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Berbera basing politics: Understanding actors, interests, and animosities

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The presence of forward forces in foreign soil is not a modern notion, but is thought-provoking when a small state projects its military might in multiple locations of a similar strategic importance. The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) base lease in Berbera is a case in point which attracted a reproach from the public, and politicians. The joint parliament sitting to approve the draft agreement further complicated the reproach, resulting in many stakeholders to argue that the approval process suffered insufficient consultation, citing ambiguity, and suspicion. Berbera basing politics is critical to Somaliland's national security, but gained little scholarly attention that can explain the rationale, and the underlying assumptions. This paper will, therefore, provide a qualitative assessment on impact of UAE's overseas defense posture on Somaliland's political direction. Specifically, it tends to analyze the structural architect of the basing politics including actors, interests, risks (animosities), and prophesy on scenarios for use. This paper uses secondary and primary sources to sketch out the key issues; it also employs relevant international relations theories: security dilemma, deterrence, defensive, proxy war, geopolitics, pre-emption, beggar-thy-neighbour, and safe-haven concepts to make sense on this matter.

Key words: National security, basing politics, interests, actors, animosity, deterrence, collective security, collective defense.

INTRODUCTION

Somaliland declared its independence in May 1991 in armed struggle, but with Somalis this time. Geographically, it borders with Ethiopia to the South, Djibouti to the West, Somalia to the East, and the Gulf of Aden to the North.

The Gulf of Aden is directly facing the southern part of Yemen with a coastline of 850,800 km. The population estimate of Somaliland is 4.5 million (Unrepresented

Nations and Peoples Organization, 2017) with an area of 137, 600 km² (Ministry of Planning, 2013). Historically, the Republic of Somaliland gained its independence in 1960 from Great Britain, and then united with what was then known as Italian Somaliland in July 1960. After the collapse of the Siyad Barre regime, Somaliland collected its remnant from the ash to establish a *de facto* state that manages its domestic and international affairs, enjoying a

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relative peace, and stability as “an oasis of stability in a volatile region.”¹ Today, it enjoys a *de facto state* status under international law (Arieff, 2008), though it fulfills the entire statehood standards set out in the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. In terms of its economy, the livestock plays the key driver where close to “65% of the population depend either directly or indirectly on livestock and livestock products for their livelihood (Ministry of Planning, 2013). In summary, it is a fourth-world country dying for employment, economic development, and international cooperation.

In the last two decades, Somaliland achieved tangible strides towards peace and security amidst a conflict prone region. In doing so, this tiny republic spends approximately half of its national budget in the different security and law enforcement departments (McGregor, 2014) to ensure law and order is maintained. Despite this investment in the security sector, the country suffered from several terrorist attacks waged by the Islamist militant group known as al-Shabaab. Consequently, Somaliland established a coastal guard unit with sundry of “boats to patrol more than 500 miles of coastline along the Gulf of Aden” (Langfitt, 2011) to secure its waters. While it is a very daunting task to tackle a sophisticated piracy with such limited resources, this unit made sure to secure its waters. Therefore, it is evident that such security measures had expanded the strategic importance of Somaliland to attract international investment, and the military base establishment.

METHODOLOGY

Since hosting foreign forward forces is complex and multifaceted axiom, which had a profound impact in both domestic and exterior political arenas. Hence, this paper conducted a thorough analysis on the establishment of Berbera Military Base. Moreover, the geographical interest of this study was confined within the Horn of African region certain particularly states, enjoying an established link with Somaliland, and the United Arab Emirates as well as other non-state actors ranging from civils society, media, and clan elders.

In doing so, this paper has employed both secondary and primary sources to sketch out the key issues on Berbera basing politics, including literature of relevant text books, academic papers, and close observation to the political development relating to the establishment of the military base. In addition, this paper relies on relevant international relations theories such as security dilemma, deterrence, defensive, proxy war, geopolitics, pre-emption, beggar-thy-neighbour, and safe-haven concepts to make sufficient sense on this matter.

UNDERSTANDING BASING POLITICS

Generally, presence of forward foreign forces appeals for domestic, regional, and international controversy, mainly stirred through media channels. Historically, presence of military bases in a foreign soil dates back to the ancient Greece and its city states, particularly during the era of Thucydides (c.460 B.C.–c.400 B.C.), who realized the relevance of military base in the military discipline and subsequently transcribed on its rudimentary stage (Harkavy, 1989). Modern historians trace the military bases back in the fifteenth century during which the European civilization attained an economic, political, and military advancements. In Europe, this period saw that the “commercial importance began to walk together with military issues, with basing access turning crucial to defend new lands for exploration” (Lersch and Sarti, 2014)”. This is a vibrant demonstration that military basing politics maintained its relevance in the contemporary international agenda. Currently, the USA alone maintains “approximately 800 of US military bases in the world” (Vine, 2015) on which it spends over millions of dollars a year. There also another more than “21,564 combat troops” (Hesse, 2015) in the neighboring Somalia, in the name of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Military installations operated by smaller states are less prospective in the history of military basing politics. Indeed, it is the powerful states that acquire military access rights in the soil of smaller states. However, the recent establishment of military bases by the United Arab Emirates, a relatively small state, in the Horn of Africa region, is a noble phenomenon but confrontational around in the political encircles. In most cases, establishment of military bases in a foreign soil is a very daunting task for defense personnel, and diplomatic corps, due to divergent security interests; Somaliland is not an exception. The United States, for instance, “found it difficult to perusal many of its erstwhile clients that their security interests are convergent with its own” (Harkavy, 1989), resulting in many of its negotiations to conclude rejection from the prospective accommodating states. In Somaliland, the confrontation toward the establishment of the military base lies with the opposition political operators and local inhabitants, albeit only to some degree.

