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RED SEA RIVALRIES:  
THE GULF, THE HORN, AND THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF THE RED SEA

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PARTICIPANTS:

MODERATOR: MICHAEL O'HANLON  
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, The Brookings Institution

RUSH DOSHI  
Post-Doctoral Fellow, Foreign Policy, The Brookings Institution

ALEX RONDOS  
Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, European Union

ZACH VERTIN  
Fellow, Foreign Policy, Brookings Doha Center

KAREN YOUNG  
Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good afternoon, everyone, welcome to Brookings. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program, and we are sponsoring this event with our Africa Security Initiative, as well as with my friend, Zach Vertin, who is at the Brookings Doha Center, a joint operation, but we have scholarship and expertise from really throughout the country and Europe as well. And just delighted to have you here for this forum on the Red Sea and the geopolitics and surrounding key strategic and diplomatic and economic issues about this very important body of water that for a long time has not been thought of as an area of major power competition or rivalry or activity even though the Suez Canal, of course, is at one end of it and it's been important to the world economy and global military operations for a very long time.

But as we see a number of countries in that region of the world become more powerful, more interested in protecting their influence, more competitive in some cases with each other, we started to see the Red Sea become really much more a fulcrum of this competition but also cooperation.

And I'm just going to say a brief word here of additional introduction about the subject and then the panelists and then pass the baton to Zach, who will frame the conversation. He's much more of an expert on the topic, just back from Djibouti, a visiting fellow in our Doha Center in Qatar, distinguished author who wrote a great book on the Sudan peace process he was personally involved in, and so he will really frame today's conversation. And then we'll work through the next few panelists and then have a bit of discussion up here before going to you.

So let me just say again one more word on the region and then a word on each of the panelists before handing over to Zach.

When I think of this region, it's not one I claim a lot of expertise about, but if you think about the key neighbors, you have two of Africa's three most populous countries either along the Red Sea or right next to it. And that's, of course, Egypt and Ethiopia, each

with a population of plus or minus 100 million. Ethiopia, of course, doesn't quite touch the Red Sea because Eritrea does and that's contiguous space. And then we move down to Djibouti and Somalia. And we also have Sudan adjacent to the Red Sea. So if we think about Africa, we have probably close to 300 million people living in countries that are immediately proximate to this important body of water, a large fraction frankly of the entire continent's population and some of its most important actors.

Then, of course, we also have the Arabian Peninsula with Yemen and Saudi Arabia being the key countries along the Red Sea. Other parties interested as well, however, and certainly the Eastern Arabian Peninsula states, like the UAE and Qatar also quite interested in projecting influence and not that far away. And then Turkey. And again, Zach is going to frame the overall geography. But when I look at the map I'm struck my just how many important countries are now in a position to reach out and touch the Red Sea for better or worse in one way or another. And it's sort of a first in the sense that, again, this has been a body of water where big ships and super powers have transited for a long time but not where the regional actors have necessarily had quite the capacity that they have today in many cases. At least that's the way it looks to me. Zach is going to clean up my mess and frame it much more intelligently in just a minute.

Next to him, Alex Rondos is the special representative of the European Union to the Horn of Africa. We're honored to have him with us today. He has held that position for eight years. Also, he has a long lineage in Africa having been born there. Greek citizen, a Greek ambassador, but educated in Africa and also in England, and worked with Catholic Relief Services for a long time, but then also created the first inter-Orthodox faith charity and humanitarian relief agency which now operates in a number of countries ranging from Russia to some of the places we're talking about today. And so very privileged to have him.

To his left is Karen Young from the American Enterprise Institute. And since I'm cherry-picking the most fun facts out of each bio, just to give you a sense and you can, of

course, see their more detailed bios elsewhere, on a panel with a lot of global, you know, trotters and a lot of people who have been all over the world, Karen may win the prize for being the woman of five continents as I count it in terms of where she has done her studies, her various kinds of field research. She was a Fulbright scholar, for example, in South America. She's also studied and taught in the broader Middle East region and UAE, and wrote a 2014 book on the UAE. Now she's just next door here at the American Enterprise Institute.

And finally, Rush Doshi. Rush began his academic career brilliantly in an institution that Zach and I have also had to be the privilege to be part of at Princeton. Unfortunately, he's fallen off the straight and narrow a bit since then getting -- after his undergraduate at Princeton, he went to Harvard for his Ph.D., and he's now affiliated in part with Yale. So these are blemishes on an otherwise sterling and very promising career. But fortunately, we're trying to get him back to the straight and narrow because we also have a claim on him this year at Brookings and perhaps beyond. He's a post-doc here with us in the Foreign Policy program.

So thank you for being here. Thank you for listening to my long, rambling introduction. But now Zach is going to put things in much more cogent terms.

My friend, over to you.

MR. VERTIN: I think you've covered it pretty well.

Thanks, everyone, for being here, sharing an interest in this kind of new region, one I find particularly fascinating and have followed for a number of years since I was in the last administration. And it really has become, as you know, a very hot issue over the last couple years. And this is really in many ways about two, in some ways, distinct regions fast becoming one. So there is a real history across both shores of the Red Sea, but the level of the surge in political and economic and strategic engagement that we've seen in recent years is really unprecedented. Right? So on one side -- or together, you have these different forms of government, different cultures, different kinds of diplomacy that are really

crashing together astride this body of water, by the way, which happens to be one of the most shipping routes in the world and a major strategic chokepoint. We'll talk about all of these issues.

So I am really excited about this issue, about the opportunities, but also concerned about the risks, right? And in many ways one of the central themes of this story is Middle Eastern rivalries playing out now on a much bigger chess board. We've seen this in several adjacent regions but not least in the Horn of Africa.

It's also interesting for a second region, and that is many of you, whether you're in governments or foreign ministries or international institutions, will have confronted the same institutional gap that I and others have; right? We have folks that watch Africa and we have folks that watch the Gulf in the Middle East. And they're not historically very good at talking to one another. Right? And so this has been an exercise in trying to straddle this issue figuratively.

Trevor, can we put up the map real quick?

So just to give a sense of the map that Michael outlined, this is a product we did in recent months. There have been all sorts of rumors and talk about the proliferation really of commercial ports and military bases on the Red Sea; right? And in many ways this is the sort of most tangible manifestation of this conversation, right, is this mad dash for real estate, particularly on the African side of the coast. So we tried to frame each of these issues here outlining the countries involved, the stakeholders, the terms of whether it's a port or a military base, its current status and some relevant points of analysis just to try and distill this all in one place. So you can find that on our website, and hopefully it's a useful tool to you.

I'm going to ask Trevor to take it down now just so we're not all --

So I'll briefly, as Michael said, frame the issue in three tiers, very simply, and that will kind of offer us entry points.

First is what's happening in the Horn of Africa, which by the way on its own

is really remarkable. Extraordinary changes after years of stasis in many parts of the region. I'll mention two in particular. Ethiopia, as many of you know, a new prime minister came to power and the changes that are happening right there now are really, really unprecedented. In some ways the lid has been lifted off Ethiopia after many years and there's both incredible opportunity, a lot of buzz about the new prime minister and his introducing liberalizing reforms and appointing more women to the cabinet and really opening up Ethiopia. Very exciting but incredibly, incredibly fragile. Right? And so what happens in Ethiopia as we've already seen around the region spills over and impacts Eritrea. It impacts Somalia, it impacts Djibouti, and it impacts the rest of the rest of the region, including the second country I'll mention, which is Sudan. Right? So Sudan sort of figures in this conversation as part of the greater horn, and in the last 10 days, if you've been following the news, it suddenly is going to figure, for better or worse, in a much bigger way in this wider conversation.

