

# BACKGROUND

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## The Saudi–Qatari Dispute: Why the U.S. Must Prevent Spillover into East Africa

Joshua Meservey

### Abstract

*An escalating spat between a Saudi Arabian–led coalition of countries and Qatar is spilling into the Horn of Africa. Somalia, a country the U.S. is trying to help stabilize, is under the most strain, while the antagonists’ other engagements, particularly with Eritrea, could deepen intra–East African divisions. The U.S.’s Africa-related goals in the crisis should be to ameliorate its effect on Somalia; prevent the Gulf States’ competition from exacerbating East African tensions; preserve its own influence in the region; use the increased influence of Gulf allies to fight Iranian influence building; and cooperate with the United Arab Emirates to facilitate a resolution to Eritrea’s destabilizing border disputes with its neighbors. To do so, the U.S. should serve as an honest broker for the Saudi–Qatari rivalry; encourage the competing countries to cooperate with the larger international effort to stabilize Somalia; and pressure Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Gulf States to stop any of their remaining funding—and crack down on their citizens’ funding—of terrorism and Wahhabi proselytizing in Somalia and beyond.*

The latest iteration of an old rivalry between Qatar and a Saudi-led bloc of Middle Eastern countries is straining the international stabilization effort in Somalia and altering some of the geopolitical dynamics in East Africa. All the major countries involved in the Middle East feud have extensive leverage with Somalia. The Somali government has remained neutral so far, as antagonizing either side of the dispute would imperil badly needed investment and support, but pressure is mounting on it to make a decision.

### KEY POINTS

- In June 2017, long-simmering tensions boiled over when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt broke diplomatic ties and air, land, and sea links with Qatar.
- The dispute is entangling East African countries, including long-volatile Somalia in whose stability the U.S. is heavily invested. The primary countries involved in the feud have extensive leverage with Somalia. Pressure is mounting on the country to end its neutrality in the dispute, but declaring for either side would likely imperil badly needed investment and support.
- Gulf States’ increased involvement in the greater East Africa region threatens to deepen tensions there. Saudi Arabia’s and Qatar’s proselytization in particular of Wahhabism in the region and their history of supporting Somali terrorist groups challenge U.S. national interests.
- Gulf States’ East African engagements could be an opportunity for the U.S. to push for a resolution to Eritrea’s long-standing border disputes with its neighbors.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3268>

**The Heritage Foundation**  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 546-4400 | [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

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The U.S. has been engaged in trying to stabilize Somalia for decades as the disorder there has facilitated terrorism, created recurring humanitarian disasters, and destabilized America's East African allies. Somalia still faces immense challenges, but currently has its best opportunity in more than 20 years to stabilize. The Gulf dispute is an added strain Somalia can ill afford.

The U.S. must be wary of Qatari and Saudi influence in the region amplifying the negative effects their support for Wahhabi proselytizing and terror groups has already created. Saudi and Emirati engagement with Eritrea could worsen regional tensions, though Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are also frustrating Iranian influence-building efforts in the Horn, which strongly aligns with U.S. interests. There may also be an opportunity for the U.S. to join with the Emiratis to try to facilitate a resolution on Eritrea's border disputes with Ethiopia and Djibouti that poison intra-East African relations.

To advance its interests in such a complex environment, the U.S. should, among other initiatives, serve as an honest broker in the Gulf dispute; encourage the competing countries to cooperate with the larger international effort to stabilize Somalia; and pressure Gulf States to stop any of their remaining funding—and crack down on their citizens' funding—of terrorism and Wahhabi proselytizing in Somalia and beyond.

### **The Somalia-Middle East Connection**

In June 2017, long-simmering tensions boiled over when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Egypt (sometimes collectively known as "the Quartet") broke diplomatic ties and air, land, and sea links with Qatar. The latter, a small but wealthy monarchy, refused the series of demands the Quartet made of it, and Turkey and Iran sprang to Qatar's aid.

The dispute is dragging in a range of countries, including long-unstable Somalia. The government there is trying to remain neutral, reportedly turning down a Saudi offer of \$80 million to cut ties with Qatar.<sup>1</sup> It continues to allow Qatar Airways—Qatar's state-owned airline—to use Somali airspace as well, a significant benefit to the Qataris given the economic importance of the airline.