Types of military bases are too diverse based on their security needs. However, scholars of defense and international relations agree that the establishment of military bases is directed towards attainment of national security objectives. These objectives are: collection of intelligence, supply chain support for certain operation, and communication needs. If communication, intelligence, and logistical operations is assumed to cut across the different types of military bases, then the “Naval and Airfield” bases are the most prominent foreign military presence (bases); it is the naval and airfield bases, which are the case in point to our discussion on

¹ Ali Mohamed, Somaliland: An oasis of stability in a volatile region May 2016,

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/280948-somaliland-an-oasis-of-stability-in-a-volatile-region> (Accessed on April 2, 2016).

Berbera basing politics.

Because of its strategic location, Somaliland contributes its share to the history of military basing literature, particularly during the Cold War. In the 1970s, the former Soviet Union (Federal Republic of Russia) established a military base in Berbera, which was a naval and aerial base. This base was aimed at protecting Russian interests in the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, and generally the Horn of Africa region. The United States leased this very military installation for comparable purpose when the diplomatic relation between Somalia and the Soviet Union severed to its lowest. Considering the perspective of hosting state, there are both merits and demerits, which are associated in providing access rights to foreign military installation. A protagonist argument to the foreign military base claims that the presence of sophisticated military will boost the attainment of national security objectives, thus leading to a global peace and security. This argument relies on offensive (deterrence) and defensive concepts in the realist tradition of international relations.

On the other hand, antagonistic interpretation to this subject does not rule out the national security factor; however, it posits that establishment of military bases lead to potential arms race, and security dilemma in the region, which are other international relations theories to explain the subject in discussion. Henceforward, this monography acknowledges these two arguments, and tends to establish an inclusive sense through careful analyses, observations, and discussions.

WHY BERBERA APPEALS FOR MILITARY BASES?

To appreciate the importance of Berbera military base for the Emirates, it is indispensable to look at the geographical and historical roots of this coastal town in harbouring foreign forward forces. But before delving further, we should understand the determinant factors regarding the characteristics of the location that can serve as a military base. As mentioned previously, the purpose of military installations supersedes historical characteristics, and social factors to finally determine the location of a military base that can fit the bill.

Firstly, when the establishment of the military base is designed to serve the purpose of training ground, firing live bullets, or executing regular movements of machines, then it is the lack of human traffic, availability of space, and quietness characteristics that determine the location of a military base; of course the basic communication infrastructure remain critical. Secondly, when the purpose of the base is geared towards a military intervention, then “the ability to rapidly and effectively “project” force became an increasingly important location criterion; so access to airfields, rail lines, interstate highways and ports grew in importance” (Harmon et al., 2014). Therefore, the strategic importance of Berbera for a

military base mirrors the latter factors.

Berbera is situated on the northwest coastline of Somaliland. More importantly, It geographically supersedes the other coastal towns in the region because it is a sheltered harbour towards the southern side of the Gulf of Aden. Berbera plays a commercial role, by providing portal services to wide range of Somali and non-Somali communities in the region. In addition, it remains strategic when it comes to commercial and oil shipping lanes. Such strategic location allows the great powers to monitor the sea traffic of the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa; hence Berbera attracts the interest of foreign military forces to project their military might through naval and air military basing. This assertion is evident in the rationale of USSR naval and air military base, which was established in Berbera in the 1970s. According to experts, this military base was aimed “to control the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa region... this airfield with the longest runway in Africa and a deep-water port was built specifically for [R]ussian military. [It] has been also featured an important communication and intelligence center (Анастасия, 2016). In less than 10 years, the ideological relationship between USSR and Somalia deteriorated due to WARSO’s unwarranted support to Ethiopia during Ethio-Somalia war in 1977. This military vacuum created by WARSAW Pact signalled as a sizeable opportunity to NATO camp, the US in this case. Similarly, the United States translated its strategic commercial, and security interests in this region in the form of forward military forces to control the shipping lanes that transcend in water of Berbera. In doing, the US Government rejuvenated a formerly severed relation with Somalia. In 1980, the United States, executing its Red Sea and Indian Ocean strategic interests, had “concluded military agreement with Somalia...gaining access to American naval and air forces” (Mangi, 1987). The agreement package included the repair and rehabilitation of the current oil terminal in Berbera as well as other structures in the port. In the same token, the US took over this military base to “project Western power in to the southern Red Sea and northwest Indian Ocean... to monitor the sea lanes along the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula and the east coast of Africa” (CIA, 1981)”. Since the Somali Republic collapsed, this strategic location was open to its historic interests, including that of smaller states, like United Arab Emirates.

