



The Gulf States Mediating in the Horn of Africa: For Domestic or Regional Consumption?

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Key Findings

- ▶ Gulf mediation in conflicts throughout the Horn of Africa (HoA) is not divorced from domestic considerations, particularly when regarding expatriate populations in Gulf states. These considerations, therefore, must be recognised when examining Gulf involvement.
- ▶ Egypt is very much a part of regional considerations in the Horn of Africa, due to its geographic location and ties with the Gulf states. Its role in the blockade of Qatar between June 2017 and January 2021 is particularly notable.
- ▶ The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Saudi Arabia are the primary Gulf actors in the Horn of Africa. For the UAE in particular, mediation is sought in relation to investment opportunities. Qatar has followed mediation efforts with investment in some cases, but the UAE's mediation efforts appear more dependent on a broader investment strategy than a dedicated conflict mediation agenda. This is not the case for Qatar or Saudi Arabia.
- ▶ The Gulf states involved in the Horn of Africa have tools at their disposal in conflict mediation that are not solely economic but also include media, diaspora ties, and leadership commitment to such efforts. Viewing Gulf interventions in the Horn of Africa through the lens of "riyal-politik" or petrodplomacy is therefore too simplistic.
- ▶ Just as Gulf mediation considers domestic political audiences, and in particular expatriate populations, geopolitics also matter. Greater involvement in the Horn of Africa is often framed as opportunistic, given that it is an area where there is little Western intervention or competition. As such, the Horn of Africa has been dominated by non-Western powers.
- ▶ For the smaller Gulf states, Gulf mediation, both in the Horn of Africa and further afield, can be understood as part of the project of building state identity. This is particularly true for Qatar and the UAE. The dynamic is less apparent for Saudi Arabia, as it is the largest state in the GCC. For the smaller Gulf states, however, conflict mediation allows them to expand global connections and recognition, as well as foster pride in the country's policies among domestic populations, both of citizens and expatriates.

Policy Recommendations

- ▶ Western policymakers should encourage multilateral, rather than bilateral, pursuits where possible. This would help integrate more members of the Horn of Africa, as well as of the GCC, into mediation to enhance chances of regional buy-in and long-term success.
- ▶ Western policymakers should continue to foster the intra-Gulf cooperation that has been greatly enhanced since the signing of the Al-Ula Accords in January 2021. Since January 2021, competition in the Horn of Africa has abated but has not disappeared completely; working through multilateral platforms could help to facilitate this change as well.
- ▶ Western policymakers and the Gulf states should be encouraged to use tools at their disposal, not solely to disseminate achievements via media, but also to make others aware of issues that could also be addressed at the international or multilateral level, rather than regionally.

Introduction

Much has been written about the Gulf states' increased interest and role in the Horn of Africa, particularly since the conflict in Yemen in 2014. As de Waal explains, "[t]he War in Yemen sharpened and accelerated a process, already underway, whereby the political rivalries of the Middle East penetrated the Horn of Africa" (de Waal; 2022). Further, the rupture of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt, from Qatar between 2017 and 2021 led many to consider the Horn of Africa the region outside of the Gulf most affected by regional misunderstandings. Indeed, countries on both sides of the division during this period appeared to be scrambling for position in ports, investment projects, and even military bases. All of this suggests that events on the Arabian Peninsula fundamentally shape policies pursued outside of it, a dynamic noted by Mason (2022).

Previous literature has noted ways in which Gulf mediators, specifically Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), exhibit conflict mediation behaviour that is qualitatively different from that of other states in the region (Freer; 2022). This paper represents an effort to enhance understanding of Gulf state mediation in the Horn of Africa, with a view to discerning whether it is exceptional compared to other regions in which Gulf states are engaged.

