



# MIDDLE EASTERN STATES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: SECURITY INTERACTIONS AND POWER PROJECTION

**Federico Donelli**

University of Genoa (Italy)

**Brendon J. Cannon**

Khalifa University (UAE)

In December 2017, at the end of a bilateral meeting, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Sudanese counterpart Umar al-Bashir announced a deal to restore Suakin, a ruined Ottoman port town on Sudan's Red Sea coast. The agreement also gave Turkey the right to build a naval dock to maintain civilian and military vessels. More than one year later there are doubts as to how much work Turkey will do beyond restoring the Ottoman town. However, certain regional states are uncomfortable with the apparent consolidation of a **permanent Turkish presence in the region**, thereby feeding a process of perceived securitization in and around the Red Sea.

A few months later, in April 2018, the flag of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) began to flutter on the small island of Socotra. The position of this isolated Arabian Sea island makes it a **strategic outpost** for the conduct of ongoing UAE military operations in Yemen as well as control of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the entrance, from the south, to the Red Sea. The two seemingly unrelated events are yet more evidence, for some, of a complicated game of chess between **rival ideological and political blocs** in the Middle East that now stretches into Africa.

The Middle East region has been the scene, for decades, of political balancing acts amidst continuous power and influence scrambles due



to its structural characteristics – a highly dynamic and amorphous regional system in which power relations are fluid and order is in short supply – and **the lack of a clear regional hegemon**. As noted by professor Fawaz Gerges, following the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, a “psychological and epistemological rupture” has occurred in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Although mostly limited to the domestic dimension of the states, these dynamics appear to have taken on an extra-regional dimension that increasingly feeds perceptions and narratives of **shifting distributions of power**. A wide range of academic and think tank literature has emphasized these changes in light of an emerging identity Cold War pitting conservative Sunni monarchies against a revolutionary Shi’a Iran.<sup>2</sup> Recent security interactions across the Red Sea seem to form part of this intertwined **rebalancing dynamic** across the wider Middle East regional security complex (MERSC).<sup>3</sup>

While Middle East states and peoples have long been involved with the Horn of Africa and its inhabitants, the growing security engagement of certain MERSC states with the Horn of Africa – most apparent since 2015 – certainly adds another layer and, broadly speaking, exhibits all the traits of (defensive) realism’s theoretical linchpin: **the acquisition of appropriate amounts of power** through the pursuit of alliances and influence. The actions of certain states such as Turkey, the UAE and Qatar across the Horn of Africa have reportedly “facilitated geopolitical tensions and regional rivalries that risk militarizing the region and impacting human security by reinforcing more state-centric conceptions

**“Although mostly limited to the domestic dimension of the states, these dynamics appear to have taken on an extra-regional dimension that increasingly feeds perceptions and narratives of shifting distributions of power”**

1. Gerges, Fawaz A. (ed.), *The New Middle East. Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

2. Gause III, F. Gregory. “Beyond sectarianism: The new Middle East cold war.” *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper* 11 (2014): 1-27. See also Calculli, Marina and Matteo Legrenzi. “Middle East Security: Conflict and Securitization of Identities.” In *International Relations of the Middle East*, edited by Louise Fawcett, 218-53. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

3. Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.



of security concentrated on territorial and border disputes.”<sup>4</sup> Another scholar noted that “A race is underway between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey to build naval and military bases right across the Horn of Africa. This threatens to change the naval balance in the north-west Indian Ocean.”<sup>5</sup> One journalist went so far as to suggest “The Iranians can now use the new Turkish base [at Suakin] in Sudan to send more arms and equipment to [the] Houthis [in Yemen], while Turkey can use its **newfound military presence** to send more troops to Qatar, or meddle further in the affairs of Egypt.”<sup>6</sup>

