



Somalia and the Gulf Crisis

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Principal Findings

What's new? The rivalries underpinning the June 2017 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis – particularly between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the one hand and Qatar and, by extension, Turkey on the other – have spilled into the Horn of Africa, notably fanning instability in Somalia. Mogadishu-Abu Dhabi tensions have risen sharply.

Why did it happen? The Somali government of President “Farmajo” says it remains neutral in the GCC rivalry, but the UAE perceives it as too close to Qatar. Abu Dhabi appears to have upped support to Somalia’s regions, or federal states. Farmajo, in turn, has deepened ties with Doha and Ankara and repressed rivals.

Why does it matter? Certainly not all of Somalia’s problems can be pinned on the GCC crisis. But competition among the Gulf powers and Turkey has magnified intra-Somali disputes. As Mogadishu-Abu Dhabi relations unravel, those disputes – which pit the Farmajo government against rival factions in Mogadishu and against federal states and Somaliland – could escalate.

What should be done? The Somali government should remain neutral in the intra-GCC spat and reconcile with Somali rivals. Qatar and Turkey could encourage such reconciliation. The UAE should coordinate with Mogadishu regarding all its aid and investment in Somalia. Abu Dhabi-Mogadishu talks are a priority – Saudi or European Union officials could mediate.

Executive Summary

The bitter rivalries underpinning the crisis among members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have added a dangerous new twist to Somalia's instability. Competition between the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on the one hand, and Qatar and, by extension, Turkey on the other has aggravated longstanding intra-Somali disputes: between factions in the capital; between Mogadishu and the regions; and between it and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland. Abu Dhabi's relations with the government of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" have tanked. Farmajo's government accuses the Emiratis of funding its rivals and stoking opposition, particularly in Somalia's federal states. Emirati officials deny meddling and accuse Farmajo of falling under Doha's and Ankara's sway. All sides need to take a step back. Farmajo's government should abide by strict neutrality in the intra-GCC spat and seek to reconcile with its Somali rivals. The UAE should pledge to coordinate its aid and commercial interests with Mogadishu. Talks between the Somali and UAE governments are a priority.

After the June 2017 Gulf crisis, which saw Saudi Arabia, the UAE and a number of allies sever diplomatic relations with and impose an economic blockade on Qatar, President Farmajo, who had assumed office only months earlier, faced intense Saudi and Emirati pressure – reportedly pushing him to cut ties with Doha. Farmajo insisted he preferred not to pick sides. But for the UAE, reports that the president had received Qatari funds ahead of his election and his appointment of officials known to be close allies of Doha belied his claims of neutrality. Abu Dhabi feared that increased Qatari and Turkish backing for the Somali government could embolden political Islamists – whose influence it regards as a threat but to whom Doha and Ankara tend to be more sympathetic – and that, amid intense jockeying for influence around the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, it was fast losing ground to its main geopolitical rivals.

In response, the UAE appears to have stepped up support for other Somali factions and Somalia's federal states. The Farmajo government in turn has displayed an increasingly authoritarian bent, using rivals' alleged ties to the UAE to justify crackdowns against them. Long adept at manipulating foreign involvement, politicians across the Somali spectrum have exploited the escalating rivalry for their own ends.

Mounting tension between the UAE and what it perceives as a Qatar- and Turkey-backed government in Mogadishu intersects with a number of Somali fault lines. First, it has amplified disputes between the government and rival factions in the capital, complicating a crisis in the Somali parliament that threatened to turn violent in late 2017. In early 2018, the government raided the homes and offices of two prominent critics, accusing them of receiving Emirati funds. Deteriorating relations between the Somali government and the UAE also may heighten risks of factionalism within the Somali security forces; Somali officials accuse Emirati-backed units of ignoring orders (Abu Dhabi says all troops were under the Somali Ministry of Defence's command).

Still more perilous is the deterioration in Farmajo's relations with Somalia's federal states. As his government refused to distance itself from Qatar, federal states, some of which depend on Emirati investment and chafed at Mogadishu charting a course on the Gulf crisis they perceived as contrary to their interests, took a public

stand against his position. Circumventing the capital, some appear to have accelerated negotiations with DP World – an Emirati conglomerate the activity of which is widely perceived as serving Abu Dhabi's strategic goals – over deals that would see DP World develop and manage their ports. Recent months have seen increasingly heated recriminations between senior government officials and federal state leaders, some of whom have made provocatively timed trips to Abu Dhabi.

A bitter standoff between Mogadishu and the breakaway region of Somaliland could prove as dangerous. In March, Hargeisa's finalisation of its own contract with DP World, according to which the conglomerate would develop Somaliland's Berbera port, prompted a furious reaction from Mogadishu. Farmajo's government protested to the Arab League that the deal violated its sovereignty. The Somali parliament enacted legislation banning DP World from operating in Somalia, thus targeting not only the Berbera contract, but also potential deals between the company and federal states. Somaliland's leader, Muse Bihi Abdi, referred to Mogadishu's attempt to block the agreement as a declaration of war.

In April 2018, Mogadishu-Abu Dhabi relations took their worst turn yet, when Somali officials confiscated millions of dollars from an Emirati plane in Mogadishu, citing the money as evidence of Abu Dhabi's meddling. According to Emirati officials, the funds were destined for Somali security forces whose salaries it has long been paying. Those officials point to years of Emirati subventions to Somali forces fighting pirates and Al-Shabaab – support welcomed by successive Somali governments. Frustrated at the seizure, Abu Dhabi halted aid projects, pulled all personnel from and abandoned the Mogadishu base at which it was training Somali security forces. As relations between the Farmajo government and Abu Dhabi unravel, any one of the intra-Somali disputes – in Mogadishu; between the Farmajo government and the regions; or between it and Somaliland – could escalate.

All sides need to reverse course before that happens. The Somali government should ensure it remains neutral in the intra-GCC spat and adopt a more conciliatory approach to rivals, including by rekindling talks with the federal states and rescheduling a meeting previously planned between Farmajo and Muse Bihi. Gulf powers should not allow the rivalry that has split the GCC to upend weaker states. Abu Dhabi should be ready to enter talks with Farmajo's government and coordinate its aid and investment across the country. Qatar and particularly Turkey, whose investment in Somalia gives it considerable clout, might nudge Mogadishu toward compromise with its rivals in the capital, the federal regions and Somaliland. Saudi or European Union officials, who appear to enjoy the trust of both Mogadishu and Abu Dhabi, could mediate between the two.

Clearly, Somalia's troubles today cannot all be laid at the Gulf's door. The optimism generated by Farmajo's election win in early 2017 was always likely to run aground on the country's thorny clan politics and a resilient Al-Shabaab insurgency. But Gulf rivalries have made things worse. The zero-sum politics that the Somali government and foreign powers appear to be pursuing are unlikely to end well. Somalia will always be too factious for any one axis to dominate. The Gulf powers – and even more so the Farmajo government and its Somali rivals – all stand to lose from the instability their competition provokes. The likely winner is Al-Shabaab.

Somalia and the Gulf Crisis

I. Introduction

Many Somalis greeted the February 2017 electoral win of Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo” with euphoria. Farmajo’s cross-clan support and a vote perceived at the time as reasonably credible left many optimistic that he could turn the page on decades of instability.¹ Fifteen months later, however, Farmajo’s government is embroiled in a number of debilitating crises. Factionalism in Mogadishu is rampant, security in the capital is deteriorating, the president’s dealings with Somalia’s federal states souring, and animosity between Mogadishu and the breakaway Republic of Somaliland fiercer than at any time in the past decade.

The president’s difficulties stem, in large part, from challenges inherent to ruling Somalia, surmounting its factious clan politics and containing a resilient Al-Shabaab insurgency.² Intense struggles over power and resources have long been endemic to both the capital and regions; the 2012 Somali provisional constitution, which should have helped resolve such disputes, instead does little to decide how authority and assets should be allocated among institutions and between Mogadishu and Somalia’s federal states. In that light, today’s instability is nothing new. But what lends it particular potency is the fact that it is amplified by the wider geopolitical confrontation that, since the June 2017 Gulf crisis, has pitted Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) against Qatar and, by extension, Turkey.

