

The Horn of Africa as a Theater of Global Hegemony and Power Positioning: Who are the Actors and Why?

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Introduction

The Horn of Africa is becoming increasingly the epicenter of multi-power competition for sphere of influence, involving both established world powers and even emerging global powers that are positioned closest to the region. In its current state, therefore, this geopolitical entanglement in the Horn of Africa can be linked to the strategic significance of the Red Sea, which is often viewed by many political observers as well as regional experts as a vital outlet for the world economy. Stretching from the Suez Canal that links it to the Mediterranean, to the straits of the Bab al Mandab that connect it to the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea occupies the world's most vital shipping lane, interlocked between the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Gurjar describes the importance of the Horn of Africa to global commerce in this account:

In the last decade, the region {Horn of Africa} lying between Suez Canal and the Seychelles has emerged as a new geopolitical hotspot with factors like impressive economic growth of regional countries, emergence of new security threats, and the ensuing major power rivalry driving the strategic trajectory of the region. The straits of Bab el -Mandeb, which lies at the heart of this region, connects the energy-rich Middle East to Europe and, along with the Suez Canal, is considered a jugular vein for global trade. Annually, goods worth about \$ 700 billion, 25,000 ships and nearly two billion barrels of oil pass through the strategic Bab el -Mandeb Strait (Gurjar, 2020, 1)

Indeed, Gurjar and others with expertise on the Horn of Africa have examined at great length the strategic significance of the region to the global economy and the rivalry that exists among the various great powers; however, what is missing in many of their investigations is the more urgent studying of the consequences emanating from the hegemonic power rivalry for the regional states that are often at the risk to external pressure and influence. Considering the foregoing, the questions that his paper aims to answer are which are the contending powers, and what are the underlying reasons for lurching their geopolitical ambition into the region? Stated alternatively, what precisely triggers the pursuits of their national interest in that sub-region of Africa? The paper addresses these questions and explores the many facets of hegemonic power aspirations in the region. Furthermore, the study posits that the Horn Africa region has become a troubled spot pitting some hegemonic powers against each other, as they vie for control of the vital waterways of the Red Sea. The study further postulates that unless checked, the after-effect of this alarming external pressure, to which the regional states are subjected, could eventually lead to hostilities between the hegemon and the subjugated states and even to a possible armed confrontation among the rival powers themselves, with grave consequences for the states in the region. At a minimum, hegemony may stifle in the end the regional states' effort to maintain their political stability, preserve their sovereignty, and realize their targeted aspirations of development and prosperity.

The significance of this study lies mostly in its promise to be an all-inclusive geopolitical analysis of the Horn of Africa, deciphering the extent of the external rivalry in the region among both global and regional powers. This is particularly worth mentioning because the Horn of Africa has indeed become increasingly the hotbed of terrorist threats, piracy, fragile interstate relations, and intrastate social upheavals. In the broader context of international relations, therefore, these factors could lead to unexpected armed confrontations among external powers as well as the regional states. The importance of this research is further buttressed by the reality that the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, taken together, are key to international peace and security, and any disturbance caused by hostilities among the hegemonic powers in that part of Africa, some of which have been known to be historical foes for decades, could bring havoc in the region on an unparalleled scale that the international community has never seen before.

The methodology utilized in this study relies on qualitative data analysis, with a focus on the implications of hegemony for peace and security in that critical sub-continent of Africa. Using the case study method, the investigation aims to describe events, issues, and activities vital to the study of international relations. By choice and practical necessities, therefore, the paper depends on wide-ranging bibliographical sources, most of which are very current, to examine the topic holistically while identifying the salient factors that give both meaning and context to it. In doing so, the author takes the challenging task of selecting, processing, and analyzing information applied to understanding the questions raised in the introduction of the paper, thereby enabling the reader to evaluate the study's overall validity and reliability methodically. The methodology used in the study attempts to answer the two main questions often posed in any given social science research undertaking: how was the data collected or generated? And how was it analyzed? These two critical questions have been contextualized throughout the study.

Furthermore, an effort has been made to ensure the unfettered readability of the data analyzed in the research. Accordingly, the paper is organized into four sections. This introductory section is followed by a brief discussion of the geopolitical context of the region, offering an overview of its importance to global security and international commerce. The third section is where each of the hegemonic powers---global and emerging ones---is briefly examined to demonstrate the extent of its involvement in the region, while explaining the types of activities that each hegemon is involved in. As is customary, the concluding section of the paper offers a summary of the study.

The Geopolitical Setting of the Horn of Africa

An Overview

Any mention of the constituent states of the Horn of Africa may not necessarily be constant as many scholars and regional experts, using their own reasonable understanding of the geographical delineation of Africa, provide a contextualized definition of the region as they deem appropriate. One version of such a view regards Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and the *de facto* state of Somaliland, including the semi-autonomous territory of Puntland, both integral parts of Somalia in the past, as constituting what is known today as the Horn of Africa; it should also be noted here that the two breakaway self-governing territories of Somalia are unrecognized as independent states by the international community, for Somalia still claims both as parts of its sovereignty (Egal, 2021)). The other version expands the list of countries that make up the region to include Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda. In this study, however, the author's focus will be on the first set of counties, although this should not preclude the latter states from remaining within the purview of this study; any time their relevance becomes known, they will be a part of the discussion.

In essence---especially from the geopolitical standpoint---the impact of the Horn of Africa can be partially or fully interconnected with these critical global sea routes: The Red Sea, the Strait of Bab el Mandab, the Gulf of Suez, the Gulf of Aden, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and even the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the strategic location of the Horn, along with these various sea routes, makes the states in the region extremely vital to the security and safety of global commerce routed to Europe, the United States, and the rest of the world. It is therefore in this context that the national interest of the global and regional powers is directly tied to the Horn of Africa; hence, the rivalry among those hegemons that are positioned to control and influence the commercial, military, and existential landscapes of the region.

To ensure their hegemonic presence in the Horn of Africa, various global and regional powers use their trade, investment, military, intelligence, and diplomatic capacities, and even in some cases the instrument of development aid, with the intention of placing undue pressure and influence on the regional states while attempting to thwart each other's rival from gaining a competitive edge and pursuing their national interest and geopolitical supremacies. Two sets of countries, which may be hailed as global and regional, are the known forces

at work in the Horn. Global powers are those states that, through their great economic, political, and military strengths, can exert power and influence not only over their own region of the world, but beyond others. Such countries as the U.S., China, Russia, Great Britain, Germany, France, India, and Japan, and to a lesser degree Italy, Turkey, and Spain, may fall into this category of states. On the other hand, enjoying the power attributes, as quoted in the following, and acting as regional powers *vis a vis* the Horn are Israel, Iran, Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. As a rule, therefore, regional power can be described as

...a state that projects influence in a specific region. If this power capability is unrivaled in its region, the state could rise to the level of a regional hegemon. The regional powers display comparatively high military, economic, political, and ideological capabilities enabling them to shape their regional security agenda. Overall, the terms “middle powers” and “regional powers” convey capacity, hierarchy, influence, and aspiration (Yilmaz, 2019, 1)

With this distinction made, we will shortly review the global and regional powers that have established their presence in the Horn while deciphering the rationale undergirding all facets of their presence in the region. In effect, therefore, this section of the paper simply exposes the motive of each power for displaying a show of force in the Horn of Africa in pursuit of gaining a strategic advantage over their rivals competing for control and influence. In each case study, the global or regional power’s activities in the Horn of Africa are examined, using the economic, military, and geopolitical variables particular to each power.

It is also critically important to see beforehand in the larger scheme of things that there is an undisputable truth that global powers have been increasingly vying for influence in Africa for several decades and even more forcefully in recent years. As global apprehension deepens yet more due to the prevailing global hostilities caused by both the Russian-Ukraine war and an increasingly aggressive Chinese posture towards self-ruled Taiwan, Africa’s strategic importance seems to have risen, while both uncertainty and the threats of instability around the globe have heightened simultaneously. Melvin, analyzing the geopolitical competition among the various world powers in the Horn of Africa, describes the situation along the same line as follows:

The Horn of Africa is undergoing far-reaching changes in its external security environment. A wide variety of international security actors—from Europe, the United States, the Middle East, the Gulf, and Asia—are currently operating in the region. As a result, the Horn of Africa has experienced a proliferation of foreign military bases and a build-up of naval forces. The external militarization of the Horn poses major questions for the future security and stability of the region (Melvin, 2019)

The Hegemons in the Horn of Africa: Global and Regional Powers

While both economic and military capabilities provide valid measurements of global power rankings, however, military firepower has been the mainstay of ranking nations and their influence on the global stage. In this regard, the U.S., Russia, and China are known to occupy the three highest power rankings in the world in that order. In the following case studies, nevertheless, the discussion does not mean to follow such an order; it is an arbitrary listing of the countries by the author without regard to any military or economic rankings, or both. With that said, we will now turn to examining each of the global and regional power’s vital interests in the region, as well as the extent to which they participate in using their power and influence to maintain their presence and power positioning there.

United States

Among the global powers, the U.S. presence in the Horn of Africa takes center stage, given the current fierce hegemonic competition there, pitting one power against another. Essentially, U.S. foreign policy priorities in this region can be threefold: containment of Russia and China from dominating the region; prevention of piracy in the Indian Ocean, along with the offshore shipping lanes near the coastal waters of Somalia; and thwarting the spread of Jihadist movements in the area, juxtaposed with its antiterrorism policy particularly aimed at Al Shabab in Somalia, an extremist Al-Qaida-like organization committed to global Jihad and a harsh interpretation of Sharia law. While these three specific priorities provide the impetus for the U.S. strategic presence in the Horn of Africa, containing Iranian aggression against U.S. allies in the Middle East is also the ultimate pursuit of U.S. foreign policy. U.S.-Iranian relations have been strained for decades over the issue of Iran’s nuclear program and its aggressive foreign policy against U.S. allies—Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, among others

(Negatu, 2022). This has been further exacerbated by the Yemeni civil war in which the U.S. is indirectly involved supporting the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthi rebels, which are supported by Iran.

Using any one or a combination of the three foreign policy objectives as a justification, therefore, U.S. intervention in the Horn of Africa has been manifested for decades in the military, economic and diplomatic spheres. However, the main instrument of U.S. policy used to exert influence on African and other developing countries has always been humanitarian and development assistance, conducted through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Indeed, the Horn countries receive a good share of such assistance especially during the time of droughts and other human-caused and natural disasters. For example, in July 2022, USAID reported that the U.S. allocated \$1.3 Billion among Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, which was aimed at alleviating the unrepresented drought that was causing starvation in these Horn of Africa countries (U.S. agency for International Development, 2022). Nonetheless, such aid is also known for being strategically targeted and deliberately so for exerting influence on the economically vulnerable countries while deterring rivals from gaining a foothold in areas where geopolitical strategies shape interstate behaviors among global and regional powers.

Militarily, the U.S. projects its widely recognized visibility in the Horn of Africa by having established a permanent naval expeditionary base in the tiny Horn of Africa state--- Djibouti. Located adjacent to the International Airport in Djibouti City at its official Camp Lemonnier Base, the U.S. Africa Command, working through the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa, boasts on its website that the U. S. naval base in Djibouti "...works against malign actors to strengthen collective security forces and respond to crises to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability and prosperity" (United States Africa Command, 2023). Leasing the Camp Lemonnier Base from Djibouti at a rate of \$38 million a year, the U.S. uses the base first and foremost to ensure that Al Shabab and other Jihadist movements are militarily restrained from spreading extremist ideology throughout the region; and both American combat troops and drone strikes are employed at times against them in their hideouts throughout the various parts of Somalia.

This strategic base, the only permanent military post of the U.S in Africa where about four thousand American troops are stationed, additionally serves three strategic purposes: monitoring as well as ensuring the free flow of global commerce through the Red Sea, while serving as a deterrent to Iranian military adventure in the area, particularly against Iranian arms shipments to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, which is located strategically across from Djibouti and bordering the Strait of Bab el Mandab. The Yemeni crisis began in 2014 when Houthi insurgents took control of Yemen's capital and largest city, Sana'a. A Saudi Arabian-led coalition, consisting of some Gulf States, has been fighting the rebels in support of the internationally recognized government based in the southern port city of Aden, and the U.S. provides logistical and intelligence assistance to the coalition (The Center for Preventive Action, 2023). Furthermore, the base serves as a deterrent to rival global powers' geopolitical maneuvering in that vital region of Africa, especially involving the two U.S. current nemeses ---China and Russia. So, the U.S. foremost strategy is to become a counterbalance to all the rival powers that have established a presence there.

The U.S. also uses other forms of military aid to shore up its diplomatic ties with some of the regional states and maintain its influence versus its adversaries. Whether training Somalia's anti-terrorist forces or supplying small arms to Djibouti, however, this is no match, by comparison, with what the U.S. provides in military-related aid to Israel, Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Ukraine, which runs into billions of dollars. Because of the sheer number of military sales or aid to the Horn of Africa states, which are so small that no credible information is available to cite, the U.S. does not hold any significant ranking as those compared to China, Turkey, France, Great Britain, and Russia. We will look at each of these countries' military involvement in the proper time and space in the ensuing discussion. Similarly, in the investment and trade arena, the U.S. has had a hardly visible record especially compared to those of China or Turkey or even to some of the Gulf States. Devermont and Harris, writing a commentary for *The Center for Strategic and International Studies*, seem to validate this very viewpoint, as the following statement conveys:

And yet U.S. trade and investment with sub-Saharan Africa remains unimpressively low. The United States did approximately \$32.6 billion worth of trade in goods with the region in 2020, down from \$36.8 billion in 2019. This means that in the past two years, U.S. trade with sub-Saharan Africa has represented less than 1 percent of all U.S. trade in goods. If there has been a six-decade consensus on U.S. opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa and multiple initiatives and programs to increase trade and investment, why have there been such disappointing results? (Devermont and Harris, 2021, 2).