EMIRATES’ EXPANSIONIST AGENDA

The federation of the United Arab Emirates was established in December 1971 stretching along the Persian Gulf, the Arabian section to be exact. This country contains a federation of 7 emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain and Fujairah, which is bordered by two other Arabian

neighbours in the north by the Persian Gulf, in the east by the Gulf of Oman and Oman and in the south and west by Saudi Arabia. In terms of land mass, the “total area of the UAE is about 83,600 km², of which 77 700 km² is the mainland surface area, where the population lives” (FAO, 2008); this is jaggedly 60% of Somaliland’s land mass. The population estimate is 9.3 M (WPR, 2017), which is double of Somaliland’s population. The movement to establish these Trucial States came to live at the beginning of 1968 when the United Kingdom communicated its plan to ending the protection agreement. Consequently, Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi “acted rapidly to establish closer ties with the emirates... then Ruler of the emirate of Dubai, Sheikh Zayed called for a federation that would include not only the seven emirates that made up the Trucial States, but also Qatar and Bahrain” (UAE, n.d), although the latter two states never embraced, and declined to join the federation movement.

The United Arab Emirates is not a middle power state, which can largely shape the politics of international security order. But its Union Defense Forces (UDF) are expanding in the Horn of Africa region: It has a defense army that is equipped with sophisticated modern machinery purchased from a variety of countries, mainly from the western countries; the US and the United Kingdom. Reacting to the international security system characterized by the fact of anarchy, this tiny nation exerted substantial effort to investing and developing powerful military capability to deter its adversaries, and preserve its national interests; both domestic and international. Favourable foreign investment terms, and open policy to international markets resulted a high per capita income, which contributed to enjoy spacious annual trade surplus; its exports exceed imports, which helps the country’s currency to strength. According to the World Bank, the United Arab Emirates managed to achieve a “sustained real GDP growth of over 6% per year in recent decades, with oil surpluses invested into the non-oil economy” (World Bank, 2016). This investment focused on military power, invest foreign countries, and implement its national security agendas. In 2011, for instance, the country spent approximately 5.5% of its GDP to armed wings, including the Air Force and Air Defense, and the Navy forces (CIA, 2011), among others. Normally, states establish military base to protect their foreign interests. This assertion holds special interest for this paper because of the UAE’s recent militarization in the Horn of Africa, especially its intention to establish a military base in Berbera.

Military basing politics is not an out dated axiom in the field of international relations, and its realpolitik variants. In fact, deploying military personnel in foreign soil evolved human the civilizations all the way down to the Greece, and its city states. Therefore, it is not a contemporary concept for discussion in any way. However, a tiny country like the UAE to project its military strength to outer region in another continent offers an

interesting point to discussion. In late 2016, the government of Somaliland and the UAE conversed over the possibility to forge security cooperation, which later led the UAE’s proposal to set up a second military base in Horn of African (Shafqat, 2017), Berbera, Somaliland. The purposes of stationing the UAE military personnel in Somaliland, and rest of the region are unprecedented.

Since military basing serves for both defensive and deterrence purposes, this response paper argues that the establishment of military base in Somaliland is serving both these purposes from Emirates standpoint. Moreover, it is believed that the establishment of a military base in Berbera is complex and multifaceted political and military reality that requires an exclusive analysis; therefore, it will examine the different actors and their interests by viewing from international relations position.

ACTORS AND INTEREST: WHAT IS IN IT?

It has been previously assumed that international relations exclusively deal with interaction between the states. However, the increasing interaction of global society to address contemporary issues invited other actors to the international politics. These new actors include media houses, non-governmental organizations, regional alliances, community elders, and political leadership. Because states and non-state actors navigate both domestic and global political issues, there are a set of common characteristics including “(a) autonomous capacity to determine their own purposes and interests; (b) capability to mobilize human and material resources to achieve these purposes and interests; (c) actions... to influence the state-to-state relations or the behavior of other nonstate actors in the global system” (Sekiguchi, 2009). They are classified as “official actors, social actors, political actors” (Shehata, 2012). This monograph tends to map out actors, and interest of Berbera military basing politics.