The four powers’ involvement in Somalia predates this crisis. For years, Gulf and Turkish assistance, including direct budgetary support, humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, and training and funding for Somali security forces, has been critical for Somalis and welcomed by successive Somali governments. Their engagement has always involved some jockeying for influence in a country of enormous strategic value, given its proximity to the Gulf, centrality to Red Sea security and string of ports with vantages on key shipping routes.³ But any competition was largely kept in check.

Since the June 2017 crisis, however, that competition has spilled over. Farmajo’s government accuses the Emiratis of agitating against it. Abu Dhabi rejects that charge and believes it is ostracised due to the new government’s proximity to Doha and Ankara. Friction between Mogadishu and Abu Dhabi, having simmered since the crisis, boiled over on 8 April 2018, when the Somali government confiscated \$9.6 million in cash at Mogadishu airport from a UAE plane. Shortly thereafter, the

¹ Crisis Group Commentary, “The Regional Risks to Somalia’s Moment of Hope”, 22 February 2017. The vote was indirect, with clan representatives casting ballots for the president.

² For background, see Crisis Group Report N°170, *Somalia: The Transitional Government on Life Support*, 21 February 2012. On Al-Shabaab, see Crisis Group Report N°99, *Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War*, 26 June 2014.

³ Tension has been particularly acute since the 2011 Arab uprisings, which in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya saw Qatar and Turkey mostly back mainline Islamists and the UAE, and often Saudi Arabia support their opponents.

UAE suspended military cooperation with Mogadishu, extracted Emirati trainers and halted aid operations.⁴ President Farmajo's May 2018 visit to Doha only five weeks later, apparently cementing his ties to Qatar, added fuel to the fire. The media has amplified tensions further, as both UAE- and Qatar-allied outlets have carried partisan and inflammatory coverage.

This report examines how rivalries among Gulf powers and Turkey and the deterioration of Abu Dhabi-Mogadishu relations have deepened Somali instability, notably by aggravating disputes between Farmajo's government and opposing factions in Mogadishu; between the government and Somalia's federal states; and between Mogadishu and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland. It draws upon interviews in Somalia, including with senior Somali officials; as well as in Abu Dhabi, Doha, Ankara, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, New York and Washington.

⁴ Accounts differ as to whether the UAE decided itself or was asked by the Somali government to withdraw its mission. Emirati officials say it withdrew from aid projects due to security concerns for UAE personnel and local staff, who have received threats. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, Abu Dhabi, Doha, April 2018.

II. Farmajo's Presidency and the Gulf Crisis

In the Gulf crisis's aftermath, President Farmajo's declaration that he would remain neutral was met with scepticism in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, who perceived his government as wedded to Qatar and Turkey. In response, Abu Dhabi appears to have doubled down on its relations with other Somali factions and Somalia's federal states, prompting anger from senior Somali officials and disquiet among Western and African diplomats. The government's use of its rivals' alleged Emirati backing to justify crackdowns and adoption of anti-Emirati rhetoric to play to its nationalist base has not helped. Farmajo's reluctance to cut ties with Qatar and Turkey makes sense, particularly given the scale of Turkish aid and investment, though his increasing reliance on both countries has further soured relations with the UAE.

In June 2017, as the Gulf spat escalated and Saudi Arabia, the UAE and their allies broke off relations with and imposed an embargo on Qatar, the Gulf powers lobbied governments worldwide, including in Africa, to pick sides. Several African leaders expelled Qatari diplomats, though a number quietly restored diplomatic ties shortly afterward.⁵ Farmajo's government faced particularly acute pressure, with Riyadh allegedly offering it additional financial backing in return for it severing ties to Qatar.⁶ Instead, Farmajo insisted he was set on keeping Somalia out of the fray.⁷

Beneath the president's claims of neutrality, however, lies a more complicated reality. Before his election, Farmajo ran what seemed to be a bare-bones campaign for the presidency. His outreach appeared – and likely was – less well-financed than that of other contenders, who were widely perceived to have received significant outside funding.⁸ After the vote, however, unconfirmed reports surfaced that Farmajo's campaign had received a last-minute boost from Qatar.⁹ The president's early cabinet appointments added to speculation about his close ties to Doha.¹⁰ His refusal to

⁵ See, for example, "A bitter rivalry between Arab states is spilling into Africa", *The Economist*, 23 January 2018.

⁶ While many accounts of Saudi attempts to woo Farmajo come from Qatari-funded or allied media – and thus should be treated with caution – a number of Somali and other African officials, as well as senior European Union diplomats, report significant pressure on the government, including the offer of additional financial backing, to cut ties with Qatar. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu and other African capitals, September 2017-May 2018. According to one Qatari diplomat, a Saudi delegation visited Mogadishu to encourage the severing of ties with Doha. Crisis Group phone interview, April 2018. Also see "Somalia turns down \$80m to cut ties with Qatar", *Bartamaha*, 12 June 2017.

⁷ See, for example, "Somalia declares neutral stand in Gulf crisis", *Goobjoog News*, 7 June 2017.

⁸ "Fueled by bribes, Somalia's election seen as milestone of corruption", *New York Times*, 7 February 2017. Foreign political contributions were not regulated but appear to have played a significant role. Some candidates made official and unofficial visits overseas, reportedly to seek foreign political support and/or receive funds. "Somalia 2016-2017 Limited Election Process: EU Election Expert Mission Final Report", Altair Consortium, February 2017.

⁹ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Mogadishu, 2017-2018. Qatar denies funding individuals, saying all its support goes to the government. Crisis Group phone interview, Qatari diplomat, April 2018.

¹⁰ Farmajo's campaign manager and subsequent chief of staff, for example, is a former Al Jazeera correspondent believed to be close to Doha. A UAE official said: "Our understanding of the situation is that someone who used to be a correspondent for Al Jazeera is now running Villa Somalia". Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

publicly pick sides in the Gulf spat was thus viewed in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi not as neutrality, but as, in effect, siding with their rivals.¹¹

His relations with the Saudi-led bloc deteriorated sharply, triggering a temporary suspension by Riyadh of direct budgetary support of some \$30 million per year.¹² The Saudis backtracked shortly thereafter, in part, reportedly, worried by anger on the Somali street – and elsewhere in Africa – that they were using financial muscle to extract concessions from weaker states.¹³ Riyadh resumed budgetary support in October 2017. It may still resent the influence wielded by individuals in Farmajo's cabinet it perceives as pro-Qatar or Turkey, but its channels of communication to the government remain open.

Abu Dhabi's relations with Mogadishu, on the other hand, have gone from bad to worse. The UAE has deeper commercial and military ties to Somalia than Saudi Arabia, part of what Emirati officials describe as a region-wide policy to promote freedom of maritime navigation and combat Islamist extremism.¹⁴ Specifically, the UAE had trained and supported Somali units since at least 2014, first to combat piracy, and later for operations against Al-Shabaab.¹⁵ According to one senior UAE official:

If there was no Al-Shabaab in Somalia, we wouldn't have a footprint. We have supported the government in Mogadishu to claim back Somali territory. This is linked to our work in Afghanistan. One of the main reasons we are interested is because we believe there is a connectivity in this fight – these are the same groups, being affected by the same narrative. This was the reason for our initial presence in Somalia and it remains our main goal.¹⁶

From the Emiratis' perspective, Qatar aimed to use its influence in Somali politics, which has expanded over the last few years, to obstruct their own.¹⁷ In Somalia as

¹¹ According to one Gulf official: "Somalia is a conflict point between the UAE and Qatar. Qatar found a strong ally for their agenda, which is Turkey. They managed to pry away the president of Somalia [to their control]". Crisis Group interview, April 2018.