Most of the major antagonists in the current Gulf dispute have decades-old engagements with Somalia that have increased noticeably in recent years. In the

1980s, Somalia was heavily dependent on economic aid from a handful of Gulf States including Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup> The Saudis provided Somalia's army with weapons, materiel, and training throughout the 1970s and 1980s, ending the assistance only after Somalia's long-time dictator Siad Barre fell in 1991.<sup>3</sup> During the chaotic civil war in the 1990s, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency alleged that a Saudi charity run by Salman bin Abdulaziz, now the king of Saudi Arabia, funneled weapons and other support to the infamous warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed.<sup>4</sup> The Saudi government, wealthy Saudi individuals, and Saudi charities have been credibly accused of funding Somali terrorist groups.<sup>5</sup> While the Saudi government no longer appears to support Somali terrorist groups and has largely cracked down on its citizens' terror funding in recent years, some financing for terrorism still flows from Saudi citizens.<sup>6</sup>

In 2016, Saudi Arabia gave millions of dollars in general budget support to the Somali government and has pledged over \$1 billion in total assistance to the country.<sup>7</sup> Newly elected Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (better known as "Farmajo") has visited Saudi Arabia three times since his election in February 2017, including on his first official overseas visit.<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with a policy of more active involvement throughout Africa, the UAE has been significantly involved in Somalia as well.<sup>9</sup> It recently signed with Somaliland—an autonomous region of northern Somalia as well as an unwilling member state of Somalia's national government—a seven-point economic and military agreement that included building a base at Berbera, a Gulf of Aden port city.<sup>10</sup> The UAE funds the maritime police force in Puntland state,<sup>11</sup> provides military equipment to the Somali National Army,<sup>12</sup> and has trained Somali commandos. It also provides Somalia with significant humanitarian aid and bankrolled presidential candidates in 2012<sup>13</sup> and 2016.<sup>14</sup> An Emirati company, DP World, won concessions to develop two ports in northern Somalia and is in talks to develop a third in the south.<sup>15</sup>

Egypt's engagement with the Somali government began shortly after Somali independence in 1960. Egypt trained the Somali army and navy in the 1960s, and during the Ogaden War pitting Somalia against Ethiopia supplied the former with tens of millions of dollars' worth of military assistance. Egypt continued its military support of Somalia until the late 1980s shortly before Siad Barre fled Somalia.<sup>16</sup> As

it did with Saudi Arabia, the U.N. accused Egypt of supporting the Islamic Courts Union, a now defunct Somali terror group, in the mid-2000s, something the Egyptians denied.<sup>17</sup> More recently, Egypt has provided humanitarian aid to Somalia, and there were reports in 2013 that Egypt Air was considering resuming flights to Mogadishu.<sup>18</sup>

Qatar has provided aid to Somalia for decades, often funneling it through Muslim Brotherhood organizations.<sup>19</sup> For years, Qatar facilitated a series of negotiations among groups vying for power in Somalia and allegedly sent weapons to Mohamed Farah Aidede during the civil war in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> Qatar also supposedly provided millions of dollars to the 2012 election campaign of presidential candidate Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, at least some of which was allegedly used to buy votes of members of parliament<sup>21</sup> in Hassan Sheikh's ultimately successful campaign. Additionally, there are a number of wealthy, Qatar-based Somali businessmen who help facilitate ongoing links with Somalia.<sup>22</sup> Some members of the Qatar-based Somali diaspora sent funds to the Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab, as did a major Qatari terrorism financier later sanctioned by the U.S.<sup>23</sup>

Qatar's main ally in the ongoing Gulf crisis, Turkey, established its largest African embassy and largest overseas military base in the world in Somalia. Turkish companies manage the Mogadishu seaport and airport that account for almost 80 percent of the Somali government's revenue,<sup>24</sup> and Turkish Airlines is the only international airline that flies to Somalia.<sup>25</sup> Turkey claims to have spent \$1 billion rebuilding Somalia thus far,<sup>26</sup> and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Mogadishu three times between 2011 and 2016.<sup>27</sup> He was the first non-African leader to visit since the fall of Barre.<sup>28</sup>