While some Gulf actions in the Horn of Africa appear motivated by intra-GCC divisions – such as Qatari and Emirati intervention in opposing political sides in Somalia – other acts are opportunistic, contextualised by a relative lack of competitive global powers in the field. As one Gulf official told International Crisis Group: "If you look at the future of Africa, it's clear – China is in. The Arab countries are in. The U.S. is not" (International Crisis Group; 2018). The Horn of Africa therefore represents a space dominated by non-Western outside actors, and as such is an attractive option for Gulf states to expand their influence without provoking competition from the United States or European powers.

Also linked to Gulf involvement in mediation in the Horn of Africa is its ability to enhance these states' efforts at developing a state identity recognised globally. One negotiator involved in Qatar's mediation in Darfur maintained that these attempts "often end up placing more emphasis on the 'news' of mediation rather than the outcomes" (Barakat; 2014). Even if an agreement is not reached, involvement in conflict mediation allows Gulf states to build valuable networks to expand political and economic ties outside of the Arabian Peninsula (International Crisis Group; 2019).

Active Players in the Horn of Africa: Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Gulf involvement in the Horn of Africa has been dominated by Qatar and the UAE since the 2010s, with Saudi Arabia becoming involved mid-decade with the start of the war in Yemen. These states have recognised opportunity not solely for mediation, but also for economic advancement and investment if such conflicts are mitigated. While Gulf involvement in the Horn of Africa was first framed around the need for food security in the early 2000s, it has evolved to require more holistic engagement with such states. This now encompasses a broader range of interests including geopolitics, diaspora populations, and even military concerns, in addition to economic interests.

Gulf states began involvement in conflict mediation in the Horn of Africa in the late 1990s.. Qatar first brokered a deal in 1999 between Sudan and Eritrea, who had cut off diplomatic relations in 1994. The Qataris hosted a meeting in Doha between the two countries' presidents, who signed a six-point agreement which led to the resumption of diplomatic ties ([Mesfin; 2016](#)). Qatar later mediated between Somali factions in mid-2000s. Nearing the end of the decade, its involvement had become so noticeable that, in April 2008, the Ethiopian Government severed ties with Qatar on the grounds that it was "a major source of instability in the Horn of Africa" ([ibid](#)). It was Qatar's ties to Eritrea and alleged support for armed opposition groups across the region, particularly in Somalia, which had spurred the decision and shows how Qatari intervention was initially perceived by HoA countries, or at least by Ethiopia ([ibid](#)). Ultimately, the two countries resolved their differences in 2012 after a meeting between Qatari Prime Minister Shaykh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi ([ibid](#)).

Qatar was also the first of the Gulf states to become involved in conflict mediation in the Horn of Africa through multilateral means. In September 2008, through a joint appointment by the Arab League and African Union, Qatar became the mediator between the Sudanese Government and various rebel factions. As Barakat notes, "Qatar's sustained involvement in Darfur reflected strategic interest there, given long-standing ties with Omar al-Bashir's government and the large Sudanese diaspora in Doha" ([Barakat; 2014](#)). Despite the fact that there was multilateral agreement on Qatar's role, domestic considerations about its large domestic population of Sudanese nationals also influenced Qatari actions, indicating how, for Gulf mediators, domestic considerations and foreign policy are often intertwined.

In February 2010, the Sudanese Government signed a ceasefire framework agreement with one rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), leading President al-Bashir to declare that the conflict had ended (*ibid*). The Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), an umbrella organisation of smaller rebel groups, signed onto the agreement as well, which became known collectively as the Doha Agreements (*ibid*). Qatar had hosted track one and track two talks in Doha, becoming the only Gulf state to host such a mediation, and had also promised \$2 billion in investments before the talks as a further incentive, with the Qatar Investment Authority brokering another deal to develop agriculture in Sudan to enhance Qatari food security, with \$1 billion in investment funds (*ibid*). These mediation efforts had buy-in from senior officials, as then-Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud "spent months meeting international stakeholders to gain insight into global perspectives on the conflict and in Khartoum and Darfur meeting with the conflict parties and affected populations" (*ibid*). Some participants viewed Qatar as too closely linked to the Sudanese Government, while the Sudanese Government complained that the efforts had not included enough rebel groups, with this lack of inclusivity leading to the stalling of talks in 2012 (*ibid*). There was also some concern that the Egyptian Government had wanted to lead the efforts, given its geographic position and historic ties to Sudan, and therefore disapproved of Qatari involvement (Interviews). Qatari efforts in Sudan have been overtaken since the new government was put in place in 2019, and South Sudan now hosts discussions with armed actors.