These analyses, seemingly long on rhetoric and short on facts, lead us to explicitly question the extent to which MERSC states currently involved in the Horn of Africa possess the intent and capability to effectively project power into the region. We do so by reviewing **significant security interaction stages** between relevant MERSC states in the Horn.<sup>7</sup> As importantly we define and analyze these states’ national security interests and resource arrays, hypothesizing that relevant MERSC state actors may possess some intent but currently lack the capability to effectively project hard power in the Horn of Africa for the length of time suitable to demonstrably alter current distributions of power. This is because their **primary national security interests** (defense of the homeland) as informed by assessed threats from external states

4. Kabandula, Abigail, and Timothy M. Shaw, *Rising Powers and the Horn of Africa: Conflicting Regionalisms*, «Third World Quarterly», 13.

5. Brewster, David. (2018). “Base race in the Horn of Africa.” *The Interpreter*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/base-race-horn-africa>

6. Moubayed, Sami (2017, December 28). Turkish base in Sudan a problem for Arab powers. *Gulf News*. <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/turkish-base-in-sudan-a-problem-for-arab-powers-1.2148443>

7. While they are beyond the scope of this short article, the actions and engagement of Horn of Africa states with relevant Middle East states should not be understated. Indeed, this is an often-misunderstood or ignored facet of the ongoing and intense security and economic interaction between regional security complexes. For example, the role of Ethiopia and Somaliland was critical to DP World’s involvement in the port of Berbera. Cannon, Brendon J. and Ash Rossiter. Ethiopia, Berbera port and the shifting balance of power in the Horn of Africa. *Rising Powers Quarterly*, 2(4), 7-29.



will inevitably trump security concerns in the more distant Horn; and because they possess **limited resources** beyond the maintenance of a sustained forward presence thus inhibiting any prospective, long-term and sustained deployment.

### **DETERMINANTS OF ENGAGEMENT**

Historically and mainly due to its geographical proximity, the Horn of Africa's cultural and trade interactions with the Middle East, and vice versa, have been intense.<sup>8</sup> These interactions have increasingly become **associated with politics and security**. While patterns of interaction have been uneven, what links the actions of all MERSC states involved in the Horn of Africa regional security complex (HOARSC)<sup>9</sup> is that they have now demonstrated at least some intent and a limited capacity to engage significantly with the majority of states in the Horn. Some such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Egypt have been involved quite substantially since the 1960s and the era of decolonization.<sup>10</sup> Engagement by Turkey, the UAE and Qatar, on the other hand, dates back approximately one decade. The entry of small to medium rising powers in the region has certainly made an impression and has already had an influence on major political changes such as **the 2018 peace accord between Eritrea and Ethiopia**.<sup>11</sup>

The impetus for Turkey, Qatar and the UAE may have differed, but the intensity of their recent interactions in the HOARSC does seem to have roots in the 2011 uprisings and upheavals. These resulted in turmoil across the region and, as noted, certainly paved the way, in part, for

**“Engagement by Turkey, the UAE and Qatar, dates back approximately one decade. The entry of small to medium rising powers in the region has certainly made an impression and has already had an influence on major political changes such as the 2018 peace accord between Eritrea and Ethiopia”**

8. Verhoeven, Harry. *The Gulf and the Horn: Changing Geographies of Security Interdependence and Competing Visions of Regional Order*, «Civil Wars», vol. 20, no. 3 (2018): 333-57.

9. We consider Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Qatar, Egypt and Iran to be the Middle East states involved in security interactions with the HOARSC.