¹² Crisis Group Commentary, "A Dangerous Gulf in the Horn: How the Inter-Arab Crisis is Fuelling Regional Tensions", 3 August 2017. The Saudis and other "non-reporting development partners" (among them Turkey, the UAE, Qatar and China) do not always disclose detailed aid figures, but a recent survey of aid flows shows Saudi Arabia contributed \$20 million in 2016 and \$30 million in 2017., "Aid Flows in Somalia: Analysis of Aid Flow Data", Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, Federal Republic of Somalia, March 2008 (www.somaliaaidflows.so). Though Riyadh temporarily cut budgetary aid, its humanitarian support remained largely unaffected; Saudi Arabia's King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre reports a total of \$12.5 million in humanitarian aid to Somalia in 2017. See <https://data.ksrelief.org/EN/BeneficiaryStatistics.aspx>.

¹³ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Somali business leaders, activists and intellectuals, Mogadishu, Nairobi, February-April 2018. Abu Dhabi also is concerned about its deteriorating image in Somalia and that Qatar gains by projecting itself as benevolent. Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Abu Dhabi, April 2018.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior UAE official, Abu Dhabi, March 2018.

¹⁵ Estimates of the training program's size vary significantly. One UAE official suggested that as many as 10,000 Somalis had been trained and were still receiving salaries from the UAE. Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, senior UAE official, Abu Dhabi, March 2018.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018; Gulf official, April 2018.

elsewhere, Abu Dhabi voices concern about Doha's and Ankara's support for political Islam, particularly movements linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, a force that Emirati leaders argue is akin ideologically – and a gateway – to more violent and intolerant forms of Islamism. Over recent years, the UAE has accused Qatar of promoting Somali politicians sympathetic to Islamists or at times even to Al-Shabaab itself.¹⁸

Abu Dhabi argues that despite its concerns about Farmajo and his staff, it was willing to work with the new president, but that Qatar was intent on forcing it out.¹⁹ As the Emiratis perceived themselves losing ground, they appear to have reinforced relationships with other Somali leaders, particularly in Somalia's federal states.²⁰

The Somali government, on the other hand, denounces Emirati interference. According to Prime Minister Hassan Ali Kheyre:

We cannot compromise on issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity. When we say we are neutral, we mean we are neutral. We cannot accept to be questioned on this. No one questions Kenya's or Ethiopia's neutrality. Why should Somalia be punished for saying it wants to be independent?²¹

Many Western and African officials agree.²² According to a former Western ambassador to Somalia:

Farmajo's position of neutrality in the Gulf crisis shocked and angered the Saudis and Emiratis. He reasoned – correctly in my view – that Somalia had important relations with all parties and no interest in their dispute. Asserting Somalia's sovereignty was in Somalia's interest. Besides, Turkey is a huge investor in Somalia and Qatar helps in other ways. Roughly four years earlier, when the Saudis demanded that Somalia break ties with Iran and expel its diplomats and citizens, it did so immediately. This defiance from a formerly compliant and weak African state was unwelcome.²³

Certainly, President Farmajo had good cause to remain neutral. That said, his government's reaction to what senior officials perceive as Emirati pressure has not helped. It has adopted increasingly repressive tactics (detailed in subsequent sections) against rivals, often using their alleged ties to Abu Dhabi as pretext.

Farmajo's rhetoric against the UAE also appears in part as an attempt to reconnect with his nationalist base. During his campaign, Farmajo pledged repeatedly to defend Somalia's sovereignty against foreign powers, particularly Ethiopia.²⁴ In office,

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Gulf official, April 2018. A UAE official said, "it is the influence of Qatar financially, Turkey militarily, and the Muslim Brotherhood ideologically – this is the threat". Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018; Gulf official, April 2018.

²⁰ One Gulf official said, "in Somalia the [elected] government comes and goes every four years. The UAE doesn't support individuals, because they come and go. We try to build relationships with the institutions; this is our approach so that we have a stable relationship". Crisis Group interview, April 2018.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, Prime Minister Hassan Ali Kheyre, 24 April 2018.

²² Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, Nairobi, January-April 2018.

²³ Crisis Group interview, May 2018.

²⁴ Crisis Group Commentary, "Somalia's Moment of Hope", *op. cit.*

however, he moved quickly to reassure Addis Ababa – sensibly, given the Ethiopian contingent fighting Al-Shabaab and the importance of maintaining relations with Somalia’s powerful neighbour.²⁵ But for many supporters, Farmajo’s rapprochement went too far when he handed over a prominent Ethiopian-Somali rebel commander, Abdikarim Muse “Qalbi Dagah” to Ethiopia, and declared Abdikarim’s Ogaden National Liberation Front a terrorist group – a line no previous Somali leader had dared cross. Since then, Farmajo appears to have sought to offset that concession to Addis Ababa with a harder line against Abu Dhabi.

The government’s nationalist stand against the UAE also strengthens the perception, which it has struggled to shake, that it is overly attached to Doha and, to a lesser extent, Ankara. Beyond his appointment of officials perceived as tied to those two powers, the president has accepted additional Qatari and Turkish aid. In November 2017, his government signed a deal with Qatar under which Doha will provide \$200 million for the construction of two major highways, the rehabilitation of several federal government buildings and other smaller development projects in Mogadishu and the Shabelle river valley.²⁶

For their part, Qatari officials argue that Doha’s deepening ties with Mogadishu are a natural progression of its past humanitarian support and deny its involvement has an ideological bent.²⁷ According to one foreign ministry official: “Our goal was never to have a rivalry with the UAE in Somalia. Our engagement is prior to that. It’s about creating stability and countering extremism in Somalia, through genuine humanitarian and developmental projects that we are implementing either bilaterally or through the UN”.²⁸ Doha aims, according to Qatari officials, to carve out a long-term role as a donor, investing in health, education and exploration of Somalia’s natural resources, including oil and gas.²⁹

As for Turkey, it is now one of Somalia’s major donors and investors.³⁰ Turkey’s initial provision of humanitarian aid, particularly during the 2011 famine, has morphed into commercial interests, direct budgetary support to the government, training of Somali security forces and thus considerable influence in a country that offers Ankara an important market for Turkish goods and services as well as strategic depth.³¹ Turkish officials echo their Emirati counterparts in emphasising that Ankara’s

²⁵ More than 4,000 Ethiopian troops are currently fighting in Somalia, many with the African Union mission, AMISOM. See <http://amisom-au.org/2016/01/amisom-ethiopian-national-defense-forces-contingent-deploys-in-kismayo/>. For Farmajo’s initial outreach to Ethiopia, see Crisis Group Commentary, “Somalia’s Moment of Hope”, op. cit.

²⁶ According to Qatari officials, Doha had previously offered budgetary support to Somalia. Crisis Group interviews, Qatar Development Fund official, Doha, April 2018; Qatari official, phone, April 2018. Also see “Qatar supports Somalia with projects worth \$200 million”, *Qatar Tribune*, 29 November 2017.

²⁷ Qatari officials say that Doha sees Somalia as a strategic gateway into Africa, along the Red Sea and endowed with undeveloped oil and gas reserves. Crisis Group interviews, Qatari foreign ministry officials, Doha, April 2018; Qatari official, phone, April 2018.

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Doha, April 2018.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Qatari foreign ministry official, Doha, April 2018.

³⁰ For background, see Crisis Group Briefing N°92, *Assessing Turkey’s Role in Somalia*, 8 October 2012.