Additionally, in 2010, Qatar became in mediating a border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea that dated back to 2008, when Eritrean troops entered a disputed border area ([Sudan Tribune; 2021](#)). A June 2010 mediation agreement facilitated by then-Amir Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani began the process of rescinding sanctions on Eritrea ([Doualeh; 2016](#)). In June 2010, Qatar deployed a peacekeeping mission in the area between Djibouti and Eritrea, which is unusual practice for Gulf mediators, who tend not to contribute troops on the ground ([Barakat and Milton; 2017](#)). Nonetheless, the ceasefire has yet to be converted into a peace agreement. This is despite a breakthrough in 2016 on a deal negotiated by Qatar which forced Eritrea to release four prisoners – who had been captured in 2008 during border clashes –from Djibouti's armed forces (*ibid*). In June 2017, Qatar withdrew troops from the border area after both Djibouti and Eritrea sided against the country in a blockade led by Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt in 2017, despite Eritrea's refusal to cut ties with Qatar. Here, Qatari actions demonstrate that mediation is not completely divorced from regional politics and policies. In September 2018, Djibouti and Eritrea normalized diplomatic ties that had been cut in 2008 through Ethiopian-led mediation ([Maasho; 2018](#)).

In 2019, however, the Eritrean Government accused Qatar of using a “scheme of subversion” by providing aid and support for Eritrean opposition groups living in Sudan ([Economist Intelligence; 2019](#)). The Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied the accusations, which, it stated “raises suspicions about the real intentions and the parties behind this unrealistic statement” ([The Peninsula; 2019](#)). Although Qatari relations with Eritrea have since that time improved, these accusations demonstrate how Gulf mediation, or even suspicion about Gulf involvement in internal affairs, has spurred strong reactions in the Horn of Africa, demonstrating the power these outside states are considered to hold.

While Qatar had little mediation involvement in Somalia until the 2020s, other Gulf states have attempted participation previously. Turkey first established a special relationship with the state in 2013, with Ankara serving as a venue for discussions between Somalia and Somaliland until 2015, when the talks faltered ([Mahmood; 2020](#)). At the start of the GCC crisis in June 2017, Somali leadership remained neutral, but the Emirati Government suspected President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo of following the political lead of Qatar, leading it to lend further support to Somalia’s federal states. In turn, President Farmajo deepened ties with Qatar and Turkey ([International Crisis Group; 2018](#)). The International Crisis Group highlighted that the Gulf rivalry “amplified disputes between the government and rival factions in the capital, complicating a crisis in the Somali parliament that threatened to turn violent in late 2017” ([ibid](#)). Since the end of the crisis in 2018, Turkey appointed a special envoy to spearhead talks between Somalia and Somaliland ([Mahmood; 2020](#)).

