



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Knowledge for All

Workshop 12

GRM 2023

The Gulf and the Horn of Africa: Trans-Regional Competition and Cooperation

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Abstract

The Horn of Africa is home to Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. The region sits astride the strategic shipping lanes linking Asia and Africa, connecting the Suez Canal, the Mandab Strait, the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. For thousands of years, the Horn has long been in contact with the Arabian Peninsula and southwestern Asia. The Gulf countries and peoples in particular have maintained close political, religious, social and cultural ties with the Horn of Africa.

The Red Sea, a narrow body of water, connects the Indian and Mediterranean Oceans and is the crucial commercial link for the transportation of goods between the East and the West. Hence, the choke-points of the Bab al-Mandab and the Suez Canal have a substantial strategic significance, both regionally and globally. The Red Sea also abuts several states on its eastern and western shores – Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen in the East,

and Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti, on the West, with Ethiopia being separated from the sea by a narrow sliver of Eritrean territory. Many of these states have a long history of domestic turmoil and conflicts with neighbours.

Due to the imbalanced character of the region's natural resources, strategic significance, political and social instability, weak economies, fragile regimes, and grave civil conflicts, the Horn of Africa has attracted outside powers seeking to fill power vacuums, transposing their rivalries to the region through direct presence or through proxies. In the era of sectarian conflict and zero-sum game struggles, competition among West Asian states – aligned in diverse groupings – has had spill-over effects in the Horn. World powers, meanwhile, have added to the interlocking threads of conflict and cooperation. The United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Russia, China, India and Japan, all have geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the Horn, spawning both conflictual confrontation and cooperative endeavour.

In the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Horn of Africa has been facing crises of its own: serious drought, soaring food prices, environmental degradation, sluggish economic growth and humanitarian crises.

The Horn of Africa, therefore, has become a new platform for the Gulf countries and global powers to compete and cooperate in security, strategic outreach, development and governance. This raises a range of critical questions: What are the major developmental and security issues facing the Horn of Africa, and how do these impinge on governmental policy there? What factors are shaping the growing engagement of Gulf countries in the affairs of the Horn of Africa? What are the multilateral institutions and frameworks through which the involvement of outside powers with Horn of African countries is mediated? What is the nature of the military presence which Gulf and world powers have developed in the region, and what are the objectives of these? How is governance in the Horn of Africa countries being affected by the growing Gulf state engagement in the region?

These, then, are the issues at the heart of the proposal which is being put forward and which are intended to form the foci of discussion. The emphasis is on attracting new research, putting the spotlight on dimensions of trans-regional competition and cooperation. We wish to encourage strong participation from the Horn of Africa countries themselves, as well as from Gulf countries and elsewhere.

Description and Rationale

Background

The Horn of Africa is clearly a region of strategic importance to the GCC Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran and Iraq. Furthermore, Israel has concerns about the expanding Iranian presence in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, and Egypt's ties with Ethiopia have become deeply contentious due to the building of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The Egyptian government fears that the dam could adversely affect its access to the Nile waters. Ethiopia, for its part, is embroiled in an ongoing internal conflict in Tigray province. Meanwhile Somalia remains a failing state that is home to a lethal extremist organization, Al-Shabaab, while its provinces host powerful secessionist movements. External powers are also active: the UAE has established a strong presence in the ports of Yemen on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (Mokha, Aden, Perim Island in the Bab al-Mandab, and Socotra), as also in Somaliland, Puntland and Eritrea; while both Turkey (in Suakin) and Russia (in Port Sudan) are seeking bases on the Red Sea in Sudan.

On grounds of concerns over terrorism, human rights, and great power competition, the United States is giving considerable attention to the Horn as well. France, with its colonial ties with The Comoros and Reunion and bases in Djibouti and Abu Dhabi, has also strengthened its naval presence in the western Indian Ocean, and is pursuing maritime ties

with the UAE and India to shape a triangular alignment in the region.

The European Union, Russia, China, India, Japan and other Asian and European countries have put forward various initiatives to ensure peace and security in the region. Both the world powers and the Gulf countries are pursuing bifurcated strategies in the region. On the one hand, they are contributing developmental aid and UN peace-keeping forces to the region for good governance; on the other hand, they are engaging in rivalry and competition in the region, which increase instability and force local countries to choose sides.

The Horn, therefore, has become a key arena where outside powers vie for influence and/or project naval power in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. The network of military bases that outside powers have established, the network of proxies that Sunni and Shiite forces have produced, and the local extremist affiliates that the Islamic State and Al-Qaida have set up, intertwine and interact with each other. The Gulf countries, in particular, are seeking to use proxies with a view to bringing the region into their orbits.