## The Stakes

Despite Somalia's record of instability, the Gulf States have good reason to seek influence there. It has the second-longest Indian Ocean coastline in Africa, is proximate to the Bab el Mandeb Strait—a global shipping chokepoint<sup>29</sup>—and to the Middle East. Somalia also borders Djibouti, which boasts the only significant port for thousands of miles on the Horn of Africa's coastline. Somalia's ports could provide more shipping options for the underserved region. Ethiopia, a land-locked neighbor that is Africa's second-most populous country and one of its most economically vibrant, is in particular need of

other ports. Somalia's ports could also provide better access for Gulf States looking to Africa to meet their growing food demands.<sup>30</sup>

Somalia's northern regions also sit just across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen, where the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and others are battling Iranian-linked Houthi rebels and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). An Emirati company, DP World, managing the Bosaso and Berbera ports might also be a means by which the UAE ensures that those ports do not emerge as competitors to its own ports. It is also a possible hedge for DP World—which operates the Port of Djibouti, through which more than 95 percent of Ethiopia's imports and exports flow—to ensure that it continues to benefit from Ethiopian trade revenues as Ethiopia pursues its strategy of diversifying away from the Port of Djibouti.<sup>31</sup>

Given Turkish President Erdogan's apparent nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire<sup>32</sup> that once controlled parts of Somalia, his attempts to position Turkey as the defender of Muslims around the world,<sup>33</sup> and Turkey's historic ties with Africa, it is unsurprising that Somalia attracted his interest. His outreach is also a continuation of a Turkish policy formulated in 1998 of increased engagement with Africa.<sup>34</sup> The Turkish public sympathized with their fellow Muslims' suffering in Somalia during the 2011 famine, so there are domestic political reasons for Erdogan to engage in Somalia as well.

## Familiar, but Different

Middle Eastern squabbles ensnaring Somalia are nothing new. In 2015, the Somali government announced that it would open its air, land, and sea areas to the Saudi-led coalition fighting the war in Yemen. There are rumors that UAE-trained Somali troops are fighting in Yemen for the coalition as well.<sup>35</sup> After an Iranian mob sacked the Saudi embassy in Tehran in 2016, Saudi Arabia cajoled Somalia, along with a number of other countries, to break ties with Iran.<sup>36</sup> Following a failed 2016 coup against Erdogan, Somalia quickly capitulated to Turkish pressure to transfer to the Turkish embassy control of the schools and a hospital in Somalia linked to exiled Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Erdogan views as a political threat.

Yet the Saudi-Qatari rift is the most serious Middle Eastern dispute to entangle Somalia in decades. Given the extent of the Saudi alliance's investment in Somalia, it will be difficult for Farmajo to withstand

Riyadh's pressure if it bears down. Farmajo's government is seeking debt relief from Arab League states,<sup>37</sup> which Saudi Arabia could potentially block if sufficiently angered. Over 80 percent of Somalia's livestock exports, which account for as much as 50 percent of Somalia's GDP, go to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.<sup>38</sup> The UAE is the primary importer of lucrative (though illegal) Somali charcoal as well.<sup>39</sup> An unknown but significant number of Somalis work in the Gulf States—the Somali and Saudi governments in 2016 were negotiating tens of thousands of Somalis traveling as workers to Saudi Arabia<sup>40</sup>—and Dubai in particular is an important business hub for Somali merchants.<sup>41</sup> Curtailing their activities would be one way to pressure the Somali government, particularly as so many Somalis rely on remittances for their daily support.

The Gulf crisis is also exacerbating an unresolved constitutional dispute between Somalia's states and the federal government over what the nature of the division of authority should be between them. Galmudug, Puntland, Somaliland, and South West State have already declared their support for the Quartet in the dispute with Qatar, as have a number of influential Somali politicians.<sup>42</sup> Their support is the likely fruit of the UAE's policy of building influence with the states through bilateral engagement. If the Somali federal government continues to refuse to side with the Quartet, Saudi Arabia may follow the UAE's lead and increasingly work directly with the states, further weakening the federal government.