There are of course several roadblocks that inhibit American investors from fully engaging in trade and investment ventures in Africa. While the challenges are many, the most common ones regrettably involve biases

and fears long held by American businesses about the feasibility of making investments in Africa where historically political instability and corruption have been widespread. This has been further fueled by a lack of U.S. government backing for American business firms in their efforts to find a favorable environment and unfettered pathways for investment opportunities in sub-Saharan African countries. “At the heart of the anemic trade and investment between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa is skepticism about market opportunities, made worse by U.S. media and ingrained stereotypes about corruption and investment challenges,” according to Devermont and Harris. (Ibid.)

However, during the most recent years under the Biden administration, U.S.-Africa trade and investment trends seem to have changed course, and the prospects for future substantial engagements have never been more promising. For example, citing Africa’s integration into the world markets and acknowledging the robust entrepreneurial spirit among the young section of the African population, the White House, in December 2022, announced that “the U.S. Government has helped close more than 800 two-way trade and investment deals across 47 African countries for a total estimated value of over \$18 billion, and the U.S. private sector has closed investment deals in Africa valued at \$8.6 billion” (The White House, 2022). Added to this new thinking is the highly touted African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), signed into law in 2000, that is at the core of U.S. trade policy with Africa aimed at providing qualifying African countries with duty-free access to the U.S. market. In general, AGOA is intended for improving U.S.-African relations and more importantly helping African countries with a preferential treatment of their trade deals with the U.S., so that they can sell their products unimpeded, with the goal being the uplifting of the African economies and the living standards of the people thereof (Young African Leaders Initiative, 2019).

Reinforcing the recent and positive development that has come to characterize U.S.-African trade relations, Clements observed that AGOA has enabled outcomes, including...

duty-free exports for almost 7,000 products from Africa to the United States. It has created long -term, sustainable growth by stimulating the private sector and creating jobs in many African countries. It has also supported the growth of certain sectors in the region, such as garment manufacturing (Clements, 2021, 1).

Looking at it critically, U.S.’s revitalized trade and investment interest in Africa, however, stems primarily from a strategy designed to counter China’s strong activities throughout Africa in all facets of development. China has outperformed all other countries in Africa in more recent years by creating opportunities and infrastructure amenable to loans, investments, and development projects, including the construction of railways, highways, bridges, air- and seaports, and large-scale power facilities, among others. Particularly, the Horn of Africa has benefited the most from Chinese commitment to Africa’s development needs. We will return to this same subject later in its proper place. The discussion now proceeds with Russia.

Russia

The geopolitical strategy of Russia in the Horn of Africa, compared to that of the U.S., is driven by a separate set of goals. Characterizing Russian foreign policy in the region as “Engaged Opportunism,” Ramani notes that Moscow in recent years has taken a bold stance to reclaim its global power status and has done so without ever alienating any of the states in the region, engaging them instead constructively through diplomacy while shunning the appearance of taking any

sides in the region’s most polarizing conflicts.... Russia’s resurgence in the Horn of Africa has generally dovetailed with the People’s Republic of China’s regional aspirations but has placed it increasingly at odds with France and the United States. Looking ahead, Russia’s ability to link its Horn of Africa strategy to its aspirations in the Middle East will shape the future trajectory of its involvement in the region (Ramani, 2020, 1).

Ramani further observes that Russia’s “engaged opportunist” security strategy in the Horn of Africa is predicated on a desire to become a preferred arms dealer to African countries, offering regional powers as well as others an alternative to Western arms suppliers, particularly the U.S., France, Great Britain and Germany; however, geopolitical considerations have also elevated Russia’s hegemonic aspirations in more recent years, compelling it to secure military presence in the Horn of Africa that would possibly be a counterbalance to Western strategic military positions in the Red Sea. The overriding aim is still to procure a military base to reassert

Russia's global power once again and ensure a physical presence in that vital region of Africa; nevertheless, the Russian strategy is not exclusive of investment opportunities either. In fact, an increase in trade and investments with the Horn countries could help boost Russia's global standing in the military, diplomatic and economic spheres while equally furthering its competitive edge against its geopolitical rivals in the region.

Exporting arms to client states in Africa has already put Russia at the top of the list of global arms suppliers to African countries. "Along with natural resources, arms exports are a key component of Russia's economy. In the last two decades, Moscow has managed to deepen its connection with Africa and became the biggest arms supplier on the continent," Kondratenko reflects (2020, 2). The five African countries that import Russian arms---in order of ranking by the number of arms sales---are Algeria, Egypt, Angola, Nigeria, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Yet among the Horn of Africa countries, Sudan, Ethiopia and more recently Eritrea have been patrons of the Russian arms industry. Weapons, ranging from transport helicopters and antitank missiles to surface -to-air missiles and tanks, are sold to African countries by Russia. At the same time, Russian arms sales are often made to Africa without any consideration of the internal politics of its client states, unlike the U.S. and other West European states. Often, the U.S., France, Great Britain, and Germany, just to mention only the top suppliers, are most likely to be influenced by factors such as the human rights record of a country purchasing arms from them. "In comparison to other big players, arms deal with Russia do not demand political or human rights conditions. In some cases, Russia has managed to fill the gap where European or American suppliers stepped out," Kondratenko maintains (Ibid). More recently, Russian drones have also been used as an enticement for building strategic partnerships in the Horn of Africa; Eritrea is a case in point.

As Russia further pushes assertively for global supremacy, the Horn of Africa has become its major conduit to that eventuality. The most recent conclusion of an agreement that Russia made with Sudan on the acquisition of a naval base in Port Sudan, a port city on the Red Sea, is the clearest indication of Russian strategic calculations, which certainly would present a formidable challenge to the U.S. and its Western allies. The *Associate Press* reported in February 2023 that the agreement allows Russia to set up a naval base with up to three hundred Russian troops, and to simultaneously keep up to four navy ships, including nuclear-powered ones, in the strategic Port Sudan on the Red Sea. The base would ensure the Russian navy's presence in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and spare its ships the need for long voyages to reach the area, according to Viktor Bondarev, the former Russian air force chief. In exchange, Russia is to provide Sudan with weapons and military equipment. The agreement is to last for 25 years, with automatic extensions for 10-year periods if neither side objects (Magdy, 2023, 1).

This action coincides with other rival powers that have long established their military posts in Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, and Somaliland, for example, a subject to which we will return to in the oncoming discussion. Russia's military presence in the Sudanese Red Sea port is also expected to usher in a new Russian investment undertaking. *Middle East Eye*, an online newsletter that delivers coverage and analysis of the Middle East, North Africa and beyond, characterizes Russian economic motives in Sudan in these terms: "Russia has long eyed Sudan as a gateway to Africa's gold, as well as a stake in a global power play over a key strategic waterway "(Ibid). Worried by the Russian display of power dynamics in the region, the U.S. has since voiced its concern to Sudan, but the African country seemed content with having Russia as a strategic ally on its soil. In fact, "Washington' s warning about Russia comes amid revelations of a massive effort by the Kremlin to extract gold from the African country. US officials say this could prop up the Kremlin's war chest as it faces slumping oil prices and western sanctions," the report by the *Middle East Eye* further reveals (MEE, 2022).

Simultaneously, Russia's invigorated foreign policy strategy in the Horn of Africa has also yielded yet another successful diplomatic victory, as another Red Sea state, Eritrea, succumbed to the Kremlin's courtship of securing a naval base near Eritrea's port city of Massawa. In exchange, Asmara would host a dependable ally and even more importantly procure advanced weapons to shore up the military prowess of its armed forces. The *Eritrean Press Agency* reported in May 2022 that "Eritrea receives 8 Russian Zala KYB drones – in return for Russian military base. Russia gave the drones in the form of support to Eritrea which it considered its friend in need for Eritrea is a key for the region's peace and as an input for the military base which Russia is going to build in the future in Afabet, 40km away from Massawa" (The Eritrean Press Agency, 2022).

Therefore, having secured agreements with two key Red Sea states---Sudan and Eritrea---to build military bases, respectively, Russia would be able to counterbalance the U.S.'s strategic advantage that the latter has enjoyed for several years because of its possession of the Camp Lemonnier Base in Djibouti. Retaining naval bases in such strategic areas of the Horn of Africa also could mean that Russia would be poised to protect its military and economic interests against foes and competitors alike and maintain the balance of power among the global and regional forces operating in the region. Furthermore, Russia's hegemonic presence in the Horn Africa would increase the prospects of extracting gold in Sudan and of mining vital mineral deposits in Eritrea in the

immediate future. It would also be in the realm of possibilities for Moscow to explore investment ventures in the energy sector and embark on infrastructural development projects there, as well as in the nearby neighboring states. The fact that “Petroleum exports from Russia account for the largest share (24%) of Suez southbound petroleum traffic” (Baloi, 2023, 2) further amplifies the significance of Russia’s naval presence in Eritrea’s waters. Having a naval base to safeguard exports through the Red Sea and to protect future investments in the Horn of Africa, where such investments might exist in the future, could be vital to any great power as Russia is in the current global power ranking, contends Baloi (2023). A comparable analysis of China’s intentions in the Horn of Africa now follows.

China

There is no doubt that a formidable competitor of the U.S. and its Western allies in the Horn of Africa nowadays is China, given that the hegemonic rivalry among several global and regional powers for control and influence over the region is alarmingly intense. However, with some exceptions, China’s relations with African countries in general and with the Horn of Africa states in particular are economically driven. Thus, China’s priorities have pivoted toward agriculture, trade, and infrastructure development throughout the continent. *Horn Economic and Social Policy Institute*, headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, reported that,

In a matter of two decades, China has become Africa’s biggest economic partner. Across trade, investment, infrastructure financing, and aid, there is no other country with such depth and breadth of engagement in Africa. The Chinese firms of all sizes and sectors— are bringing capital investment, management knowhow, and entrepreneurial energy to every corner of the continent—and in so doing, they are helping to accelerate the progress of Africa’s economies (Horn Economic and Social Policy Institute, 2020, 1)

The report further reveals that China has already become a big source of finance for African development, and the development loans that the Horn of Africa countries receive from the Asian economic powerhouse have been on the rise consistently, sometime resulting in defaults on loan re- payments by some. Still, the countries who have benefited the most from Chinese loans and investments are Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya, although Uganda, Sudan and South Sudan have been recipients, as well, but to a lesser degree. These loans and investments primarily are centered on the transport, power, communication, industry, water, and mining sectors of these countries’ economies. *Ibid.* To amplify the extent of China’s engagements in such sectors, *Xinhua News Agency* reported that “Since 2017, China’s imports in services from Africa have been growing at an average annual rate of 20 percent, creating close to 400,000 jobs for the continent every year.” (Xinhua, 2022). In a move that offsets U.S. recent efforts to increase its influence in Africa, China reportedly “...dropped d 98 per cent of tariffs on exports from Burundi, Ethiopia and Niger,” with the aim of expanding such benefits to other African countries in the future. Chinese business firms have made direct investments of \$43.39 billion in Africa as of 2020. China’s tariff liberality on African exports followed an announcement by the U.S. that the latter closed “...more than eight hundred two-way trade and investment deals in 47 African countries as of last year, with an estimated value of more than US\$18 billion. The US private sector has also closed investment deals in Africa valued at \$8.6 billion” (Jennings and Nyabiage, 2023, 1).

While China’s ongoing economic engagements with the Horn of Africa states came about out of necessity, yet this was not accomplished in isolation; the acquisition of a naval base in the tiny state of Djibouti, where China has had its first military facility overseas since 2017, has provided an added momentum for China’s geopolitical scheme in the Horn of Africa. As is always the case with hegemonic powers, however, China’s rationale to have the base in Djibouti was that “It will be used to resupply navy ships taking part in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions off the coasts of Yemen and Somalia, in particular” (Blanchard, 2017). It is further claimed that the base serves as a logistics support facility, while providing these other services: anti-piracy and peacekeeping operations; protecting China’s growing overseas assets; evacuation of Chinese citizens in crisis situations; conduct counterterrorism operations; and institutionalization of intelligence-gathering, among others (Melvin, 2019).

Nevertheless, the valid rationalization for China’s strategy lies substantially in the fact that the Horn of Africa has become the battle ground for control and influence such that global powers as well as ranking middle - power states have been vying to establish presence to ensure that no one global power or a group of powers control the shipping routes of the Red Sea where international commerce is channeled in huge volumes. So, it is therefore the proximity of the Horn of Africa states to the Red Sea that has made them exceptionally vital to the security of international commerce, as ships and other carriers pass though the shores of some of the states in the region. This unfortunately subjects them at times to pressure as well as courtship by hegemonic powers for influence and

control. That is also why more than ten external powers have currently military posts just in Djibouti alone. When Somalia and Eritrea are added, even possibly Somaliland, to the mix, one can reasonably assume that it is the hegemonic rivalry that has obliged the Chinese to secure a military base in Djibouti, just as the U.S., France, India, Japan, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Spain, and Saudi Arabia all have done so.

On the other hand, while China may still be regarded as a newcomer to Africa's arms and security technology market, compared to other global powers, it is now considered as a progressively growing player also. However, "China's market position is comparatively small and has not expanded recently. While it has emerged as the arms supplier of choice for a handful of regimes, these regimes are minor players in terms of total arms transfers," argues Hendrix (2020). In other words, China must catch up in its arms sales to African countries *vis a vis* Russia, the U.S., Germany, and France in that order. To date, although China has recently become the exporter of choice for several African countries, the total sales amount only to 2.5 percent of the total global African arms market recorded so far (Ibid).

What follows next in the discussion is India, a ranking global power in both the military and economic spheres. As the most populous state on earth, with an estimated population of 1.4 billion, India's national interest can be enormous. Thus, we will now briefly examine India's prevailing interest in the Horn of Africa.