Somaliland, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti are major official actors in the Berbera basing politics. We have political actors which are ranging from former or/and prominent politicians and the opposition parties. Similarly, there are also social actors involved such as media outlets and community elders. It should be noted that a proper analysis of these key actors in the basing politics is a puzzling question. For example, why non-middle power state is willing to project its military power beyond its regional blocks; what are the interests? Explaining the UAE’s increased interest to set up couple of military bases in Horn of Africa is another interesting question? Who else is concerned in the regions regarding this military base? Finally, can international relations theories illuminate on these puzzling questions?

To explain these dynamics, we should therefore utilize the following relevant IR theories to analyse and

comprehend the dynamics, interests, and actors of this argument. Relevant concepts in this case may include: Security dilemma, deterrence, proxy war, geopolitics, pre-emption, beggar thy neighbour, and safe-haven concepts.

Official actors

Somaliland (security, economy, political)

The decision to grant a military base is a process of trading-off between the national interest package against the territorial integrity of a portion of your soil.. In relation to this, there are multiple reasons to allow forward foreign forces, including economic package, political support, and common security agreement among others. The case of Berbera military base to host the UAE's second military forward force in the Horn of Africa, following Eretria, is a relevant subject to discuss. Why did Somaliland accept a foreign military base, while living in a region characterized by war, conflict, piracy, and insecurity? Perhaps, we need to look out the other military bases in the region, particularly in neighbouring Djibouti and Eretria to understand the overarching drive of military presence in the region.

Scholars consider Djibouti as a "prime military real estate on the planet" (Jeffrey, 2016) because of its location in the southern gateway to the Red Sea on the way to the Suez Canal, like Berbera. China's military presence in Djibouti is viewed as an economic energizer through "construction of free trade zone, promotion of China-Djibouti bank, construction of a railway line from Djibouti to Addis Ababa" (Igbino, 2016), among others. Moreover, China tends to "engage Somalia as part of its expanding number of African diplomatic partners" (Lanteigne, 2013) as well. Despite economic development package, the case in Eretria posits another interesting perspective: Eretria will use the presence of Emirates in its country "to expand its relationships beyond the region to break its isolation in the region" (Front, 2015).

Somaliland interest towards the military base in Berbera mirrors that of Djibouti and Eretria, in my view. Although Somaliland meets the Montevideo Convention, it is still struggling with political isolation preventing from participation of international political system, including diplomatic relations, business investment, and global security arrangements. Since national security is paramount to the survival of any state, unrecognized states like Somaliland endure the challenges of joining regional security forums, "declarations and treaties, [which are] frequently negotiated within the framework of the UN" (Barston, 2006). In this view, the lease agreement of the military base in Berbera with the UAE will, therefore, bridge this security vacuum in such a way that satisfies other economic, commercial, political, and military interests, but it always depends on the negotiation approach. In addition, smaller states strive to maintain their national security via a variety of sources to

avoid exploitation of regional or international powers. Furthermore, this military base agreement reflects this very security concept, thus diversifies its security guarantors. Although, the signed lease agreement remains confidential, its content which was presented to the Somaliland parliament for approval (News, 2017), indicates economic package, security cooperation, and development projects. Also, the recent statement of the Foreign Minister confirms a similar package. What about the Emirates?

United Arab Emirates (commercial, security)

Security and economic interests are two crucial factors to explaining the UAE's intention to build up a military base in Berbera in my view. It should be agreed that survival is the principal foreign goal for all states. The realist tradition of international relations is, therefore, best suited to expound this power politics agenda. The projection of the UAE's forward forces tends to realize this very survival objective. Put it simply, the establishment of military base in Berbera serves for both defensive and offensive purposes in line with its foreign policy goals. Regarding the Yemeni conflict, the UAE is fighting three wars: (1) They are backing the "internationally recognized government against Shia clans called the Houthis, (2) Another war is being fought against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the Yemeni-based terrorist group (Knights, 2016), and (3) The final war is an attempt to gain strategic and economic route in the Indian Ocean and Horn of Africa. The former registers well in its FP goals to "eliminate terrorism in all its forms and diminish all its resources" (UAE, n.d) and to support the Sunni-led internationally recognized government. This very rationale raises several questions on how Berbera military facility might help in achieving the above objectives. Two possibilities are apparent to this question.

Firstly, this military base tends to facilitate the air, and naval strikes to the anti-peace elements in the south of Yemen. The division of labor between the leading powers (that is, UAE and KSA) warrants a critical consideration vis-à-vis this military base. The UAE forces are leading the military operations in the south and eastern parts of Yemen (Knights, 2016); this zonal operation is directly facing the Red Sea where Berbera city situates. Thus, this military facility will provide an ideal strategic location to embark such air and naval strikes to deter its adversaries, or perhaps an alternate base to Eretria. Secondly, there is a vital economic factor in the equation. Emirates are among the immediate beneficiaries of Strait of Hormuz to export its oil supplies. Largely controlled by Iran, Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, and is the world's most important oil passage. The UAE recently opened a "1.5 million bbl/d Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline...allowing crude oil shipments to circumvent Hormuz" (eia, 2012) on its way to Asian emerging markets, western Europe, and

America. Bad peace is always eviler than a war, the exacerbation of the Islands dispute in Hormuz between the UAE and Iran can lead to the closure of this strip, thus causing unbearable economic suffering to the UAE. Since the closure of Hormuz is economically nerve touching, Emiratis is forced to think beyond the horizon, in the study view. A safe passage to the Indian Ocean via Aden or Berbera remains under consideration to serves as an alternative root, but this alternative route requires a heavy security protection due to the insecure nature of this region. Hence, the military base in Berbera is best suited for these purposes, and able to secure commercial and economic interests in the water of India Ocean.