So the first tier is sort of these transitions, remarkable political, economic transitions and potential for opening up across the Horn of Africa.

The second part of our conversation or the second tier are the Gulf States and this wider Red Sea. And this is really the fat part of our conversation, if you will. So I mentioned these unprecedented levels of interest from Gulf States with really deep pockets and big appetites. And this presents, I think, real opportunities for political and economic integration with the Horn of Africa, but it also, as I mentioned, possesses risks. And I think the question really for the African states on the western shores of the Red Sea is can they harness these relationships? Can they harness what are right now quite asymmetric relationships and do so in a way that benefits them without either surrendering their sovereignty or getting drawn into the Gulf crisis, right, which has really been exported to the region?

The third tier Michael alluded to is this larger question of greater power competition. For those of us that worked in the Horn of Africa and tried to get greater

attention on the region for many years, suddenly there is a great deal of attention. And this in large part deals with the question of China and China's arrival in Djibouti, this tiny city state at the southern gate of the Red Sea. Really, it's one natural resource is its geographic location. The Chinese have arrived there in economic terms, but also, most notably, with its first-ever overseas military base. And that base sits just down the road from the only U.S. base in Africa. And so many of you will have seen over the last year and a half this spiked some concern in Washington.

And so as Michael said, I'm just back from Djibouti and trying to separate the fact from the fiction. Right? What is cause for concern there? And what opportunities are there? And I think in many ways we'll talk about this, but Djibouti is a test case. Right? It's a test case for the Chinese and it's a test case for us. What can we learn here and what kind of precedent will that set as China continues to rise around the globe?

So those are the three tiers, and we'll jump in at each level and ultimately invited you to do as well.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic, Zach. Thank you.

By the way, I should mention there are about eight chairs up here which have signs that say they're reserved but they're not, at least not anymore. I will hereby declare them free and available. So please feel free if you wish.

Also, now, if I could begin, Alex, with you, and maybe starting with the immediate proximate states, the first tier or first circle in the framework that Zach has outlined, an area that you've been working hard at now for eight years in your current job and even longer throughout your career. How would you describe the dynamics that are at play and the promise versus the peril of where we are at this strategic moment?

MR. RONDOS: Well, thank you. First of all, thank you very much for having me with you.

About three or four years ago it became apparent to me and my colleagues that the environment around the Horn of Africa was shifting. We were seeing new players

come in and Zach has just described them. Primarily, it was the spillover of differences within the Gulf competing for the region. And the way it looked to us was that for the first time in many, many years in recent history, Saudi Arabia, The Emirates, others, were beginning to pay attention to their western flank in a way that they hadn't really before. And the sense is that they were now becoming operational in terms of investments, securing ports, and the like. With the outbreak of the Yemen conflict, this became a more militarized or securitized presence, which has all sorts of implications for the governments of the eastern coast of Africa. So that began to wake us up, and I started trying to raise the alarm among my -- not the alarm but just get people to wake up and pay attention.

So I'm very glad we're at the stage where this has now become a more open discussion. It needs to be. Otherwise, I think silence and denial opens -- the great risk is misunderstanding and miscalculation. We have a proliferation of new players. It's a multiplication, but also they're accelerating. There's a dynamic here at work.

Now, if you look at it from the point of view of the countries in the Horn of Africa, and Zach has just alluded to the fact, we are going through a transformation in this region which people must be very careful not to look at it in a short-term transactional and transient way. In effect, what we all need to wake up to and understand is that there is an entirely new generation in this region, but in many other parts of Africa, that is coming of political age. This is no longer a development project where we say how do we employ certain youth? They are acquiring a political voice and expressing it in different ways. And if we don't understand that, we will not understand this new, if you will, tidal wave that's gathering in the politics of Africa, and certainly of the Horn of Africa.

In Sudan today, you only have to look at who is on the streets. Youth, educated youth, in vast numbers, and women. But that's something special to Sudan. But we should take note. Ethiopia we saw last year, again, people mobilized and liberated. So what we have is, first of all, what we have to manage is what I would call a collision between the expectations, the new demographic expectations of youth, with the combination of



misgovernance or the failed delivery of governments to their people. This new generation is basically saying what do I belong to? And secondly, are beginning to define what they want to belong to. That is absolutely fundamental if we don't understand that, it's a political issue, it's not just about finding some jobs because they're defining it.

Therefore, a more fundamental point is, which to me is very exciting, is you're seeing a new generation which is sort of showing that Africa can be its own agent in change. Okay? It may be messy. It may be unpredictable, but there is something happening. And for those of us of my generation, it is just a thrill to see that happening. There's something new occurring.

That means that we have governments that are some -- what we're talking about is transitions here, deep transformations. Now, if we use an analogy, my take on what's happened in Ethiopia and is emerging now in Sudan, this is the 1989 moment for not only this part of Africa but I think a much wider area. We might want to look back and ask ourselves what were some risks then? We happily let shock therapy occur with Russia. What did it give us? What is the conclusion now for a place like Ethiopia? A hundred million people who come from a pretty centralized system. How do they transform? How do you manage this? Are we alive to the challenge? Are we equal to it? And are we confusing a rather blithe support for a democratization process when, in fact, people right now want to see dividends immediately? The youth are on the streets with expectations.

That is the real context that's occurring, and we'll have a chance perhaps to go into more depth in it.

Now, those who have interests and are coming in to the region, to me this has all the attributes of the scramble for Africa of what started almost 200 years ago. It is about competing interests, which are both security and commerce, but the method is surprisingly similar. It is about identifying where one places ones entrepose. If you look at the west coast of Africa, it's littered with old castles and forts. Are these ports the new equivalent?

It is about acquiring local proxies. It is about local leaders either striving for survival or looking for money, trying to find someone to sponsor them. That is the recipe for a bit of a mess. The only minor consolation is that historically at least we Europeans are not involved in that but we are becoming rather sleep spectators. And that's a problem, too.

But that's the context of what, as I see it on the ground, and we need to be very, very attentive. And that is why, for instance, the European Union about six months ago, it's all its leaders, when they gathered, actually came out with a policy, a formal policy calling for the creation of something like a forum which allows the two sides of the Red Sea to be talking with each other, create the mechanisms which at the very least prevent misunderstanding or even conflict. That's the heart of what led us to that and what we see now.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic framing.

If I could just follow up with one question before going to Karen. Karen, we know, is going to talk to some extent, I think, about competitive dynamics involving the Gulf States in this part of the world. And you alluded to the way in which perhaps some of these countries in Africa watch each other. The youth movements, the demands for political reforms. We see some dynamics. But in what other ways do you describe the African countries as acting as a cohesive, or perhaps a non-cohesive community? In other words, are the interesting dynamics, the various outside players with any one African state like Djibouti? Or are there interesting dynamics between Sudan and Egypt, between Sudan and Ethiopia? We know about Ethiopia and Eritrea's past. Are those kinds of dynamics within the African states important for this story as well?

MR. RONDOS: Yeah, they're vital. Historically speaking, I think we're at a moment where these countries of the region have a choice and it's a race against time. Either they gather themselves and become a more coherent unit to be able to navigate the relationship with the world outside them or they will be picked apart. And I've been on record even talking about that with the heads of states of the region. That's the one.

