

DISCUSSION PAPER

**Horn of Africa
Caught in Between the
Qatar-GCC Crisis:
Case Studies
of Somalia
and Sudan**

By Abdinor Hassan Dahir

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Abstract

The Gulf Crisis, which is now 10 months old, has spread to Horn of Africa making it a hotspot for rivalry. Initially, two traditional pro-Saudi countries in the region, Sudan and Somalia, have preferred to stay neutral in the diplomatic spat and urged dialogue. This paper argues that Qatar's diplomatic presence in the region, especially in Sudan and Somalia, contributed to their neutral stance. It also contends Turkey's engagements in both these countries and its position in the Qatar-Gulf spat influenced their position.

Introduction

On June 5, 2017 three of the six Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members cut off ties with another fellow Arab GCC member state—Qatar. The move was justified to be a protest against Qatar's relations with Iran and its alleged support for terrorist groups, which Doha denied. Consequently, the protesting countries spearheaded by Saudi Arabia imposed a full land, sea and air blockage on Qatar. The blockade, which began the 10th day of the Holy month of Ramadan and corresponding with the 50th anniversary of the Naksah (setback) day when Israel defeated Arabs in the six-day war, is now in its ninth month.

As the news of the diplomatic spat spread, some other non-GCC countries threw their weight behind the Saudi-led bloc by either cutting or downgrading their diplomatic links with Doha. These countries were Muslim-majority nations and almost of all of them are either members of Arab League or Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Some other Muslim countries, including Turkey, Pakistan and Algeria preferred to stay neutral in the intra-Gulf rift by either staying silent or urging the conflicting sides to solve their disputes diplomatically.

As the rivalry to isolate Qatar heats up, a fierce competition for influence has ensued in certain parts of the world, particularly in the Horn of Africa. Initially, Djibouti and Eritrea sided with the Saudi camp by downgrading their diplomatic relations with Qatar while two traditional Saudi allies—Sudan and Somalia—have adopted neutral stance in the family feud. By doing so, Mogadishu and Khartoum have allowed Qatar Airways, which was banned from the Gulf neighbors following the feud, to use their airspace. Moreover, Somalia and Sudan further flexed their diplomatic muscles by extending a helping hand to solve the row between the brotherly nations. However, as the rivalry goes on for months and a solution is not in sight at least for now, these two Horn of African nations which share close cultural, political and economic association with the GCC, have a lot at stake.

Traditional Pro-Arab Orbiting

Traditionally, Sudan and Somalia pursued pro-Arab foreign policy since their independence in second half of 20th century. They share deep historical, cultural and religious relations with the Arabian Peninsula that dates back in the time of Prophet Muhammad and first Hijra (migration) of some of Prophet's companions to the Horn of Africa.¹ Since its independence in 1960, Somalia's traditional foreign policy has featured a pan-Arab characteristic. Mogadishu joined the Arab League in 1974 and adopted Arabic as the official language of the nation, in addition to the Somali language. On the other hand, Sudan also joined the Arab League in 1956, ten days after it gained independence from the Anglo-Egyptian rule. These factors, although geographically both countries locate in Africa and some historians and linguists point both belong to the Cushites—a vast stock of languages and peoples considered Afro-Asiatic—could be the reason majority Somalis² and Sudanese³ consider themselves more Arabs than Africans.

Since then, both Sudan and Somalia formulated their foreign relations with the rest of the world on Arab unity basis and rallied behind the GCC states, particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in exchange for economic and military support respectively. A recent example is Somalia and Sudan, together with Djibouti, severing diplomatic ties with Iran in 2016 when Iranian protesters torched the Saudi embassy in Tehran. In 2015, Somalia had also sided with Saudi Arabia against Sweden over allegations of human rights violations committed by Saudi authorities.⁴ Furthermore, both Khartoum and Mogadishu back the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen against Iran-allied Houthi rebels.

However, it is not the first time these nations took neutral position in a diplomatic dust-up between the League of Arab nations. In 1979, when most Arab states severed diplomatic ties with Egypt due to its Camp David agreement with Israel, Somalia and Sudan were among the three Arab countries who sided with the pro-American Anwar Sadat, then president of Egypt.⁴ Moreover, Somalia joined the ranks of the pro-US Egyptian-led coalition of Arab League countries who initially confronted the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.⁵ However, at this time, Khartoum backed the Saddam invasion, which pushed Sudan towards Iran—an isolated and Western sanctions hit. This led the disintegration of Sudan's links with the rest of Gulf nations for several years. Sudan's relations with Iran soured in 2014, when Sudanese authorities ordered the closure of Iranian cultural centre in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, accusing its employees preaching Shia ideology in a Sunni majority country.⁶ It is believed this was a pretext for Khartoum's ditching of Tehran in favor of Riyadh after the latter's execution of Shia cleric in January, 2016.