However, angering powers like Qatar and Turkey by disavowing Qatar could bring domestic political problems for Farmajo,<sup>43</sup> in addition to the risk of losing aid and other support.<sup>44</sup> Qatar is a champion of the Muslim Brotherhood,<sup>45</sup> and the Somali Muslim Brotherhood is powerful. It first established itself in 1978 in Saudi Arabia as an organization known as al-Islah.<sup>46</sup> There is also a spin-off Brotherhood group known as Damul Jadiid, a loose network composed mostly of former al-Islah members to which the previous president of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, belonged.<sup>47</sup> An estimated 30 percent of the members of the new parliament belong to groups with Islamist sympathies, including Muslim Brotherhood groups.<sup>48</sup>

### Eritrea's Role

The Gulf rivalry is also spilling into Eritrea, one of Africa's most isolated yet strategically located states. President Isaias Afewerki leads a repressive regime that dominates the country perched on the Red Sea

between Sudan and Djibouti close to the Bab el Mandeb Strait. As with Somalia, long-simmering Gulf enmities and particularly the Yemeni War have made Eritrea of greater interest to the Gulf.

Qatar ramped up its Eritrean engagement in the 2000s primarily through a range of investments, including a luxury resort on Eritrea's Dahlak Kebir island, which the Qatari royal family reportedly built for \$50 million. Qatar allegedly gave direct financial support to the Eritrean government as well,<sup>49</sup> and in 2009 Somalia accused Qatar of funneling money to al-Shabaab through Eritrea.<sup>50</sup>

In Eritrea, Qatar has robustly pursued its strategy of building geopolitical influence by mediating international disputes. Its arbitration in a tiff between Eritrea and Sudan led to the two countries restoring ties in 2000. Its biggest effort in the region began in 2008 when it refereed a violent border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti,<sup>51</sup> and stationed, in 2010, hundreds of peacekeepers in the disputed zone. After Djibouti and Eritrea expressed support for the Quartet, Qatar withdrew its troops and tensions spiked along the contested border.<sup>52</sup> Qatar's withdrawal was likely an attempt to punish both countries and to create an example of the instability it says the Quartet's blockade is creating in the region.

The souring of the Eritrean and Qatari relationship may have stemmed from Qatar's frustrated hopes at inducing Eritrea to open up to the international community. Had Eritrea done so, it would have provided Qatar another route into the region and burnished its credentials as an important international influencer. Qatar may also have calculated that alienating Eritrea's staunch and much more powerful enemy, Ethiopia, was unwise.<sup>53</sup>

Eritrea stopped short of cutting ties with Qatar, but its public statement of sympathy for the Quartet was likely due to the recent flurry of Saudi and Emirati engagement. The U.N. claims that senior Saudi and Emirati officials traveled to Eritrea in early 2015 for talks,<sup>54</sup> and the UAE reportedly leased a base for 30 years in Eritrea's port city of Assab for strikes in Yemen.<sup>55</sup> The Emiratis have since made major improvements to the Assab facility. The Saudis have a military presence in Assab as well, and Eritrean President Afewerki visited Saudi Arabia twice in 2015 after joining the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen.<sup>56</sup> Eritrea reportedly sent 400 soldiers to fight with UAE troops in Yemen in exchange for money and fuel.<sup>57</sup>

## Djibouti

The tiny country of Djibouti usually attracts the most foreign power attention, given its position on the Bab el Mandeb Strait and its significant port. Djibouti hosts Camp Lemonnier—the U.S.’s only permanent military base in Africa—as well as Japan’s only overseas base and China’s first permanent overseas base. France also has a permanent military presence in Djibouti, and ships from the international anti-piracy operation patrolling the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean frequently dock there. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited in 2009 to sign a clutch of agreements with the Djiboutians, though Djibouti severed ties with Iran in January 2016 under Saudi pressure.\*

The Saudis and Emiratis reportedly approached Djibouti seeking a deal to launch attacks in Yemen from Djiboutian territory. A diplomatic quarrel unrelated to the current Gulf crisis, however, led to the UAE and Djibouti severing ties in May 2015, and the Djiboutians expelled Saudi and Emirati troops that were already in their country. A previous business dispute between the Djiboutian government and the UAE-based DP World likely exacerbated the row.†

The Saudis and Emiratis pivoted to Eritrea, and UAE soon after signed an agreement to build up its military presence in Eritrea’s port city of Assab. This likely angered the Djiboutians who are involved in a border dispute with Eritrea, though Saudi Arabia later repaired its relationship with Djibouti. The two signed a security agreement in 2016, and Saudi Arabia is preparing to build a base there.‡ Djibouti also downgraded its ties with Qatar in June 2017. It is unclear if Djibouti will allow the Emiratis back in, though Assab may offer all that the UAE requires, making the point moot.