Now, what is really occurring at the moment has been the quite dramatic change of policy on the part of the Ethiopians with Eritrea. This was the frozen conflict of the Horn of Africa. And it's become somewhat less frozen. Now, let's watch and see how it unfolds. But that's key. And because of that now you've had Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea signing agreements. Djibouti will, I hope, eventually get involved in that but Zach has just been there. He can tell us more about it. So what we have is the beginnings of something that resembles the small horn as some of us call it, the original small horn. They seem to be very keen to make that work. And good for them if they do. But this region, there's a web of relations which runs much deeper, so it cannot be too exclusive. And the latest changes in Sudan suggest that Sudan might sort of be able to fit in, assuming it goes in the direction that it looks like at the moment.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. Thank you very much.

Karen, over to you. Please help us understand how and when and up to the present the different Gulf States that have a strong interest in the Red Sea with a particular eye on the UAE, but others as well, have started to see this particular area that is not their immediate neighborhood but still pretty darn close. And we all know from the graphic that they're getting more and more active.

Over to you, please, and thanks for joining us today.

MS. YOUNG: Thank you for inviting me.

I really like the way that we've started to frame the conversation and to kind of tack onto it.

Alex has said there's definitely transformation going on across the wider region, right? We think about the MENA region and what's going on in the Horn. And so maybe it's useful to think of these as like concentric circles all rotating like gears. And so to think about the kind of change that creates cascade effects or domino effects between regions is really important. But I think it's also important to contextualize that there have been good ties and important ties between the Gulf and the Horn for a long time. And we

see this in terms of priorities of food security of the Gulf. We see it in people-to-people ties and using Dubai especially as a financial hub for commercial operations in the Horn. Earlier, you know, antipiracy efforts which were multilateral and with the West and really a kind of training phrase for the UAE and other states to create expeditionary forces and to involve themselves in training operations with local militaries in the Horn. So that's been going on for a bit.

But this new phase, I think, has some pretty interesting dynamics. And even if you think about earlier port facilities, like how Djibouti and how Adan begins with DP World. That's not the statecraft that we see now. Those were commercial operations, which weren't necessarily very successful ones. Right? And so the drive of what I see as especially UAE economic statecraft towards the region is very much, I think, a smart combining of a development and security nexus.

It's not my phone. I don't know whose it is.

And so the priority of seeing this region as central to both economic and security needs makes a lot of sense. And it makes sense because, you know, you mentioned, Zach, the term "chokepoint." So both the Bab el-Mandab and the Strait of Hormuz are major chokepoints for international trade. And it's not just about oil. Right? So most of the oil that comes from the Gulf goes eastward. But what goes around the Arabian Peninsula is about 20 percent of the world's maritime trade in rice. About 28 percent of the world's maritime trade in wheat. About 30 percent of the world's maritime trade in fertilizers. So again, the food security priority, the need to be, you know, part and connected to global trade flows, I think the Gulf States and the UAE understand very well that that's their future.

And so military basing comes later and with the kind of first training, with the piracy, and now, you know, larger training efforts. And of course, then 2015 Yemen. But these things have been building, you know, in gears that have been turning and widening in scope.

I also want to mention what I think has motivated this switch or this ignition

of a more interventionist foreign policy from the Gulf States, from Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, in particular. But they share some things in common.

And so the first driver of this more intervention as foreign policy is really what I call the "magic decade." And the magic decade was 2003 to 2014. This enormous generation of revenue from oil and gas exports. And so this allows these states to have the capacity, the economic capacity to put themselves on the map in different ways in a wider -- widening sphere of influence. And the widening sphere of influence is rationalized more and more after 2011 and the Arab uprisings across the region. After 2013, more importantly, after UAE gets more involved in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in 2011 to 2013, in Egypt. And then, of course, in late 2014, the beginning of the war in Yemen and the Saudi intervention in March 2015, which the Emiratis joined.

This creates the security threat of really feeling the pressure, and as they see it, as the UAE and the Saudis see as the threat of Iran into the peninsula, and justifies this expansionist view. So I think we have to see it as this combination of the development security nexus, knowing that if you're in a region that is growing and that is prospering you are safer, and knowing also that the way you protect yourself is to broaden that sphere, to make economic partnerships, but the sense of threat comes from this rising threat of sense of attack from Iran, and also this sense of disengagement from the U.S. And so all of these things start to build in 2011, intensify after 2013, get even more critical after 2015. So it's no surprise here we are now that there is this strategic imperative to be more present physically, to be more engaged economically, to devote more financial resources. I mean, the \$3 billion UAE injection into Ethiopia is just one example of the widening use of these kinds of tools. And that's just one aspect. It's really a big circle. The way Emirates Airlines thinks about it is, you know, the billions of people within a five-hour flight of Dubai, and that's that sphere of influence.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And Zach wants to add one point.

But before I come to him I wanted to ask one more question about the Gulf

States in the Red Sea region that builds on what you said. But I just want to understand, to what extent are they fundamentally competing with each other? You talked about the importance of this region for them as a group. We know there are a lot of rivalrous dynamics within the GCC, to put it mildly, but we also know that this plays out differently in different parts of the world. My good friend Jeff Feltman has taught me a lot about how these play out in Libya and there are different dynamics in every single country. Are the relationships in the Red Sea primarily competitive or are they just all more interested than they used to be and not necessarily rivalists with each other?

MS. YOUNG: I think they are different styles. I think the Emirates style of engagement is different than the Saudi style is different from the Qatari style and the Turkish style as well. They have different strengths. Is it competitive? Absolutely. And you could see the Emirati, especially taking up real estate, a term that Zach also used, in Bambara and Bosaso, is an attempt to just hold ground. And in Somalia, we see this tension between Qatar-Turkey on one side and the UAE on the other really, really intensify to the point where it's destabilizing to the federal government and, you know, plays out in domestic politics severely.

What's the future of that? I think it will continue. There is just no shortage or end to this sense of a national importance to be more present, to reserve space so that someone else doesn't enter it, but also, I mean, it's national interest. So, you know, you can say, oh, it's just about the GCC dispute. No, I don't think so. I think these are national security and economic priorities. They are competitive. And the fact that, you know, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are not speaking to their neighbor only intensifies it. But it's not the root of that behavior.

MR. O'HANLON: Great, thanks.

Zach, over to you before going to Rush.

MR. VERTIN: Trevor, if you're in there, can we put that map up once more? I just want to make one more point. Maybe not.

Just on the motivations. I mean, I agree with what Karen said. I do think that we've talked about the Yemen crisis in 2015 and how that has informed this in some way. I don't want us to underestimate how much the Gulf crisis and how much that competition has colored their engagement in the Horn of Africa for the last couple of years. And in many ways this has been unwelcomed by a lot of the African states. Right? So this has been hugely polarizing in Somalia. It's caused real problems in Djibouti. The Ethiopians to their credit so far have been able to try to balance both sides. Right? So very recently you saw Prime Minister Abe make a trip to the Gulf and he made a point of visiting both Doha and Abu Dhabi on the same day. Right? So asserting their national interests. But some of these states went to the Horn of Africa, just as they went to other regions in the wake of the 2017 GCC crisis and put real pressure on African states to fall in line. And that's caused some real tension.

And thirdly, if you remember from the map, Karen has alluded to this, but it's no secret that the most assertive actor in the Gulf so far has been the UAE. And if you look at the entire African coast, you see their interest in ports in Egypt, in Jeddah, down the entire African coast -- Assab, Somaliland, Puntland, Mogadishu. But also, I want to note that there's another element here, and that's control of the entire south coast of Yemen. Right? So the ports aren't necessarily operating there but there are historical ports here and the Emirates have made this a priority.