Why Take a Neutral Stance Now?

Like in the past, it was expected that both Somalia and Sudan would follow the suit of the boycotting countries and sever ties with Doha. However, both chose to take neutral position in the rift between the brotherly fellow Arab nations. Somalia called upon the countries involved in the conflict to explore solution.

Sudan its part also declared its unwillingness to take sides in the rift and encouraged diplomatic dialogue to end the conflict. The African Union has also urged African states to stay neutral in the dispute. The neutral decision was regarded a backlash against Saudi Arabia and UAE, two influential powers in the region.

Qatar's Footprint in Sudan and Somalia

Qatar's influence in these countries is visible and paramount encompassing areas of conflict mediation, economic investment, and humanitarian assistance.

Investment in the Economy

Starting from Sudan, the recently strengthening relations enabled Khartoum to attract considerable amount of aid packages and investment in agricultural and energy sectors in Sudan, whose economy has suffered after the succession of South Sudan in 2011, effectively grabbing much of Sudan's oil fields.⁷ Doha also sought to increase the economic and military cooperation with Sudan, which was subject to US and western sanctions. Since South Sudan's break away, Qatar has inked economic and military pacts with the Sudanese government that paved the way for (a) Qatar's depositing of 1 billion USD in Sudan's central bank for agricultural and energy investment in 2014, and (b) Qatar's provision of natural gas to Sudan and boosting of military cooperation, such as training, with it.⁹

However, the tiny Gulf monarch is not the only investor in Sudan's feeble economy. Saudi Arabia is reportedly the largest Arab investor in Sudan's different sectors with more than 590 projects in agriculture and infrastructure. In 2016, Riyadh's investments in Sudan totaled 15 billion USD. The United Arab Emirates is also the second largest investor in Sudanese economy with

11 billion USD in different projects, such as agriculture, infrastructure and mineral sectors.¹⁰ Furthermore, as the US sanctions on Sudan were recently lifted, it is expected that Gulf investors, especially the anti-Qatar Quartet, will move in to invest Sudan's rich resource—with vast gold and mineral deposits and 1.5 barrels of proven oil reserves.¹¹

Qatar's investments in Somalia were historically low, compared to that of Saudi and UAE. In November last year, Qatar signed 200 million USD agreement with Somalia, which encompasses infrastructure development and job creation.¹² Somalia's major economic infrastructure was either destroyed or damaged during the civil war, and this deal amounts a major investment move by Qatar after Turkey, which has also extensively invested in Somalia's key economic sectors, such as the Mogadishu airport and seaport as well as the major roads in the capital city. However, Qatar's recent deal could be regarded not only a bold gesture to contribute to the recovery of Somalia, but also a leverage against the Saudi-led Quartet influence in Somalia as well as the wider Horn of Africa.

Conflict Mediation

Qatar influence in Sudan is also evident in the area of mediation. Doha has helped Sudan to restore relations with its neighboring Eritrea, which had severed ties

with Sudan in 1994. The presidents of Sudan and Eritrea, Omar Al-Bashir and Assaias Affawarki respectively, met in Doha in 1999 and agreed to resume relations. Qatar has also played a mediation role between the Sudanese Government and the Darfur rebels. Several attempts to establish a lasting cessation of hostilities and to lead to a more comprehensive peace agreement were made, such as the signing of Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) in 2011, and the payment of 500 million USD for the reconstruction of Darfur. However, although Qatar role has received both African and international positive remarks, significant progress in the Darfur peace process has yet to be made because of the complex nature of the conflict and stakeholders involved.¹³

Traditionally, Qatar's influence in Somalia was limited to humanitarian aid and charity works, such as building Mosques, Madrasas, schools, hospitals and orphanage sponsorship. However, Qatar's activism in Somalia gained momentum in 2006 after the emergence of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) that briefly ruled much of the country before the intervention of the US-supported Ethiopian forces. The leader of ICU, Sheikh Sharif, was invited to Doha and met with the Emir and Foreign Minister. Following this meeting, Qatar dispatched a needs assessment team to Somalia and Qatar Red Crescent established an office in Mogadishu. As usual, Qatar offered to help mediate the ICU and Transitional Federal Government but that did not come into fruition.