\* Berouk Mesfin, “Qatar’s Diplomatic Incursions into the Horn of Africa,” Institute for Security Studies *East Africa Report* No. 8, November 2016, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ear8.pdf> (accessed September 29, 2017).

† Alex Mello and Michael Knights, “West of Suez for the United Arab Emirates,” War on the Rocks, September 2, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/09/west-of-suez-for-the-united-arab-emirates/> (accessed September 29, 2017).

‡ John Aglionby and Simeon Kerr, “Djibouti Finalising Deal for Saudi Arabian Military Base,” *Financial Times*, January 17, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/c8f63492-dc14-11e6-9d7c-be108f1c1dce> (accessed September 29, 2017).

The benefits for Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Eritrea are clear. Assab is less than 40 miles from Yemen and a convenient launch pad for attacks there. Wooing Eritrea will also help the Saudis and Emiratis undercut Iranian activity in the region. Afewerki visited Tehran in 2008 and signed a number of bilateral deals, and the U.N. accused Iran of facilitating the training of Eritrean intelligence officials in late 2012.<sup>58</sup> Eritrea also once allegedly served as a link between Iran and the Houthi rebels, possibly even hosting Houthis on Eritrean soil.<sup>59</sup> Building a presence in Eritrea could potentially help the Emiratis and Saudis squeeze Iranian (and Qatari) access to the Suez Canal,<sup>60</sup> as well as frustrate Iran’s broader efforts in the region.

Egypt has been strengthening ties with Eritrea as well,<sup>61</sup> perhaps in part to gain leverage over Ethiopia. Egypt and Ethiopia are feuding over Ethiopian plans to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Nile River, upstream from Egypt.

Cairo is adamant that it cannot allow an upstream dam on such an important resource,<sup>62</sup> while Ethiopia refuses to abandon construction of the hydro-power dam that will almost triple power production in a country where 70 percent of people do not have access to reliable electricity. It also plans to sell power to neighboring countries.<sup>63</sup>

A stronger Saudi and Emirati presence in East Africa could help their ally Egypt better pursue its grudge with Ethiopia. Afewerki also supposedly claimed that waters released from the Adi Halo Dam that Eritrea is currently building could make up for any water Egypt might lose to the GERD.<sup>64</sup> It is unclear how serious an offer it is, or whether it is even possible, however.<sup>65</sup>

Eritrea’s politically and economically difficult situation<sup>66</sup> likely motivated its alliance switching. It could benefit from Middle Eastern aid and investment, and it seems the Quartet has offered greater

# Friends and Foes in a Strategic Region



\* Includes one of Libya's competing governments based in Tobruk.

**NOTE:** Other countries not displayed on the map also broke or downgraded ties with Qatar.

inducements than did the Qataris or Iranians. Being helpful to important countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE could also garner their support for lifting U.N. sanctions on Eritrea. At the very least, the alliance will relieve some of Eritrea's isolation, and likely further strengthen Afewerki's regime against armed challenges from rebels or neighbors.

The Gulf States' activities in Eritrea may exacerbate tensions within East Africa. Ethiopia, one of the biggest powers in the region, in particular likely takes a dim view of Saudi and Emirati engagement with Eritrea. After a long war, Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993, turning the latter into a landlocked state. The two countries occasionally go to war over disputed areas of their shared border, and Eritrea allegedly once supported al-Shabaab, a group Ethiopia has battled since its inception. Both countries have supported rebel groups opposed to the others' government. Ethiopia already severed diplomatic ties, since restored, with Qatar in 2008 over what Ethiopia claimed was Qatar's destabilizing support for Eritrea.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, Ethiopia and another East Africa power, Kenya, are concerned about the spreading influence in the region of the supremacist practice of Islam known as Wahhabism.<sup>68</sup> For decades, Gulf States—including Saudi Arabia and Qatar and their citizens—have funded Wahhabi proselytization throughout the world.<sup>69</sup> Their work has been so effective that Wahhabism has supplanted Sufism, the syncretic and—in the African context—generally tolerant practice of Islam, as the dominant strain in East Africa.<sup>70</sup> Wealthy Gulf citizens directly funded Somali terrorist groups, such as al-Itihaad al-Islamiya and al-Shabaab, as well. Ethiopia and Kenya are battling al-Shabaab and worry that further Gulf state involvement in the region will perpetuate radicalism.<sup>71</sup>