India

India's strategic priorities in the Horn Africa are primarily steered more than anything else by economic imperatives. What should also be acknowledged here is that the rivalry that exists currently between India and China in both South Asia and the Indian Ocean has further expanded to the Horn of Africa in a typical hegemonic entanglement based on a show of force for strategic positioning, global supremacy, and international power recognition. While India has had years of experience in assisting Horn of Africa states with much-needed food assistance during times of drought and famine, however, it has gone beyond the humanitarian mission in recent years and come to realize that the Horn of Africa is critical for its national security from the geopolitical standpoint. As a result, Africa and the Indian Ocean Region are central to the foreign policy of India. In practical terms, though, India's strategic interest in the Horn of Africa can be attributed to four interrelated core reasons: to secure a military presence in the immediate future and ensure competitiveness as a ranking global power in such a strategic region of the world; to monitor if not to counteract against the perceived or actual hegemonic threat of its historic archenemy---China--- in the Indian Ocean and by extension the Red Sea; participate in the global anti-piracy campaign being conducted by several of the great powers operating off the coast of Somalia; and finally to find an economic outlet whereby Indian investors can reap the benefits of both the undeveloped African markets and the abundant landmass that is suitable for commercial farming throughout the continent.

Majumdar, reporting for Deutsche Welle (DW), a German public, state-owned international broadcaster, states that "India is trying to strengthen its long-standing ties to countries on the continent as New Delhi attempts to catch up with China, which has emerged as Africa's largest trading partner" (2022, 2). This economic rivalry between China and India over African markets is further reflected in the security realm where a military presence in the strategically vital region of Africa becomes a necessity. Thus, China's military base in Djibouti has naturally drawn India's ire; however, India has no known military base in the region at the time of this writing, although there were reports indicating that the country was seriously considering establishing one in Djibouti, thereby joining its rivals in the military arena there, as well (Whitehead, 2021). Yet, India has not sat idle throughout the years either. In addition to maintaining economic and cultural diplomatic ties with several Eastern and Western African countries, it has had a history of having defense partnerships with them, and therefore defense exercises and training of African officers have been part of its defense diplomacy (Singh, 2021).

As stated earlier, India's impacting presence in the Horn of Africa however is heavily manifested in the economic arena. The Indian Embassy in Ethiopia, for example, reported in January 2023 that "Indian investors are the second-largest foreign employers in Ethiopia, providing employment to more than 75,000 persons. About 61.78% of Indian investment is in the manufacturing sector, followed by agriculture (13.1%)" (Chaudhury, 2021). Africa-India overall trade has also been growing over the last several years, and the trend will most likely continue, as India attempts to have its presence felt in the continent. According to Gakhar and Gokarn, African exports to India were growing at a rate of 32 per cent annually, with Indian exports to Africa at a rate of 23 per cent. Much of this trade involved exports of minerals, such as gold and ore, as well as oil and gas. Gakhar and Gokran, for example, assert that "India currently faces an energy deficit and coupled with potential supply insecurity from other regions, Africa's role as a supplier of minerals and fuels may intensify in the short run" (2015, 3).

Having explored the roles of the four largest military powers in the Horn of Africa in the foregoing analysis,

we now pivot to the discussion of the same focusing on all other emerging global and regional powers. This is to be accomplished by presenting a case-by-case account of their strategic interests, motives, and activities throughout the rest of the study.

France

France, along with Great Britain and Italy, has had the longest presence in the Horn of Africa starting as colonial powers in the latter part of the 19th century. The Somalian territory was then divided up among the three European powers, following the Berlin Conference of November 15, 1884 – February 26, 1885, that carved up Africa into colonial territorial possessions among such European powers as Belgium, Italy, France, United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, and Germany; Ethiopia, which was not a party to the conference, had its share of such a possession. Consequently, the French took the area known today as Djibouti; the Italians took the southern part of Somalia, including the current Somalia independent state; the British occupied the territory to the north, including the current *de facto* state of Somaliland, in order to safe guard their trade route through the Suez Canal that had been open in 1869; and Ethiopia incorporated what is known as the Ogaden, which is currently the eastern portion of that country. Even after Djibouti gained its independence in 1977, which was then known as *French Somaliland*, France's influence in Djibouti has been so deep-rooted to this day that critics of the former colonial power mock the latter to be a "protectorate" of the former. This depiction of Djibouti comes amid circumstances showing on the ground that the strategically located, tiny state relies too heavily on French protection and support to maintain its sovereignty, thus giving it the appearance of a neocolonialized state that has yet to secure "real independence" from its past.

To the extent that France's presence in its former African colonies today is one of "paternalism," some experts reason that the relationship can therefore be regarded in the context of neocolonialism. Egal, for example, states that, "(2021, 1). To protect and influence its interests in post-Independence Africa, France, opted to institutionalize its relationships with its former colonies by signing comprehensive bilateral economic, political, military, and cultural accords that binds effectively French control, domination, and presence of the former colonies." (Ibid). Nonetheless, France's strategic interest in the Horn of Africa is still fully deep-rooted in its military base in Djibouti, where the hegemonic rivalry is the fiercest, as ten global and regional powers monitor each other's activities against the background of the Red Sea and its vital waterways through which the greater shipments of global commerce find their way. Among the global and regional powers that have bases in Djibouti are the U.S., France, Italy, Japan, China, and Saudi Arabia. While these six countries are primarily military base proprietors, they host others, as well. For example, France hosts German and Spanish military personnel; United States hosts British troops; and Japan has entered an accord to share its base(s) with India. In this regard, a total of ten countries is stationed in Djibouti alone.

France has had a long history of military interventions in Africa specifically in times of crises in those countries that were its former colonies, for example, Senegal, Chad, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali, among others. However, France is known to have its biggest military base on the continent stationed in Djibouti, counting some 1,500 troops. Djibouti, hosting France's biggest Foreign Legion deployment, is home to French warships, aircraft, and armored vehicles. Using the Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport, the French Air Force runs, in cooperation with other allies, such diverse operations as anti-piracy campaigns in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea; humanitarian aid; peacekeeping; tactical and strategic military raids; naval and air force sorties; drone strikes; special combats; anti-terrorist threats in Yemen and the Horn of Africa; and intelligence and surveillance gatherings (De Faakto Intelligence Research Observatory, 2019). According to Hansen, France has been active in the economic arena, as well. French companies have long been involved in African business ventures so much that 5% of France's export trade is with African countries, mostly of those known as *Francophone* because of their colonial past under France. To complement this, a substantial size of French nationals, numbering up to 240,000, live throughout Africa doing business and being involved in other forms of occupation, including banking and education. The strong ties that France has had with its former colonies are best described in the excerpt below:

Though France has diversified its sources of raw materials, Africa remains an important supplier of oil and metals. French officials also stress the importance of encouraging regional stability and development, support of democratic governments. "The African continent is our neighbor, and when it's shaken by conflict, we're shaken as well," said André Dulait, a French parliamentarian during a debate on Africa (Hansen, 2008).

Japan

At a glance, Japan's foreign policy toward the Horn of Africa may seem to be driven by the desire to join other forces in the anti-piracy campaign that is being waged by many of the great powers operating in the Indian Ocean and more particularly off the coast of Somalia; however, the motive for its active involvement in the region is also powered by considerations of trade and investment, along with the geopolitical realities deep-down to the region itself. Furthermore, Japan's interest in the Horn of Africa, like its hegemonic counterparts, banks heavily on such considerations as security details, freedom of commerce, and upkeep of global power standing. Along this line, Hammond observes that "Pirates or no pirates, Japan remains committed to an international security operation off the Horn of Africa which is increasingly a cornerstone of its wider Africa policy" (2019, 1). In addition to securing a military base in Djibouti, Japan's mission in the region is to ensure that "...a rules-based international order while providing an essential service in preserving safe passage through maritime corridors critical to Japan's economy and energy security (Ibid). From this statement, one can see that Japan's strategic interest is truly imbedded in its activist stance in Africa through the mechanisms of trade, investments, foreign aid, and the like. The military component of this activism is of course well reflected in the securing of a military base in Djibouti, thereby countering the perceived and real threat other rivals in the region may pose in the strategic and vital seaways of the Red Sea. At the same time, unlike Russia, China, the U.S. and even Turkey, Japan is not known as an arms exporter to Africa, and in that regard, there is really nothing worthy of scrutiny here.

For Japan, however, the main challenger in the Horn of Africa is none other than China, and so it is the threat of the Chinese expansion in Africa that gives chills to Japan. As archenemies for decades if not centuries, Japan and China never agree on many international issues particularly those involving southeast Asia; a regional rivalry, fueled by the disputed South China Sea, has been at the center of discord between the two Asian economic powerhouses. Consequently, in competition with China, Japan leased from Djibouti in 2011 a military site and stationed a contingent of 180 Japanese troops, which is next to the U.S. Camp Lemonnier military base located at the Horn of Africa country's international airport. "Japan will lease additional land next year to expand a military base in Djibouti, eastern Africa, as a counterweight to what it sees as growing Chinese influence in the region," recounts Kubo, adding that "Japan also pledged to increase its support to infrastructure, education and healthcare projects in Africa, committing an extra \$30 billion in public and private support" (2016, 3). This huge sum was intended of course to counter China's \$60 billion commitment to development projects throughout Africa, which also included debt cancellations for several counties and pledges of developing the agricultural sector to eliminate food deficits while boosting commercial farming for domestic consumption and recapturing the amount of foreign currency reserve to be gained from agricultural exports (Ibid).

While acknowledging Japan's keen interest in building strategic partnerships with the Horn of Africa counties, Askar contends that Japan seeks "...to maximize its vital interests and enhance its influence amid strong international competition. Japan is also keen to counter China's influence in the Horn of Africa, which has grown immensely in recent years" (2021, 1). In addition to offering humanitarian assistance at times of drought and famine to the regional states, Japan's underlying economic interest in the Horn of Africa has been for the most part investing in several of the dynamic sectors of the African economies, while exploiting the strategic location of the Horn of Africa states, with a special focus on the export of goods and services. As Japan is known for aiding countries that lack both skills and capital, Tokyo's priorities in Africa thus have been supporting economic development, given that it is essential to link the emerging economies of East Africa with those of the world in which Japan itself plays a major part. This has led naturally to the growing Japanese interest in the maritime corridors of the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, especially the Red Sea and Strait of the Bab al-Mandab, which connect Africa and Asia through the seas of Asia and the Indian Ocean.

United Kingdom

As a former colonial power, Great Britain has had a long history of engagement in the Horn of Africa, particularly in the current *de fact* state of Somaliland, which used to be called then *British Somaliland*. Unlike France, though, the British presence has been extremely limited since Somalia's independence, and it is only very recently that the U.K.'s interest in the Horn of Africa seems to have heightened after China and other great powers have been competing for geopolitical dominance of the region. At the same time, it should be noted that the U.K. has had a long and mutually beneficial partnership with other *Anglophone* African countries under the auspices of the *Commonwealth*---a political association of 56-member states, the vast majority of which are former territories of the British Empire. Some of these countries included African states, eighteen in total, whose postcolonial ties with Great Britain have been unbroken under the *Commonwealth*.

However, following *Brexit*---a nomenclature for the official withdrawal of Great Britain from the European Union (EU) in January 2020---the U.K. has shown a renewed interest in revitalizing its international image and consequently embarked on a foreign policy that is particularly focused on Africa as a whole, with an eye on the

Horn of Africa as well as the security of the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Indian Ocean. This whole new thinking of the U.K. has come about against the backdrop of the global hotspots of the Middle East and the Horn of Africa today, which have drawn the attention of several global and regional powers, as each seeks geopolitical supremacy at a time of political uncertainty across the world. Added to this global uncertainty are the threats looming over the U.S.-China confrontation over Taiwan and the Russia-Ukraine war that is threatening to plunge the U.S. and EU into an armed conflict directly with Russia, even to the extent of engaging in a nuclear war that may culminate in World War III; all these are concerns of Great Britain as they are to the great powers, and to the rest of the world, as well.

As is true with all its rivals in the Horn of Africa, the U.K.'s interests are multi-faceted. Active diplomacy that advances the national security interest of each state at the international stage is often an essential tool especially for any global power to remain competitive, and this imperative therefore has driven the British to make inroads into Africa by engaging strategically located African countries diplomatically. With the intention of propping its international standing, the U.K. in effect has replicated the actions of its counterparts---both allies and adversaries---in the Horn of Africa. In affirmation of this view, Askar notes that "Recent tours and movements by British officials in some regional countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia reflect a noticeable interest to expand Britain's regional political and diplomatic presence in light of the international and regional competition in this region" (2021, 2).

Looking at it holistically, however, the long-term foreign policy strategy of Great Britain seems geared primarily toward an improvement of its trade and investment activities and becoming a major player in Africa. There is no doubt that the U.K. is making a concerted effort to have an impacting influence in the Horn of Africa at a level that is commensurate with its national interest and global power ranking. In the end, this sub-region of Africa is where the security interests as well as the strategic priorities of great and emerging powers are colliding, given the backdrop of intense hegemonic competition that has permeated throughout the region during the most recent decades. Although the presence of dozens of British troops in Djibouti to maintain its security needs, using the U.S. military base in Camp Lemonnier as an official post, may not seem to project a stately physical presence demonstrative of the U.K.'s global reputation, it certainly is a strategy that serves it effectively at this time. Germany, and Spain, along with India, have similar arrangements with their respective allied global power stationed, with an established military base in Djibouti. Sure enough, like the other regional powers, the U.K. uses its troops to provide support to the global anti-piracy campaign in the Indian Ocean while protecting the security of the shipping waterways of the Red Sea and ensuring that global commerce remains unaffected by any threats that could stem from the Yemen civil war---spilling over to the Red Sea---and the often-volatile Middle East politics.