A final possibility is proxy war between the great powers, the United States and Russia. Although this assertion remains implicit, its conclusion is mainly inferred from two practical aspects: (1) the historical perspective, and (2) emergency of Russia as potential great power. This strategic location allows the great powers to monitor sea line traffic in the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, and Horn Africa; hence, Berbera attracts the interest of foreign military forces to project their military might through military basing. This very strategic importance brought the former Soviet Union (Russia) to establish a military base in Berbera in the 1970s, which was aimed at controlling the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa region. Due to severance of relations between Somali and the Soviet Union, the military base was shut down. The closure of the military base in Berbera attracted the United States of America to use the facility for a similar purpose to monitor the sea lines along the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula and the east coast of Africa. Therefore, the strategic importance of this location remains critical to the great powers, particularly at this era where sources of global energy are substantially decaying.

Despite historical grounds, the tireless efforts of Russia to revive and restore its influence no the international order should be acknowledged. This potential re-emergency of Russia to shape global order is a distressing development to the West, especially that Russia will match the military and economic capabilities of the West in the next couple of decades. The US Defense Department believes that Russia “will continue to activate, guide, and direct identity networks, including foreign proxies, to further their own national interests” (JoE, 2016). In response, the US crafted a political and military strategy to deter Russia’s former influence to come back, including US objection to Russia in returning to strategic locations. Thus, it is safe to assume that US is pursuing a proxy with Russia in Berbera military base to deter in occupying this strategic location until counter evidence emergences.

Somalia (Legal, political)

Somalia is a legal actor to Berbera basing politics. It has

rejected this military base agreement both privately and in the public domain as well. First, it should be acknowledged that Somaliland retains the political and physical presence of its borders. In other words, Somaliland enforces its administrative authority to its territory, and has also accomplished to “collect taxes, provide some services, and has held several successful democratic elections ... [and] does not benefit from formal international status.”² However, Somalia continuously claims to retain the prerogative authority and the privilege over the jurisdictions of former Somalia landmass under the realm of international customary law. According to Ankara Communiqué released at the end of the meetings between Somali and Somaliland, 13 April 2013, calls to “consolidate a cooperation on security sector”³, which the establishment the UAE’s military base in Berbera can be inferred. Consequently, it is only this prerogative authority that makes Somalia to remain an active actor in politics of Berbera military base.

Ethiopia (national security, security dilemma)

Ethiopia is a concerned actor in the establishment of military base in Berbera. Geopolitics and security dilemma are two prominent international relations theories to further explain this concern in the study view. Firstly, the seven countries in the Horn of Africa region retain dissimilar military power capabilities, making the scholars to disagree with the exact qualifier of a regional power house. Nonetheless, in the affairs of Somaliland politics, it should be acknowledged that Ethiopia is a pivotal player due to its political, military, and economic collaboration. Currently, Somaliland enjoys commercial, political, and security agreements with the Federal Government of Ethiopia. Somaliland maintains diplomatic presence in Addis Ababa with some degree of diplomatic. Despite Ethiopia’s influence in the Somali stretch, it also projects its military strength to resolve the other regional security issues, serving as a relevant indicator to its “will to lead and influence the region” (Mulugeta, 2014). Since Ethiopia enjoys considerable geopolitics leverage, it is not therefore a surprise to learn Ethiopia is concerned about the proposed military base in Berbera devoid of its prior knowledge and consultation. Similarly, Ethiopia advanced a comparable concern when Emirates established its first military base in Eritrea, though the two political contexts are largely varying.

Secondly, this military bases creates a security dilemma to Ethiopia. What does the security dilemma signify in the realm of international relations? It is a security concept that explains that any security build-up of a state makes the rest of states in a region to compete, which can lead

² Chatham House, Conference Summary: Somaliland’s Place in the World, December 2011. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Africa/1211confsummary.pdf> (Accessed September on 25, 2016).