In 2021, however, Qatar brokered an agreement between Somalia and Kenya. It had sent Mutlaq al-Qahtani – Special Envoy for Counterterrorism and Mediation in Conflict Resolution – to mediate between the two countries in December 2020, after Somalia cut off diplomatic ties with Kenya, accusing Kenya of “interfering in internal affairs” ([Custers; 2021](#)). The two had also clashed over maritime borders ([ibid](#)). In May 2021, Somalia and Kenya resumed diplomatic ties ([ibid](#)). In July 2022, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud made a state visit to Kenya, after the International Court of Justice ruled that the states’ disputed maritime border should be adjusted to grant Somalia rights to much of an oil-rich area of the Indian Ocean, to the consternation of the Kenyan Government ([Amunga; 2022](#)). The same month, both states signed a deal to restart the trade of khat, resume flights by Kenya Airways to Mogadishu, ease certain restrictions on visas, and re-open the border ([Reuters; 2022](#)). This agreement represents one of the more successful instances of Qatari involvement in Horn of Africa conflict mediation.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE later became involved in mediating conflicts in the Horn of Africa. Notably, one of DP World's first international contracts was in Djibouti, where it began development of the Doraleh port in 2006 (The United Arab Emirates in the Horn of Africa). By 2015, however, the two countries – whose officials had formerly clashed over corruption allegations – again fell out, when the UAE, through DP World's ports, tried to use Djibouti to launch its military efforts into Yemen (*ibid*). Riyadh, leading the mission in Yemen, signed a security agreement with Eritrea to use Assab port as a launching ground (*ibid*). Despite such tensions, both Djibouti and Eritrea publicly supported the blockade of Qatar shortly after it began in June 2017. Mahmood considers the UAE's fallout with Djibouti and Somalia an example of how Gulf involvement, in some cases, "has exacerbated existing disputes or fostered new tensions" ([Mahmood; 2020](#)). It also demonstrates how Saudi and Emirati involvement in the Horn of Africa was influenced by their military actions in Yemen.

The UAE also became involved in mediating a border dispute between Sudan and Ethiopia as of March 2021, but withdrew by May 2021, as Sudan continued calling for sovereignty over the disputed border region ([MENA Affairs; 2021](#)). This decision clearly demonstrates the Emirati willingness to step back when its mediation appears unlikely to succeed.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia perhaps most successfully intervened in the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, a twenty-year war which both countries agreed to end in April 2018 ([International Crisis Group; 2018](#)). In the same month, Abiy Ahmed became Ethiopian prime minister, aligning with the values of the UAE in his ambition to privatise the country: "Among the many constraints on Ethiopia's growth has been its lack of sea access and consequent reliance on Djibouti as the sole outlet for its exports. The UAE's newly signed port contracts could help. In March 2018, DP World announced that Addis Ababa would take a 19 per cent stake in the Berbera port's development" (*ibid*). Abu Dhabi pledged \$3 billion to Ethiopia, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE assured Eritrea that they would help the country in lifting international sanctions (*ibid*). Although the UAE's relationships with Djibouti and Somalia were suffering at the time of this mediation, "the Ethiopia-Eritrea deal in many ways cements Abu Dhabi's role as a player in HoA politics" (*ibid*). After the peace deal was signed, Prime Minister Abiy helped to improve the UAE's relations with Somalia (*ibid*). Whilst the terms of the peace-deal are little-known publicly, the signing of it and subsequent developments have received much media attention, the most of recent of which saw Eritrea criticising recent comments made by a senior Saudi taking credit for their involvement ([Mahmood; 2020](#)).

By 2019, the much-improved relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia was still somewhat tense, largely due to domestic political opinion about it in Ethiopia and hesitation of Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki to make any policy changes that could prevent him from consolidating political control over country (Stigant and Phelan; 2019). Nonetheless, "Ending the 'no war, no peace' period between Ethiopia and Eritrea remains a historic milestone. The stories of families reunited after decades highlights the deep personal costs of conflict and the immediate possibilities of peace" (ibid). It appears that peace has arrived largely at the level of government elites, rather than socially – something which is difficult for conflict mediators to control. The former, however, is signalled through acknowledgement of the importance of leadership relations by Emirati President Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed, who visited Addis Ababa as the rapprochement was in progress, depositing \$1billion into the central bank and awarding Ahmed Abiy and Isais Afwerki – the Prime Minister of Eritrea and the President of Eritrea respectively – the Order of Zayed, the highest civilian honour (Mahmood; 2020). The peace accord was signed in Jeddah in September 2018. After it was signed, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also tried to improve Eritrean relations with Egypt, leading to the Eritrean prime minister's visit to Cairo in June 2018.