On the other hand, unlike some other global and regional powers involved in arms transfers to the Horn of Africa states, the volume of sales that the U.K. is known to have made in the past and currently have been insignificant, although in the decades past Somalia and Eritrea, following its independence in 1993, have been the beneficiaries of such sales. At the same time, it should also be noted that arms sales by the U.K. to other African countries as well as to allies in the rest of the world have been the mainstay of a British foreign policy instrument for decades (Fleshma, 2011). On a much larger scale, Great Britain has more recently embarked---in pursuit of its economic interests---on a renewed roadmap that is forward looking. This has come about against the backdrop of its singular action to leave the EU and enjoy the leeway that allows it to conduct its own independent political, diplomatic, and economic policies unfettered by any collective decision making that the EU requires of its member states. Consequently, the U.K.'s economic policy has been on a new trajectory that is best described by Askar as follows:

Britain seeks to preserve its power on global economy's map by forging a network of economic alliances, building strong trade partnerships with African countries in various fields such as infrastructure, renewable energy and technology, opening new markets in the Horn of Africa's countries as substitutes for EU's markets, benefiting from the population density and natural resources enjoyed by these countries, exploring economic opportunities, boosting trade volumes and expanding investments in the Horn of Africa's countries, ensuring bilateral and collective trade agreements with these countries, and highlighting Britain's status as a new partner for African states. All of this is boosted by London's efforts to occupy a better rank as a foreign investor in Africa among G7 countries in the next few years (Ibid).

Although there were reports showing that Britain's trade with Africa has shrunk in absolute and relative terms, from 30% in 1960 to about 3% in 2022, after *Brexit*, however, trade between Africa and the U.K. in general has grown steadily. According to Nicholas Westcott (2022), more than 40 per cent of the UK's African trade was with South Africa and Nigeria. This obviously does not in any way suggest that the Horn of Africa has been the main

beneficiary of the trade with the U.K. It only confirms the earlier assertion made that the U.K. has not as actively involved in the region as it has in other parts of the continent, particularly of those states in the western and southern regions of Africa. At the same time, in the investment sector, Great Britain has set a robust record in most recent years, as noted by Westcott in this excerpt:

In 2019 the country held the second-largest stock of foreign direct investment in Africa (after China) at \$66 billion – 83 per cent of it invested in oil, gas, mining, and financial suggest services. Annual investment grew rapidly after 2000, but plummeted after Brexit and recovered in 2018-2019, only to fall again during the covid-19 pandemic. African investment in the UK was around \$3 billion in 2014, but the UK has found a niche in encouraging expanding African companies to list on the London Stock Exchange. By 2019, more than 110 African companies with a combined market capitalization of \$175 billion were listed on the London Stock Exchange – more than on any other stock exchange outside Africa bid (Westcott, 2022, 1).

That was why in 2020, the U.K. hosted an Investment Summit with African countries in hopes of promoting and elevating business investments throughout the continent, with the belief that“...Africa is home to several of the fastest-growing economies in the world; financial technology and telecoms are booming on the continent; African minerals are increasingly in demand; and Africa has great potential to improve its agricultural output.”(Ibid). In sum, the U.K.’s engagements in the many facets of its international relations with the Horn of Africa countries have been on the rise of late, and they are expected to accelerate even more in the coming years, as will those of the other powers that are competing for influence and primacy in the region.

Italy

The colonial ties that Italy has had historically to the Horn of Africa touch a chord with three of the four countries in the region. Both Eritrea and Somalia were once colonized by Italy; however, Italy’s attempt to subdue the Ethiopian Empire and subjugate it into a colonial status ended in fiasco, as the Italian army was defeated in 1896 at the Battle of Adwa by the Ethiopians in one of the greatest wars in the history of Africa. Of course, during the Second World War, Italy was able to occupy Ethiopia for 5 years while the fight to expel them from the country still raged on. Given this historical connection, therefore, Italy’s presence in the region should not be unexpected, as France’s presence there should not. Unlike France, though, Italy’s commitment to shaping the geopolitical surroundings of the region has been low key for many decades. This, however, has changed course in most recent years, as Italy’s geopolitical interest in the Horn of Africa becomes more deepened in competition with allies as well as adversaries.

In the last ten years, the objectives of Italy’s foreign policy have been redefined to include the African continent as a priority,” states Strangis, of the Istituto Affari Internazionali. The wider objective of Italian renewed interest in Africa was spelled out in a2020 A Partnership with Africa declaration, which provided areas of cooperation with African countries with a focus on security, migration, and human rights.“ Rome is strengthening ties with the countries of the Horn of Africa, a strategic region at the center of the Red Sea route, one of the busiest trade routes in the world,” Strangis correctly notes (2022, 1).

Given this backdrop, Italy’s foreign policy toward the Horn of Africa thus relies on the three similar pillars to those Germany pursues in the region: stemming migrations from other countries through the dangerous waters of the Mediterranean Sea; becoming an active player in the global security taskforces of the Red Sea, with the aim of ensuring the safe and secure passage of international commerce; and taking advantage of the trade and investment opportunities that the region provides for.

Of all the countries in southern Europe bordering the Mediterranean Sea, however, Italy has been the most affected by immigration issues over the years. In fact, 75 percent of the migrants arriving in Europe land in Italy at the point of entrance. Using Libya and Tunisia as a gateway to Europe, most of the immigrants wanting to migrate to the various European countries end up on the Italian shores because of the country’s proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. These immigrants often take the high risks of volatility of the ocean’s waves at the time of turbulence and the vagaries of human traffickers that guarantee them no safe passage except usurping exorbitant fees from them while conducting their criminal endeavor. For example, in 1922, “6,701 migrants arrived in Italy from the Mediterranean -- around half were rescued at sea and the other half landed on their own,” according to a report published by *Info Migrants* (ANSA, 2022). D'emilio revealed, citing a remark made in March 2023 by a

lawmaker from a right-wing party in Italy, that “nearly 700,000 migrants are in Libya awaiting an opportunity to set out by sea toward Italy” (2023, 3). According to *Statista*, a leading provider of market and consumer data, 59,700 immigrants from Tunisia, Egypt, Bangladesh, Iran, Côte d’Ivoire, Iraq, Guinea, Morocco, Eritrea, and Sudan arrived in Italy between January and November of 2021 (2021, 1). From this stark evidence, one cannot fail to fathom the enormity with which Italy may view the immigration crisis it has confronted. Indeed, this is a national security challenge for Rome.

Equally important to Italian foreign policy objectives is having to assume a global role at a vital and strategic region like the Horn of Africa. A loyal member of the Western alliance, Italy’s global interest aligns with that of the U.S. as well all other member-states of NATO and EU. The most prominent of such countries---the U.S., France, Great Britain, and Germany---use global security imperatives and freedom of commerce through the Red Sea as a *raison d’etre* for their presence in the Horn Africa, and the same goes for Italy in that regard. With this being the case, Italy maintains its own military base in Djibouti. The base is regarded as the “... first real operational logistic base of the Italian armed forces outside the national borders and considered by the Italian government a permanent outpost in an area of enormous strategic importance” (De Faakto Intelligence Research Observatory, 2019, 1). Among the reasons that experts often cite as a trigger for the global powers to have military facilities in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Djibouti, are: “fighting terrorism, close to Somalia and Yemen; surveillance of mercantile traffic; deploying instructors and parachutists in Mogadishu as part of the European training mission in favor of the Somali army; military engagement in anti-terrorist operations against Shabab Islamists or al-Qaeda exponents; and liberation of hostages, kidnap and ransom operations” if and when they occur (Ibid). Italy is actively engaged in some if not in most of these activities, thus complementing the roles that other Western allies play in the region.

The third and last pillar in Italy’s Horn of Africa strategy may be linked to a trend that is at a high pitch of global economic diplomacy in the Horn of Africa these days, where business interests have become the superseding crusade of external powers. More specifically, though, this pillar is centered on the opportunities that the region offers to Italian investors while getting the most out of trade relations between Italy and the Horn of Africa states; and, undeniably, development aid has been the mechanism Italy and others use to advance their relations with the developing nations of the Horn. The abundance of natural resources, including the potential for benefit extractions in the dynamic sectors of the economies of these states by Italian businesses, is the driving force for Italy to navigate a constructive engagement scheme beneficial to Italy, primarily, but also to the states whose resources are sought after. To the extent that enhancement of trade relations and investment ventures often require effective diplomacy, proving a genuine interest in assisting countries that lack the know-how and the necessary funds to launch projects on their own, Italy has put programs in place that offer basic services to the needy and the less privileged in some countries of the Horn. Strangis clearly puts this in context in the following citation:

Through the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) program in Ethiopia and Kenya, Italy has become a leader in projects concerning water resources. Italy is allocating funding and know-how to initiatives to tackle drought and climate change in Ethiopia. Moreover, the Italian Development Cooperation Agency is participating in a UNICEF project on drought response in Ethiopia that would implement sustainable water supplies in affected areas. At the bilateral level, Italy is reinforcing its ties with Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea through aid and development programs. Between 2017 and 2018, an overall amount of 81 million US dollars was donated to these countries. A stronger relationship has been built with Ethiopia especially, for which Italy is the second-largest commercial partner in Europe (Strangis, 2022, 1)

An Italian entrepreneur, named Agostino Siccardi, in an interview conducted in 2019, reiterated this in a much more convincing disclosure, as the quotation below so unveils:

...today, if you want to be successful, you must sit at the table and negotiate on an equal footing with the African customer: the time of colonization is over: let us keep in mind that Africa is not just emigration, as we want to believe. He added that The Africa Horn has enormous potential in terms of business and has a very strategic position, being at the entrance of the Red Sea, where all exports from Far East countries to European countries transit. For too long, for example, Somalian piracy has disturbed these trades. For the business not only, money is needed for investments, first there is need for stability so that they can proliferate (Fotogiornalista, 2019, 1).

Although the exact amount of Italian business investments in the Horn of Africa is difficult to pin down, a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD) disclosed that Italy was the seventh

among the ten top direct investors in Africa (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2019). In an exclusive interview with the Ethiopian News Agency on April 1, 2023, Agostino Palese, Italy's Ambassador to Ethiopia, affirmed that Ethiopia is regarded by his country as its strategic partner in the Horn of Africa, adding that “We believe that Ethiopia could play a role in the Horn of Africa” (Ethiopian News Agency, 2023, 1). Citing the importance of Ethiopia as an investment destination for Italian businesses, Ambassador Palese further stated that energy development in Africa is Italy’s expressed interest, with private investment playing a key role and efforts to improve the skills and training of Africans in many different sectors of the economy becoming as the core objective of his government. For example, the ambassador cited the banking sector in Ethiopia where such skills and training may be needed, adding that “We have to continue to work because if Ethiopia is to attract investment and to have more reform economic agenda, I understand it takes time, but the only way is to go forward and especially in the bank system and on custom” (Ibid.)

Germany

To put it in perspective, Germany’s foreign policy toward Africa in general has been one of indifference for years, in contrast to its Western allies that have been active throughout the continent for decades. Nonetheless, the European economic powerhouse, as Germany is often hailed by many observers, has not been entirely blasé, either. Based on the principles of respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and peaceful resolution of conflicts, Germany has dealt with African countries every so often, but not of course as actively and vigorously as France, the U.S., or Great Britain, just to mention a few. What drives Germany’s strategy in Africa are the issues of migration, development, and security, according to Pelz (2021). In what seems consistent with this same viewpoint, Schadomsky affirms that “Despite their understandable commitment to Ukraine, Germans and Europeans should not ignore the Horn of Africa. They must consider both geopolitical factors and their own self-interest: Should war and hunger trigger a wave of refugees across the Mediterranean, it could lead to new social upheavals in Europe” (2022, 2).

Overall, however, three interrelated pillars provide the guiding tenets of Germany’s activities in the Horn of Africa. The first pillar is security. Like its Western allies, Germany’s presence in that part of Africa has been shaped by the global security undercurrents prevalent not only in the Horn of Africa but also the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and even the Persian Gulf. As key EU member and a loyal partner of the Western alliance, led by the U.S., Germany’s national security interest is therefore intimately tied to that of its allies. Thus, the anti-terrorism and anti-piracy campaigns waged by the global powers in Somalia as well as in the Indian Ocean, respectively, has compelled Germany to join forces with them, as this is coordinated with its overall national interest and foreign policy priorities. So, Germany’s measured involvement in the Horn of Africa has given way to the stationing of a small contingent of German soldiers, numbering between 30 and 80 in Djibouti, under the sponsorship of France, which has had a well-established military presence in its former colony for decades. For example, reporting for the *Philadelphia Trumpet*, Di Santo discloses the functions of Germany’s military station, asserting that “Germany has a presence at a French naval airbase in Djibouti, from which it patrols strategic sea lanes around the Horn of Africa. It conducts air patrols in support of an EU-wide mission to fight piracy and, in the past, has deployed frigates and support ships in the area” (2019, 1). At the same time, research shows that Germany’s arms transfer to the Horn of Africa is nonexistent. Although it is known in the global arms sales industry as the world's third-leading weapons exporter, often placed behind the U.S. and Russia, there is no recorded data crediting it as an arms seller to African countries.

A second pillar and a fundamental tenet of Germany’s foreign policy strategy have been the containment of massive inflowing of foreign immigration, mostly involving unskilled African migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea and seeking refuge in EU countries. Germany has been a magnet for economic refugees in most recent years, but it has been equally welcoming of refugees for humanitarian reasons stemming from wars and other human-made disasters. For example, Germany was absorbing more than one million Syrian refugees at the height of the Syrian crisis in 2015. Also, it has been a country of choice for asylum seekers; in 2017, for instance, “Eritrea followed only Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan as a top country of origin of people seeking asylum in Germany” (Pelz, 2018) While unskilled foreign labor is regarded as a liability not only in Germany but also in France, on the contrary, skilled labor is welcomed by both European countries because, in the view of Tandian, “...It can help balance an ageing society and finance the pension system, as well as compensate for the current shortage of skilled workers” (2023, 2).