In December 2006, Ethiopian forces invaded Somalia and ICU reign was crashed, which paved the way for resistance struggle against occupying forces. Qatar fiercely opposed the Ethiopian intervention by chairing UN Security Council meeting on 27 December 2006, and demanding the immediate withdrawal of the Ethiopian troops from Somalia. The deposed ICU officials met with Qatari leadership and organized an opposition conference in Doha in July 2007. The conference was attended by ICU, members from the free parliaments of the Transitional Federal Government, as well as civil society and Somali nationalists. Doha was regarded a hub for resistance against the invasion and occupation of Ethiopia. Following peace talks in Djibouti, ICU's leader was elected president for a unity government in 2009 and

opposition splitted over his election. Qatar pressured President Sharif to expand his government by adding the members from the opposition to the new cabinet. Furthermore, Qatar sponsored Yusuf Qaradawi's peace mission to Somalia in 2009, with the aim of pressuring president Sharif to talk with the opposition faction, particularly Hassan Dahir Aweys and his Hizbul-Islam.

Pyramid Diplomacy

Another aspect of Qatari influence is Doha's funding of Sudan's ancient historic sites to keep them intact which could serve a huge boom in Sudan's meagre tourist industry. Although it is not relatively well known to the wider world, Sudan is a home of more than 200 burial tombs and ancient pyramids—almost twice as many as those in Egypt.¹⁴ With 135 million USD and 40 projects led by international teams from Poland, Germany and France, Qatar has heavily invested in the preservation, restoration and exploration of Sudan's historical monuments. The discoveries are expected to fill the gap of Sudanese ancient history, which is also one of Africa's unexplored antiquities and UNESCO world heritage sites. In March last year, Sheikha Moza, the mother of Qatari Emir Tamim, visited pyramids restored by Qatar in the historic Sudanese City of Meroe.¹⁵ The visit was regarded by many not only a royal visiting an ancient capital of the lesser-known Pharaonic kingdom, but also signaled Doha as a stakeholder in Sudan's relic.

Political Support

Some of Qatar's aid to Somalia, which increased after the Islamic Courts Union took power in Mogadishu in 2006, have been used for political influence.¹⁶ In 2012, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected Somalia's first non-transitional President since the fall of the central government in 1991. In 2017 election, Qatar was linked to former president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's Peace and Development Party, an offshoot of the al-Islah branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, Somalia's new president, was also reported to have received significant assistance on his election campaign. Although he is not an Islamist, Fahad Yasin, Farmajo's chief of staff, along with Somali diaspora in Qatar, are believed to have been a duct for support from Qatar to Somalia.¹⁷

The Turkish Factor

Another important factor that needs a closer appraisal is Turkey's influence in the region as well its position in the intra-Gulf diplomatic spat. Turkey, since the beginning of the crisis, has urged the GCC member states to resolve the dispute through dialogue. Following the family feud, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey travelled to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait in last July in a bid to defuse the crisis, and offered his support to Kuwaiti-led mediation efforts. Turkey has also unreservedly supported Qatar and offered strong solidarity with the Qatari people by dispatching cargo ships and hundreds of cargo planes loaded with essential foodstuffs and medical supplies to break the blockade.

Furthermore, Ankara has opened its first overseas military base in Qatar in July last year and deployed more troops following the crisis. Turkey and Qatar share same vision on many fronts, especially the Arab spring events in the MENA region, and the base is aimed at helping both countries to confront "common enemies".¹⁸ In fact, the closure of the Turkish military base was one of the 13-demand list put forward by Saudi-led boycotting countries in last June for ending blockading.

Turkey's stance in the intra-Gulf dispute is believed to have indirectly contributed to how the conflict is being perceived in the Horn of Africa, particularly with regard to the neutral positions of Sudan and Somalia. Both countries have relatively strong relations with Turkey, which are mainly based on historical, economic and shared ideals. Turkey's relations with Sudan and Somalia date back to Ottoman era, but the modern ties gained momentum under AK Party leadership. To deconstruct how Turkey has contributed to the neutral stances of Sudan and Somalia; this section of the paper examines the recent Turkish activism in these African states.