So if you look at this map again, none of these ports, in and of themselves, are necessarily game changes. Right? But I think the view from Abu Dhabi is you piece together this constellation and you get to their primary goal, which is shaping the future of maritime trade in the Western Indian Ocean. Right? And so the Dubai ports world and the Emirates have made port operation and port development one of their central industries and they've proven a comparative advantage to this. But, and Rush will talk to this, they see Chinese trade volume coming. Right? They see trade volume coming. They see it entering Djibouti into the fast-growing African market. And if you take one more look at the map you'll

see that Dubai port is not on that route. Right? It's out of the way. And so I think the Dubai ports' world and the Emirates right now are making an attempt to insert themselves in the belt and road initiative, to insert themselves in the future of maritime trade rather than be simply replaced in the space of five or 10 years. And that for me is one of the most important driving factors in this.

MR. O'HANLON: So very quickly. If I could ask each Karen and Zach before I go to Rush -- Rush is going to talk, I'm sure, about the broader Chinese and U.S. dimension which is, as we know, around the world becoming not just economic but military and strategic. It's a very complex competition even in the context of a relationship that's multifaceted.

But when I hear you two talk about the rivalries with the Gulf States they have with each other, it sounds like it's mostly economic. That it's not primarily ideological or strategic or military. Am I wrong? Is this primarily an economic competition shaping the future of trade in the Indian Ocean? Or are there elements that could be interpreted as military or coercive or ideological in some broader sense? Do you see what I'm getting at? I know there's a lot to say, but just a quick answer. To what extent do I have that partly right? To what extent do I have that mostly wrong?

MR. VERTIN: Both.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay.

MR. VERTIN: I think all of those elements are -- I mean, I think there's an economic component, but in many ways, at least since 2017, it has really accelerated as a result of the crisis. And that is about economics. It is also about ideology. Right? And so there is, real or perceived is a view that Qatar, and by extension its partner in Turkey have an interest or have ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, and for the Emiratis and the Saudis, and the Emiratis in particular, that's a no go. Right? And so, you know, the elements that shaped the Gulf crisis in its beginning, as I mentioned, have just been exported to this region. So I do think it's a competition that's happening on multiple levels, and you know, I



think there's blame on both sides. Right? There are newcomers to this and there are folks that have been there before.

Just one point on Turkey. Turkey figures in almost all of these conversations. And yet, you know, this is an issue lamented by many of its diplomats because they would argue that they've been in the region longer and their engagement has been more nuanced. Right? It's not about individual relationships or the immediate financial resources they can bring to bear. Somalia is a case in point. They've been there for longer, so in some ways I think their entry points have been different. Turkey did come sooner, but I do think Turkey has now, despite its increasing focus at home, has come to realize the soft power value of its assets and its relationships in the region. And each side in each of these states and these relationships is rushing to snatch up territory, as Karen mentioned, so the other side can't get it, and really reinforce these client relationships. And sometimes, as I mentioned, that's been -- there is opportunity there but it's also proven destabilizing.

MR. O'HANLON: I guess, Alex, I'll come to you in a second.

You were talking about how these countries could be picked off if they don't work together. Is that sort of the concept that you were alluding to as well?

MR. RONDOS: Absolutely. Yes, yes. I mean, that's what I mean when -- if you follow the old scramble, it's the same MO again. Absolutely. And there will be a lot of people waiting to either be picked off, you know, and there will be others happily at work trying to kind of penetrate and establish influence. I take that as a given.

I think one point, if I may just quickly on the ideological aspect of this, look, we need to understand that this region is going through -- I'm talking about the Horn of Africa -- a profound shift, if you will, in terms of the religious culture. The two most successful proselytisms we have seen in many, many decades, if longer, of the expansion of the Wahhabis on the one hand, certainly in Africa. I mean, it's quite phenomenal. If you just look at it as proselytism. And on the other hand, in Africa, is the rise of Pentecostalism. So one needs to look ahead and ask oneself, where will they meet? Okay? And part of it is in

this region.

And given that in Eastern Africa, the tradition has been, you know, I'm sure Muslims and experts, I will apologize if I use terminology too loosely, but Eastern Africa was really the place, as much as Western Africa, the home of sort of the Sufi ideology. There was a coexistence. And in Eastern Africa where we have large Christian and large Muslim populations, what we're seeing now is the emergence of a more exclusivist definition of religious identity which is beginning to gnaw away at the trust that allowed communities to coexist. This is potentially something Ethiopia has to look at. It's played out in different countries like Kenya. Obviously, not in Somalia. That's a different issue. But there are some fault lines there. So there is an ideological dimensions. And those from outside, and I'd say specifically Saudi Arabia which has, you know, made very clear it wants to redefine its own -- the way in which faith is practiced within Saudi Arabia. All I can say, and I've told them in the past, that message has not reached East Africa. Okay?

MR. O'HANLON: Karen, how would you describe the nature of the competition?

MS. YOUNG: Yeah. I'll just add that the politics of intervention get really messy when they become intervention in the domestic politics of the recipient states. And so certainly, there's a preference from the UAE and Saudi Arabia for secular authoritarian capitalism, however you want to envision that. But it's also transactional, and they're willing to work with all kinds of groups as we've seen in Yemen. And I think we've seen in the Horn as well. So the cascade effects are difficult.

At the same time, I think, you know, this is very experimental, right? So the vulnerability of the recipient states of, you know, of financial intervention of these new bases and ports, it's just unwritten. So we really don't know. But yeah, I mean, the Qatari-Turkish approach has been more through Islamic charities. They've grown deep roots in Somalia in that way. The Turks have shown themselves to be very effective in kind of administration. So you get alternate models of the delivery of services, alternate models of the delivery of,

you know, cash injections. But, you know, the preference for partner can be fluid.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Excellent.

And please be preparing your questions because I'm going to go to Rush. But because we've already had so much conversation I'm going to go to you pretty soon.

But Rush, please bring us now into the third circle and the third tier of players. And with a specific emphasis on the country that you know so well. I should say Rush does a lot of his research reading documents in Mandarin to understand Chinese thinking on this and other strategic choices facing the PRC. So the floor is over to you.

MR. DOSHI: Thanks so much. And thanks so much to everyone for spending part of your day with us today.

Let me just start by saying that there's a clear -- there's a growing notion in parts of China that the Red Sea is a strategic theater. It's not just true in the government. That's also true in, you can argue, the world of film.

There was a movie that came out last year in 2018 called Operation Red Sea. And the premise of the movie was that an antipiracy Chinese taskforce was in the Red Sea. Some Chinese citizens were taken hostage and the Chinese basically had to save them. And in the process of saving them they encountered a nuclear proliferation ring and they stopped that as well. And then victorious, they sailed back to China. And on the way there they encountered a naval taskforce from the United States and they threatened them and the movie cuts to black. So we don't know exactly what happens next.

MR. VERTIN: We're going to show it after if you want to stick around.

MR. DOSHI: Movie watch party after.

So that just goes to show that there's a consciousness, increasingly, in China about two things. Number one, different theaters in the world. But number two, also that China has overseas interests and those interests matter.

And that leads me to kind of a second point, which is that as we think about China's global ambitions, we should understand that they think about global liabilities.