In this case, the economic and security interests of Saudi Arabia and the UAE are clear. The Emiratis wanted to minimise opposition to military facility in Assab, Eritrea, which at that point was important for their involvement in Yemen (ibid). Additionally, lifting UN sanctions on Eritrea was a means of removing obstacles to the provision of financial and military support from both the UAE and Saudi Arabia (ibid). Crucially, mediation of the conflict has opened potential economic opportunities to connect Eritrean ports to Ethiopia, the world's most populous landlocked country, which the Gulf mediators could then help to connect to its regional allies (ibid). The presence of all three motivators demonstrated the multi-faceted nature of Gulf involvement in the Horn of Africa.

Types and Tools of Interventions

The Horn of Africa has proven a unique space for the intervention of non-Western powers. While only the Gulf states have been discussed here, China and Turkey are two other important actors within the region. In the early 2010s, Iran also tried to nurture relationships with Eritrea and Sudan as a means of bolstering its position in the region and expanding its rejectionist, anti-Western stance, primarily through building ties with other states that had been under Western sanctions (Eritrea and Sudan) ([Mazzucco; 2023](#)). While initial ties flourished, in 2015 Eritrea chose to join Saudi Arabia's fight against the Houthi rebels in Yemen and cut off ties with Iran ([ibid](#)). In 2020, Eritrea and Sudan joined the Saudi-led Red Sea Council for security cooperation, and in 2021 Sudan signed the Abraham Accords, causing the state to drift further from Iranian foreign policy preferences ([ibid](#)). Given these developments and the domestic pressures faced by the Raisi Government, it seems unlikely that the Horn of Africa will become a site of Iranian-GCC competition in the short term ([ibid](#)). Western policymakers, therefore, should resist the urge to frame Gulf intervention in the Horn of Africa as a tool to alienate Iran, particularly given the March 2023 rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

What, then, has motivated these states to take on new ties with the Horn of Africa? In a region where non-Western powers have struggled to gain influence, what sets the GCC states apart? The next section of this paper highlights four specific tools implemented by Gulf Governments to ensure that their ties with states in the Horn of Africa are longer-lived than Iran's relations with these states: the media, personal involvement of political leadership, economic assets, and diaspora populations.

Media

Qatar's hosting and funding of Al Jazeera since 1996 has been cited as one of the main tools of Qatari intervention in the Horn of Africa. Al Jazeera has made Qatar known to many in the region, publicising its mediation efforts and differentiating it from its neighbours. As the International Crisis Group observes, "Qatar's stock rose further with the 2006 launch of Al-Jazeera English. Within a few years, the channel's Africa coverage far surpassed existing outlets in breadth and resources, bringing a Qatari perspective into the African mainstream. Growing diasporas from the Horn in Doha reinforced the country's positive image back on the continent" (Intra-Gulf Competition in Africa's Horn). This produced more knowledge of Qatar as a state, and potentially has fostered trust of it as a mediator.

Even if many citizens of Horn of Africa countries may not have advanced knowledge of Qatari foreign policy, they will likely be familiar with Al Jazeera, a station which has dedicated considerable coverage to the region. And while Al Jazeera faced criticism during the Arab Spring of becoming biased in favour of Islamist groups, it retains a reputation as one of very few media outlets in the Middle East that is not directly controlled by the state, allowing it to frame itself truly as representing the voice of the people and in so doing putting forward a view of Qatar as a potentially more sympathetic regional power for many.

Personalised Political Involvement

In the cases of more involved Gulf states within the HoA, such as Qatar and the UAE, involvement has also meant interaction with the most powerful political elites of these countries, suggesting that there is political buy-in for conflict mediation there. In many ways, this is a positive development, as the willingness to risk national reputation indicates the priority of mediation to these states.