Given this reality, Germany’s new undertaking by seeking skilled workers from selected African countries lately indeed has put German-African relations on a new trajectory of cooperation for the common good. However, as a footnote to this, it should be noted that the “brain drain” syndrome, pushing the African educated class out of

Africa, is costing African countries profoundly while alleviating the skilled labor shortages of the advanced countries of the West, such as Germany. For example, Germany announced at the beginning of 2023 a policy that would establish skilled-worker recruitment centers in Ghana, Nigeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt. According to Tandian, “The people sought are skilled workers with vocational training, skilled workers with academic training, researchers, scientists and managers” (Ibid).

In this connection, while Germany’s new search for selective African immigrant talent is certainly a new indicator of closer cooperation, still yet mass immigration from Africa of the unskilled category is of major concern to Germany, as well as Italy, both of which have been affected the most by ongoing immigration issues; France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece, all bordering the Mediterranean Sea, are also impacted, but not as much. Given these circumstances, therefore, Germany’s fear of being swamped by excessive immigration of unskilled workers from Africa and elsewhere simply seeking economic opportunities may not be unfounded. European countries have seen for decades migrants taking extreme and risky journeys through illegal human trafficking across the Mediterranean Sea relentlessly to reach their shores and become a liability for them, as the foreign immigrants strain the educational, healthcare, and social welfare systems that the European countries have created for their own citizens. Consequently, many, like Germany, have taken a stand to stem the problem at its root-cause; that is to say, tackling the immigration issue from the place of origin---Africa and elsewhere. Since the interrelated issues of political instability, economic crisis, coupled with ethnic strife and drought conditions, are the main culprits, global response to the needs of counties that are prone to these conditions are usually used as a justification for external intervention. Thus, it is against this background that Germany’s foreign policy toward Africa, and most importantly to the Horn Africa, should be weighed.

The third pillar that defines Germany’s global standing is further underpinned in activities that aim development as key to political stability and national unity. Countries that have historically been wrecked by violence, stemming from any combination of ethnic conflict, famine caused by drought conditions, border disputes, and authoritarian governance, as some of the African states have, are likely to be on Germany’s development radar, with priorities centered on humanitarian aid, trade, and investments. For example, in 2011, at the height of an alarming famine conditions in Africa, Germany’s Federal Foreign Office donated 9.6 million euro in humanitarian aid for the Horn of Africa, which was increased to 33.5 million euro in the same year. This was in addition to EU’s total humanitarian aid of 160 million euro, of which Germany contributed about thirty-two million euro (German Federal Foreign Office, 2011). Likewise, as some of its Western allies as well as other rivals have done of late, Germany has begun to engage Africa in activities that spur development. The aim is tapping trade and investment opportunities across the continent, incentivizing market forces domestically, and integrating African budding economies into the global capitalist system. To that end, other countries have held business summits with African states and have done so in the hopes of opening investment ventures in the growing African economic sector while aiming to meet the demands of domestic market forces within their own countries seeking investment potentials globally. Countries such as the U.S., China, Russia, Turkey, India, Japan, among others, have held business summits in most recent years with African states, with trade and investments talks dominating the agenda. Germany had its own version of such a summit in 2017 in Kenya---the *German African Business Summit*---where “around 400 business and political representatives were expected to attend with a view to getting to know new markets, finding business partners and discussing opportunities and risks” (Olly/Fotolia – Business, 2017).

Nonetheless, Germany’s involvement to date in African trade and investment activities have mostly involved West Africa, Southern Africa, and to some degree East Africa. In contrast, German investment interest has been minimal to date relative to the Horn of Africa, although Ethiopia remains a good prospect for German investors in the future. Pelz, reporting for Deutsche Welle (DW), maintains that “Ethiopia is already included in Germany's G20 initiative "Compact with Africa" (2018, 3). The goal is to attract more private investment to selected African countries. Reform partners would benefit from additional German development aid. In exchange, these countries would be obliged to uphold democratic values, respect human rights, and fight corruption” (Ibid.)

Spain

Spain’s past foreign policy agenda toward Africa was best described by Gilin 2010 in a policy brief that he wrote for FRIDE, a European think thank for global action:

Spain lacks historic links in the continent comparable to those of France or the United Kingdom; it is also a country which, in spite of having increased its volume of ODA {Official Development Aid} from 2 billion Euros in 2003 to almost 5 billion euros in 2010, does not have the requisite economic might to compete with the United States or China (2010, 2).

However, global realities often compel established and emerging global powers to adapt to contemporary trends and developments affecting the global system, as they compete for limited resources and seek to cooperate with, influence, and control others that are less powerful but whose natural resources are untapped and need development. As such, Spain has made a change of course and embarked on a more far-sighted foreign policy agenda lately, with Africa playing a significant part in it. “We want to be a strategic partner in the continent,” pronounced Spain’s Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez in 2021, stressing the importance of Africa to Spanish business investments. Launching a new African strategy, he promised that African countries would be his administration’s diplomatic priority, further asserting that his plan would include boosting “...financing schemes to support Spanish companies seeking to expand in Africa and also a commitment by Madrid to call for debt relief for African countries at G20 meetings.” (Gallardo, 2021).

Unlike other European colonial powers, however, Spain’s African colonial experience is inconsequential because it had only one colony---Equatorial Guinea. Thus, Spain’s African engagements have been most recent, and even those engagements are widespread throughout the continent instead of concentrating in a sub-region. In that regard, the Horn of Africa is not particularly a strategic priority for Spain, although the country’s membership in the EU and having a shared democratic tradition with the West overall still make an alliance with Western powers that are active in the Horn of Africa a strategic necessity. As part of the innovative approach, Spanish companies built highly touted projects in some selected African countries, such as Morocco, where a mega solar energy facility was inaugurated in 2016, and Kenya, where a wind power farm in Lake Turkana was built in 2017.

In the investment sector, Spain has made some headways, as well. For example, “Spain’s exports to Africa were worth €19 billion in 2019, or 19 percent of the country’s exports outside the EU. Spain’s imports from Africa were worth €27 billion that year,” according to Gallardo (Ibid). At the same time, there have been some drawbacks negatively impacting Spanish investments in Africa. As with their counterparts in the U.S., Spanish investors have been reluctant to commit fully to business ventures in Africa fearful that political instability and corruption would put such ventures at a high-risk. The storyline about African countries has been for a while that frequent regime changes and high-level corruption reported in several countries of Africa make business decision making on foreign investments most difficult. Yet, this negative caricature of African societies has lessened in recent years. As a result, foreign investors are now pouring in billions of dollars into Africa more than any other time in the past, although the exact figure is hard to quantify.

On the other hand, Spain is not known as a major exporter of arms to Africa. Even so, it ranked seventh among the world’s twenty-five largest exporters of major arms during the period between 2016 and 2020, according to a study done by Wezeman, in 2021. Still constituting only 3.2% of arms traded in the international market, Spain’s arms exports during that period went to Australia, Singapore, and Turkey, not to Africa (Wezeman et al, 2020). In this connection, it is also essential to note that Russia remains the single largest foreign arms provider to Africa, accounting for 49% of arms bought by the region. The US and China are neck -and-neck with sales to Africa being 14% and 13%, respectively. Regarding Spain’s physical presence in the Horn of Africa, one can only point to the EU’s *Operation Atalanta*, established initially as European Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia, which....

is a current counter-piracy military operation at sea off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean that contributes to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast. The operation is part of the EU's comprehensive approach for a peaceful, stable, and democratic Somalia and contributes to stability in the Horn of Africa” (Council of the EU, 2021).

Stationed in the French facilities in Djibouti, Spain maintains fifty military personnel to support EU’s mission and has continuously increased its activities in the Horn of Africa by deploying maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft as part of *Operation Atalanta*.

Turkey

While a member of the EU but geographically connected with the Middle East, Turkey’s national interest in the Horn of Africa certainly has an overlapping implication for the latter as well as the former. As Turkey is bordered by Syria, Iraq, and Iran, the proximity of these countries to the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea all make the EU -member state a regional power by proximity. Of course, proximity alone does not necessarily make a state a regional power, since power variables could be manifested in the size of population, human capital, military capacity, economic power, and technological prowess of a country. Beckley, describing the essentials of power, observes that...

Power is the most important variable in world politics, but scholars and policy analysts systematically

mismeasure it. Most studies evaluate a country's power using broad indicators of economic and military resources, such as gross domestic products and military spending, which tally their wealth and military assets without deducting the costs they pay to police, protect, and serve their people. As a result, standard indicators exaggerate the wealth and military power of poor, populous countries, such as China and India (2018, 1).

Despite the lack of consensus in effectively measuring the essentials of national power, nonetheless, Turkey's global power ranking has been on the rise during the most recent decades. With a population of eighty-five million, a GDP rank of 20 in the world, and a military that is in the top ten of the world's one hundred most powerful armed forces, Turkey is a country to be reckoned with. In fact, Turkey maintains the second largest number of military personnel among NATO countries, only exceeded by the U. S. (Statista, 2022).

Given the forgoing, what is Turkey's role as a regional power in the Middle East and by extension in the Horn of Africa? As a Sunni Islamic state, Turkey's relations with the Middle East and North African Arab countries have gone through rough times lately. The Sunni-Shia religious schism has not been the cause of it, however. Turkey and Egypt, where Sunni Islam is the dominant religion in both states, have been at odds for decades over such issues as the Muslim Brotherhood, a Pan-Islamic, religious, and social movement founded in Egypt, which taught the illiterate, and set up hospitals and business enterprises and later advanced into the political arena. Egypt saw the Brotherhood as a threat while Turkey had sympathies for it. Furthermore, Turkey and Egypt became on the opposite sides of the Libyan crisis, following Muammar Gaddafi's removal from power in 2011. The struggle between two political factions in post-Gaddafi Libya over succession pitted Turkey against Egypt because of the support they provided to the opposing factions there. Similarly, Turkey's support to Qatar, which is at odds with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, has exacerbated regional tensions.

The Qatar–Saudi Arabia diplomatic row has been on the forefront since the beginning of the Arab Spring—a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2010 and 2011, challenging some of the region's entrenched authoritarian regimes. The revolution was viewed as a threat by Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates to their kingdoms, as did Egypt, whereas Qatar supported it. As Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, both of which are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Qatar's warm relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia's key rival in the region, have fueled further tension between the two Gulf states. On top of that, Qatar's popular broadcasting outlet, *Al Jazeera*, which focuses its coverage on international and regional topics, supported the Arab Spring all along while fanning anti-Saudi Arabia news accounts, which has made things worse. In this connection, as Turkey has been a key supporter of Qatar against the interests of Saudi Arabia and the UAE primarily, with Bahrain and Egypt also included the regional rivalry in the Gulf has thus spilled over to the Horn of Africa for influence and control. The efforts of Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Iran to secure some presence in the Horn of Africa as well as influence the geopolitics of the region are therefore part of the hegemonic rivalry in the Horn of Africa—the underlying thrust of this study.

While Turkey has had a long history of diplomatic relations particularly with Ethiopia, its active presence in the region only became more pronounced in 2011 as Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Somalia and secured a military presence there, using humanitarian aid to the famine-stricken, politically unstable Horn country as an enticement. What followed then was the following:

Ankara surged aid funding, initiated development projects, opened schools, and assumed a leading role in shaping the state-building agenda, including opening a sizable military facility to train Somali government soldiers. Today, Turkish firms operate Mogadishu's air and seaports, its markets are flush with Turkish-manufactured goods, and Turkish Airways flies direct to the capital city—the first major international carrier to do so (Vertin, 2019, 1).

Looking at Turkey's engagements in the Horn of Africa critically, however, one is inclined to conclude that three overall objectives steer its foreign policy toward the region: securing a strategic position in the Horn of Africa as an emerging power; increasing its trade and investment capacities; and becoming a major arms supplier to the regional states and beyond. In 2017, Turkey followed its Somalia success by courting Sudan, following Erdogan's state visit there, to engage in bilateral relations. Erdogan agreed to help restore the Sudanese "Suakin Island—a historic and long-defunct Ottoman trading post on Sudan's Red Sea coast and a one-time launching point for African Muslims traveling to Mecca. Among the dozen cooperation agreements inked was a pledge from Erdogan to restore the island, revive its cultural significance and reestablish annual ferries to the holy sites" (Ibid). However, the two countries' relations have been in limbo since the Sudanese military toppled the pro-Turkey regime of

former Sudanese President Omar al Bashir in 2019.

Nonetheless, it is in Somalia where Turkey has secured a foothold in the region, with the first military base of its kind outside Turkey. Established in the capital, Mogadishu, in 2017 at a cost of \$10 million, the base was expected to provide training for Somalia's soldiers. Ironically, Somalia also was hosting the United Arab Emirates simultaneously. The UAE ran a military facility in the capital but had also agreed to secure another base in the breakaway region of Somaliland. This action of the UAE obviously created a shaky situation for Somalia, leading eventually to the former's easing out of the deal. The UAE's presence in Somalia certainly would have pitted it against Turkey, and the fact that the UAE sought a military presence in Somaliland was tantamount to recognition of the latter's *de facto* independence, which was unacceptable to Somalia. That said, Turkish military presence in the Horn of Africa country was a strategic move that aims to challenge Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE primarily, as these regional powers vie for control and influence the affairs the various states in the region (Al Jazeera, 2017).

Because both Sudan and Somalia are fellow Muslim states, Ankara saw them initially as a convenient target for strategic alliance in the region; however, it has been Ethiopia since then in which Turkey has been well invested; both commercial investments in and arms sales to Ethiopia, the second most populous African country after Nigeria, have taken prominence. In 2016, for example, Turkey and Ethiopia signed an agreement, with a 5 million square meter area leased to Ankara in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, for 99 years to build a trade center for Turkish companies. Ethiopia has since been Turkey's top investment market not only in the Horn but also throughout the continent. According to the Turkish Embassy, Ethiopia at the time was the biggest recipient of Turkish direct investment in Africa. The *Middle East Observer* reported that the Horn of Africa country had then \$2.5 billion of the total \$6 billion Turkish direct foreign investments in Africa (Rashed, 2016).