10. Verhoeven (2018).

11. Ylönen, A. (2019). Is the Horn of Africa's 'Cold War' over? Abiy Ahmed's early reforms and the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. *African Security Review*, 1-8.



attempts to **redistribute regional power distributions and regime types**. Beyond the competing ideological and regime poles of Iran and KSA, the rise of political Islamic movements galvanized Turkey's regional ambitions, to include its support for Egypt's short-lived Muslim Brotherhood government, as driven by Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party or AKP government.<sup>12</sup> For decades, Qatar, a conservative Gulf monarchy, has used its vast oil wealth in the service of various and often controversial political agendas across the region, at times dovetailing with Ankara's support of Hamas in Palestine or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.<sup>13</sup> The UAE, on the other hand, drew closer to KSA post-2011 in an attempt not only to maintain but grow **the power and influence of the region's conservative monarchies**. This jockeying for influence has now spilled beyond the boundaries of the MERSC into the HOARSC, a regional security complex, like the MERSC, that is also characterized by intense security interactions among its actors and the lack of a clear hegemon. Such security interactions, given delicate structural and systemic variables in both regional security complexes are therefore of concern to regional and extra-regional states.<sup>14</sup>

We highlight that MERSC states involved in the HOARSC did not initially do so because of attempts to curb the influence of ideological and political rivals. But this certainly seems to at least partially inform the current rationale of these states to deploy finite resources to the HOARSC. For example, over a decade ago, the UAE, via the state-owned DP World, began to invest in **the development and management of**

**“the UAE, on the other hand, drew closer to KSA post-2011 in an attempt not only to maintain but grow the power and influence of the region's conservative monarchies”**

<sup>12</sup>. There is evidence that the high polarity in the ME has stimulated overlapping rivalries and created the conditions for increased engagement of certain ME states with those of the HOA in the political and security arenas. See Rossiter, Ash, and Brendon J. Cannon, *Re-Examining the “Base”: The Political and Security Dimensions of Turkey's Military Presence in Somalia*, «Insight Turkey», (2018): 1-22; Verhoven, *The Gulf and the Horn*.

<sup>13</sup>. Roberts, David B. (2017). *Securing the Qatari State*, «The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington», Issue paper 7, 1-10.

<sup>14</sup>. Ursu, Anca-Elena and Willem van der Berg. (2016). China and the EU in the Horn of Africa: competition and cooperation? *CRU Policy Brief*. Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, pp. 1-12.



**Djibouti's ports** in 2005 almost certainly based on straightforward cost benefit analyses involving profit. That same year, Turkey launched a political agenda of openness towards the African continent that was largely driven by humanitarian and business organizations, but that quickly led to **Turkey becoming a political actor in Somalia**<sup>15</sup>, culminating in 2010 and 2011 with Turkey acting as a mediator in the Somali crisis.<sup>16</sup>

Qatar and KSA, states with interests that increasingly seem to align with Turkey and the UAE, respectively, have also been active but less visibly so. For example, KSA has been in the process of building a military base in Djibouti since the two states signed an agreement in 2016.<sup>17</sup> It also has a primary role in the financial system of Sudan<sup>18</sup> and has strengthened its bonds with Ethiopia,<sup>19</sup> being one of the main promoters of normalization of ties between Addis Ababa and Asmara. On the other side of what some have termed an intra-Sunni rift, Qatar has committed to invest US\$4 billion **to develop and manage the port of Suakin** in Sudan. Furthermore, Doha has been credited for providing the resources leading to the election of Somalia's sitting and previous presidents, thus reportedly wielding a outsized amount of political power in Mogadishu.<sup>20</sup>

15. Rossiter & Cannon (2018): pp. 5-6. See also Özkan, Mehmet and Serhat Orakci, "Turkey as a "Political" Actor in Africa: An Assessment of Turkish Involvement in Somalia," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2015), pp. 343-352.

16. Federico Donelli, "A hybrid actor in the Horn of Africa. An analysis of Turkey's involvement in Somalia", in A. Ylönen and J. Záhořík (eds.), *The Horn of Africa since the 1960s. Local and International Politics Intertwined*, Abingdon, New York: Routledge, pp. 158-170.

17. Toumi, Habib. (2016, March 8). Saudi Arabia 'to open military base in Djibouti'. *Gulf News*. <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/saudi-arabia-to-open-military-base-in-djibouti-1.1686291>

18. Eleonora Ardemagni, The Yemeni Factor in the Saudi Arabia-Sudan Realignment, The Arab Gulf States Institute, April 12, 2016.