### **Reason for Concern, but a Potential Opportunity**

The potential effect on U.S. interests of the Gulf countries' greater involvement in East Africa is uncertain. The U.S. should cooperate with those countries where interests align, such as the Quartet's supplanting of Iranian influence in parts of the Horn of Africa. Yet Saudi-funded Wahhabi proselytization, their (and others', including Qatari) previous support for Somali terrorist organizations, and their support that may continue today for terrorist organizations in other parts of the world present a sig-

nificant long-term challenge to U.S. national security. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have made some, though incomplete, reforms around the problem,<sup>72</sup> and their deeper engagement in East Africa may amplify the radicalization problem there.

The U.S. must manage these difficulties, but should also seek to benefit from the Gulf countries' growing importance in the region. The Emiratis in particular are a natural partner given their positive counterterrorism record. One area of potential cooperation would be to try to facilitate a negotiated end to Eritrea's border disputes with Ethiopia and Djibouti. There is the danger that the UAE's investments in Eritrea could embolden the Eritrean regime and make it less willing to compromise, but the Emiratis might be able to influence the Eritreans in the right direction. The UAE also has growing importance in Ethiopia,<sup>73</sup> where Turkey, another U.S. ally, is already a powerful economic presence.<sup>74</sup> Given Ethiopia's domestic challenges,<sup>75</sup> it may be willing to try to ease tensions on its northern border.

The UAE's difficult relationship with Djibouti likely gives it little influence there, but the U.S. has strong ties with Djibouti. The U.S. could coordinate with its European and Japanese allies who are also present there to try to ameliorate its dispute with Eritrea.

### **Walking a Tightrope**

The web of competing Middle Eastern interests has put the Somali government in a difficult position and may upset the delicate geopolitical balance in East Africa. The Somali government needs to focus on delivering competent governance as the best way to achieve the U.S.-supported goal of stability for its country, and East Africa should be seeking resolutions to its internal rivalries. To advance its own interests in the region, the U.S. should:

- **Serve as an honest broker for the Middle Eastern dispute.** The solution for easing the dispute-related pressure on Somalia and the rest of East Africa is to achieve a negotiated solution to the Middle Eastern standoff. The U.S. also has a strong national interest in uniting the Gulf States to resist Iran's growing influence. The dispute distracts from that effort and risks driving Qatar and Turkey closer to Iran. The U.S. is the only country with sufficient diplomatic capacity to serve as an honest broker to both sides.