³ Ankara Communiqué on Somali talks

to a potential regional tension. When an international or regional system faces security dilemma, they are operating in a “condition in which efforts to improve national security have the effect of appearing to threaten other states, thereby provoking military countermoves”, these countermoves can possibly lead into “a net decrease in security for all states” (Griffiths et al., 2008). Any military build-up or additional layer of security arrangements made by a state provokes the rest in the region. When such security event transpires, states had no other choice but to communicate their concern in a diplomatic means. Also, it should be noted that Ethiopia’s diplomatic relations with Somaliland is more trustworthy in many ways, but tackling this security concern permanently remains obligatory to Somaliland. In this view, Somaliland should, therefore, acknowledge Ethiopia’s major concern towards the establishment of military base in Berbera as result of the new security cooperation between Somaliland and the UAE.

The strategic apprehension of Ethiopia cannot be explained solely by the present security development in the region, but we should dive in to the history. Ethiopia has a standing conflict with Egypt on the Nile upper stream waters, and had a historic skirmish with former Somalia. Whereas the latter, both sides employed a harsh propaganda machines by using “folk tales, idioms, poems and proverbs, invariably demonize the other ethnic group” (Mohamed, 2011). The United Arab Emirates and these two states are members of Arab League, which is bound by ties of religion, culture, and blood. Because of these historical and socio-cultural dynamics, Ethiopia’s reservation to an Arab military base in the region is vindicated, though its skeptics to Somaliland is lesser degree than the military facility in Eretria. Accordingly, the UAE’s military base in Berbera might seem a proxy war to Ethiopia where a credible threat is playing on the sound track. Granting that Arabian politics is very diverse, and compete for individual national security interests, nevertheless Ethiopian scholars are cynic about the recent military bases in the Horn. Among them is Zeray Hailemariam, who is arguing that this incursion “can lead into proxy war in the horn of Africa, which is directly security threat to Ethiopia under any circumstances” (Hailemariam, 2016).

In this regard, because of this security apprehension, Somaliland should coin carefully coded diplomatic efforts, and communication to reverse this doubt, in which worrying its major close ally in the region, and powerful neighbor.

Djibouti (Beggart-thy-neighbour)

This monography contemplates that Djibouti is the final state actor in the establishment of military base in Berbera. By contrast to Ethiopia’s apprehension, its concern can be explicitly traced in commercial perspective than security since French provides a “long term security

commitment and guarantee from outside adversaries” (Tertrais, 2009). The economic argument posits that there are two important aspects permitting Djibouti to appeal key international economic powers: Its location in the red sea, and facing the Indian Ocean; and relative peace and security. These two aspects that validate Djibouti as “one of the more important security beachheads in the developing world” which “matters greatly to global commerce and energy, due to its vicinity to the Mandeb Strait and the Suez-Aden canal” (Braude, n.d). Djibouti took these factors for granted. The coastal town of Berbera locates a similar strategic location, and enjoys a relative peace and security, breaking the chain of monopoly. There is also a political squabble between Djibouti and the UAE, which resulted a severed diplomatic relation.

The relations of two states severed to its lowest, leading the UAE to close its consulate and subsequently withdrawing its forces from Djibouti by May 2015; sensing a diplomatic humiliation. The UAE certainly did not confine its reaction just to leave the country, but has instigated successive retaliatory events in the region. The establishment of a military base in the neighboring, the oft-hostile Eretria, is an apparent diplomatic punitive measure. The confrontation shifted to economic sphere, where the UAE made “a retaliatory move as parts of its new economy war...[and] established a significant trade relations with the landlocked Ethiopia in an attempt to sway it from Djibouti’s port to use its new \$442 million investment platform of Berbera port (Mwaura and Muse, 2017). So far, there has never been an explicit retaliatory act from Djibouti, but its public diplomacy towards Berbera military base is felt inducing to Beggar thy neighbour policy approach.

Political actors

Oppositions groups (Political, involving war in Yemen)

Although very nascent, the political parties in Somaliland have thus far performed a critical function in the country which includes keeping the government in control, providing check and balance to the incumbent government. As commanded in the constitution, parties “play a vital role in the market place of political ideas and programmes” (SONSAF, 2011); these political programmes include tabling an alternative policy options once government undertakings are perceived contrary to the national interest. Berbera military base is another UAE-sponsored investment which is received a contrasting stand point between the government⁴, and UCID⁵ party on a side, and Waddani⁶ party on the other

⁴ The Government also implies the views of Kulmiye ruling party

⁵ UCID party is one of the three political parties in Somaliland which stands for Justice and welfare party

side. Since UCID shares a similar view with the government, the study shall move forward to discuss the dismissal of Waddani towards the military base. To understand Waddani's refutation on military base. First, it is imperative to acknowledge that Somaliland is going through a cycle of presidential election, scheduled on November, 2017. Thus, the interest of this opposition party is both implicit, and explicit in nature. It is so grim to infer a complete scene solely from its public political speeches. Nevertheless, these public speeches are expedient to understanding the explicit interests, expressing voluminous worries on possibility unintended results from the War in Yemen, should Somaliland intermingle the fire in Yemen. In this view, their primary interest is prevention of conflict. This assertion can ostensibly be warranted from the recent speeches made by its presidential candidate, and the party leader in numerous occasions.