19. James Jeffrey, "What Is Saudi Arabia Up to in the Horn of Africa?", *The New Conservative*, December 3, 2018.

20. Federico Donelli, *Le due sponde del Mar Rosso. La politica estera degli Stati medio-orientali nel Corno d'Africa*, Milano: Mondadori Università, 2019. See also Cannon, Brendon J. (2019). Foreign State Influence and Somalia's 2017 Presidential Election: An Analysis. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 18(1), 20-49; pp. 31-33.

**"KSA has been in the process of building a military base in Djibouti since the two states signed an agreement in 2016. It also has a primary role in the financial system of Sudan and has strengthened its bonds with Ethiopia, being one of the main promoters of normalization of ties between Addis Ababa and Asmara"**



The worsening of **the Yemen crisis** further increased the geostrategic importance of the HOARSC for certain MERSC states, particularly the UAE, KSA and Iran. The Yemeni civil war unquestionably boosted **the security interactions between the two regions** as the gradual strengthening of the Iran-backed Houthi rebels' position came to decisively affect Saudi internal and external security interests. Of primary concern to the anti-Houthi coalition was the influence of Iran and Tehran's supply of weaponry, to include missile parts, to the Houthis.<sup>21</sup> The Saudi-led coalition, spearheaded by the UAE, attempted to break both Eritrea and Sudan away from Iran in order to stem **the supply of weaponry** from points across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Yemen in the Horn. In 2015, when the Saudi-led coalition launched military operations in Yemen to combat the territorial gains of the Houthi movement, it was subsequently supported by both Eritrea and Sudan.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, Eritrea agreed to lease its Hanish Islands and facilities at the port city of Assab to the UAE for 30 years in 2015.<sup>23</sup> That same year, Dubai-based DP World signed a tripartite agreement with Ethiopia and the de-facto independent but internationally unrecognized Republic of Somaliland to refurbish and expand the port of Berbera on the south coast of the Gulf of Yemen. Two years later, P&O Ports, a subsidiary of DP World, won a 30-year concession for **the management and development of a multi-purpose port project at Bosaso** in Somalia's autonomous region of Puntland. But the UAE and its companies were not acting alone nor were they the first to cut deals in the region. In 2014, a Turk-

**“The Saudi-led coalition, spearheaded by the UAE, attempted to break both Eritrea and Sudan away from Iran in order to stem the supply of weaponry from points across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Yemen in the Horn”**

21. As of November 20, 2018, there had been 133 publicly reported intercepts of missiles fired from Yemen. *CSIS Missile Defense Project*. <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile-war-yemen/>.

22. Sudan has sent troops to fight in Yemen. Eritrea has allowed the UAE to use its airspace, territorial waters and, most importantly, the base and port at Assab in support of its military operations in Yemen.

23. Starting with very little, Assab has been substantially developed by the UAE. It now reportedly includes a modern airbase, a military training depot, and, significantly, a deep-water port under construction. Katzman, Kenneth. (2017, August 18). “The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy.” *Congressional Research Service*. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21852.pdf>



ish company (Albayrak Group) took over operations at Mogadishu's port. This followed on the heels of a Turkish company (Favori LLC) taking over management of Mogadishu's international airport in 2013.<sup>24</sup> By 2017, Turkey not only controlled Somalia's most lucrative infrastructure assets, but had built a large embassy and opened a military facility to train the Somali National Army (SNA).<sup>25</sup> To Somalia's north, in the Red Sea, the Suakin agreement between Turkey and Sudan was signed in December 2017, as noted previously.