Humanitarian Assistance

Turkey has taken a pivotal role in Sudan's humanitarian and development sphere. In 2010, Turkey along with Egypt co-chaired the Cairo Donors Conference for the Reconstruction of Darfur, held under the auspices

of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and pledged 70 million USD in assistance to Darfur, the bulk of it for the region's education, health, agriculture and reconciliation projects.¹⁹ Several Turkish agencies, including the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), currently operate in the troubled regions of Darfur and Western Sudan. Since 2009, TIKA has implemented more than 50 projects in Sudan, including 50 million USD hospital in Nyala, Darfur, which provides medical care to the victims of the armed strife in the region. The Turkish projects undertaken in Sudan amount 300 million USD.²⁰

Ankara's relations with Somalia have recently become a symbol of Turkey's links with the rest of Africa. Somalia's central government has collapsed in 1991 and the nation descended into civil war and warlord rule until 2000. At the first place, Turkey took part efforts to restore peace to the country through contributing personnel to UNOSOM (United Nations Operations in Somalia) mission—a U.S-led international coalition force—which Lieutenant General Çevik Bir, a Turkish military commander, was heading between 1993 and 1994. The mission did not achieve its intended goals and was finally pulled out of the country in 1995.²¹ However, Ankara's engagement in Somalia gained momentum in 2011, when a massive famine hit the East African country that engulfed the lives of more than 260,000 people and displaced many others. Then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, along with his family members, cabinet members, and representatives from Turkish NGOs as well as private sector, led huge delegation to help prevent the famine and bring international community's attention to the plight of Somalia.²²

Development and Capacity Building

On the security and military side, Sudanese police and security personnel receive various training courses each year from Turkish National Police Forces. Currently, the number of Sudanese officers who received training from Turkey total 3800. Furthermore, Turkey contributes personnel and financial assistance to the UN Darfur Peacekeeping Mission.²³ The two

nations also maintain military cooperation and conduct joint military training exercises. For instance, Turkish military ships carrying 700 servicemen docked in the Port Sudan harbor, the Red Sea, and conducted joint training with their Sudanese counterparts in June 2015. Turkey and Sudan inked a military deal in last December to fight terror, when Turkish President Erdogan paid 3-day visit to Sudan. The agreement states that Turkish military will have a presence in the Sudanese territorial waters on the Red Sea and will confront terrorism in Africa, particularly in the Horn and East Africa regions. Under this deal, Sudan will also hand over the Suakin Island to Turkey for rebuilding, investment and tourism purposes for 99 years.²⁴

Ankara provides training to Somali security forces (police, military and naval) both in Somalia and Turkey. In 2017, Turkey opened 50 million USD worth military base, which will provide training to Somali National Army, in Mogadishu that occupies 400 hectares and houses three military schools, dormitories, and depots. Turkey has also been participating in the counter-piracy multinational naval task force that operates in the Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and off the eastern coast of Somalia.²⁵ It also supports AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) peacekeeping force by providing direct budgetary assistance.

Upon successfully averting the famine, Turkey's involvement in Somalia grew to prominence and Turkish civil society and state organizations started to engage widely with Somalia. First, Ankara has contributed to Somalia's return to the international community by continuously lobbying for its rebuilding in the global forums. It has renovated Somalia's basic infrastructures, such as the Mogadishu airport and seaport, and established aviation air-travel links between Somalia and the rest of the world. It has opened its largest embassy in the world in Mogadishu. Ankara has built a 200- in-patient capacity hospital in Mogadishu—the largest in the East Africa. Additionally, Turkey took the lead in enhancing the capacity of Somali state institutions, which were destroyed by the two decades-long political and civil

turmoil. These include providing budgetary support to the Federal Government of Somalia, training the government personnel, equipping and rebuilding the state premises such as the ministries and other government buildings.

Finally, Turkish education institutions maintain excellent academic relations with some of their Sudanese and Somali counterparts in areas of research, educational development and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Turkish Government offers higher education to Sudanese and Somali students willing to study in Turkey within the framework of Turkey Scholarships Program.

Economy and Investment

Following successive and reciprocal high-level visits over the years, Turkey is currently among the Sudan's five economic partners with more than 5,000 Turkish community and 480 companies operating across the country. Now, the trade volume between the two countries amounts 500 million USD and both nations eye to rise this number to 10 billion USD.²⁶

Turkey supported Sudan, which its rich-resource base economy was hit by American sanctions since 1990s. In 2008, the Turkish government offered 100 million USD credit to Turkish companies willing to invest in Sudan and doubled this amount amid continued consultations. Additionally, Ankara and Khartoum agreed establishing an industrial free economic zone north of the Port Sudan, on the Red Sea, which will serve a base of Turkish industries and investments once completed.