Social actors

Social actors, such as business community, media outlets, and community leaders, among other, are deemed as other relevant actors in Berbera basing politics. In democratic states, media outlets are charged with the responsibility to produce news items and editorial notes on hot political, and social agendas that are making the headlines of the day. In this regard, the media outlets are interested in revealing the backend workings (discussions on the negotiations) in a real time to satisfy their customers, the public audience. Clan elders are among the social actors who made the news since the start of the Berbera basing politics, but their apprehension is dissimilar to the media passages because their concern rests on the potential social risks that come with foreign forces. It is worthy noting that other clan elders gave a welcoming expression to the military base in Berbera, citing social and economic opportunities. In communicating their concern, religious leaders, civil society members, and business actors are not forthcoming; they usually advance their apprehension through different means of communication, perhaps via the back-door channel than through public.

Others (UN, Traditional Donors)

United Nations

Somaliland situates a volatile region that has been ravaged by serious of insecurity, piracy, and terrorism incidents. In addition, the United Nations (UN) imposed an open-ended arms embargo on Somalia since 1992 to react to the ongoing conflict and deteriorating humanitarian situation. And Somaliland includes the

⁶ Waddani is one of the three political parties in Somaliland, which stands for Somaliland National Party

coverage of this UN resolution. Specifically, the UN resolution on arms embargo (2002) explicitly "prohibits the direct or indirect supply to Somalia of technical advice, financial and other assistance, and training related to military activities" (Council, 2002); this resolution has been extended to 15 November 2017⁹. Technically, the UAE's military base in Berbera contravenes this very UN Security Council resolution (UNSC). The UN monitoring group on Somalia and Eritrea will report to the UNSC, though the tone of the report will depend on UAE's maneuvering, and influence on the council.

Traditional donors

European Union, United Kingdom, United States, and many other European countries had been supporting Somaliland from many fronts since its inception; supports that are ranging from humanitarian to development to law enforcement trajectories, and are recently dubbed as the traditional donors as result of Turkish and Arabian involvement in the Somaliland politics. Although Andrew Allen, the UK deputy ambassador for Somalia, stated that the military base in Berbera "is not a UK issue" (Allen, 2017); however, since traditional donor were Somaliland friends during the tough times, they should be diplomatically engaged once such new security development emerges.

PROPHECY TO RISKS

The decision to grant an access right to a foreign military personnel leads to a profound impact to the country's future as well as foreign policy architect, and goals. In the study opinion, the military base agreement with United Arab Emirates is a relevant subject, which citizens, scholars, and politicians should converse about its potential unintended risks in a frank manner. Scholars in the realm of international affairs argue that "long-term presence of a country in a host state can result in political, environmental and social problems" (Lersch and Sarti, 2014)¹⁰. In this view of this claim, this paper tends to discourse some of these risks in the context of Somaliland in general, and Berbera port city in particular.

Security risk

Security is a risk factor that warrants attention. It is viewed that the UAE military base in Berbera will attract a response from some of the warring functions in Yemen,

⁹ UN Security Council. "Security Council Extends Arms Embargoes on Somalia and Eritrea" Adopting Resolution 2317 (2016). (2016) <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12584.doc.htm> (accessed April 7, 2017)

¹⁰ Further explanation "The establishment of foreign military bases and the international distribution of power" has been captured in page 96

particularly the Houthis, which can lead to a domestic insecurity. This concern is repeatedly advanced by Waddani opposition party and other independent politicians. It also poses regional security risk since the establishment of military base is an act that triggers an increased military build-up. Theoretically, the basing agreement poses a security dilemma to the neighbouring state(s), which is a “condition in which efforts to improve national security have the effect of appearing to threaten other states, thereby provoking military countermeasures” which can lead “a net decrease in security for all states” (Griffiths et al., 2008)¹¹. Any military build-up or additional layer of security arrangements made by a state provokes the rest of states in the region, by fact. It should be noted that Ethiopia’s diplomatic relations with Somaliland is more trustworthy in many ways, but security concern remains legitimate because the perceived common interest between Somaliland and Ethiopia is neither fixed nor uniform. We should, therefore, realize Ethiopia’s major concern towards the establishment of military base in Berbera, resulted by the new security cooperation between Somaliland and the United Arab Emirate.

Social risk

Sexual violence committed by foreign soldiers is a tormenting concern in areas where military bases are built and Berbera inhabitants are in no way different to living with this apprehension. Thus, the sexual violence alone does not induce this anxiety. The aftermath of sexual assault is devastating as well, resulting in a proud impact on victims’ physical, psychological, and social wellbeing. Consequently, the result of such acts may attract domestic and international spotlights, further causing unintended results to both parties in the agreement. The uproar caused by such in a US military base personnel in Japan is a case in point.