³¹ Ibid. Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, May 2018. According to one Turkish academic: “There might be a handful of AKP [Justice and Development Party] people interested in Somalia for ideological reasons, to foster like-minded Muslim brothers (those in the Western media or the Gulf who

support is motivated largely by security, though they place greater weight on strengthening the central state:

Our priority is security, in other words increasing the ability of the central government to provide security. Without security, you cannot have development and people will distrust the central government. The 14 October 2017 Mogadishu bombing and the smaller suicide bombings since show that Mogadishu needs all the support it can get.³²

Like Qatar, Turkey rejects that its support enables Al-Shabaab. According to one Turkish official: “That is ridiculous. Our priority is strengthening the national army. How can this be in line with supporting terrorists?”³³ Ankara argues that the Muslim Brotherhood – in Somalia as elsewhere – is a political reality, a movement that has never taken up arms itself and an antidote against harder-line groups like Al-Shabaab.³⁴ Turkish officials emphasise the extent and history of their engagement in Somalia, against which they view both Emirati and Qatar involvement as superficial. They tend to distance Ankara’s role from that of Doha.³⁵

In addition to managing Mogadishu port since 2014 and opening, in 2016, the largest Turkish embassy in the world in the Somali capital, Turkey has expanded its security assistance. According to Turkish officials, Ankara’s direct budgetary support to the Somali government also has increased – from \$2 million per month a year ago to \$2.5 million today.³⁶ While Turkish influence and investment in Somalia has been significant for years, these increases reinforce the sense in Abu Dhabi that Mogadishu is turning from the UAE to Turkey.³⁷

Overall, while the government’s crackdowns against Somali rivals are counter-productive, its apparent tilt toward Qatar and Turkey is understandable, given the importance of their investment and aid, Farmajo’s deteriorating relations with Abu Dhabi and the latter’s apparent backing of his rivals. But as those ties deepen, so, too, does Emirati disquiet.³⁸

present Turkey as supporting Islamists in Somalia just use this rhetoric to badmouth Turkey). [Turkish leaders] might tell you Turkey is there for humanitarian reasons. But at the core of Turkey’s involvement are geostrategic power dynamics”. Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, May 2018.

³² Crisis Group interview, senior Turkish foreign ministry official, May 2018.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Turkish former diplomat and Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2018. Also see footnote 31.

³⁵ Ibid. According to the former Turkish diplomat: “Turkey’s position in Somalia is separate from that of Qatar and definitely above and beyond any UAE-Qatar confrontation. We do not coordinate our position with Qatar. Compared to Turkey, the UAE’s and Qatar’s involvement is superficial”.

³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, May 2018; Qatar Development Fund official, Doha, April 2018.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018. A common refrain from Farmajo’s supporters is that Turkish investment can help Somalia weather friction with the UAE. One official said, “I agree vital economic links are at stake in relation to the Somali-Emirati spat and Dubai remains a major hub, especially for the Somali informal *hawala* money transfer system, telecom companies and shipping. But this is changing. We are diversifying and will not always depend on one strategic relationship”. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, January-April 2018.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Abu Dhabi, April 2018.

III. A New Twist to Old Struggles in Mogadishu

Gulf rivalries are intertwined with competition among factions in Mogadishu. Alleged Emirati funding of factions opposed to the federal government and, in turn, Farmajo's crackdown on rivals, accusing them of receiving millions of Emirati dollars to agitate against him, have added new complexity to struggles in the capital, as a series of recent disputes illustrates.³⁹

The first split the Somali parliament into two factions, pitting Prime Minister Kheyre and a pro-government faction against opponents led by the lower house speaker, Mohamed Osman Jawari. Reportedly triggered by Kheyre's frustration at Jawari's repeated obstruction of government-sponsored bills, in late 2017 the dispute escalated into a full-blown crisis, with the government accusing its rivals of orchestrating an Emirati-funded parliamentary rebellion aimed at forcing out Farmajo and Kheyre.⁴⁰ In March 2018, it threatened to turn violent when the government replaced the parliamentary police with army units, which deployed outside the parliament building and at checkpoints across the capital. In response, Jawari issued a press release calling on parliamentarians and the Somali people to protect the legislature.⁴¹ Some parliamentarians reportedly summoned clan militias to defend them.⁴² Armed clashes were averted only when the African Union mission, AMISOM, brokered a meeting between the president and speaker.⁴³

Many in Mogadishu believe Gulf funding aggravated the dispute. That said, the UAE-Qatar rivalry does not map precisely onto the opposing sides, as illustrated by the subtle game Jawari himself has played. Though often portrayed as Emirati-backed, in reality he often played pro-Qatar and pro-UAE factions in the lower house off against each other in order to maintain influence.

In March 2018, for example, he masterminded a parliamentary motion against a long-discussed deal that would allow the Emirati company DP World to develop Somaliland's Berbera port – a deal Farmajo and his allies in parliament also have opposed (see Section VII). This move allowed Jawari not only to demonstrate his clout in parliament but also, reportedly, to pressure the Emiratis, who have built close ties to Jawari's rival for leadership of the Digil Mirifle clan, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, president of South West federal state.⁴⁴ The speaker's manoeuvres illustrate the fluidity of Somali politicians' ties to Gulf powers and the adroitness with which many extract personal and political gain from foreign jostling for influence.

³⁹ The UAE denies funding any individuals. A UAE official said, "there has never been any such thing as supporting individuals or choosing sides". Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Somali government officials, Mogadishu, 22 April 2018.

⁴¹ "Jawari calls for re-deployment of regular forces in parliament as he nods motion against him", *Hiiiran Online*, March 18 2018.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, Somali government officials, Mogadishu, 22 April 2018.

⁴³ Crisis Group interviews, Somali political sources, Mogadishu, Nairobi, March, April 2018.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Jawari also may have hoped to create potential legal leverage against the Farmajo administration in its quest to engage with foreign companies from other countries.

Jawari resigned on 9 April, reportedly when he realised that he would lose a government-sponsored – and allegedly Qatar-funded – vote to oust him.⁴⁵ Tensions within parliament have subsided, though for how long is unclear. In principle, the speaker's departure could improve prospects for dialogue between the government and its rivals, but the acrimonious nature of his exit appears to have entrenched divisions. Parliamentarians admit that the overlap between parliamentary infighting and the Gulf powers' rivalry has increased opportunities for patronage.⁴⁶

A second dispute involved opposition leader Abdirahman Abdishakur Warsame.⁴⁷ Over the course of 2017 and early 2018, Abdishakur levelled increasingly strident critiques at the government. In response, senior officials accused him of receiving Emirati funds and planning to destabilise the government.⁴⁸ In December 2017, Somali forces raided his Mogadishu residence. Five of his bodyguards died during the raid. Abdishakur was held by security forces for three days, his passport confiscated and was reportedly released only on condition he would not speak to the media or leave the country.⁴⁹ The government blames him and his guards for resisting a routine search-and-interrogate operation and provoking the firefight.⁵⁰

A day after the raid – while Abdishakur was still in detention – Farmajo sent a minister to meet elders of his Habar Gedir clan to apologise and offer compensation for the security guards' deaths. The minister admitted “a mistake occurred” and hinted officers misinterpreted orders.⁵¹ With no independent probe and two contrasting, partisan narratives, the truth may never come to light. But whatever happened, many Mogadishu residents blame the government. The opposition claims the raid reflects its “growing authoritarian tendencies” and even calls for a caretaker administration to oversee forthcoming elections, planned for 2020.⁵²

A last clash involved Mogadishu mayor, Thabit Abdi Mohammed, a former Farmajo ally from the powerful Abgaal clan, part of the Hawiye clan family. Thabit's response to the October 2017 Al-Shabaab attack at Soobe junction, the deadliest

⁴⁵ See Harun Maruf, “Speaker of Somalia's parliament resigns”, VOA, 9 April 2018. During the standoff between Jawari and Kheyre, there were widespread rumours in Mogadishu that Jawari's resignation owed to Qatari funding of MPs, allegations again denied by Qatar. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, Doha, April 2018.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Somali parliamentarian, Mogadishu, 21 April 2018.

⁴⁷ Abdishakur is chairman of the Daljir party; a dual Somali-UK national; former minister of planning in 2009, as well as a former leader of the negotiation committee of the Union of Islamic Courts that briefly governed Mogadishu and much of south and central Somalia in 2006.

⁴⁸ Somali officials allege that over the past two years Abdirahman received millions of dollars from the UAE to destabilise the government and “buy his way” into Villa Somalia. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, Nairobi, February 2018. He denies the charges. See his op-ed, Abdirahman Abdishakur Warsame, “Corroding our nascent democracy: How the government introduced a rule of tyranny in Somalia”, *Goobjoog News* (goobjoog.com), 5 January 2018.

⁴⁹ “Somalia: Politician Abdirahman Abdishakur released from jail”, *All Africa* (allafrica.com), 21 December 2017.