Qatar's mediation in Sudan in the early 2000s was seen as the start of personal buy-in by political leaders of Gulf mediation efforts. It has continued since, with heads of state increasingly involved in mediation efforts. As noted above, Emirati President Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed visited Addis Ababa in 2018, and in January 2022 received the Ethiopian Prime Minister for a state visit. Similarly, Qatari Amir Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held conversations with the Eritrean president in 2022 and has also been personally in contact with the Somali president. Personal involvement of heads of state as well as senior members of ruling families in Gulf mediation and the maintenance of Gulf ties in the Horn of Africa, indicates the extent to which sustained involvement in the region is a policy priority, thereby facilitating political and social trust.

Economic Assets

Investments often follow conflict mediation when there is Gulf involvement in the Horn of Africa. It is important to trace this development to global financial markets. As Donelli highlights, "The 2008 global financial crisis drove the ME countries to redirect their investment and economic interests towards regions less affected by the economic collapse, such as Africa" (Donelli; 2021). As an economic strategy, Gulf involvement in the Horn of Africa made sense from the early 2000s.

It is important not to simplify all Gulf involvement in conflict mediation in the Horn of Africa as investment opportunities. The potential for profit and the unique ability of Gulf states to put in place massive investments, however, cannot be ignored. The UAE has seized on investment opportunities for decades within the Horn, with DP World building its first port there in 2006. While the ability to finance opportunities in the Horn is not the only unique thing about the Gulf as an actor there, it does set these states apart from other actors involved in the Horn of Africa, such as Turkey, and therefore must be taken into consideration.

The Role of the African Diaspora

The GCC states are home to large expatriate populations: some 60,000 Sudanese nationals are estimated to live in Qatar alone, approximately 176,000 in Saudi Arabia, and around 75,000 in the UAE. Similar figures exist for other HoA countries, creating unique social and cultural bonds between these states and Gulf mediators. Gulf states can therefore benefit from mediation efforts both abroad and domestically with local expatriate populations. Further, and perhaps more significantly, the existence of such communities in the Gulf fosters important trust and legitimacy for Gulf mediators which Western mediators lack.

These social ties are fostered by media as well as by the maintenance of personal connections between Gulf and Horn of Africa leaders. Although members of expatriate populations cannot vote in Gulf states, they can provide helpful support for their host states, particularly when travelling to their home countries.

Cooperation or Competition? Perception among the Gulf States and in the Horn of Africa

Having summarised the role of Gulf states in conflict mediation in the Horn of Africa, the key question remains of whether these states are cooperating or competing, particularly since the signing of the Al Ula Accords in January 2021. Further, what sets the Horn of Africa apart from other regions when it comes to Gulf involvement? The answers to both questions are not static and have shifted depending on geopolitics and domestic political concerns. It is dangerous to consider these are constants, and it is worth reiterating that this paper was written in early 2023.

In the period between the Arab Spring protests in 2011 and the end of the Gulf crisis (2017-2021), the Gulf states were viewed as competitors, with Somalia offering a clear example of this. This competition – with Qatar supporting the central government and the UAE supporting Somaliland and other federal states – “worsened centre-periphery tensions, as Mogadishu struggled to proceed with a foreign policy that its member states opposed. Prior to the breakthrough with Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s engagement with Asmara was also a source of concern for Ethiopia, demonstrating the potential for Middle Eastern engagement to aggravate tensions” (Mahmood; 2020). In Sudan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE initially backed the Transitional Military Council (TMC) over the civilian protest movement due to fear of Islamists taking power post-Bashir (The Middle East’s Complicated Engage in the Horn of Africa). Ultimately, however, “the involvement of Western nations like the U.S. and public backlash following the violent break-up of the protest sit-in ultimately played a role in helping moderate this behaviour in favour of a more balanced outcome” (ibid).