Objectives and Scope, and Contribution to the Field

Most current academic research on the Horn of Africa focuses on the internal political, security, economic and cultural ties among the Horn of African countries. Relatively little gives attention to the interregional competition and cooperation. Yet the latter aspects are crucial to how the peoples of the Horn of Africa will be able to cope with what will most probably become the world's worst food insecurity emergency in 2022. The motivations which are leading outside powers to engage in the region, whether politically or economically, are tightly linked to what they see as their own interests.

In recent years, the US, Russia, the European powers, Russia, China, India, and the Gulf countries etc. have nominated their special for Horn of African affairs, aiming to offer peace initiatives for the region, while the Gulf states are expanding their investment in the Horn, in such fields as electricity, infrastructure and seaports.

In this workshop, we seek to examine how rivalries and cooperation among the Gulf countries and world powers have spilled over into the Horn and how the engagements of these countries outside of the Gulf deepens rivalries within the Gulf. The impact that the establishment of foreign military bases has on the political and economic dynamics of the countries which host them also needs investigation, as also the implications which this has for terrorism/anti-terrorism and radicalisation/de-radicalisation.

While the literature on the precise field we are interested in remains limited, we would encourage those submitting papers to take note of the following works, and where possible to build upon them:

1. "Horn of Africa: Current Conditions and U.S. Policy: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health of the Committee on Foreign Affairs," House of Representatives, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, second session, June 17, 2010. United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health / Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2010
2. SIRC Conference on the Horn of Africa, Horn of Africa: Transforming Itself from a Culture of War into a Culture of Peace, Lund: Media-Tryck, 2009
3. Mohamed Jaber, Horn of Africa: Family, Population, and Development, Helsinki: The Population Research Institute, 1997

4. Abdirahman Osman, "Challenges and Breakthrough for Horn of Africa Regional Integration," *Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 2(1), 2019.
5. Robert Mason and Simon Mabon, *The Gulf States and the Horn of Africa: Interests, Influences and Instability*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022
6. Faith Mabera, *The Horn of Africa-Persian Gulf Nexus: Inter-regional Dynamics and the Reshaping of Regional Order in Geopolitical Flux*, Institute for Global Dialogue, Issue 136, April 2020
7. Asteris Huliaras and Sophia Kalantzakos, "The Gulf States and the Horn of Africa: A New Hinterland?" *Middle East Policy*, Vol.24 (4), 2017, pp.63-73
8. Viktor Marsai and Máté Szalai, "The "Borderlandization" of the Horn of Africa in Relation to the Gulf Region, and the Effects on Somalia," *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 2021, pp.1-20, DOI: 10.1080/08865655.2021.1884118
9. Federico Donelli and Giuseppe Dentice, "Fluctuating Saudi and Emirati Alignment Behaviours in the Horn of Africa," *The International Spectator*, Vol.55 (1), 2022, pp.126-142
10. Muna H.Obaid, "Motives For Gulf Interest in the Horn of Africa," *BABIR International Journal for Human Sciences*, Vol.2 (1), 2020, pp.91-108
11. Tim Niblock, Talmiz Ahmad and Degang Sun (eds), *Conflict Resolution and Creation of a Security Community in the Gulf*, Berlin: Gerlach, 2017
12. Tim Niblock, Talmiz Ahmad and Degang Sun (eds), *The Gulf States, Asia and the Indian Ocean: Ensuring the Security of the Sea Lanes*, Berlin: Gerlach, 2018
13. Freedom Onuoha, "Sea Piracy and Maritime Security in the Horn of Africa: The Somali Coast and Gulf of Aden in Perspective," *African Security Review*, Vol.18 (3), 2009, pp.31-44
14. W. Howard Wriggins, *Dynamics of Regional Politics: Four Systems on the Indian Ocean Rim*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992
15. Zach Vertin, "Red Sea Rivalries: The Gulf, the Horn, & the New Geopolitics of the Red Sea," *Brookings Doha Center*, August 2019.
16. Abigail Kabandula and Timothy M. Shaw, "Rising Powers and the Horn of Africa: Conflicting Regionalisms," *Third World Quarterly*, 31(12), 2018
17. Daniel Di Santo, "Japanese Military to Expand Base in Djibouti," *The Trumpet*, 26 November, 2018, <https://www.thetrumpet.com/17965-japanese-military-to-expand-base-in-djibouti>
18. Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "India's China Challenge in Africa," *The Diplomat*, 31 July, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/indias-china-challenge-in-africa/>
19. Fantu Cheru and Cyril Obi, Eds. *The Rise of China and India in Africa: Challenges, Opportunities and Critical Interventions* (London: Zed Books, 2010)
20. János Besenyő, "The Africa Policy of Russia," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 31(1), 2019, pp. 132-153
21. David Monyae, "US, Russia, China and Africa in the Evolving Global Order," *Changing*