Opportunities as well, but also liabilities. And what are those liabilities? Well, 100 million Chinese citizens go abroad for tourism every single year according to statistics from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Something like one to two million Chinese citizens currently live in Africa, and about half a million in the Middle East. I think 30,000 Chinese businesses are registered around the world, and that's just the human dimensions.

We get to the economic dimension and it's slightly more interesting, perhaps different story. The economic dimension is that, of course, China is relying heavily on oil and commodity flows from this part of the world, all of which go through the Indian Ocean, all the way to China, which makes these waterways extremely important to China. And, of course, as a result of that importance, China has kind of had to adjust its military and naval strategy.

And that leads to my third point. We're seeing a China that is increasingly going global in its military profile. And that's not exactly a new phenomenon. If you go back about 10 years, 11 years now, China dispatched the first antipiracy taskforce to the Red Sea in that area. Right? That was the first time, 2008. Since then it's done it more than 30 times, and each time there's a number of vessels. They've learned a lot more about how to do it. They stop in different places to resupply. And they've actually gained a lot of experience. It's a learning effort in part. And I say it's a learning effort because piracy is not a huge problem for Chinese vessels. I mean, one half of one percent of vessels encounter some kind of piracy problem in that area, and yet China has a significant presence there.

The second component to this is that China has sort of changed its view, its naval doctrine you could argue, the kind of military writing about its global profile. It's talked increasingly about the importance of a blue water navy. So in 2012, it talked about -- in its white paper, defense white paper talked about the importance of a navy that can travel the distant blue waters. In 2015, they kind of doubled down on that. It sort of made it even more clear that China needed to be what they called a maritime great power. And so that language has been repeated by senior leaders as well, including by the current leader,

President Xi Jinping.

So what does all of this tell us? It tells us that as China, given its interests, given its liabilities, expands outward, it's going to need support to do that properly.

And that brings us to Djibouti. Because Djibouti is, in many ways, a test case for what a global PLA, Peoples Liberation Army, could look like.

Now, China has promised for many, many years that it would never have an overseas base. That was kind of one of these bedrock Chinese principles. And yet, it nonetheless opened what it calls, not a base, but a logistics or support facility in Djibouti. Right? It's an interesting kind of rhetorical sleight of hand. And the reason they did that, and Zach can talk more about this since he was just there, in my view and the view of some of the writings that I've read is basically they want to learn. They know that in the future they're going to need a global presence, and this is a great opportunity to understand how to do it. And one of the most complicated parts of this picture is having the ability to station your military on the sovereign soil of another country is extremely challenge. There are all kinds of legal issues, diplomatic issues, operational issues. And China is learning now to navigate them. And by some accounts, and Zach can tell us a little bit more, it's learning quickly.

So I'll leave it there and I'll just add one small thing, which kind of builds on Alex's point. This part of the world has historically mattered quite a bit for Eurasia, for control of Eurasia, for control of India even. If you go back 500 years to the Portuguese and the Dutch, the French, the British, all of them had some kind of presence in this area. And it was important to have that presence to project power further. The Portuguese began in many ways on Western Indian and the Eastern Coast of Africa. And so the idea that the places that mattered then also matter now isn't just some kind of rhetorical slate of hand. It's actually real because there are certain geographic realities there. And there are chokepoints. There are certainly important ways to control vast quantities of water. There's all kinds of reasons geographically why these areas matter. And so that's why I think we're going to see China become a much more active player in the region going forward.

And I think I'll leave it there for now.

MR. O'HANLON: That's great, but I have a follow up which is to try to read Chinese minds and thinking and answer an unanswerable question which is, nonetheless I'm going to pose to you, which is to what extent does China see its increasing role in this region as fundamentally competitive with and rivalrous with the United States? And to what extent does it have in mind a more collaborative, sort of, you know, Gulf of Adan counterpiracy mission broadly defined approach where they're just now doing more their fair share as a rising greater power and they hope that it can be as cooperative and collaborative as possible? I mean, we all have our moments when we're trying to sing Kumbaya and holds hands, so I'm sure they can tell a good story about the latter motivation, but to what extent when you try to discern the driving impetus, is it more rivalrous and competitive or is it more collaborative?

MR. DOSHI: That's a great question. I'm not sure the answer is very easy to render because I don't know that they completely have figured that either. Right now, China, in my view, has had a grand strategy for going back to the end of the Cold War. So starting in the early 1990s. And that strategy was really focused much more on pushing the United States to some degree or minimizing some degree of American influence in Asia, building China's own influence, and sphere of influence you could argue within Asia.

But the global question is one that they've still been trying to figure out. And there's quite a bit of speculation within China on what their global strategy should be. I think there are some aspects that they've figured out, but just to give you an example. Within China there is a system for funding research at universities. And within that system, the number one topic for quite a bit of time was maritime issues. That was what got the most funding for about 10 years. But in the last few years, and especially with the change in the political situation in the United States, we've seen that China is much more focused on global governance questions or global questions, and those are now the top-funded issue.

So it just goes to show there's a lot of thinking in China about what the way

forward is. And that's part of the reason why it's not entirely clear just how rivalrous their perspective is.

But if I could just go a little further. Why did they pick Djibouti? I mean, why -- we've heard why Djibouti matters from a strategic perspective. I've talked a little bit about why it's always mattered historically. But there's also a kind of political rationale. China has thought that it needs a presence in this part of the world for a long time. Again, it imports something like 60 percent to two-thirds of its oil. A lot of that flows through this part of the world. Forty percent of its trade goes through the Suez Canal. It recognizes that there's liabilities there. If the United States or India or others decide they want to interdict Chinese shipping, that's a possibility. It's not easy to do but it's one the Chinese have thought about for a long time. And so they feel like they need to be there.

And in some ways Djibouti is maybe one of the less provocative places to be if you're going to be in the region. And maybe Zach will talk a little more about this. And the reason I say that is because there's already so many countries operating in Djibouti. There's obviously the United States, but there's also France. And of course, there's Japan, not to mention others as well.

So when China throws its hat in the ring, it doesn't build a base, it builds a support facility, perhaps it's more justifiable, less controversial, as a way of kind of exerting presence. It's definitely provocative but maybe it's the least provocative of provocative options. That's one way to look at it.

So I think that China definitely sees strategic completion as part of the reason it's there, to kind of more firmly answer the question. It's not all about antipiracy. In fact, antipiracy, I think, has never really been the goal of China's Indian Ocean presence and Red Sea presence. I think it's really about preparing itself for a world in the future where it's able to better secure its equities there. But given the possibility that in the future if there is conflict, the United States or India might act, you know, in a negative way for China's interests given the resource flows across the region.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. Thank you.

So I want to give anybody who has got a quick thought they want to offer at this juncture of the conversation the opportunity, and then we'll go to the audience for their questions.

Does anybody want to react to where we are at this juncture?

MR. VERTIN: I'll just briefly add, Rush and I were talking about this earlier. I mean, part of the reason I went to Djibouti was to dig into this question of is this a rivalry? What's fact and what's fiction? As some of you will surely know, this became very hot about a year ago on Capitol Hill. Basically, Dubai Ports World was operating the port in Djibouti for quite some time after some accusations, whatever you think happened, there were accusations that that port was being underdeveloped in order to keep Je Jebal Ali Port in Dubai the sort of main game in town. Right? So the Emiratis -- there's a falling out and they leave town and the Chinese -- the concern is that the Chinese, in addition to their military base will be able to take greater control of Djibouti's ports. And the rationale for this is the issue of a debt trap. People looked at Sri Lanka, they looked at elsewhere, and they were concerned that Djibouti had taken out too much debt to build a railway to Ethiopia, to build this new port, to build some other infrastructure. And the concern was that there would be a national security interest. That America's only U.S. base in all of Africa is there and that if the Chinese assume control of this port that would present a serious threat to us in terms of freedom of access and movement.