⁵⁰ “Somali security forces arrest former minister in raid”, Reuters, 18 December 2017.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, opposition activist, Mogadishu, December 2017.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, opposition leader, Mogadishu, February 2018.

terrorist attack suffered by the capital, won him considerable applause.⁵³ Despite his initially close ties to the government, he became a more prominent critic as his popularity grew. He also championed the longstanding Hawiye demand that greater Mogadishu, estimated to host over two million inhabitants (of a total estimated fourteen million in Somalia), should be designated a federal state – called Banaadir – which would allow it greater self-governance and representatives in parliament's upper house. Thabit appears to have promoted the capital's statehood mostly to build his own support base.

Instead of seeking to turn down the temperature, the government picked a public fight with the mayor, accusing him of corruption and, again, of receiving Emirati funds. In January, it deployed forces to take control of the national Banaadir regional headquarters, which houses the mayor's office. The next morning Thabit resigned. While Thabit's opportunism in promoting Mogadishu's statehood might have justified his removal, the manner in which it happened solidified opposition to the government. Shortly after his replacement, Engineer Abdirahman Osman Yarisow, took over, Qatar donated 30 buses to the mayor's office.⁵⁴ As the UAE shut down its aid projects after the April 2018 seizure of its funds at Mogadishu airport, the mayor reportedly asked Qatar to assume responsibility for some of those projects.⁵⁵

To some degree, all these disputes are extensions of traditional Somali factionalism. The precise impact of the Gulf crisis on them is difficult to ascertain, given the difficulty of linking often opaque foreign funding directly to politicians' actions and the fact that the government, either overreading Emirati influence or using it as a pretext, has cracked down even on opponents whose UAE ties are unclear.⁵⁶ That said, Gulf rivalries – whether directly or indirectly – appear almost certain to have exacerbated divisions, hardening both the government's and its rivals' positions and complicating efforts to reach consensus. They have added a thorny new layer to elite struggles in the capital.

⁵³ Thabit arrived quickly on the scene after the attack and mobilised support for victims. See "Somalia: Mayor Thabit opens counselling center for October 14 victims", *AllAfrica* (allafrica.com), 24 October 2017.

⁵⁴ "Qatar donates 30 buses, two cranes to Somalia", *Gulf Times*, 18 April 2018.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Qatar Development Fund official, Doha, April 2018.

⁵⁶ For example, according to one Turkish former diplomat: "Farmajo was unjust about Jawari, who was not the UAE's man. The president has cracked down on people who could have been aligned, even sometimes on pro-Turkey figures. Some of those he cracked down on were definitely not pro-UAE. Over time, the public of Somalia will get frustrated, and Farmajo and Qatar will both lose if they do this". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, May 2018.

IV. Fracturing the Security Sector?

The UAE versus Qatar/Turkey rivalry also appears to be aggravating factionalism within the security forces. This dissension risks undermining the campaign against Al-Shabaab and could stoke future conflict, given that it often mirrors political divides.

Security sector divisions are hardly new. Much of the Somali army is a patchwork of former clan militias, whose primary loyalty is often to commanders or elders rather than up the formal chain of command.⁵⁷ Nor is the UAE's support – or that of other countries – for the security forces new. As part of a memorandum of understanding it signed with the Somali federal government in 2014, the UAE has trained personnel and built infrastructure for the Somali army, marine police and regular police force, including beyond Mogadishu.⁵⁸ Its initial support for counter-piracy operations in the 2010s has gradually morphed into the struggle against Al-Shabaab, which is the primary focus today.⁵⁹

For example, the UAE ran a training camp in Mogadishu and paid the salaries of Somali trainees. It also trained, kitted out and paid the salaries of the Puntland Marine Police Force, which focuses on maritime security and counter-terrorism operations.⁶⁰ Abu Dhabi has also trained and helped command specialised brigades of the Somali army.⁶¹ In May 2015, it donated armoured vehicles to Jubaland state.⁶² Some officers and other civil servants have also gone for training in Dubai.⁶³ Abu Dhabi argues that its efforts have been coordinated with those of Western governments in Somalia.⁶⁴

Similarly, Turkish investment in the security sector dates back a number of years. Since 2011, the Turkish government has been training Somali forces both in Somalia and in Turkey.⁶⁵ In October 2017, it commissioned a new military academy (estimated to have cost \$50 million) in Mogadishu to train 10,000 Somali soldiers in the next few years. The academy, the construction of which had been long in the works and coordinated with other donors including the U.S. and European Union (EU), cements Turkey's role as a major security player.⁶⁶ Turkey has long supported creating a strong Somali military, arguing that security is a prerequisite for addressing the fragile nation's dire humanitarian needs.⁶⁷ Qatar, which has traditionally steered clear of

⁵⁷ See Crisis Group Report, *Somalia: The Transitional Government on Life Support*, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

⁵⁸ "Abdullah bin Zayed receives Somali defence minister", WAM, 7 November 2014.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, senior UAE official, Abu Dhabi, March 2018.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interviews, former U.S. official, Washington, May 2018; government official, Abu Dhabi, March 2018.

⁶² "Jubaland receives delivery of rare military hardware from UAE", *Goobjoog News*, 26 May 2015.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

⁶⁴ A U.S. defence official agreed that there was "if not always outright coordination then at least awareness on the U.S. side" of Emirati operations. Crisis Group phone interview, April 2018.

⁶⁵ "Turkey's military move into Somalia, after backing Qatar in Gulf crisis", *Newsweek*, 8 July 2017.

An "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the Republic of Somalia on Military Training Cooperation", was signed on 22 May 2010 in Ankara.

⁶⁶ Harun Maruf, "Turkey gives weapons to Somali soldiers", VOA, 5 January 2018.

⁶⁷ "Turkey to lobby for Somalia's security", *Hürriye Daily News*, 6 December 2012.

the security sphere, may be considering a shift. After a Somali military delegation met Defence Minister Khalid Bin Muhammad al-Attayah in Doha in March 2018, Qatar – according to a senior Somali official – pledged to construct new Somali army barracks.⁶⁸ Qatari officials say talks between Doha and the federal government about supporting security sector reform are ongoing.⁶⁹

Over the past year, however, the escalating rivalries among Gulf powers and Turkey appear to have brought troublesome new dynamics to their assistance. Specialised units trained and equipped by rival powers reportedly face pressure to lend their weight to competing political factions.⁷⁰ The 30 December 2017 raid on Senator Abdi Hasan Awale Qeybdiid's residence in Mogadishu by UAE-trained troops revealed the disconnect between the various security forces operating in the capital.⁷¹ Farmajo's government claims it had no knowledge of the attack on the senator's house. Farmajo himself ordered the arrest of more than 40 UAE-trained army troops and launched an investigation into the raid.⁷² Somali officials accuse UAE-trained units of carrying out operations not sanctioned through the regular chain of command, in some cases defying orders and seeking to "protect" individuals deemed to be government opponents.⁷³

The UAE denies this charge, arguing that its trainees fall under the command of the Defence Ministry, together with AMISOM (both of which had sanctioned the training program).⁷⁴ As the Emiratis announced in April they were ending military cooperation with the Somali government, the government assumed full command of the Mogadishu-based, Emirati-trained unit at a special ceremony in the capital.⁷⁵

The threat of greater factionalism is all the more worrying given the dysfunction that already wracks the security forces.⁷⁶ A 2017 operational readiness assessment revealed that the army "lacked the properly trained manpower, barracks, weapons and ammunition, as well as logistical support The Somali national army needs to

⁶⁸ Crisis Group Skype interview, senior Somali official, May 2018; "Qatar to build SNA military bases in Somalia", Radio Dalsan, 13 March 2018.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group email correspondence, Qatari foreign ministry official, May 2018.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Somali security sources, Mogadishu, February 2018.

⁷¹ "Raid on senator's home reveals divisions in Somali security forces", *Newsweek*, 30 December 2017.

⁷² An Emirati official claims the raid was a set-up, based on an intentionally false tip that Al-Shabaab was in the villa. Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

⁷³ Crisis Group interviews, Somali officials, Mogadishu, February, March 2018. Some cite in particular an operation which saw Emirati-trained units protect Hassan Moalim, a parliamentarian.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

⁷⁵ Initial reports of discontent within that unit – partly triggered by reports its members raided their armoury and stole hundreds of rifles (allegedly later sold at the Cirtokte arms market) – have since subsided but long-term issues of integration, stipends, command and control will take time to settle. See Abdi Sheikh and Feisal Omar, "Exclusive: Weapons stolen from UAE training facility in Somalia, sold on open market", Reuters, 25 April 2018.