- **Diplomatically support Somalia’s neutrality in the Saudi–Qatar dispute.** The United States is remaining neutral in the dispute given its strong relationships with both sides and should use its influence with both to relieve pressure on the Somali government. In exchange for such an intervention, the U.S. should receive verifiable assurances from President Farmajo to pursue governance reforms.<sup>76</sup>
- **Pressure Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Gulf States to stop funding—and crack down on their citizens’ funding—of terrorism and the proselytizing of Wahhabism in Somalia and beyond.** Much of the Gulf funding for terrorism now likely flows from wealthy citizens rather than governments.<sup>77</sup> The U.S. should push the Gulf governments to stop any of their own remaining funding of terrorist groups and Wahhabi proselytizing and to stop their citizens’ funding as well.
- **Try to persuade the rivals to harmonize their Somalia engagement with the larger international effort to stabilize the country.** The Gulf countries sometimes pursue their own narrowly conceived interests in Somalia in ways that undermine the broader stabilization effort.<sup>78</sup> The U.S. should try to convince them that more fully coordinating with the international effort in Somalia is most in their interests.
- **Help Somalia diversify its economic partners.** Economic engagement with Middle Eastern countries is benefitting Somalia and the region. However, overreliance on a small group of countries makes Somalia vulnerable to the sort of political pressure it is now facing. Diversification would also increase the Somali economy’s ability to weather the frequent turmoil that strikes the Middle East.
- **Work with the UAE to facilitate a resolution to Eritrea’s border disputes with its neighbors.** Of the Gulf States, the UAE appears to have the most influence with Eritrea. Eritrea’s border disputes are only two of the challenges associated with Eritrea, but resolving them would be positive for the region, the U.S., and the UAE.
- **Encourage and support deeper economic integration within the East African region.** Deeper East African economic integration would provide a larger and more attractive market for investors, eliminate costly trade barriers, and reduce shipping times and costs, among other benefits. Such economic ties might also blunt the divisive effect of external disputes on the region, and promote cordial relations among East African countries. A regional economic bloc, the East African Community, has taken some steps towards deeper integration, but it does not include a number of important countries, including Ethiopia.
- **Lead in East Africa.** The Middle Eastern competition is a powerful new dynamic in East Africa, the long-term effect of which is unclear. Excepting Eritrea, Iran, and Sudan, the U.S. has generally productive relationships with the affected East African countries and the Middle Eastern antagonists, and has other strong allies, such as Japan, Italy, and the U.K., with a stake in East Africa. The U.S. is in a unique position of influence. It should lead the effort, in cooperation with its allies, on issues of shared interest to shape the new East African dynamics in a positive direction.

### A Long Way to Go

Somalia is deeply fragile with extreme challenges to achieving stability. Getting dragged deeper into a prolonged, high-stakes Middle Eastern dispute will only intensify Somalia’s and the rest of the region’s challenges. While trying to prevent that from happening, the U.S. should also take any opportunity to use the Gulf States’ greater influence in the region to promote peace and prosperity there.

—*Joshua Meservey is Senior Policy Analyst for Africa and the Middle East in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign and National Security Policy, of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, at The Heritage Foundation.*



## Endnotes

1. "Somalia Turns Down \$80m to Cut Ties with Qatar," *Middle East Monitor*, June 12, 2017, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170612-somalia-turns-down-80m-to-cut-ties-with-qatar/> (accessed September 27, 2017).
2. *Somalia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, [https://cdn.loc.gov/master/frd/frdcstdy/so/somaliacountryst00metz\\_0/somaliacountryst00metz\\_0\\_djvu.txt](https://cdn.loc.gov/master/frd/frdcstdy/so/somaliacountryst00metz_0/somaliacountryst00metz_0_djvu.txt) (accessed October 13, 2017).
3. Ibid.
4. In 1993, Aideed's militia killed more than 20 Pakistani peacekeepers, prompting the U.S. to launch a military raid against Aideed that led to a pitched battle in Mogadishu. Militiamen shot down two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters and killed 18 U.S. servicemen during the battle (dramatized in the 2001 movie *Black Hawk Down*). For the allegations, see Matt Schroeder, "Arms to Somalia: Déjà vu," Federation of American Scientists, November 20, 2006, [https://fas.org/blogs/security/2006/11/arms\\_to\\_somalia\\_dj\\_vu/](https://fas.org/blogs/security/2006/11/arms_to_somalia_dj_vu/) (accessed September 27, 2017), and Department of Defense memo, posted by Federation of American Scientists, <https://fas.org/asmp/resources/FOIA/DIASomaliaApril97AideedReceives.pdf> (accessed September 27, 2017).
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76. For reforms to which the U.S. should hold the Somali government accountable for achieving, see Joshua Meservey, "U.S. Must Press Somalia to Deliver Competent Governance," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 3252, October 5, 2017, <http://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/us-must-press-somalia-deliver-competent-governance>.
77. Peek, "The Roots of Lone Wolf Terrorism."
78. One example is the corruption-fueling money they give political candidates during elections. Another is the allegations that Qatari officials delivered significant amounts of money, much of it in cash, to the Eritrean regime. Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE are also some of the few countries that do not officially report the aid they disburse in Somalia, demonstrating the sometimes non-transparent nature of their Somalia engagement. "Aid Flows in Somalia: Analysis of Aid Flow Data," Aid Coordination Unit, Office of Prime Minister, Federal Republic of Somalia, April 2017, and Rosen, "What Is an Expensive, Idyllic Resort Doing in Eritrea?"