So I do think these are issues to watch after digging into this for a week, and I don't think there's any need for outsize paranoia or hysteria. I mean, the debt question is an open one. I think the Djiboutians are in a better place than is sometimes reported in the media. And I visited all three of Djibouti's ports, including the port in question that got so much attention on Capitol Hill. And despite fears that it had already been taken over and asserted control by the Chinese of its 700 employees, there wasn't a single Chinese employee on site.



MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Excellent.

We look forward to your questions. I think I'll take about three at a time and I'll ask the panelists to each think about responding to maybe one or two out of each block of questions that we get. And we'll begin up here in the second row. We'll take two in the second row, one in the third. That will be round number one.

MS. SLAVIN: Thanks very much. I'm Barbara Slavin from the Atlantic Council. Very nice to see you, Alex.

MR. RONDOS: Indeed.

MS. SLAVIN: It's been a while.

Question is about Iran. It popped up here and there. Is Iran really active in the Red Sea? Is this just something that the Emiratis and the Saudis sort of stir up to excuse their own interventionist behavior? And don't most of the supplies to the Hutus go through Oman and not through the Red Sea? Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. Thank you.

The gentleman down here.

MR. EHRENREICH: Rick Ehrenreich, State Department, INR Africa.

Good presentation. Iran was interesting as well. I'm interested in your take on that.

The other thing is you made some good observations, Zach and Karen Young, on Turkey, but it was really striking to me how late in the conversation, how late in the conversation Turkey came up. When I sort of look at Turkey, particularly the way it engages in the Horn, it seems that the major conflict is Turkey versus UAE with the others playing supporting roles. Is that reasonable or is that not? Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Super. Thank you.

And then just behind you, please.

MR. WILLIAMS: Hi, how are you? My name is Chai Williams. I'm a student at Georgetown.

First of all, thanks so much for putting this event on. This is really fantastic.

My question was, we heard discussion about the different styles or how the GCC members are getting involved in Yemen and the Red Sea. We also heard about how the UAE is starting to integrate their presence into Yemen into like a broader trade network. I wanted to ask if you guys could explore a little bit more differences within UAE and Saudi, reasons for why they're getting involved in Yemen and the Red Sea rather than just how. Like, competition within them? Are those priorities different, and how are they different? Is there potential for competition in the medium to long term? Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: And before we come to the panel, is there a question anybody had for Rush? I wouldn't want to leave out the China dimensions. So we'll go here in the fourth row and then come back to everybody.

QUESTIONER: Hi, I have a question for you about the Chinese growing participation in the peacekeeping operations across Africa, because this is also something that the Chinese have been going -- doing as a way of learning. So if you can comment on that. Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. So why don't we start with you, Rush, and then we'll just work down the row.

MR. DOSHI: Thanks. That's right. There has been -- China is a top contributor, of course, to UN Peacekeeping operations. You know, one of the question is why, and where do they go? Certainly, there seems to be some degree of thinking about where they deploy peacekeepers that's based on strategic consideration. So South Sudan is probably one example of that. There are Chinese peacekeepers not just in Africa but also in the Middle East. I think there's about 1,000 in Lebanon, for example. So they certainly get around. They certainly get around to important places. But by and large, I think of China's peacekeeping role less as a kind of beneficence, less as kind of a generosity, and also less about strategy or strategic deployments and more about learning, just like I think about the base in Djibouti as kind of about learning.

There's a lot of writing that the Chinese did about the importance of peacekeeping operations and there's newspapers and other kinds of material produced by the Chinese military recounting what they learned on these operations. And often it give us a military that's not really been able to fight a war in a long time, a chance to practice military operations abroad. To practice some degree of expeditionary capabilities. And so I think of peacekeeping operations really in that capacity for China.

Hopefully I helped answer your questions. And I think, you know, just one last point I'd add is they'd often talk in my view, you know, when there's a conference with African states, they'll often mention the peacekeeping role that they have there as a kind of example of how they're contributing to the public good in Africa.

MR. O'HANLON: Super. Thank you.

Karen?

MS. YOUNG: Thanks. So many good questions.

Barbara, yours is a good one. We didn't talk too much about Iran and the ability of the UAE in Saudi Arabia to really convince Sudan and Eritrea to switch sides, so to speak, in 2014-2015. So that was sort of a precursor to a lot of the action or presence that we see now.

On the notion of what kinds of weapons or missiles or support flows through the Red Sea corridor to Houthi support in Yemen, I don't, you know, I don't have good intelligence information. People don't share that with me. I don't know. But it certainly is a fear. But I think your suggestion is probably correct, that the more likely route is over land. But I'm not privy to that kind of intelligence.

The Turkey question is a good one as well. I think it's really interesting. We see this also playing out in Sudan, the Suakin lease in late 2017 to the Turks, and Sudanese politics, I, you know, am no expert in but certainly one would wonder now with the change in government, how these relationships, long 99 year leases and new promises of financial support from Saudi Arabia in particular will influence Sudanese sharing of that space

between Iran and Saudi Arabia. So I think that's an open question.

The question about the UAE. The way I think of the UAE strategy towards the Horn is very much that there's a learning curve in effect as well. It's experimental. There's also the nature of UAE foreign policymaking in that it can turn on a dime, right, and we saw this in Somalia, in particular when there was a dispute. There was an aircraft that landed in the Mogadishu airport and there was \$10 million in cash that was seized and a dispute ensued between the central government in Somalia and the UAE, and quickly the training operation stopped. There was a UAE hospital that basically, within 24 hours, ceased operations.

That's not the kind of institutional capacity and decision-making that we would see present, of course, in U.S. foreign policy. You have long-term commitments. You have agencies which have relationships and financial commitments, staffing commitments, that can't turn on and off in that way. So this is, I think, a vulnerability for recipient states of this kind of aid and support.

What did the UAE learn from that experience? Well, they're back in Somalia. Right? They're trying to reengage. And so the preference for this very transactional and I'm mad, you know, take my ball and leave kind of behavior is not a long-term sustainable way to engage. The preference for personalistic relationships we have seen very clearly is a vulnerability because in these states, these are more -- there are lots of players. There's, you know, lots of faces and it's not just top to top. So this complicates those efforts considerably.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Mr. Ambassador?

MR. RONDOS: Yeah. I think two or three observations. I can't really speak to Iran except we've got to watch Yemen very carefully. When you sit on the African side, we're seeing a spike in all sorts of traffic coming out of Yemen which is either controlled or uncontrolled but beginning to pour across the Gulf of Adan. ISIS elements

short of shifting down. There's weapons, increasingly sophisticated weapons. In Somalia, we're discovering a level of technological sophistication in the bomb making and the type of weapon being used by Shimab, which can only suggest that there is training and knowledge being brought in. This is not indigenously designed. So where is this coming from? And I'm not saying it's Iran, but the passage by which this sort of trafficking occurs is well known. So I think that's one.