In June 2017, the split in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) pitting KSA, the UAE and Bahrain against Qatar exacerbated an already tense relationship, leading to a situation whereby internal GCC political dynamics have increasingly affected relations with, and regional dynamics in, various HOARSC states. **Diplomatic and economic pressure** applied by opposing Gulf states to sever relations with one GCC bloc or the other has led HOARSC states to react in different ways. Eritrea, for example, appears to have taken advantage of the situation and further cemented its relationship with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Others such as Ethiopia and Sudan have reacted by attempting to play both blocs off against each other, signing various agreements with Turkey and Qatar on the one hand and the UAE and KSA on the other. Caught in the middle, Somalia has remained publicly neutral but President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed aka Farmajo and his inner circle, reportedly elected with Qatari cash,<sup>26</sup> appeared to categorically choose sides when they supported a move by Somali MPs to ban DP World from operating in Somalia and, in April 2018, seized Emirati diplomatic cargo with a reported US\$9million.

**“Diplomatic and economic pressure applied by opposing Gulf states to sever relations with one GCC bloc or the other has led HOARSC states to react in different ways. Eritrea, for example, appears to have taken advantage of the situation and further cemented its relationship with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi”**

24. Federico Donelli, *The Ankara Consensus: the significance of Turkey's engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in «Global Change, Peace & Security», vol. 31, no. 2 (2018), 57-76. 10.1080/14781158.2018.1438384

25. Rossiter & Cannon (2018)

26. Cannon, Brendon J. (2019). Foreign State Influence and Somalia's 2017 Presidential Election: An Analysis. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 18(1), 20-49.



## THE LIMITS OF MIDDLE EAST POWER PROJECTION IN THE HORN

As demonstrated in the preceding section, while certain MERSC states have certainly increased their security interactions with those in the HOARSC thereby leading to a **proliferation of port and basing deals**, the talk and related analysis about a process of securitization in the Red Sea may be hyperbolic. This is because they fail to take into account the national security interests and resource arrays of MERSC states involved in the HOARSC. The question, then, becomes not so much could Turkey or KSA deploy troops and military assets to Sudan, for example, but, why would they? Our below examination of these variables provides the answers.

### National Security Interests

An analysis of first and second tier national security threats emanating generally from external powers for relevant MERSC states operating in the HOARSC is shown in Table 1. We define first tier external threats as those coming from states possessing both the ability and intent to cause catastrophic harm to the national security of the country. We define second tier external threats as threats emanating from states possessing the possible ability and intent to cause serious harm to the national security of a country.<sup>27</sup>

Table 1 is important because it clearly demonstrates that states in the MERSC each perceive their primary and secondary external threats as other states within the same regional security complex. The only aberrations we observe are Turkey and Egypt.<sup>28</sup> What does this mean?

<sup>27</sup>. Admittedly, the states listed in Table 1 will be the subject of some dispute given its qualitative nature. To be clear, we emphasize that Table 1 is instructive *vis-à-vis* the aims of this paper and was completed by reviewing the relevant literature associated with threat perceptions of states *vis-à-vis* external states in both RSCs over the longue durée. Additionally, these are perceptions of external threats rather than perceived threats coming from within the states.

<sup>28</sup>. According to Buzan and Wæver's theory, Turkey is an insulator or buffer state that,



It demonstrates clearly that foreign policy objectives as defined by national security interests based on threats from external states, regardless of leadership changes or regime type, will largely continue to focus national security assets and resource arrays **towards geographically proximate primary and secondary threats**. These constitute almost exclusively states within the same MERSC. As importantly, none of these states posing primary or secondary national security threats are in the HOARSC. In such a scenario, the rationale for significant power projection away from the homeland consisting of the means for a direct intervention as well as a sustained forward presence is therefore lacking. This is even more so when one considers the resource arrays of relevant MERSC states.<sup>29</sup>

### Resource Arrays

MERSC states, even those with seemingly deep pockets, cannot realistically apportion the significant funds required for **projecting power away from the homeland** for the length of time needed to demonstrably shift current distributions of power. For example, Turkey, a medium power with a GDP of US\$851 billion and G20 member with the second largest military in NATO, has gone through an extended period of **political and economic insecurity**, particularly since 2016. In addition, the long civil war in Syria, including the interventions of both Russia and Iran, and Ankara's military intervention aimed at countering Kurdish forces affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have

---

given reasons of geography and history amongst others, straddles the boundaries between the European and Middle Eastern RSCs (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 344). Egypt, on the other hand, is part of the Levantine sub-complex of the MERSC but maintains a significant security interaction with states in the HOARSC because of the importance of the Nile River to Egypt's political and economic security.