Political risk

When military base is negotiated during blistering political seasons, it creates a domestic political uproar immediately. In facts, some scholars in basing politics strongly argue that it “can bring political instability to the region in question” (Griffiths et al., 2008). Such instability emanates from two sources: Domestic, and regional. Put it simply, the domestic political subjects are currently feeling hard-hitting political pain due to the coming elections, which is scheduled to take place by end of 2017. Throughout this period, any military, political, and economic agreement that carries a sort of incentives raises an eyebrow. The opposition groups trust that

Berbera military base agreement will impose a foreign backed, undue incentive to the incumbent ruling party, which can lead to unnecessary domestic political unrest.

Environmental risk

A final risk that military base may pose in the host country is environmental deprecation. These environmental concerns include pollution and health hazards, which emanate from field exercises; including live firing and testing of conventional weapons both on the land and in the sea adversely impact living species. In other words, contamination of local inhabitant can lead to severe social tumults, which usually lead a “strain relations with the host country when its citizens are affected” (Myers, 2010). The military base in Berbera involves both naval and air operation that can lead adverse impact on oceanic and ground environment.

SCENARIOS FOR USE

As explained above, this military base will be used in any of the following four scenarios, depending on the circumstances:

1. In the long run, Berbera military base might be used to maintain the UAE’s military capability to intervention any contingency in the waters of red sea and Indian Ocean;
2. Conflict in Yemen explains the short run objective of this facility; thus, this base may serve to facilitate both air, and naval strikes to the anti-peace elements in the south of Yemen, the Houthis to be very specific to date;
3. This base may serve to secure an alternative route for Emirates’ products to Asia market in case Iran closes the Strait of Hormuz. The UAE is an immediate beneficiary of the Iran controlled Strait of Hormuz to export its oil supplies. Any exacerbation of ongoing dispute (mainly between UAE and Iran) can lead Iran to closure of the strip; thus, causing severe economic mishap to Emiratis. Since the closure of Hormuz is economically nerve-touching, Emiratis is forced think beyond the horizon. A safe passage to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea is an obvious alternative for Emiratis, but requires a heavy security and protection due to the insecure nature of this region. Hence, establishment military base in Berbera is best suited for this purpose, and able to secure commercial and economic interests in the water of India Ocean.
4. Wide-ranging war with its adversaries in the region, including terrorists and pirates. As clearly stipulated in its foreign policy goals, the UAE is committed to “eliminate terrorism in all its forms and diminish all its resources” (UAE, n.d), and acts of piracy that are threat to global peace and security. Therefore, it is difficult to rule out the military base in Berbera would be used to achieve this foreign policy goal.

¹¹ Security dilemma can be further read in *International Relations: The Key Concepts, 2nd Ed.* P. 295

CONCLUSION

Berbera basing politics is a complex and multifaceted question in the field of international relations. What makes the subject more complex is the multiplicity of the involved actors as well as the diversity of interests pursued during the negotiation processes. Ensuring national security, avoidance of regional conflict, economic competition, political influence, and securing market development packages are among the immediate interests which are heavily protected by the predominant six actors are trying to protect. Somaliland and the UAE are the primary actors in Berbera basing politics game. Granting access right to foreign forward forces has a profound influence to the hosting country's foreign policy architecture since it poses political, environmental and social risks.

Based on those risks, Somaliland should: (a) Negotiate the terms of the basing agreement more carefully, and inclusively to circumvent domestic political and social pressures. In other words, Somaliland needs the negotiation process conclude slowly, and naturally; (b) Technical experts including environmentalist should be concluded in the negotiations started by senior politicians; (c) Involvement of military personnel is imperative and finally (d) For the sustainability purpose, the negotiating need to focus on trade agreement via investment, and penetration of Emirates market.

Military base entails negotiation of two states in the realm of international law through Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), or Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs). Although the framework of the agreement is customized to the context; however, the generic nature of SOFAs, including content, and its approval process mirrors the draft military base agreement that was recently presented to the houses of the parliament. Technically, Somaliland is part of the current Federal Republic of Somalia, but on the other hand, its as a sovereign state under international law as it fulfills the entire statehood standards and the criteria set out in the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. This convention forms the basis of Somaliland cause to statehood, at least from international law perspective.

Establishment of military bases in a foreign soil is not a new phenomenon which its footprints can be traced back to ancient Greece and its city states. Politically, the presence of foreign forward forces pleases the attention of domestic, regional, and international controversies particularly when its connected to ongoing hostility, like the current situation in Yemen, for which the Emirates are planning to use for Berbera military base. Geographically, the location of Berbera supersedes the other coastal towns in the region since it is a sheltered harbour, with deep water. And, to satisfy the UAE's immediate and long-term interests, it is also facing the southern side of the Gulf of Aden, which is adding to its strategic

importance. Moreover, it is very close to the commercial, and oil shipping lanes, allowing the great powers to monitor the sea line traffic in the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, and Horn Africa. It is only this strategic signification that attracted USSR, USA, and now the Emirates.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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