⁷⁶ After the October 2017 truck bombing in Mogadishu, Hussein Moalim Mohamud Sheikh Ali, a former national security adviser to the president, said the Somali security services and the donor nations working with them are both to blame for disorganised security. "Deadly Somalia blast reveals flaws in intelligence efforts", Reuters, 20 October 2017.

be capacitated in all fields – training, equipment, mobility and weapons – to be able to inherit, hold and preserve the gains achieved”.⁷⁷

On assuming office, Farmajo promised to rebuild the army and crush the insurgency within two years. In May 2017, his government unveiled a national security pact at the London conference. This pact was backed not only by donors but by federal states, suggesting a degree of consensus between Mogadishu and the regions that has since dissipated.

But Al-Shabaab remains a formidable force, with clear command-and-control within its ranks, a ruthless intelligence apparatus, and a revenue generation system and ability to deliver basic services, particularly dispute resolution, that outstrip those of Mogadishu.⁷⁸ U.S. airstrikes and ground operations since early 2017 may have taken a toll on its leadership and assets, but such tactics are unlikely to defeat the insurgency. Indeed, in some cases the civilian casualties they cause drive up support for militants.⁷⁹ In response, Al-Shabaab has stepped up attacks, carrying out over a dozen in Mogadishu over the past eighteen months. The uncertainty over the continued presence of African Union forces – AMISOM announced in late 2017 it would begin a phased exit – serves to deepen unease inside and outside the country. Factionalism in Mogadishu and potentially within the security sector, together with Mogadishu-federal states tension described in the next section, distract from efforts to counter Al-Shabaab and risk playing into the insurgency’s hands.

⁷⁷ “SRSG Michael Keating’s Situation in Somalia Briefing at the UNSC (S/2017/1109)”, Security Council Report (www.securitycouncilreport.org), 24 January 2018.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group Briefing, *Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War*, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February 2018; see also “Somalis protest military raid that killed 10 civilians”, VOA, 26 August 2017.

V. Mogadishu-Federal State Government Friction

President Farmajo, who hails from outside traditional Mogadishu elites, came to power enjoying considerable support from beyond the capital. The Gulf crisis, however, has helped catalyse escalating tension between his government and Somalia's federal states, some of which rely on Emirati aid and investment.

The UAE has been involved in Somali regions for a number of years. Receiving minimal funding from Mogadishu, some federal state leaders see Emirati support as key to rebuilding their economies and infrastructure.⁸⁰ Following the outbreak of the Gulf crisis, senior Somali officials and Western diplomats believe that Abu Dhabi quietly stepped up offers of support, particularly to federal states located along the coast, whose ports make them of greater strategic interest.⁸¹ Abu Dhabi, meanwhile, says that its policy has been consistent, and only the Somali government's perception of it has changed.⁸² One official said: "If we can't be there through the federal government, we think it's better that we keep our relationships with the federal states. They recognise what the UAE has done to support their development We don't want them to collapse".⁸³

Whatever the case, federal state governments adopted an increasingly assertive posture against Farmajo. In August and September 2017, they released a series of statements expressing support for the Saudi-Emirati bloc, contradicting Farmajo's declared desire not to pick sides, and in one case openly attacking Mogadishu's supposedly neutral position.⁸⁴ Federal state officials express frustration that the government did not consult them as it adopted a position on the Gulf crisis that they believe works against their interests. In turn, many in Mogadishu – including civil society leaders and diplomats, not just government officials – perceive that resistance in part as sparked by Emirati funds and as a means of pressuring Farmajo to distance himself from Qatar.⁸⁵

The Farmajo government objects that federal states' stance on the Gulf spat undercuts Somali foreign policy, which is Mogadishu's prerogative. It also views growing

⁸⁰ The UAE interprets the Somali constitution as granting the regions full autonomy on signing economic and commercial agreements. Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, May 2018. The 2012 provisional constitution's Chapter 5, Article 54 states: "The allocation of powers and resources shall be negotiated and agreed upon by the Federal Government and the Federal Member States (pending the formation of Federal Member States), except in matters concerning: (A) Foreign Affairs, (B) National Defense, (C) Citizenship and Immigration [and] (D) Monetary Policy, which shall be within the powers and responsibilities of the federal government". See <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf>.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interviews with diplomats, cross-section of Somalis (business leaders, civil society activists, intellectuals), Mogadishu, Nairobi, February, March and April 2018.

⁸² Crisis Group interviews, senior UAE official, Abu Dhabi, March 2018; UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

⁸⁴ "Somalia: Federal government hits back regional states; reaffirms its neutrality in Gulf crisis", *Horn Observer*, 21 September 2017.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews with diplomats, civil society representatives, federal state officials, Nairobi, February-April 2018; Qatari official, phone, April 2018. A UAE official contested this claim: "It is not the case. We are never interested in the breakdown of a state". Crisis Group interview, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

commercial and military assistance funnelled directly to the regions as a threat, likely to diminish its already shaky influence in the regions and embolden an assertive periphery. Other foreign powers have their own ties to federal states, but the Somali government argues that they usually coordinate with Mogadishu or at least keep it informed.⁸⁶ Qatari officials, for example, argue explicitly that, unlike the UAE, they channel aid only through the federal government “to protect Somalia’s territorial integrity” and accuse Abu Dhabi of seeking to regionally divide Somalia.⁸⁷ The Somali government echoes that charge.⁸⁸

The friction may have hurt counter-insurgency efforts. The security pact unveiled at the London conference, shortly after Farmajo’s inauguration and before the June 2017 Gulf crisis, envisaged federal states’ forces becoming part of the Somali army and the establishment of federal and regional state police departments.⁸⁹ All federal states and donors signed up to the pact, which set a six-month deadline for the reforms. That deadline has since been missed, partly due to political infighting in the capital but also to Mogadishu–federal state tensions.⁹⁰

Meetings between the government and regional representatives in the latter part of 2017 had appeared to make some progress on easing the standoff. But 2018 has brought fresh strain, as news broke that the UAE-based conglomerate DP World was in direct negotiations with Puntland, South West State and Jubaland for the development of those federal states’ ports and to increase other investment.⁹¹ The visits of the Puntland and Jubaland leaders to Dubai in late April and their subsequent reiteration of calls for continued Emirati funding have stoked further tension.⁹²

Then, in mid-May, during a meeting in Baidoa, the capital of Somalia’s South-West federal state, all the federal state leaders issued a hard-hitting statement accusing the Somali government of violating Article 53 of the provisional constitution,

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Mogadishu, February–April 2018.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, Qatari foreign ministry official, Doha, April 2018. Another official said: “The Somalis recently have asked the international community before the UN Security Council to denounce UAE interference in the internal affairs of Somalia. We have to support their call. If the UAE continues its policies in Somalia, this country will be destroyed, just as the UAE is doing to Yemen”. Crisis Group interview, Qatari official, phone, April 2018.

⁸⁸ According to one minister, the Emiratis “convened meetings for federal state leaders to undermine the national government”. Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2018.

⁸⁹ The text of the pact is online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact>.

⁹⁰ See “State forces to be integrated into national army and police in 3 months”, *Goobjoog News*, 20 April 2017.

⁹¹ In an October 2017 meeting, the federal and state governments agreed on the imperative of restoring relations. A follow-up meeting in December included concrete discussions on power and resource sharing, but after that talks petered out. Regarding DP World, the UAE insists that it is a commercial operation independent from Emirati foreign policy. Crisis Group interview, senior UAE official, Abu Dhabi, March 2018. Diplomats in Abu Dhabi representing three different Western countries questioned this independence, with one stating: “When we raise it in conversations, they [UAE] always say DP World is a private company and acting out of commercial interests, but clearly those interests align with UAE foreign policy”. Crisis Group interviews, Abu Dhabi, April 2018.