There is no question that Turkey and Africa have a mutual need for cooperation in the economic sector, with Africa offering the raw materials that Turkey's manufacturing industries acutely need, including gas and oil, and with Turkey providing the investment capital and technical know-how and leveraging the potential for infrastructural development and job creation in the dynamic sectors of the African economies (Kenyon, 2018).

A related but significant goal of Turkey's foreign policy has been to develop into a major global arms supplier by increasing its arms production capacity, as the country is increasingly becoming an emerging military power and projecting an image of a higher global ranking. In 2021, it was reported that Turkey's arms sales surpassed expectations reaching their highest level, and the increase registered was reflected in the arms sales to African countries. Kenez provided this insightful reflection concerning Ankara's growing military industry:

In the first 11 months of 2021, Turkey exported \$2.793 billion worth of defense products, an increase of 39.7 percent compared to the same period of the previous year. The Turkish defense industry, which set an export record of \$2.7 billion in 2019, is preparing to set a new record by closing this year with exports of more than \$3 billion (2021, 1).

With the biggest increase of Turkish arms sales credited to African countries, Kenez argues that the strategy of the Turkish government is to make Africa a new arms market for its industry. For example, Turkey increased its defense exports to Africa" by 700 percent, in the first 11 months of 2021, from \$41 million to \$328 million. Africa, thus, ranks fifth in Turkey's defense exports" (Ibid). In the most recent years, Turkey's transfer of combat drones to Ethiopia helped the Horn of Africa country turn the tide of the war against the Tigray rebel forces in the north of the country. Reinforcing the close relations between Turkey and Ethiopia was the defense agreement they signed in April 2023, which stipulates that the two countries will engage, among other things, in the following:

... joint participation in military exercises and non-combat operations such as peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and counter-piracy operations. The agreement also allows the two countries to cooperate in the defense industry. According to Article IV (6) of the agreement, the parties also agree to share military intelligence. Moreover, the parties will provide mutual logistical support and exchange munitions, materials, and services in the form of grants or in return for payment (Kenez, 2023, 1).

Turkey has become one of the leading drone producers in the globe, and so the effectiveness of its drones in combat has also made it the envy of many other counties that lack drone technology. In addition, the Turkish military industry is well-known for exporting to other African counties and others around the world such light arms as military electronics, software and systems, ammunition, rifles, sub-machine guns, howitzers, explosives, and armored vehicles, among others. Aiming to illustrate the extent of growth in both Turkey's military industry and its arms sales to Ethiopia, Agence France-Presse reported in 2021 that "Turkish defense and aviation exports to Ethiopia rose to \$94.6 million between January and November from around \$235,000 in the same period last year" (2021, 1).

Egypt

The historical connection of Egypt with the Horn of Africa countries, juxtaposed with its geographical proximity to the region, makes the north African Arab state a natural actor in the geopolitics of the region. So, one can presume that Egypt's national security interest is interwoven with the political, economic, social, diplomatic, and military dynamics of the region. As the proprietor of the Suez Canal, it can be argued that the Red Sea as well as the Horn of Africa are the lifeblood of Egypt for existence. Without too much overstatement, Egypt's survival as a state depends on what goes on within the Horn of Africa. In the end, the Suez Canal generates for the north African Arab country annual proceeds of \$8 billion in transit fees. Linking the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, the Canal services 10 percent of the global maritime trade and most of the oil transported by sea. The Red Sea states ---Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, land-locked Ethiopia, and Somalia by extension---are all critical in the larger scheme of ensuring the freedom of global commerce through the Canal. Any disruption of shipments in the Red Sea while sailing through the Mediterranean Sea, whether stemming from wars or interstate conflicts within the Horn of Africa and nearby other countries, could be a tremendous loss to the Egyptian economy. Given this fact, Egypt's attempt to control and influence the domestic politics of the Horn of Africa states by covert or overt means has always been part of the Egyptian foreign policy strategy for decades, if not for centuries. Thus, the rivalry in the Horn with other regional Arab and/or non-Arab powers can be intense, given Egypt's national security needs *vis a vis* those of its adversaries.

Even more so, Egypt is absolutely at the mercy of the Nile River for survival, to which the water flows from the Blue Nile and the White Nile, with both rivers merging near Khartoum, Sudan, and thereby becoming Nile proper. The fact 95 percent of Egyptians live within a few kilometers of the Nile, and their reliance on it makes the Nile River unquestionably Egypt's utmost treasure. The water from the Nile is used by Egypt, among other things, to irrigate farms; provide water supplies to Egypt's third largest population in Africa; offer food sources such as fishing; and serve as a major transportation waterway for trade and commerce. The White Nile upstream countries from which the smaller share of the Nile flows are Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda. It contributes only about 15% to the flow of the combined Nile. On the other hand, the Blue Nile, rising in Ethiopia, contributes about 85% to the flow of the Nile River that passes through Egypt to the Mediterranean. The fact that the Blue Nile tributaries all originate from the highlands of Ethiopia makes the Horn of Africa state the target of Egypt's constant indignation. Egypt-Ethiopia relations have been acrimonious throughout history for this and other reasons.

In fact, a war between Egypt and Ethiopia occurred as far back as 1874-1876, when the Ethiopian Empire and the Khedivate of Egypt, a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire, clashed over sovereign rights to territories in what is now Eritrea; Egypt was decisively beaten by Ethiopia in the Battle of Gura (Military Wiki, 2012). Since then, the relations of the two countries have been hot and cold through the decades. Egypt's major concern throughout history has been the use of the Blue Nile as an exclusive entity, based on colonial era accords achieved by Great Britain, representing Sudan while a colony, and Egypt, to which Ethiopia was not a party. Named the Nile Water Treaties, the accords effectively prevented upstream countries, such as Ethiopia, from using the Nile's water without the consent of those downstream countries. This resulted in a strong Egyptian position of dominance, and Egypt continues to try to enforce the treaties even today. For years, "Egypt justified its dominance over the river by citing a colonial-era water treaty and a 1959 agreement with Sudan. But Ethiopia does not recognize them, and when its former leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, proposed building a series of dams on the Nile in 1978, he met thinly veiled threats," assert Walsh and Sengupta, reporting on the Nile water politics (2020, 3). Indeed, the hostility between Ethiopia, on one hand, and Egypt and Sudan, on the other hand, reached an apex proportion in more recent years with the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile. The largest of its kind in Africa, Ethiopia's mega dam, which has been under construction since 2011 at an estimated cost of \$4.8 billion, is supported by funds raised through domestic bonds. While the primary goal of the mega dam is electricity production to relieve Ethiopia's acute energy shortage, it also aims to export energy to several neighboring African countries. According to experts, the GERD is expected to generate a hydroelectric capacity of 5.15 gigawatts, making it the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa when completed, as well as among the twenty largest in the world. However, as Mbaku correctly depicts it in the following quotation, the acrimony between Ethiopia, and Egypt and Sudan working in unison against the former reveals the real story of the Nile water politics in that part of Africa:

The dispute over the GERD is part of a long-standing feud between Egypt and Sudan—the downstream states—on the one hand, and Ethiopia and the upstream riparian on the other over access to the Nile's waters, which are considered a lifeline for millions of people living in Egypt and Sudan. Despite the intense disagreements, though, Ethiopia continues to move forward with the dam, arguing that the hydroelectric project will significantly improve livelihoods in the region more broadly (2020, 1).

To this day, the tension triggered by GERD between Egypt and Ethiopia remains unabated. At the time of this writing, about 90 percent of the GERD construction was completed. Nevertheless, Egypt was regularly issuing threats against Ethiopia over the continued construction of the mega dam while Ethiopia condemned such threats, calling them unwarranted and diplomatically irresponsible.

It is therefore against this backdrop that Egypt's role in the Horn of Africa must be examined. While Egypt may not have yet secured an official military base in any of the regional states, that does not mean it has not tried to acquire one either. Egyptian flirtations with securing military facilities in those counties that share borders with Ethiopia have been a known fact for years. There have been instances when Egypt made such overtures to South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, and even to the breakaway territory of Somaliland, but all to no avail. The exception, however, is that Sudan and Egypt have waged a united front against Ethiopia in connection with the GERD, even to the extent of holding joint military exercises regularly aimed at intimidating Ethiopia. More recently, the Egyptians have received positive signs from the newly installed Somali administration of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, which came to power in 1922, about setting up a military post there. Even without establishing military bases in the Horn of Africa, Egypt still is a leading Red Sea power by virtue of its control of the Suez Canal. The following narrative best describes Egypt's power projection as part of its growing role in the Horn of Africa:

In recent years, Egypt has sought to increase its military spending, including to project military force into the Horn region. In January 2017, Egypt inaugurated a new headquarters in Safaga for its southern naval fleet command, covering the Red Sea and including the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which is considered a strategic interest. The southern fleet has recently been strengthened with the acquisition of modern warships, notably an amphibious assault ship. As part of the Saudi Arabian-coalition, Egypt has also been supporting military actions in the conflict in Yemen. This has primarily involved the deployment of ships to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait as part of the naval blockade of Yemeni ports, notably to counter Iranian vessels (Melvin, 2019, 1).

In sum, two interrelated foreign policy imperatives guide Egypt's posture toward the Horn of Africa --- ensuring the unfettered flow of global commerce through the Suez Canal and the prevention of water insecurity that could come from the reduced volume of Nile water flow to the nation's farmlands and drinking water reservoir. The long-term strategy of Egypt therefore is to thwart Ethiopia at any cost from building other similar hydroelectric projects in the future that will further reduce the flow of the Nile and threaten the livelihood of its people. Egypt meets all its drinking water and irrigation needs from the Nile River. Nonetheless, any conflict that could ensue between Egypt and Ethiopia, with the construction of more dams by the latter in the future, is difficult to predict now.

Saudi Arabia

As the largest oil exporter of the world, Saudi Arabia's national interest in the Horn of Africa is commingled with the security of the shipping routes navigating the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Bebel Mandab, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea, while carrying commercial products to the rest of the world. Given the proximity of the Horn of Africa to these sea routes, it is critical for Saudi Arabia, as well as for many other nations, to ensure that oil is shipped with the utmost security and freedom of movement to the global market. Thus, these routes and the Horn of Africa together make the Kingdom's growing role in the region to be a core foreign policy pursuit. While unfettered global commercial activities through these water ways are central to Saudi Arabia's foreign policy priority, two other vital national security quests ----containment of adversaries, namely Iran, Turkey, and Qatar, in the strategically vital part of Africa from expanding their influence in the region as well as creating business investment opportunities within the regional states---are also an embodiment of the Kingdom's growing attraction to the region.

Saudi Arabia's prominent role among the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), coupled with its global ranking as the largest exporter of oil, has placed the Kingdom at the forefront of the regional power hierarchy. Thus, the securing of a military base in Djibouti in 2016 was only a manifestation of the significant role that the Kingdom has come to play in the Horn of Africa in tandem with its growing aspiration of maintaining its rising status on the world stage. Indeed, the securing of a higher regional power ranking in the face of stiff competition from allies as well as adversaries, such as Iran, Egypt, United Emirates, Turkey, Israel, and Qatar, seems to be an eternal temptation of the Kingdom. There is no denial that Saudi Arabia has increased its military presence in the region because of the Yemeni civil war. The Kingdom concluded a security agreement with

Djibouti to use the base as a monitoring station of the war in Yemen and of any other adversary activities.

The conflict in Yemen, which has led to foreign interventions on both sides of the armed factions, has further compelled the Kingdom to expand its sphere of military influence by maintaining a significant naval presence in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well. The civil war in Yemen, which started in 2014 when Houthi rebels — Shiite insurgents with links to Iran and a history of revolting against the Sunni government—took control of Yemen's capital, Sana'a. Saudi Arabia has led a coalition of Gulf states since then supporting the internationally recognized central government located in Aden, the temporary capital of Yemen, near the Red Sea. The crisis has pitted Iran against the Saudi-led coalition, each sending weapons and providing logistical support to their respective patrons. Feuerstein, in a policy paper he wrote for the *Middle East Institute*, makes this insightful observation about the regional power rivalry of Middle East countries and the affected Horn of Africa states targeted for control and influence:

The relationship between the Middle East and the Horn of Africa is centuries old and complex. While the world's attention is focused on the "great power competition" in the region, primarily between the U.S. and China, the Horn of Africa has also become a central battleground for influence among competing regional players, principally Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, Qatar, Iran, and Egypt. As they pursue their interests in the region, from Ethiopia and Sudan to Somalia and Djibouti, these competing states are the main drivers of tension and instability in the Horn of Africa (020, 1).

Yet another significant element of the Saudis' national interest in the Horn of Africa is the interstate rivalry among the regional powers themselves and the quest for containment of any domination of the region by a single power. Saudi Arabia and Iran, for example, have had an embittered relationship for several decades over issues, ranging from the crisis in Yemen to Saudi Arabia's close ties with the U.S., which Iran has always viewed with intense contempt. The rivalry was further heightened by each country's view of leadership in their respective religious sect. Hubbard and Bengali, reporting for *The New York Times*, maintain that "...Saudi Arabia and Iran are global leaders of the two largest sects of Islam, with Saudi Arabia considering itself the guardian of Sunnis and Iran assuming a similar role for Shiites" (2023, 2). However, the two long-time foes have recently patched up their differences---obviously to the disillusionment of the U.S.---and agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations, as reported by Hubbard and Bengali and cited as follows:

The new diplomatic engagement could scramble geopolitics in the Middle East and beyond by bringing together Saudi Arabia, a close partner of the United States, with Iran, a longtime foe that Washington and its allies consider a security threat and a source of global instability. Saudi Arabia and Iran have competed for influence for decades, each seeing itself not just as a regional power, but also as a lodestar for the world's 1.9 billion Muslims. Tensions between the two nations grew into an all-out rift in 2016 when protesters in Iran stormed Saudi diplomatic missions after the kingdom's execution of a dissident Shiite cleric (Ibid).