<sup>29</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this article, an interesting measure and method that could be applied to gauge the national security interests of states and their capabilities to project hard power would be Michael Beckley's net power measures and tallying costs that erode a state's power: production costs, welfare costs and security costs. Beckley, M., *The Power of Nations: Measuring What Matters*, «International Security», vol. 43, no. 2 (2018): 7-44.

**“foreign policy objectives as defined by national security interests based on threats from external states, regardless of leadership changes or regime type, will largely continue to focus national security assets and resource arrays towards geographically proximate primary and secondary threats”**



concentrated its military and economic resources on both sides of its Syrian border.

| Country | RSC         | First tier national security threats (external)   | Second tier national security threats (external)                    |
|---------|-------------|---|---|
| Turkey  | Insulator   | Russia  | Iran  |
| UAE     | Middle East | Iran  | States supportive of Muslim Brotherhood (Turkey, Qatar)             |
| KSA     | Middle East | Iran  | Yemen (Iranian influence)   |
| Qatar   | Middle East | Iran  | Quartet states involved in GCC crisis (KSA, UAE, Egypt and Bahrain) |
| Iran    | Middle East | Israel and its ally, USA  | Sunni bloc led by KSA   |
| Egypt   | Middle East | Iran and "Shia Crescent" and/or States supportive of Muslim Brotherhood (Turkey, Qatar) | Riparian Nile states (particularly Ethiopia, but also Sudan etc.)   |

**TAB. 1 - FIRST AND SECOND TIER THREAT ASSESSMENTS FOR RELEVANT MERSC STATES OPERATING IN THE HOARSC<sup>30</sup>**

<sup>30</sup> To be clear, we emphasize that Table 1 is instructive vis-à-vis the aims of this article and was completed by reviewing the relevant literature associated with threat perceptions of ME states. Among the literature, see for example: Pinar Bilgin, *Regional Security in the Middle East: A Critical Perspective*, London: Routledge, 2004; Bahgat Korany, *The Changing Middle East: A New Look at Regional Dynamics*, Cairo: American University Press, 2010; Salem Paul, *Working toward a Stable Regional Order*, «The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science», no. 668 (2016): 36-52; Anders Jägerskog, Michael Schulz, Ashok Swain (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on Middle East Security*, London & New York: Routledge, 2019; Bahgat, Gawdat, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Neil Quilliam. *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, and Emma C. Murphy. *The international politics of the Red Sea*. Routledge, 2013.



The fact remains that Turkey's foreign direct investments into the Horn is a fraction of its overall budgetary expenses.<sup>31</sup> Private businesses, despite many with strong ties to Erdoğan and his AKP, operate in places like Mogadishu and Addis Ababa and do much to further Turkey's influence across the HOARSC. Turkey's much-ballyhooed "base" in Mogadishu, as currently used and operated, is certainly not a base in the traditional military sense of projecting hard power overseas.<sup>32</sup> And its intention to restore the old Ottoman port of Suakin is less driven by any grand strategy of Ankara's than by pandering to a domestic political base hungry for a **return to past Ottoman glories**.<sup>33</sup>

The case of the UAE and its operations at the port facilities and naval base in Assab is perhaps as instructive, if not more so. That is, it goes a long way in explaining not only the rationale of certain MERSC states to engage in security interactions with states in the HOARSC, but also its limits. First, Assab was leased and **developed by the UAE for the war in Yemen**. In that role it is used as a logistics base, a training center and a forward base for UAE air and naval assets. While the UAE's agreement with Eritrea means it could be there for 30 years, should the UAE discontinue its role and commitments in Yemen for any number of reasons the importance of Assab would likely be downgraded.