⁹² “Somalia: Puntland can reach deals with foreign governments, says president”, *Garowe Online*, 26 April 2018. “UAE role is crucial, says Somali regional leader”, *The National*, 26 April 2018. The Jubaland leader claims to have been paying a doctor’s visit.

which calls for consultation on all local and foreign policy issues. They claimed the deterioration in relations with the UAE was not in the national interest and appealed to Mogadishu to seek to reverse it. They also called on donors to disperse aid directly to federal states, bypassing Mogadishu.⁹³

Senior Somali officials express increasing anger at the federal states' actions. "They will lose if they side with Emiratis", said one. "The bulk of the nation is with us because they want to defend Somali sovereignty and resent seeing Abu Dhabi try to compel us to take their side. The power-hungry federal state leaders will isolate themselves. Many of the federal states will have elections in two years and will be voted out".⁹⁴ Overall, political hostility between Mogadishu and regional governments is at its worst level in years, threatening to further fracture the country.

⁹³ "Somalia: Council of Interstate Cooperation (CIC) – Communique 13-16 May, 2018, Baidoa", available here: <https://minbane.wordpress.com/2018/05/16/https-wp-me-p1xtjg-6wu-3>.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior official, Mogadishu, 25 April 2018.

VI. A Dangerous Spat with Somaliland

Gulf rivalries and Farmajo's heavy-handedness also have played into a deepening row between Mogadishu and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland. Shortly after Farmajo's June 2017 announcement that Somalia would not pick sides, Somaliland appeared set to chart its own course, declaring it would ban Qatar Airways from using its airspace.⁹⁵ Over the past few months, a deal that Somaliland has signed to allow DP World to develop its Berbera port has provoked an angry response from Mogadishu.

Somaliland's relations with Somalia have been frosty since 1991, when the central government in Mogadishu collapsed and the region declared independence. Its statehood is recognised by neither Somalia nor any other state (though a handful of governments admit travellers on Somaliland passports). Years of diplomatic efforts by African and international actors to nudge the two toward dialogue yielded little. In 2016, fresh talks between representatives of both the Somali and Somaliland governments, mediated by Turkey and supported by the UK and others, appeared to breathe new life into prospects for some form of resolution.

An escalating war of words between Mogadishu and Hargeisa over a deal formalised in March 2018, between the Somaliland government and DP World, appears to have extinguished hope of any such rapprochement.⁹⁶ According to the \$442 million deal, the Emirati conglomerate would modernise and manage Berbera port, with DP World holding 51 per cent of shares, Somaliland 30 per cent and Ethiopia 19 per cent.⁹⁷ Farmajo's government has reacted angrily. Prime Minister Kheyre, who argues that he travelled to the UAE in an attempt to block it, was particularly incensed by the manner in which he learned of it:

I was in Abu Dhabi recently and met senior Emirati officials to express our concerns about the Berbera deal and find a solution. I told them Somalia wanted to be a country that gets along with everyone. But even as we were talking, the Emiratis were secretly negotiating with Somaliland on the Berbera contract. They did not even take the trouble to inform me. I only learned of it when I was about to board my flight home.⁹⁸

Mogadishu formally protested to the Arab League, declaring the contract null and void and "a violation of Somalia's sovereignty".⁹⁹ Shortly thereafter, parliament's lower house adopted a motion, as described above, rejecting the deal. It took the

⁹⁵ "Breaking: Somaliland sides with UAE and Saudi Arabia against Qatar", *The National* (Hargeisa), 6 June 2017. In reality, Somaliland has no authority to ban airlines from using its airspace.

⁹⁶ Though Somaliland President Muse Bihi signed the lease for the port in Dubai in February 2018, negotiations have been ongoing since 2015. "Dubai's DP World agrees to manage port in Somaliland for 30 years", *Wall Street Journal*, 30 May 2016.

⁹⁷ "DP World signs agreement with Somaliland and Ethiopia", *GulfNews*, 1 March 2018; "Mogadishu fires broadside at UAE", *Africa Confidential*, 21 March 2018. Ethiopia's participation in the deal is another sore point for Farmajo's nationalist supporters.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Prime Minister Hassan Ali Kheyre, Mogadishu, 24 April 2018.

⁹⁹ "Somalia protests to AU & Arab League over Berbera port deal", Radio Dalsan (radiodalsan.com), 8 March 2018.

additional step of banning DP World from operating in Somalia, potentially obstructing the company's attempts to secure contracts to develop federal states' ports.

In response, Somaliland President Muse Bihi ominously described Somalia's opposition to the Berbera deal as "a declaration of war", adding "we are ready for you".¹⁰⁰ For their part, the Emiratis claim to have been taken aback by Mogadishu's anger. According to one official:

The Somalis surprised us with the complaint at the Arab League about trampling on their sovereignty. We have been consistent in our One Somalia policy. We had an oral agreement [about this] and we can't accept that a new government comes in [and changes everything]. This has to be understood as a commercial and development project.¹⁰¹

Somaliland similarly contends that the federal government had been aware of negotiations over Berbera's development for more than a year before the contract was signed (Farmajo's predecessor, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, reportedly at one point considered whether the Somali government itself might become a partner).¹⁰² Moreover, the deal comes against the backdrop of renewed efforts to start a fresh round of talks, mediated by Djibouti, between Somaliland and Somalia, with a face-to-face meeting planned between Farmajo and Muse Bihi.¹⁰³

Deepening animosity over the past year between the Somali government and Abu Dhabi clearly has played into the dispute. Farmajo's stance on the Dubai port could prove a misstep. Mogadishu mostly likely lacks the leverage to block the deal, and its inability to do so could make it look still weaker in the eyes of federal states, increasing the likelihood they chart an even more autonomous course in striking their own deals. Attempting to scupper the deal also risks damaging prospects for dialogue and a negotiated settlement to the dispute over Somaliland's status. It is likely to complicate any attempt to calm the recent outbreak of violence between Somaliland and Puntland forces.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ "Somaliland: President accuses Somalia of declaring war against Somaliland", *Horn Diplomat* (www.horndiplomat.com), 8 March 2018.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, UAE senior official, March 2018.

¹⁰² "Ex-PM rubbishes Dubai claims of inking MOU on Berbera port deal with Somalia", *Hiiran Online*, 22 April 2018.

¹⁰³ "Somalia: Who is facilitating Somali-Somaliland talks?" *Garowe Online*, 19 February 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Puntland and Somaliland have been engaged in sporadic conflict over the disputed Sool region for more than ten years. People who live there are divided over which side to back. In May, the two sides fought fiercely over control of the Tuka Raq village, which had been seized by Somaliland in April. The village is close to Garowe, the capital of Puntland. "Dozens die in fighting between two Somali states over disputed land", Reuters, 17 May 2018.

VII. Taking a Step Back

Of all the African states forced to navigate the rivalries unleashed by the Gulf crisis, Somalia faces the gravest challenges. The UAE, alarmed at losing ground to its main geopolitical rivals, appears to have upped support for Somali opposition leaders and federal states in an attempt to promote its interests and protect its investments. The Somali government, feeling besieged, has deepened ties to Qatar and Turkey, further fuelling Emirati disquiet, and adopted heavy-handed tactics against rivals at home, aggravating Somali factionalism. The result has been a dangerous standoff, pitting the government against opponents in Mogadishu, the federal states and Somaliland. Any of these disputes could escalate. All sides need to take a step back before that happens.