While this new development may have ebbed the tension between the two regional powers, however, their past relations were replete with bitter competition, which, to some degree, was manifested within the Horn of Africa, as each attempted to outdo the other by cajoling and pressuring the regional states for support and even for the acquirement of military facilities. Indeed, Saudi Arabia has succeeded in that effort to date by having a base in Djibouti, but not Iran.

Although a new era of rapprochement seems to be taking shape at this time, with Saudi Arabia's recent moves toward diplomatic appeasement of its former nemeses, including its willingness to cease its rows with Qatar and Turkey, their rivalry in the Horn of Africa will increase rather than decrease. For the record, both Qatar and Turkey have been historically supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood's grass-roots political indoctrination against authoritarian rule in the Arab world, which Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the rest of the Gulf states---with the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain included---abhor. This issue alone has been a source of discord amongst them for quite a while. As things have changed in recent years, however, the regional reconciliation that the kingdom seems to be pursuing with its former adversaries may be viewed as Saudi Arabia's genuine attempt to carry out its *Vision 2030 Plan*, which "...calls for diversifying the oil-dependent economy by attracting tourism and foreign investment, drawing millions of expatriates to the kingdom, and turning it into a global hub for business and culture. Calming regional tensions is central to that vision, but it is also driven by {the} desire to turn Saudi Arabia into a global power and make it less dependent on the United States" (Ibid).

While both the security of global commerce through the Red Sea and the rivalry with other regional powers

over influencing the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa have been Saudi Arabia's fixation for decades, the quest for trade and investments in Africa has been equally central to the Kingdom's growing desire to become a major regional player. As such, Lon compellingly conveys the importance of the Horn of Africa to investment-seeking businesses in the oil-rich Gulf states in this narrative:

Over the past decade, Gulf countries have been continually active and invested significantly in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa region. Booming consumer markets, natural resources, but also a strategic location along one of the world's busiest maritime routes, make the region appear ripe for investment. More importantly, the Red Sea has recently re-emerged as a geostrategic space in which competing global and regional players have sought to project influence (Lon, 2021, 1). In further accentuating the rivalry among these regional powers, Lon also notes that, "Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the one hand, and Qatar and Turkey on the other, have intensely competed to counter each other's influence, projecting their rivalries on to the politics of the Horn" (Ibid).

Saudi Arabia's investment ventures in the Horn of Africa, along with other Gulf states, is now a matter of how much, not why and how; it is simply an economic necessity that has become a pragmatic way of addressing food security. Yousif, reporting for *Asharq Al-Awsat*, dubbed the world's premier pan-Arab daily newspaper, makes this viewpoint clear, as documented in the following narration: A recent study pointed to the growth of Gulf investments in the countries of the Horn of Africa, especially in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti. Africa has become an increasingly vital partner for the Gulf states. Investment flows from the Arab Gulf to sub-Saharan Africa amounted to about \$3.9 billion between 2005 and 2015, according to recent statistics based on completed projects. The Russian-Ukrainian crisis highlighted the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa region in terms of its strategic location overlooking the oceans, global trade routes and straits heading from the Gulf states to Europe and the United States (2022, 1).

Saudi investments in Ethiopia are the largest in the Horn of Africa. The sectors in which Saudi investors are interested include agriculture, livestock, and energy. With the aim of becoming among the world's top investor states, Saudi Arabia has embarked on a strategy that would make it less reliant on its oil-based economy. For this, Africa, and particularly the Horn with its strategic location, has become a conduit to Saudi investment ventures. Regarding Ethiopia's choice by the Saudis as an investment outlet, Mousa accurately provides this insight: "...the country {Saudi Arabia} is eyeing Ethiopia as one of its top investment destinations. Ethiopia has a huge animal wealth that is estimated at 44 million cows and 32 million heads of sheep and 29 million goats, this wealth that ranked Ethiopia the first in Africa owning livestock, and tenth in the world"(2017, 1). It is a proven fact that investments in agriculture and energy take the huge share of the total amount invested in Ethiopia by Saudi Arabia, contributing \$200 million a year, with coffee capturing the largest investment dollars. During the 2015 -2016 period, for example, Saudi investors reported that there were more than four hundred business firms invested in the various sectors of the Ethiopian economy. The volume of trade as well as investments has continued to grow since then. Mousa further pointed out that Ethiopia is an attractive investment destination because the country presents a demography of youth population prone to high level of consumerism; a population of more 120 million, second in Africa, that provides huge markets for goods and services; rich natural resources that are ripe for exploitation or development; and favorable tax incentives that appeal substantially to foreign investment (Ibid).

United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates' foreign policy strategy toward Africa as a whole and the Horn of Africa particularly is like that of Saudi Arabia. As such, the UAE's policy toward the Horn of Africa is driven by two fundamental imperatives. First is ensuring the security of the Red Sea shipping channel and the Arabian Peninsula while advancing the role of being a regional player by establishing military presence in competition with allies as well as adversaries. Secondly, the UAE strategy is further buttressed by advancing economic cooperation with resource-rich Horn of Africa countries that often need foreign investments and technical knowledge for development. While these two motives are very likely to propel the UAE's engagements in the Horn of Africa, for a better grasping of the larger scope of UAE's active role in that vital region of Africa, one must glance through the narrative cited below from a published report by the *International Crisis Group*, a think tank that serves both policymakers and academics, performing research and analysis on global crises:

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged in recent months as an important protagonist in the Horn of Africa. Through political alliances, aid, investment, military base agreements and port contracts, it is

expanding its influence in the region. Turmoil in the Middle East, Iran's growing regional influence, piracy emanating from Somalia and, from 2015, the war in Yemen combined to turn the corridor's stability into a core strategic interest. The 2017 Gulf crisis, which saw Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt cut ties with Qatar, pushed leaders on both sides of the divide to double down on their alliances, including in the Horn. Since then, the UAE has nailed down diplomatic relationships and extended its reach, particularly along the Red Sea (2018, 1).

Looking at it in retrospect, seeking a military presence in the Horn of Africa seems to have been a continual fixation of the UAE. In 2015, the UAE concluded a lease agreement with Djibouti at the height of the Yemen's war, joined by Saudi Arabia, to establish a military post in the latter's territory; however, this did not last even a year, as Djibouti abrogated the agreement due to the overbearing interference of the Gulf state in its internal affairs. One reason for the strained relations had to do with the UAE company, called Dubai Ports (DP) World, which was to manage and operate Djibouti's Doraleh Container Terminal and its failure to live up to the expectations of Djibouti officials. Following that flop, the UAE secured a base in Eritrea in a 30-year lease agreement in 2015 that allowed the building of a port and expansion of an airstrip in Eritrea's Red Sea port of Assab, all with the aim of ferrying heavy weaponry and Sudanese troops into Yemen as the UAE fought then together with Saudi Arabia and other coalition members against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. This was followed by the UAE's announced withdrawal of its troops from the Yemen conflict in the summer of 2019, which led to the dismantling of the base in Eritrea altogether (Melvin, 2019).

Yet, the UAE's quest for military presence in the Horn of Africa ended neither in Djibouti nor in Eritrea. Starting in 2014, the UAE was actively engaged in training Somali troops at a base in Mogadishu as well as a contingent of anti-piracy military personnel in the Puntland state of Somalia; however, the relations between the two countries became strained in 2018 following the seizure by Somali police of three unmarked bags of money on a Royal Jet plane at the International Airport in Mogadishu, which in essence ended UAE's military presence there. Nonetheless, with a new Somali government in place in 2023, the relations between Somalia and UAE began to improve once again to the extent of having signed "...an agreement to bolster military and security ties, along with cooperation in anti-terrorism efforts, as the two countries work to improve strained relations" (Middle East Monitor, 2023).

Ironically, this rapprochement happened even though the UAE had courted Somaliland in earlier years for permission to set up a military facility in the port city of Berbera. In fact, the UAE even started construction of the base in 2017, and the agreement signed between the two included a 30-year lease. Since the port of Berbera is only 195 miles south of the war-torn Yemen, it became necessary then for the UAE to have a base in the breakaway, *de facto* state for use by its troops in the war against the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels as part of the Saudi-backed coalition. The plan for completing the construction of that military base has since changed. "The United Arab Emirates no longer plans to establish a military airport in Somaliland and the facility currently being built will be turned into a civilian airport," Somaliland's president was reported as having said at that time. According to Reuters, "Somaliland UAE military base to be turned into civilian airport" (2019, 1). In sum, the four cases mentioned in the foregoing discussion regarding UAE's efforts to establish military facilities in the Horn of Africa clearly demonstrate the enormity of its regional ambition in the face of the rivalry among its allies as well as adversaries to gain a competitive edge in the region.

Equally vital to the UAE is the quest for economic relations with the Horn of Africa states. In relative terms, the realization of a long-term food security by leveraging the investment potential of Emirati businesses in the developing sectors of the Horn of Africa states has been at the pivot of UAE's foreign policy strategy toward the region for quite a while. While Gulf states enjoy a well-developed economy powered by the oil and gas industry, reliance on the importation of agricultural products remains their *weakness*. Since much of the food imported to the UAE comes currently from Europe, the potential to invest in Africa's agricultural sector and diversify its energy-based economy has been at the forefront of the UAE's latest economic blueprint. In hopes of reducing food imports, the Emirates are also embarking on the use of modern technologies to produce more food domestically. "Increasing self-production within the local region and reducing the reliability on imports is what we are focusing on," reported one of the investment management companies known for finding farming solutions through innovative technologies (Desoukie, 2021).

With respect to the Horn of Africa itself, the UAE's investment parameters traverse across the region. In general, throughout Africa, the UAE was reported to have invested "...an estimated \$11 billion in capital in Africa in 2016, overtaking Saudi Arabia to become the largest GCC investor and the second largest in the world after China," according to Todman (2018, 2). More specifically to the Horn of Africa, agriculture-rich Sudan has always been a special attraction to the Gulf states due to that country's huge, and underused potential of the rich soil that

borders the Nile River. Foreign direct investments for the period 2000–2017 in Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and Somaliland by the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar, for example, showed massive amounts of dollars with impactful effects on the region's developing economies. Reporting on the extent of Gulf investments in the Horn of Africa, Clingendael, a Netherlands Institute of International Relations, disclosed, "The database contains 434 investments from 2000 to 2017 in 16 distinct sectors, worth approximately USD 13 billion" (2018, 1). The largest of these investments went to Ethiopia and Sudan. The report further stated that a UAE investment in Ethiopian sugar manufacturing alone totaled around \$3 billion in 2017. During the 2000-2017 period, Ethiopia hosted 233 commercial investors from Saudi Arabia and 104 from UAE. In contrast, Sudan's figures showed sixteen investors from Saudi Arabia and nineteen from the UAE. The sectors in which the Gulf states invested are agriculture and manufacturing in Ethiopia, and in Sudan agriculture. Although the figures are exceedingly small for Djibouti, Somalia, South Sudan and Somaliland, the Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait, all have made investments in various sectors across the entire region (Ibid).

Qatar

Writing for the *United States Institute of Peace*, Mahmood observed that some Middle Eastern states are often derided by critics for using the power of petrodollars as an instrument to entice or pressure the Horn of Africa countries, extracting political and economic benefits from them where necessary while improperly interfering in their internal affairs. What happened in Sudan and Somalia, respectively, following regime changes there several years ago was cited as cases in point; that is, the destabilizing aspects of their interventions in the affected countries. While this may have been true, he further noted that "...Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey—the four most engaged countries—have all been involved in conflict resolution in various capacities, indicating a broader interest in the Horn beyond narrow commercial and military interests" (2020, 1). Given this backdrop, what exactly then drives the foreign policy of Qatar toward the Horn of Africa? We will explore this point briefly.

All global and regional powers have at least two overriding objectives that they share in their relations with each other or in conducting their foreign policy goals in the arena of international relations: sustaining their economic wellbeing and safeguarding their security interests at all costs. While these two doctrines are largely embedded in the national security interests of many global and regional players, Qatar particularly possesses an added diplomatic tool in its foreign policy practices that others do not uphold as dearly as it does: It might be the only regional actor that has come to be known prominently as playing the role of a peacemaker. Others like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and UAE have played the role of mediator in intrastate or interstate conflicts in the Horn of Africa in their past, however, they have always made military presence in the region as their core objective, which Qatar by contrast has not. Underscoring Qatar's uniqueness in the sphere of regional hegemonic competition relative to the Horn of Africa, the *Economist Intelligence Unit* reported that...

The aspiration of Qatar to become an internationally recognized peacemaker in the Horn of Africa could have important implications for peace and security across the region. Having mediated between the Sudanese government and Darfuri rebels in 2008 and arbitrated in the Eritrea-Djibouti border agreement of 2010, Qatar has emerged as a serious candidate to broker talks between Eritrea and Ethiopia (Economics Intelligence Unit, 2013, 1).

Other than hosting the largest US military base in the Mideast, Qatar is not known for having a military base of its own in the Horn of Africa, unlike Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The source of its recognition as a major player in the region, therefore, comes primarily from economic prosperity derived from the extraction and export of petroleum and natural gas. Ranked as the fourth highest GDP per capita income country in the world, Qatar, like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, relies heavily on food imports. In fact, it is the most dependent of Gulf states on external food importation. For example, in 2015, Qatar imported about 80 percent of its food, primarily from the Middle East. Even without displaying a higher regional power ranking by way of establishing military facilities like its rivals in the region, Qatar still stands to benefit from its mediatory role in the Horn of Africa conflicts and reap benefits from investments and trade relations with the developing states there. However, the current volume of investments in the Horn of Africa by Qatar, compared to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, is still insignificant. Nonetheless, Qatar's roles in Horn conflict resolution are still seen as its primary diplomatic asset. Observers link its mediation functions as a sign of projecting greater leadership, and this is indeed a sensible scheme to position itself as a regional player fitting its practices.