We could expect to see the UAE maintain the base and related facilities for surveillance and logistics purposes but many assets, to include personnel, would likely return to the UAE given the significant costs asso-

**"Assab was leased and developed by the UAE for the war in Yemen. In that role it is used as a logistics base, a training center and a forward base for UAE air and naval assets"**

31 Abdulkadir Wahab Aman, Zeynep Kaplan, *The distribution and determinants of Turkey's FDI positions in Africa*, «Turkish Economic Review», vol. 4, no. 4, 2017.

32 Rossiter & Cannon (2018): 3-5.

33 Colborne, Michael and Maxim Edwards. (2018, June 26). Erdoğan Is Making the Ottoman Empire Great Again. *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/22/erdogan-is-making-the-ottoman-empire-great-again/>. See also Bilefsky, Dan, (2012, October 29). As if the Ottoman Period Never Ended. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/30/movies/in-turkey-ottoman-nostalgia-returns.html>. See also Danforth, Nick. (2016). Turkey's New Maps Are Reclaiming the Ottoman Empire. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/23/turkeys-religious-nationalists-want-ottoman-borders-iraq-erdogan/>



ciated with the UAE's current power projection associated expressly for Yemen.

## **CONCLUSION**

By a brief analysis of significant security interaction stages between HOARSC and MERSC, this article highlights how the MERSC states even though possess some intent to project hard power in the HOARSC lack the capability and rationale to effectively do so for a sustained period of time. This conclusion is determined essentially by two factors. Firstly, as evidenced by the tier threat assessments (Table 1), all the MERSC actors consider **the defense of the homeland** related to more geographically proximate problems as tantamount to security issues in the neighboring HOARSC. Secondly, all states, to include the MERSC states in question, possess finite material resources, which would inevitably affect a medium/long-term commitment by inhibiting their sustained deployment. The result entails a lack of rationale for significant power projection (consisting of the means for direct intervention or a sustained forward presence) away from their own borders. **The only exception is the base at Assab** which acts as 1) a logistics base; 2) a training center; 3) a forward base for UAE air and naval assets. In this case, the exceptionally high level of UAE commitment can be explained by the base's proximity to Yemen and ongoing operations there. For the same reason, the end of the UAE military intervention in Yemen would likely lead to a downsizing of their commitment in Assab.



**Federico Donelli** is a postdoc research fellow in International Relations at the University of Genoa, Department of Political Sciences, and visiting fellow at the Center for Modern Turkish Studies of the Şehir Istanbul University where he also teaches Comparative Foreign Policy of the Middle Eastern states. His research fields have covered International Relations and security studies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, focusing on the foreign policy of the different actors. Currently he is working on the process of militarization in the Horn of Africa. Among his latest works “The Ankara Consensus: the significance of Turkey’s engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa” in *Global Change, Peace & Security* and “*Le due sponde del Mar Rosso: la politica estera degli attori mediorientali nel Corno d’Africa*” (Mondadori Università, 2019).

**Brendon J. Cannon** is Assistant Professor International Security at the Institute of International and Civil Security (IICS) at Khalifa University of Science and Technology, Abu Dhabi, UAE. He earned his Ph.D. in Political Science with an emphasis on International Relations from the University of Utah, USA (2009). His research interests include contextualizing domestic, regional and international relations in eastern Africa, regional security in the Middle East and western Indian Ocean region, the political economy of ports, bases and airports, as well as the Quad’s Indo-Pacific strategy as contrasted by China’s BRI in eastern Africa. He is the author of multiple articles and books, with publications appearing in *African Security*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *The Journal of Strategic Security*, *Insight Turkey*, and *African Security Review*.