Repairing Mogadishu-Abu Dhabi relations will be an uphill struggle. Sentiment is raw on both sides, particularly since the government's seizure of Emirati money in Mogadishu in April 2018 and the UAE's subsequent withdrawal. Some Somali officials threaten retaliatory steps against what they view as an attempt to violate their country's sovereignty. According to a Somali minister:

The UAE is undermining our sovereignty. We engage them and express our concerns. They continue to escalate. We have shown restraint and have not taken retaliatory measures. They sent a ship to evacuate their people and equipment. We said: fine. But they convened meetings for federal state leaders to undermine the national government. They will lose in the longer term because public opinion is with us. Indeed, our government has benefited from the crisis as the people are rallying around us. So far, we are giving space for dialogue. But we can respond in kind. We have contingency measures. We could, for example, deny the Emirates overflight rights over Somalia – tens of daily Emirates flights use Somali airspace. We could reopen the Iranian embassy in Mogadishu. We don't want to do either, but we could.¹⁰⁵

Senior Emirati officials have tended to express similar anger.¹⁰⁶ That said, despite the heated rhetoric, both sides appear to want to find a way out. According to Emirati officials, Abu Dhabi recognises that it needs to de-escalate the dispute. One pointed out that the UAE has neither closed its embassy nor downgraded diplomatic relations with Mogadishu – an intentional move to avoid escalation and leave the door open for re-engagement with Farmajo's government.¹⁰⁷ Another said: "We don't want to disconnect ourselves from the Somali government, even though we are reluctant to engage with them What we need now really is for things to just calm down. They will cool. Then a mediator could come in".¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2018. In reality, Somalia would be challenged to prevent other countries from using its airspace.

¹⁰⁶ In March 2018, for example, a senior UAE official told Crisis Group: "We have been in Somalia in the darkest hours. You can't treat us like this when we have had boots on the ground, trainers with the security forces, counter-piracy operations. We have built wells, hospitals, schools". Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, March 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

Senior Somali officials argue that they have reached out to the UAE since the start of the crisis. Privately, they acknowledge that escalation helps them in the short term by solidifying public support for the government, but will hurt them in the long term, as it will weaken Somalia and, by distracting the government itself, help Al-Shabaab.¹⁰⁹ That said, they are clear they will not offer compromises they believe could be seen as surrendering Somali sovereignty – so no public apologies or removal of officials of concern to Abu Dhabi.¹¹⁰

Some form of Mogadishu-Abu Dhabi dialogue is a priority and could aim for rapprochement based on the Somali government taking steps to showcase its neutrality and the UAE pledging to keep Mogadishu better informed on its involvement in federal states. Even without such dialogue, President Farmajo's government should urgently seek accommodation with rivals in the capital, federal states and Hargeisa.

In this light, the Somali government should:

- ❑ Express publicly its willingness to participate in talks with Abu Dhabi and potentially seek Saudi mediation. It also could find a way to distribute the Emirati money it has seized to pay salaries of personnel in the units for which Abu Dhabi says the cash was destined. It could pledge to guarantee the security of Emirati diplomats and military personnel. Senior officials also should dial down their anti-Emirati rhetoric.
- ❑ Stop the selective criminalisation of clientelism, notably its crackdown on rivals under the pretext they receive UAE funding. The influence of foreign funds on Somali politics has long been a concern, but the opposition is not the only guilty party. The government also should promote financial transparency; its annual report on aid flows is a good start, but it and federal state governments should declare significant donations.¹¹¹
- ❑ Step up efforts to finalise the draft permanent constitution – which would clarify the power and resource-sharing arrangements with federal states that are at the root of centre-periphery tensions – including by resuming the dialogue with federal states it started in October 2017.
- ❑ Recommit to a meeting between President Farmajo and Somaliland leader Muse Bihi; Bihi should make the same commitment. As a gesture of good-will to both Somaliland and the UAE, Mogadishu also should curtail its opposition to Hargeisa's contract with DP World, a deal long in the making.

For their part, Gulf powers and Turkey should exercise restraint across the Horn, particularly in Somalia. The factious nature of Somali politics means that no axis can fully dominate. Attempting to consolidate control is likely to further fracture the

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, senior Somali official, Mogadishu, April 2018. He added: "Many among us lack experience in governing. We might be overconfident in believing we can bank on popular support and face down the UAE. It could cost us down the road". Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, senior Somali officials, Mogadishu, April 2018.

¹¹¹ "Aid Flows in Somalia: Analysis of Aid Flow Data", Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, Federal Republic of Somalia, March 2008 (www.somaliamaidflows.so).

Somali state, either along factional lines in the capital or between Mogadishu and the federal states. Such fragmentation would serve nobody's interests.

- The UAE should agree to dialogue and could offer to share information with Mogadishu on all DP World's dealings with Somali regions and Somaliland. Its existing diplomatic overtures to federal states and Somaliland are provocative; if it is intent on maintaining relationships and commercial ties, it should do so in a way that doesn't exacerbate Somali fractures. It also could encourage allies in the federal states to reconcile with Mogadishu.
- Qatar and Turkey should press Farmajo to repair relations with rival factions, federal states and Somaliland.¹¹² They also should support its adoption of a more balanced stand on the Gulf Cooperation Council crisis; Doha and Ankara may benefit in the short term as the Emiratis withdraw, but for Somalia, a genuinely neutral stance that allows it to receive much-needed support from donors of all stripes would better serve its interests. Qatari-allied media should dial down their inflammatory coverage of the UAE's role in Somalia.
- Saudi Arabia, which enjoys the relative trust of Somali and Emirati leaders, should promote dialogue between the Farmajo government and Abu Dhabi; Riyadh could be an emissary and potential facilitator of talks.¹¹³

Somalia's other partners should work to limit the impact of the Gulf rivalries. In particular, the African Union, the United Nations, the regional body the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the League of Arab States, the U.S., the EU and its member states should urge that all states cease covert sponsorship of Somali leaders. Western powers with close ties to both the Somali government and Gulf powers should promote Mogadishu-Abu Dhabi dialogue, and back any attempt by Riyadh to mediate. EU officials, also reportedly trusted by both sides, might also play some facilitation role.

¹¹² A former Turkish diplomat acknowledged that Ankara could do so: "Those who think Turkey is sided with Farmajo are wrong. But yes, Ankara could play more of a role to influence Farmajo, both directly and via Qatar". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, May 2018. A Turkish foreign ministry official largely agreed: "Between March and April, Turkey had been calling for restraint in the confrontation between Jawari and the prime minister and president. This is what Turkey can do, call for dialogue and lowering of tensions. We will not get more involved in domestic politics or take initiatives that call into question the president's legitimacy, so we wouldn't interfere beyond calling for dialogue". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, May 2018.

¹¹³ According to one senior Somali official: "We welcome Saudi mediation. We hope they can put pressure on the UAE to change their attitude and policies toward Somalia". Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2018. A UAE official argued that, because the UAE has not downgraded ties, there is no need for mediation. Crisis Group interview, Abu Dhabi, May 2018.

VIII. Conclusion

Clearly, Somalia's many challenges cannot all be pinned on Gulf powers, particularly given that their aid and investment for years has been a lifeline for many Somalis. Nor are Somali elites, long adept at navigating foreign clientelism, helpless victims. Moreover, many foreign powers – in the region and beyond – have long played favourites and aggravated factionalism in Somalia.

That said, almost a year after the Gulf crisis, the enmities that have riven the GCC have brought fresh complexity to Somali instability. They illustrate, too, the increasing jockeying for influence among Arab and other powers around the Red Sea and in the Horn of Africa. The extension of the Middle East's fault lines into the region have unsettled already fraught relations among Horn states and led their leaders to recalibrate their policies toward neighbours and outside powers alike.

Of all those states, it is Somalia – already arguably the weakest – whose internal politics have been most fiercely buffeted, with rivalries among Gulf states and Turkey and the unravelling of relations between the Farmajo government and Abu Dhabi intensifying disputes among factions in Mogadishu, between the Somali government and federal states, and between it and Somaliland. Even without Gulf meddling, efforts to reconcile clans and overcome centre-periphery tensions – a prerequisite for peace in Somalia – face an uphill battle. But if the country becomes a battleground for richer, more powerful states, and they and Somali factions pursue a form of zero-sum competition ill-suited to the country's factious and multipolar politics, the bloodshed and discord that have long blighted Somalia risk taking an even darker turn. All involved need to reverse course before that happens. Ideally, the Gulf powers would end the spat within the GCC that serves all their interests ill. But absent that, they should not let their rivalries destabilise weaker states.

Nairobi/Brussels, 5 June 2018

Appendix A: Map of the Gulf Region



Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in ten other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Kabul, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Sanaa, Tblisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, European Commission, Directorate General for Neighbourhood Enlargement Negotiations, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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