The 2020 establishment of the Red Sea Security Council championed by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and notably excluding Qatar and Turkey, was taken as evidence of competition between the two sides of the GCC crisis. While the Saudi-led council was initially meant to focus on issues linked to economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and environmental issues, it has been recentred on security issues. Further, “the existence of this multilateral platform has not yet helped to overcome the political divisions and short-term zero-sum calculations that have often shaped regional dynamics” (Lons; 2021).

Three developments have facilitated the diminishing of intra-Gulf competition in the Horn of Africa. First, the signing of the Al-Ula Accord in January 2021 which ended the Gulf crisis encouraged the possibility for these states to work together rather than apart and allowed Horn of Africa countries to take on ties with both sides of the crisis. This has provided an opportunity for Western policymakers and international NGOs to become involved and continue to foster and encourage Gulf unity, as well as suggesting multilateral, rather than unilateral, conflict mediation strategies.

Second, and relatedly, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have shifted their stances towards Turkey, again allowing for greater potential cooperation across formerly solid geopolitical fault lines. This means there will be (and already has been) less focus on ideological differences, particularly when it comes to Islamists. While Qatar and Turkey were positioned, between 2017 and 2021, as pro-Islamist allies against the blockading Gulf states, this dynamic has notably shifted, meaning that there is potential for alliances to change, and for pragmatism to dictate alliance formation and involvement in conflict mediation in the Horn of Africa.

Third, the ceasefire in Yemen, put in place in April 2022, has made the Horn of Africa less relevant militarily, particularly for Saudi Arabia. After the UAE ended its military involvement in Yemen in 2019, it also began to reduce its military presence. While the UAE had intended to build a military base in Berbera, Somaliland, these ambitions have been tempered; the UAE also downgraded its presence on its Assad base in Eritrea (*ibid*). Similarly, a plan for a Saudi military base in Djibouti remains in nascent phases despite having been announced in 2016 (*ibid*). These shifts make it possible for Gulf states, as mediators, to view each other as potential partners in the Horn of Africa and therefore could fundamentally shift their engagement moving forward.

We should continue to consider the Horn of Africa a critical place for engagement of non-Western powers in conflict mediation. Much of the activity to date has been bilateral and has had a mixed record of success. Recent developments, as discussed here, are likely to shift alliance patterns and approaches to conflict mediation in the Horn. It is unlikely, however, that they will cause the removal of the Gulf states as critical actors there. Western policymakers should take into account the unique tools that these states have at their disposal to move forward mediation efforts and encourage multilateral engagement in the future.

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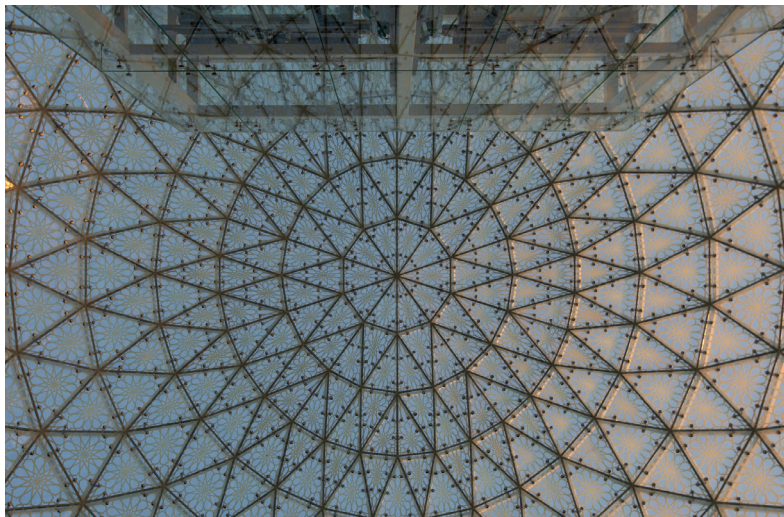
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