

The African Powder Keg: What Does the UAE Stand to Gain by Destabilizing Somalia?

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Recent events suggest that the UAE is trying to destabilize Somalia and throw it back into a multisided security crisis in order to trap Qatar's Turkish ally in a quagmire and offset the Great Power rise of Egypt's Ethiopian rival.

Most Things Come In Threes

[Somalia](#) has been shaken by three interconnected developments over the past few weeks which show that the UAE is dedicated to destabilizing the country in order to cynically advance its grand strategic interests in the region at Mogadishu's expense. The Emirates controversially [signed](#) a deal with the breakaway region of Somaliland to build a naval base in the Gulf of Aden, shortly after which a political feud between the country's President and Parliamentary Speaker [erupted into an armed standoff](#) that was fortuitously resolved before any shooting started. At the beginning of this week, the Somali authorities [seized nearly \\$10 million in cash](#) from a UAE plane that was supposedly going to be disseminated within the country for yet-undisclosed purposes, which coincided with the Parliamentary Speaker's [resignation](#) prior to a planned vote of confidence against him.

The African Powder Keg

Analyzing these three events altogether in the phased continuum that they occurred, it can be argued that the UAE is trying to destabilize Somalia as [revenge](#) for Mogadishu's refusal to cut ties with Qatar and its agreement with Ankara to allow a [Turkish military base](#) in the country. Turkey is allied with Qatar, in which it [also](#) has a military base, and this has thus made it the UAE's rival in the context of the ongoing [Gulf Cold War](#) that has already spread to the Horn of Africa region via two disputes that center on [Ethiopia](#) and [Djibouti](#). The landlocked giant is at odds with Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam that it's constructing on the Blue Nile River and which Cairo claims will make the Arab state forever dependent on the upstream one in the future, while the tiny coastal country just kicked the UAE out and retook control of the largest port in the country. The regional dynamics are such that they could [easily spill over](#) into a regional war, thus making the contemporary Horn of Africa eerily similar in a structural sense to the pre-World War I Balkans.

Standing Up To "Little Sparta"

Somalia has thus far avoided being dragged in to the Gulf Cold War and probably thought that its "neutrality" in this dispute would prevent it from being destabilized as a proxy battleground between extra-regional powers, but it now looks like the UAE is making asymmetrically aggressive moves against the country in a bid to expand its newfound Gulf

of Aden sphere of influence all throughout the region by removing any forces that stand in its way. To this end, Abu Dhabi sees President “Farmajo” as an obstacle because of his proud refusal to bow down before the Emirates by cutting off ties with Qatar and his agreement with UAE rival Turkey to build a military base along the Indian Ocean coast. This was an unacceptable display of sovereignty that the “[Little Sparta](#)” wannabe hegemon just couldn’t tolerate.

The Master Plan



Somaliland agrees to UAE naval base

The UAE staked out its claim to Somalia by reinforcing the de-facto “independence” of Somaliland through the recent naval base deal in the coastal port of Berbera, which expectedly prompted Somalian lawmakers to [react with fury](#) in Mogadishu despite their inability to stop this from happening. Then, “provoked” by the loud condemnation against it coming from the internationally recognized government, the UAE sought to exploit preexisting political fault lines within the state by provoking the recent crisis between the President and his Parliamentary Speaker. The next stage of the destabilization campaign is supposed to see the Emirates fund an anti-government “freedom/democracy movement” (hence the seized \$9.6 million from the UAE plane) either led by the former speaker or allied with him in order to put pressure on the President to reconsider his government’s erstwhile refusal to cut ties with Qatar and allow Doha’s ally to set up a naval base outside the capital. If this initial [Hybrid War](#) provocation doesn’t succeed in its objectives, then it’s foreseeable that the UAE might go as far as setting off a renewed round of civil war within the country in order to trap its rivals in a quagmire.

Regional Shockwaves

The consequences of a renewed round of widespread and multisided (as in, more complex than just the government & its allies vs. [Al Shabaab](#)) warfare could easily trick Turkey into falling for the tempting “mission creep” scenario of bolstering its assistance to Ankara’s in-country partners to compensate for the African Union’s [planned withdrawal](#) by 2020. Not only that, but Al Shabaab and potentially even Daesh could take advantage of the country’s descent back into civil conflict in order to become a more dangerous regional threat, which could in turn prompt rising Great Power Ethiopia to once again militarily intervene. That said, the regional leader is undergoing a sensitive “[political transition](#)” at the moment and its [tense domestic situation](#) might explode if any [forthcoming Somalian conflict](#) spills over into its borders and upsets its delicate ethno-political balance.

Concluding Thoughts

As cynical as it may sound, both of these “dark scenarios” would actually advance the UAE’s grand strategic objectives by drawing Qatar’s Turkish ally and its Somalian partners into a developing quagmire while destabilizing Ethiopia on GCC-subordinate Egypt’s behalf. The resultant chaos could create “windows of opportunity” for the UAE to expand its influence deeper into the Horn of Africa, as well as “justify” its military partnerships with Eritrea and Somaliland, to say nothing of any other states or future separatist regions that it might deploy to during this time. It’s of course way too early to say whether or not any of this will indeed come to pass, but it’s nevertheless important to be aware of what the UAE’s

interests are vis-à-vis Somalia and how they could be promoted via the latest destabilizing events that Abu Dhabi is responsible for in this crucially positioned country. If the present downward trajectory isn't soon averted, which it could be if prudence prevails, then Somalia might once again sink back into civil war, so it's urgent that its citizens are informed of what's happening and why so that they can work their hardest to prevent it.

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