Turkey, UAE and those, you know, I can only look at it as I watch from the point of view of the Horn. Karen just made an illusion. Let me put it to you this way if I may kind of climb into the vernacular. You know, we do institutions; others tend to do something more personal. In very fluid times, let's put it this way, we offer good nutrition and others are offering cocaine. Okay? All right? And it's kind difficult made sexy to get caught up in nutrition when you can get a high. All right? Let's put it in very simple, human, political terms. And kind of let me leave it there. That's the issue. Okay? And that's what we've got to deal with. That's my worry here. And that's why I'm very worried that if we all take a rather lackadaisical approach to this region and don't get really invested now, there may be a problem further down the road that's much bigger and much more costly because we're the ones who are going to have to foot the bill for the humanitarian crises that arrive because everyone in Africa says, you know, you'll always pick up that bill. And we will because we're good people, and our taxpayers are willing to be generous on this. But, you know, for those of us who do policy, I think it's time to raise a bit of an alarm here and say let's wake up, buckle up, speed up, scale up, rather than somehow think this is a little corner of the world where, you know, stuff happens but, you know, it doesn't involve us. It will in a major way for the very reason that Karen has pointed out.

You know, on China, yes, they're there and I think I'd defer very much to what Rush says.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Zach?

MR. VERTIN: Well, first, I think cocaine and nutrition gave us the best chance of competing with the Mueller report news today. (Laughter)

So let's see. I'll jump on Rick's question about Turkey, something I'm likewise interested in. And while a lot of analysis and research has been done about the Gulf States in particular, as I mentioned, the Turks figure in these conversations almost as frequently.

I went to Accra recently for 10 days to try and dig into this and it was just in advance of the local elections there which took place a few weeks ago. And I mention that because I think that's a big part of this story is the domestic peace and trying to unpack sort of Erdogan's brand of populism where increasingly in recent years the line between domestic and foreign policy has been erased. Right? And in this you have the Egyptians -- Karen mentioned this. The Turkish and to some degree, Qatari investment in Suakin Island in Sudan on the Red Sea coast, which immediately put up red flags in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, and in the Emirates as well, and concern about a neo-Ottoman agenda, right? In the wake of the Arab Spring, Erdogan was pushing this agenda. Is he trying to move into our backyard, right? And there's a great deal of fear of this. At Suakin, I'm not convinced it's terribly well founded. If you know anything about Suakin Island, it's pretty hard to put up a military base there. I think the Turkish economy would suggest they're not really in a position to do this right now. And Suakin, like some of Turkey's other investments in the region, I think is more about soft power, right, and trying to leverage what they can in terms of -- and it does. There's no shortage of neo-Ottoman rhetoric, right, coming out of Erdogan's mouth, but I think it's important to put that in a domestic context and understand that that language, while it looks provocative on the outside, in some ways is as much about domestic politics at a time of really shifting Turkish identity.

I'll leave it there.

MR. O'HANLON: Good. So let's go to round two. Start on this side of the room. And the woman in about the sixth row here. Good, please. Then we'll come up here

to the second row after that.

QUESTIONER: Thank you so much for this presentations.

My question is how is the U.S. reacting to these relationships in the Horn of Africa?

MR. O'HANLON: And could you identify yourself, too, please?

QUESTIONER: Yes. (Inaudible) and Associates. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Come up here, please.

MS. BHATNAGAR: Thank you very much. I'm Alka Bhatnagar. I'm recently retired as a Foreign Service officer. I have worked in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea.

So my question is two part. What is the general public's sentiments to this great competition that's going on? And are they also included in the Red Sea Forum in any shape or form?

MR. O'HANLON: Great. Thank you.

And we will stay up here for this question.

MS. BARRON: Hi, Andrea Barron from TASSC, the Torture, Abolition, and Survivor Support Coalition.

So I have two questions. First, how does Eritrea fit into this discussion about Red Sea rivalries? And then my friend Yakow from Eritrea would like to know from Rush, can you say something about the role of China in the Eritrea mining industry?

MR. O'HANLON: So this time we'll just take the reverse order if we could and start with Zach.

MR. VERTIN: Oh, no. I wasn't ready for that.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. Well, then we'll start with Rush again. We'll start with you next time.

MR. DOSHI: Well, I think it actually might be wise to start with Zach because I'm not as knowledgeable about China's specific investments in Eritrean mining.

But Zach, since you were just in the region you may know a little bit more about it.

MR. VERTIN: Yeah, I can start out. I don't know the answer to that question. So that's one. Sorry.

The question on Ethiopia and Eritrea, how is this seen -- yeah, great question. So I think the entry point for this is the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. And I will echo Alex's point that this is only just beginning. Right? And you will have seen in the media that very often it's said that the Emirates and the Saudis "brokered this deal" in Ethiopia and Eritrea. I have a slightly different view. I think the role that they played was absolutely necessary. I think they provided an international forum. I think they provided some additional credibility. I think they've greased that deal but I would argue that that initial rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea was driven entirely by domestic politics. Right? And I think because of the style of engagement from Gulf States in the Horn and the kind of diplomacy, I think it would be a stretch to say that they were involved enough in domestic politics to really make such a play. So that's one part.

I think the question is particularly important right now in Ethiopia, right, because Abe is very popular in some constituencies and seen with great skepticism in others. And Karen mentioned that they did take a pretty sizeable cash injection. Part of that has been delivered. Part of that is forthcoming. But it was watched very, very closely by the general population, and Abe will know that any leader of Ethiopia would have a very hard time if he's seen as a client of any foreign state, particularly one just across the water given all sorts of regional complexities and given Ethiopian histories. So I think he's walked very, very carefully so far to date. First, he was sort of reestablishing and regenerating the relationship with both the Saudis and the Emiratis, and as I mentioned more recently with the Qataris. No, with the Qataris, and now there's even talk that Erdogan has suggested that he would like to make a visit to Turkey as well. So particularly in Ethiopia it's watched very, very closely. Harder to say about Eritrea.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. Thank you.



Alex?

MR. RONDOS: Yeah. I think I agree with Zach. I think what's happening now, and it's very important for Ethiopia to appreciate the fact that now that you have a much more open media there's a lot more information now flowing around within Ethiopia. So what we have is a population that is becoming fairly quickly educated, perhaps wrongly on certain subjects, depends on what's out there, but there's much more information around. So it's actually difficult to judge where the sentiment really lies on a specific issue except to know that these issues now are discussed much more openly where they're not being driven by a single source, meaning the government. So I think that would be the broader point to make. So it's very fluid and uncertain.

You asked specifically about the role of -- was it Ethiopia in these arrangements on the Red Sea?

QUESTIONER: Yeah.

MR. RONDOS: Yeah. The way this seems to be playing out is the discussion focuses on bringing together the littoral states. Ethiopia has interestingly reminded people that it is merely 60 miles from the Red Sea, which can be read in a number of ways, but it's a way of just saying we're the elephant in the room. Understandably so if you're Ethiopia. And remember that probably 70 percent of Ethiopia's trade goes through Djibouti. So there's a huge stake there and it would be wise for all those who are designing these Red Sea arrangements to remember that fact. That's the reality and you never want to drive a country to mug one with its realities when it feels driven to do so.

So I think that's the point. So Ethiopia is not officially part of it but I think people understand that it and other countries who are either landlocked or just the hint of land need to be addressed and their interests need to be addressed. And that's something that's unfolding as we speak. There are all sorts of discussions. At the very least we're at the stage where people are talking about how one creates some kind of structure. My only observation there is that when we're talking about straits and seas like this and we've heard

very clearly how global is the significance of this maritime route, there are many people who have a stake, and it would be wise for those who are thinking this through to make sure everyone is brought into it. Otherwise, others outside will make their presence felt in different ways. And I think that's just an enormous mathematical reality. So we need to move ahead. And it's just encouraging at least that there are discussions such as this raising the issue. I think that's the main point.