Categorically, the peacemaker role offers Qatar a competitive edge especially over its adversaries. Although an

aura of reconciliation was underway at the time of this writing between Saudi Arabia and the UAE on one hand and Qatar on the other, the confrontation between them on some wider Middle East issues remains to be dealt with. Two key issues caused the rift between Qatar and its fellow Gulf states, along with Egypt: Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and its cozy relations with Iran, which is regarded by the latter as a regional foe.

Iran

As Arab Gulf states push ahead more assertively in sub-Saharan Africa to capitalize on economic opportunities and protect their security interests, Iran, a non-Arab Middle East country, has not remained idle either. Yet, the Iranian role, in contrast with its Middle East rivals, is limited in the Horn of Africa, although the country has a much more impacting role in the Middle East itself, with its prevalent influence in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and the Palestinian territories being the surest of its manifestations. Iran's status as a ranking regional player cannot be underestimated. Iran's geopolitical calculations are fundamentally based on some key interrelated foreign policy objectives. Being a part of the "axis of resistance," Iran sees itself as a force advancing a strategy aimed at resisting the U.S. and the "geopolitical structure of international relations," which the latter dominates. Calling the U.S. an "existential threat to the Islamic Republic," Iran's regional assertiveness stems from a reaction to the decades-old economic sanctions imposed on it by the U.S. and its allies over Iranian nuclear program and over its alleged threat to the peace and stability of the Middle East. As a champion of the Palestinian cause and one seeking the destruction of Israel as a state, Iran's regional security interests are often in collision with those of many U.S. allies in the Middle East and even in the Horn of Africa.

Iran's regional power ranking is supported by its oil wealth and by building an arms industry capable of producing missiles, rockets, drones, and other high-tech weapons systems, including a nuclear program, that the U.S. and Israel, both seen by Iran as archenemies of the Islamic Republic, have vowed to destroy before that it becomes a reality. Iran's perception of the threat that the U.S. and its Western allies pose to it has forced the Islamic Republic to forge stronger ties with both China and Russia, as well as to the countries of the Global South that are non-aligned and developing, of which African countries make up the largest number.

Iran's anti-U.S. posture is rooted in its resistance to Western cultural, military, and geopolitical domination of the Middle East in which it has long been a major player. This is further fueled by Iran's self-anointed guardianship of the faith, including its determination to raise the level of Shia Islam's heightened sense of awareness on the world stage, a worldview that evolved under the Islamic Republic, promoting the belief that "Shia have collectively suffered throughout history," and that the Islamic Republic, as the 'government of resistance,' must provide deterrence against the 'dominant powers'" (Naeni, 2021). So, given the circumstances, both national security concerns and economic interests dictate Iran's overall foreign policy priorities in the Middle East as well as in the Horn of Africa--regions whose geopolitical ramifications could become an existential threat to or shield for its sovereignty.

While the foregoing previews the essence of Iran's foreign policy parameters, a more focused look at its current playing fields in Africa and more pointedly in the Horn becomes necessary. Iranian interest in Africa seems to have been driven first by "the resistance" strategy it has adopted against the U.S. Iranian expansion of its influence in Africa therefore was deliberately conceived on the subterfuge of "South-South cooperation," using oil as a bargaining chip, along with such enticements as "building infrastructure like hospitals, setting up companies, and providing loans" for African countries (Ibid). Although the impact was minimal, Iran also invested in a few sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania. Iranian efforts to secure allies in Africa were clearly intended to thwart the Western destabilizing pressure it has faced for decades while heightening its resistance strategy by expanding its influence beyond the Middle East. It was also meant to curb the influence and advantage that its regional adversaries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, enjoy in the current situation in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere (Ibid).

However, In the Horn of Africa particularly, Iranian activities have always been viewed with contempt by its regional foes, as well as by its Western cynics. Yet, "The United States and some Arab Gulf states raise alarm over Iran's conduct in the Horn of Africa. Although Tehran does play a role in this volatile region, Iran's actual influence in the region is frequently overstated and exaggerated," argues Cafiero and Cok, reporting for *Gulf State Analytics*, a Washington, D.C.-based geopolitical risk consultancy (2020, 2). The authors further observed that, "Although there are major limitations to Iran's presence in this part of Africa, the Iranians have been able to use the region for growing networks that provide alternative corridors for the delivery of military, financial, and material assistance to Tehran's allies, proxies, and partners throughout the Arab region" (Ibid). The most acknowledged of Iranian impacting actions in the region was when it gained access in 2015 to the Eritrean Red Sea port of Assab and used it as launch pad to ferry arms to the Houthi insurrectionary in Yemen. The Eritrea-Iran axis began to emerge then as both counties faced U.S. sanctions--Eritrea because of humanitarian abuses and Iran for its nuclear

program and stance on Israel. However, the Iranian presence in Eritrea lasted only about a year, as Saudi Arabia and the UAE lured Asmara with development aid and a financial package that was so attractive that Eritrea booted out Tehran from the latter's navy base in Assab. Often seen as a destabilizing force by states as diverse as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the U.S., Israel, and European countries allied to the U.S., the Iranian presence in Eritrea was immediately dubbed a threat to peace and security in the Red Sea, the Middle East, and the Horn of Africa. Iran's support for Somalia's radical clerics and Sharia law advocates---Somalia's Union of the Islamic Courts (UIC)---in the 1990s was another example of Iranian outreach to the Horn of Africa based on ideological affinities with fringe groups that gave pro-West regimes in the area as well as their Western benefactors a jolt, as they grapple with maintaining political stability in the most volatile region of Africa. In sum, looking at the entire picture of Iranian influence in the Horn of Africa, it appears that the Islamic Republic has not been as successful as Saudi Arabia, the UAE or Turkey; it simply has not been able to secure a lasting traction in the region as it had hoped for.

Israel

The political history of Israel indeed has been rife with conflicts and hostilities surrounding Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, and Israel. On a larger scale, hostilities between the Jewish state and most of the Middle East Arab countries, which until recently had rejected Israel's existence as a sovereign state while advancing the Palestinian cause, have been the hallmark of Israeli existence since its founding in 1948. The core of the conflict revolves around the Palestinians, who have sought statehood on territories that they believe were theirs, but Israel took them by force. Since 1948, several wars have been fought between Israel and Arabs involving Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and other Middle East states; however, the two prominent wars--- the *Six-Day War* (June 5-10, 1967), and the *Yom Kippur War* (October 6 -26, 1974)---both ended with a victory by Israel, and territories that belonged to Syria, Egypt and Jordan were taken and most have remained in Israeli hands since then. Israel defeated the Arab armies and captured the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank from Jordan. The Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egypt in 1982 under the terms of the peace treaty concluded between Israel and Egypt in 1979, following the 1978 Camp David Accords, while the Gaza Strip is still divided between Israel and Egypt. Without getting into depth on the genesis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which would be beyond the scope of this study, the aim here is rather to examine the role of Israel in the larger context of hegemonic rivalry in the Horn of Africa against the backdrop of the Middle East and the competition among the hegemonies over that strategic part of Africa.

Much of Israel's interest in Africa can be traced to the earlier years of Israeli nationhood. When African countries earned their independence mostly in the early 1960s, Israeli officials saw the newly independent states in their own image and wanted to assist them in areas that needed nation building. Nonetheless the relationship between the Jewish state and several of the sub-Sahara African countries throughout the following decades has been lukewarm at best and unwelcoming at worst. In 1973, most African states had severed their diplomatic ties with Israel. However, over time, relations began to improve, and so currently the Jewish state has formal and informal ties with 46 African countries. The initial severance of ties came about in the aftermath of Arab-Israeli war of 1973, coupled with pressure placed on the African countries from those states of the OAU (Organization of African Unity), the predecessor to the current AU (African Union), that are Arab and active members of the Arab League, as they pleaded with other African member states to sever ties with the Jewish state; the Palestinian question and Israeli occupation of territories it captured during the war from Arab countries justified the demanded diplomatic breakup. Despite all of this, Israel maintained a well-guarded relationship with Ethiopia because of the country's strategic location in the Horn of Africa and due to their historic bonds spanning over several centuries (Bard, 2023).

The strategic importance of the Horn of Africa to Israel was best highlighted with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's first visit in 2016 of East Africa, and included in his journey were Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. Reporting for *Fair Observer*, an independent media organization, Cok makes the following observation:

Narrowing down focus on the Horn of Africa, Israel has a long history of engagement in the region that dates to the 1960s. The Red Sea has always been a vital waterway for Tel Aviv as it connects the country to East Africa, Asia and Oceania through the tiny outlet of Eilat. This strategic imperative has always been confronted with the hostility of nearly all the states of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden basin. Only Ethiopia and Eritrea have maintained relations with the Jewish state in the past decades, though with some setbacks (2020, 1).

Following the *Abraham Accords*, a normalization of diplomatic engagements between Israel, on one hand, and

the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, on the other, effective since September 15, 2020, Israel has made great strides in mending its relations with other Middle Eastern and African countries. "The Horn of Africa mirrors the Middle East in many aspects, and the recognition of Israel might be yet another one," according to Cok, which in effect means that, as Israel hones its relations with Arab countries, African states that had severed ties with the Jewish state would likely follow suit; and this has indeed happened since then (Ibid). A case in point was Sudan's normalization of ties with Israel in 2020 under U.S. pressure and the promise of removing Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism by the U.S. administration. Sudan had been one of the most hostile Arab countries toward Israel, and a one-time residence and host of Osama bin Laden, the founder of the pan-Islamic militant organization Al-Qaeda, who was killed in a special operation by the U.S. on May 2, 2011, in Pakistan.

Israel has had an adversarial relationship with Sudan for a long time, and the hostility between them was so entrenched that they had a reciprocal counteraction against each other, as this quotation makes it clear: "The Jewish state has financed and trained South Sudanese guerrilla groups in the past, while the Arab country has long served as an operational base to ship weapons and aid to Hamas in Gaza" (Ibid).

Ethiopia-Israeli relations, however, has been the most cordial, starting with the earlier days of the government of Emperor Haile Selassie. Even during the Derg regime, which overthrew the Ethiopian monarchy in 1974, and when the Arab outcry over Israeli occupation of territories following the Yom Kippur War was at its peak, the two countries maintained a low-key relationship that has continued to this day. In fact, Israel used to train the special forces that protected the emperor and was treating the ancient country as an ally in a region that is dominated by hostile Islamic states. Similarly, Eritrea's closer relations with Israel started during the former's 30 - year struggle for independence from Ethiopia during which time the Jewish state was supplying it with arms against the Derg regime while maintaining its low-key relations with Ethiopia. Following Eritrea's independence in 1991, "Asmara went beyond establishing diplomatic relations and reportedly offered Israel a concession to open a military base on the island of Daklah, strategically located in the Red Sea" (Ibid). As is always the case in international relations, however, Israeli-Eritrea ties began to crack after Iran made inroads into securing a naval base in the Eritrean port city of Assab from which it ferried arms to the Houthi rebels in Yemen. With the UAE being active with port building and leasing a base in Somaliland, experts conjecture that Israel would be in a better position to establish influence with the *de facto* state, with the assistance of the UAE, which is strategically located in the Horn but still striving to secure international recognition toward full independence.

Conclusion

This paper examined the ever-increasing militarization of the Horn of Africa, a modern-day hegemonic spectacle that has generated unprecedented interest, as it becomes a new nexus of geopolitical rivalry involving great powers across the world, among which are Russia, the United States, and China. At the same time, it has become clear that the competition for control and influence in the Horn among the regional powers is just as fierce as that of the global ones. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, Qatar, Iran, Israel, and Egypt, for example, are all pursuing their interests in and exporting their conflicts to the Horn of Africa. Other powers that also have impactful presence currently in the region are Japan, India, France, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and Germany.

Some external states are regarded as allies and thus known to have similar strategic interests; however, they still may pursue their policies in divergence toward the Horn of Africa. A case in point is the contrast in their pursuits of foreign policy strategies that is apparent between Egypt and the UAE. The latter has been a staunch supporter of Ethiopia's overall military posture in the region; however, by contrast, the former's relentless undermining of Addis Ababa by supporting rebel forces in Ethiopia as well as attempting to hinder the construction of the Blue Nile mega dam is a clear testimony affirming the opposite paths that two regional allies could pursue to maximize their respective foreign policy interests. And while the global powers, namely, U.S., Russia, and China, remain in fierce competition--- Russia with its expected building of a military base in Eritrea, and the U.S. and China, with their respective current military base in Djibouti---when and where their rivalry will eventually spiral to a real confrontation still remains the unanswered question; it certainly does not seem to provide a sense of security for the region and even for the entire global community.

It has also become evident in this study that research on external competition in the Horn of Africa has generated valuable data, as shown in much of the scholarly literature pertaining to the subject; however, the missing critical part---the lack of discussion about the potential ramifications of it in the region---would require further investigation and thus be the subject of scholarly inquiry in which this author will take on soon. Overall, this study therefore has been a small but well-meaning attempt to analyze each external power's motive to establish presence in that strategic region of Africa on a more comprehensive approach while simultaneously filling critical missing parts in the extant literature concerning hegemonic rivalry there. Pointing out several consequential contexts that, in

this regard, demand further scholarly investigation, has been a major goal of this study. In this connection, some significant cases bearing the direct effects of the external influence and control on the Horn may be suggested here, with an eye to a follow-up research endeavor on these effects. Such impacts may include, for example, retreat from the democratization process in the region; increase in violence and human rights violation; incidences of inter-state and intra-state conflicts; fears of armed confrontation among the external rival powers; exploitation of the region's resources at the expense of the powerless and the needy there; and finally the burgeoning debt crises and the burden under which the Horn of Africa states find themselves and to the extent to which loan defaults have increasingly become a recipe for economic disaster, among others.

Finally, this author closes with an affirmation that the adverse consequences must be part of the scholarly discourse among scholars and regional experts, so that the variety of current analyses available on hegemonic rivalry in the Horn of Africa can have the full extent of its empirical significance as a subject of scholarly inquiry.

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