The economic relations between Turkey and Somalia flourished since 2011. Turkey's investments in Somalia exceed 100 million USD and the bilateral trade volume between the two countries is currently 120 million USD—a figure expected to rise to 200 million USD in the forthcoming years.²⁷ These economic, humanitarian & political activism of Turkey in both these states as well as its position in the intra-Gulf rift, have played an indirect yet important role in the neutral decisions of Sudan and Somalia.

Repercussions of a Neutral Stance

The diplomatic fallout between the wealthy Gulf nations has negative implications on the overall security and stability of the Horn of Africa, which is already one of the most unstable regions of the continent.

Imperiling Regional Security and Stability

First, it could hinder the smooth flow of the global sea route trade. The Horn of Africa is home of Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which locates between Djibouti, Eritrea and Yemen, that connects the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea through Suez canal. It is a strategic trading route with an estimated 4.8 million barrels per day of refined petroleum products and crude oil flowing this 18-miles-wide waterway towards Asia, Europe and America. The strait passes through Domaira Island—a disputed territory between Eritrea and Djibouti. The two countries clashed over the ownership of this island several occasions, the last of which was June 2008. Qatar has been mediating them since 2010, and subsequently deployed a Qatari peacekeeping force along the border between the two countries. However, Doha pulled out its troops from the disputed border in last June, after Eritrea and Djibouti sided with the Saudi-led anti-Qatar quartet. Eritrea captured the territory right after the withdrawal of the Qatari forces.²⁸ In one hand, a conflict in this disputed territory will affect the operation of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, not to mention that it is already affected by the war in Yemen. On the other hand, a conflict between Djibouti and Eritrea will invite Ethiopia—Eritrea's foe that also have border dispute with Eritrea—and Egypt thus jeopardizing the peace and stability of the region. Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt are currently interlocked in the River Nile Renaissance dam—a controversial project that Ethiopia is building on the Nile River which Egypt fears it will diminish its share of the water.

Hampering Sudan's Feeble Economy

The standoff between the Gulf nations is putting risk on Sudan's many opportunities. Khartoum, to keep its neutral position, has replaced its state minister

to the Presidency and Gulf envoy Gen. Taha Osman Al-Hussein, a Sudanese-Saudi Citizen, who played a major role in Sudan's recent relations with the Gulf States. If Sudanese authorities decide to change their minds in favor of boycotting countries, they will have to face huge challenge from homegrown Islamist constituency, which has openly opposed the isolation of Qatar. If Khartoum decides to stick with its neutrality decision, Saudi-led Sunni Arab countries can hurt the feeble Sudanese economy. First, they could withhold or curb their investments in Sudan. Second, they could pressure U.S. not to fully lift the economic sanctions on Sudanese economy. Third, the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, is a popular destination for Sudanese looking for employment and Riyadh gives the largest number of remittances to Sudan. The boycotting nations could expel the Sudanese workers thus negatively influencing Khartoum's economy. Fourth, Sudan could become the future target of the boycott since Khartoum has large Islamist constituency and has hosted many Muslim Brotherhood members fleeing other countries.

Jeopardising Somalia's Recovery Process

Arguably, Somalia—a nation recovering from decades-long civil strife and bedeviling avalanches of terrorism—has the most at stake in this family feud. Although majority of Somalis supported their government's position in the conflict, majority of Somalia's regional states did the opposite by openly siding with Saudi bloc. Furthermore, the fact that all the countries involved in the row are traditional allies of Somalia makes Mogadishu more vulnerable and puts in a delicate position. Five of Somalia's six federal member states (Somaliland, Puntland, Hirshabelle, Galmudug and Southwest) have disputed over the government's position and openly sided with Saudi allies against Qatar. Some parliamentarians criticized government's neutral position and called on to reverse its decision. They acknowledge that Somalia faces difficult situation but argue federal government should side with Saudi allies to preserve 'the long political and economic relationship with the kingdom.'²⁹

In December last year, Somalia, in a bid to maintain its position, cracked down opposition figures perceived to be close to UAE and accused them of treason.³⁰ Additionally, Mogadishu have also asked its parliament to strip impunity of some opposition MPs to persecute for treasonable acts against the nation.³¹ To make matters worse, UAE-trained Somali soldiers raided defiant MP house in late December, 2017.³² This has created confusion among the public and resulted some MPs to table a motion against the UAE ambassador to Mogadishu, Mr. Mohammed Othman Al Hammadi, over criminal interference in Somalia's internal affairs. All these mounting political crisis have compelled lawmakers to consider impeaching President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo. The Somali government, in an attempt to defuse the crisis, dismissed three key cabinet ministers earlier January, 2018.