Draft of Workshop Agenda and Potential Topics for Papers

The workshop agenda will depend to a large extent on the papers which are presented, but the intention is to ensure that there is a good distribution of papers covering the diverse issues which have been outlined in the Abstract to this proposal. The following illustrative paper topics are intended to give some idea of what the workshop convenors are looking for:

- The policies pursued by GCC countries in the Horn of Africa
- Strategies pursued by Horn of Africa countries in engaging with GCC countries
- Impact of GCC policies on the stability/instability of Horn of Africa countries
- Domestic political and economic struggles in the Horn of Africa, and their impact on the Gulf region
- Egypt's emerging role in the Horn of Africa
- Turkey's relations with Horn of Africa countries
- Drought, food crisis and Gulf states' humanitarian assistance in the Horn of Africa
- Terrorism and counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa
- Outside powers' participation in the UN peace-keeping missions in the Horn of Africa
- Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and outside powers' anti-piracy strategies
- US-Russia rivalry and the Horn of Africa
- The strategies and impact of European powers' engagement in the Horn of Africa
- The expanding role of Asian countries in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa
- India's outreach to the Horn of Africa
- China's interests in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa
- Israel's diplomatic activities role in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa
- Israeli-Iranian competition in the Red Sea
- Migration, and trans-regional interaction between the Gulf and the Horn of Africa
- The Horn of Africa and the regional organisations (the GCC, the Arab League and African Union)
- New trends of regionalism and governance in the Horn of Africa

Publication Plan

As with previous papers submitted to GRM workshops run by the same three Directors, the best of the papers will be published. For 2023, as for the last two GRMs, these would be published as a special issue in the Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (listed as an ESCI journal).

Acknowledgement

The Directors confirm that they will work within the guidelines for workshops, directors and publication issued by the GRM.

Short CVs / Bios of the Directors

Tim Niblock is Chair Professor in the Institute for International and Area Studies at Tsinghua University, and Emeritus Professor of Middle Eastern Politics at the University of Exeter. He has held the position of Vice-President of the European Association for Middle

Eastern Studies (2009-2014), Vice-Chair of the UK Council of Area Studies Associations (2010-2014), and Vice-President of the British Society for Middle East Studies (2009-2012). He was the founding Director of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. He has previously served at the University of Reading and the University of Durham. Between 1969 and 1977 he was Lecturer and then Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Khartoum.

Among his published books are: *The Gulf States, Asia and the Indian Ocean: Ensuring the Security of the Sea Lanes* (edited with Talmiz Ahmad and Degang Sun, 2018); *Conflict Resolution and the Creation of a Security Community in the Gulf Region* (edited, with Talmiz Ahmad and Degang Sun); *Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region* (edited, with Yang Guang, 2014); *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century. The Local to Global Transformation* (edited, with Monica Malik, 2013), *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (2007), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (2006), 'Pariah States' and Sanctions in the Middle East: *Iraq, Libya and Sudan* (2001), *Class and Power in Sudan* (1987), *Iraq: the Contemporary State* (edited, 1982), *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (edited, 1981), and *Social and Economic Development in the Arab Gulf* (edited, 1980).

Talmiz Ahmad joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1974 and was posted to Kuwait, Iraq and Yemen, and then as Consul General in Jeddah, in 1987-90. After appointments in New York, London and Pretoria, he became the head of the Gulf and Hajj Division in the Ministry of External Affairs in 1998-2000. He did two stints as ambassador to Saudi Arabia, besides being ambassador to Oman and the UAE, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Director General of the Indian Council of World Affairs.

After retirement from foreign service in 2011, he was in the corporate sector in Dubai. From 2016, he has been a full-time academic. He holds the Ram Sathe Chair for International Studies, Symbiosis International University, Pune. He has authored four books: *Reform in the Arab World: External Influences and Regional Debates* (2005); *Children of Abraham at War: The Clash of Messianic Militarisms* (2010); *The Islamist Challenge in West Asia: Doctrinal and Political Competitions after the Arab Spring* (2013). His latest book, *West Asia at War: Repression, Resistance and Great Power Games*, was published in April 2022. He writes and lectures regularly on political Islam, the politics and economics of West Asia, Eurasia and the Indian Ocean, and energy security issues.

Degang Sun is Professor of Political Science at the Institute of International Studies, and Director of Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai, China. He was Deputy Director of the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, China, and he was a visiting scholar at Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University (September 2018-September 2019), and Senior Associate Member at St. Antony's College, Oxford University, and an Academic Visitor to Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (2012-2013), Denver University (2007-2008), and Hong Kong University (2004-2005). His research interests are Middle Eastern Politics and International Relations; Great Powers' Strategies in the Middle East; China's Middle East Diplomacy.