Earlier this month, the Somalia's break-away region of Somaliland, along with Ethiopia, struck a deal with Dubai based port operator—DP World—to run Somalia's Red Sea Berbera port and invest \$440 million as part of a massive expansion project. Then the Somali parliament declared the deal "null and void", and subsequently banned the DP World, which also has been recently expelled from the neighboring Djibouti, from investing any part of Somalia.³³ On one hand, this decision has resulted some MPs to table a 'no-confidence' motion against the parliament speaker, thus further threatening the country's fragile stability. On another hand, it has complicated the prospects for the unity talks between Somaliland and the Federal Government of Somalia.

The Qatar-Gulf crisis has put Somalia in a delicate position, which could potentially lead it to be tangled further in the wealthy Gulf States' diplomatic spat. If Somalia sticks on its neutral stance, then its leaders will have to face the current crisis in one hand. On the other hand, Mogadishu could be subject of further political pressure from the Gulf countries seeking to isolate Qatar from the rest of the world. First, they could stop the financial and military support they

provide to Somali government. Secondly, both UAE and Saudi Arabia account 80 percent of Somalia's total export, which is usually livestock. Livestock is the primary Somali export earner and the spat could affect the livestock export trade to Saudi Arabia, which is already under jeopardy. Third, Somalia could lose millions of dollars from remittances by thousands of Somali workers in UAE and Saudi Arabia should these countries decide to expel them. Another possible risk is that boycotting countries could undermine Somalia's efforts to get debt relief from Arab states. In May 2017 at London Conference on Somalia Development, President Farmaajo voiced that Arab League countries are assisting Somalia achieve its future potential by cancelling their debt burdens.³⁴ The Qatar-Gulf diplomatic spat could complicate and tarnish this debt relief, which is regarded important by many international development organizations if Somalia is to ever progress over the long-term.

Conclusion

It has been 10 months since Saudi-led countries severed ties with Qatar, claiming it backs terrorists in the region and maintains alleged links with Iran. The Qatar-Gulf crisis has spread beyond its original borders and the Horn of Africa became a hotspot for rivalry. Two countries in the region namely; Sudan and Somalia have preferred to stay neutral in the diplomatic spat and urged dialogue to end the crisis—a gesture that received no impression until now. Although the underlying factors for their neutral positions could be various and subject to different interpretation, two factors stand out: 1) Qatar's diplomatic influence in the region, especially in Sudan and Somalia, and 2) Turkey's engagements in both these countries and its position in the Qatar-Gulf spat.

Turkey has very strong relations with both countries, maintains a military base in Somalia, and recently signed an agreement with Sudan to rebuild the Suakin Island (a former Ottoman territory). Following the crisis, Turkey stood by Qatar by dispatching hundreds of cargo planes with essential foodstuffs and establishing a military base in Doha. Qatar has also very good relations with both Sudan and Somalia and pledged more assistance to them upon refusing to cut ties. This region has very important geopolitical location and currently hosts NATO, non-Western (China, Japan) and Middle Eastern (mainly Saudi & UAE) military bases. Djibouti, which hosts majority of these bases, has also recently announced that it will welcome a Turkish military camp in its territory. The UAE maintains military base in Eritrea and Saudi Arabia is also establishing a military facility in Djibouti, from where they conduct airstrikes against Houthi rebels across the Bab el-Mandeb.

The Qatar-Gulf rift has had negative impact on Sudan and Somalia. Both countries, as the rivalry heated up, were compelled to adjust to the conflict dynamics. Somalia cracked down opposition parties and MPs and replaced some key cabinet ministers. Sudan also dismissed its Gulf envoy and Presidential Minister to keep the balance. A prolonged GCC conflict could have detrimental impact on the regional security, especially border tensions between Eritrea and Djibouti. This could disrupt the smooth flow of global sea route trade as the Bab el-Mandeb strait locates on the Horn of Africa. A continuation of the crisis could also hurt the feeble economy of Sudan as well as that of Somalia. It has the potential to jeopardize Somalia's recovery process by derailing the Federal Government and endangering fragile gains against al-Shabaab insurgency.

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