Eritrea there is a literal state and is involved but avoiding, if you will, multilateral entanglements. It is just making its views known on certain things. So be it. Every country has its own particular approach to these issues, or rather, their leaders have specific approaches.

There was a question about the United States. I suppose it's not really for me to give advice to the United States, so let me give advice --

MR. O'HANLON: We'll take it.

MR. RONDOS: No, no, no.

MR. O'HANLON: We could probably use it.

MR. RONDOS: No, no, working on the old principle that everyone has a right to my opinion, let me offer my opinion to Europe as a part of what I'd like to still think shares some transatlantic interests.

We, I mentioned earlier, I am very, very concerned. There are huge stakes in this wider region. It is worrying to me that there does not yet seem to be a sufficient strategic focus but with a wider aperture of the lens, a geographical one. An illusion was made to the fact that, you know, you have an African department. You have a Middle East department. You know, there an awful lot of silos out of which people operate. And certainly I can say that from Europe's point of view. And that's a very practical issue because, you know, bureaucracies have their own vested interests. So that's from a policy point of view.

But I do think that as I look at the developments and they're unfolding, there

is ample room for action to be taken that are either on a whim in a moment of panic or a moment of uncertainty that can have a whole series of unintended consequences. I know that in the Horn of Africa there is sort of a ricochet effect. If you imagine a billiard table and someone throws a ball, things just start moving. You can't take Somalia in isolation, or Somaliland in isolation, or Djibouti in isolation, let alone Sudan or Ethiopia, which is like this dam which has to hold together because if it bursts the whole discussion we're having changes.

Now, that is where we need to hurry up. Frankly, get much more serious and much more focused on a lot of the issues that have already been raised in order to help shape things because our interests inevitably are involved because of what's been even discussed here. From the United States' point of view, the geography may be further than it is from Europe, but nevertheless, there are vital interests. And its effects, my concern is that when we talk Red Sea, we're really talking about the Indian Ocean, the Bab el-Mandab, the Red Sea, Suez Canal, and the Eastern Mediterranean. That's really the geography we're dealing with and the politics that have to be addressed. That's a big game. It's a global game as Rush outlined earlier.

And I'm still worried we're a bit behind the curve. I'm just encouraged at least this discussion is occurring because it wasn't even being entertained a year or more ago.

MR. O'HANLON: Super. Thank you.

Karen, over to you, please.

MS. YOUNG: Let me just give the flip side of that argument, which is, you know, we can be critical. And I, myself, was critical of the experimental nature of some of these interventions by the Gulf States in the region. But I think what we're seeing is a broader shift in development finance and engagement, which is very much more south-south in orientation, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. So the U.S. role, we haven't been in Sudan in the last week, not that I know of. We certainly didn't show up with \$400 million like

the Saudis did. So, I mean, credit to them for being the first movers, for taking an interest in their backyard, and for making finance available. We, as the U.S. Government, and I do not work for the U.S. Government, doesn't have that capacity to move that quickly, to be that agile. And so there is some benefit to that. Long-term consequences, long-term planning, of course, quite different in method. But maybe those are areas for cooperation.

MR. O'HANLON: Great, thank you.

Rush?

MR. DOSHI: Well, I actually have nothing else to add on those questions.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay.

MR. RONDOS: May I just quickly --

MR. O'HANLON: Sure.

MR. RONDOS: Karen has just prompted a thought.

Here's the issue. I'm looking at this region. It is very, very fragile. The sand is just shifting. Here's my concern. When you're going through transition of the scale, which is occurring -- I look at Sudan or Ethiopia and the like. The question is how do you help stabilize the transition so that the landing is a soft one? My worry is that normally what would be occurring is the international community and the donor community would immediately get together and we'd create contact groups or whatever you want to call them in order to say where are our interests? Do we share them? What do we do? Just to deal with the short term. My worry is that if we sit back and say, well, you know, in three years' time, God willing, everything will be fine. A bit of budget support from the World Bank, great. It's the next two years. How do we protect and immunize a transition that is already under way where we've got millions of people on the streets with high expectations who may then get disappointed? That to me is the real issue. And if we get that disappointment and it starts expressing itself in different ways, it doesn't matter whether Saudi Arabia has put in \$400 million now. That's going to be a drop in the ocean in its effect. So are we -- that's when I'm talking about -- have we woken up? Do we really understand what's going on in

this region and how we can just protect something good that is going on and bring everyone on hopefully in a way where we can kind of trust each other as we move ahead and get involved?

MR. O'HANLON: So now I want to do a lightning round. We have 10 minutes left. I'm going to take three or four questions, only one per person, please, because it's lightning round rules, and then 60 seconds per respondent on the panel to wrap things up on probably just one question each. So we'll start here in the third row and work our way back a little bit.

CALEB: Thank you. My name is Caleb. Thank you, panelists, it was a great presentation.

My question is geopolitics of the Red Sea has been changing dramatically in the last few years. So what's the interest and influence of Gulf nations and (inaudible) like U.S. and China to East African countries like Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia?

Can I have another question?

MR. O'HANLON: Okay, let's --

Sorry. I'll give Barbara really quickly --

MS. SLAVIN: Yeah, thanks.

Alex, I detect in your last comment that the U.S. Government is not playing the role it used to in terms of mobilizing nations' contact groups donor conferences and so on. Is that the case that the U.S. has dropped the ball in Africa as it has in so many other places? Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: The gentleman here in the front row and then we'll work back just for one more.

MR. MCKEEZER: Yes, Heider McKeezer with Al Bawaba, a Jordanian publication. My question is to Rush.

Where do you see China standing in the long run regarding the rivalry between GCC and Turkey and Qatar?

MR. O'HANLON: And then finally all the way back since I neglected the back part of the room. And I'll also do a quick one here in the fifth row afterwards. And that will be it.

MR. KATZ: Hi, Dan Katz, Wilson Center.

Just wondering how the northern part of the Red Sea fits into all these rivalries and competition, Israel, Egypt, particularly with Chinese investment.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

And then this last one.

YASSIN: Yeah, my name is Yassin. I'm from Somalia Mission Office.

My question is, as you know, Somali protected its 850 kilometers of the Red Sea from pirates and now it's fighting with the wildlife traffickers. Recently, we captured 23 cheetah and two lion cubs. And Saudi Arabia and the IGAD both form an established alliance on the Red Sea. Somaliland rechecked (inaudible). Without Somaliland, how will the Red Sea Forum work? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And we'll start with Rush. Sixty seconds per person, please. Sixty to 90 seconds.

MR. DOSHI: Okay. Well, there were two big questions on China so let me take them both.

The first one was about what the role of China would be and the sort of rivalries that we've discussed many of them today. I would say that China will continue to assiduously try to avoid taking sides, and you don't have to take my word for it. You can take their words for it. When Xi Jinping went to the China Arab Cooperation Forum, he specifically said that China's policy has no proxies. You know, basically, contrasting it with the United States saying that, you know, when the United States takes sides in disputes we don't, and we're going to be pragmatic. So I think that's going to continue to be the case, at least for the foreseeable future, although at some point that could change.

The other question I think was about, if I remember correctly, to what

degree China is involved in sort of the northern part of the Red Sea. So I know that China has done a lot of investment in Egypt. Specifically, there was some discussion about China building sort of an alternative capital complex for Egypt. It ended up being the case that Egypt couldn't afford it. But I would argue that the belt and road infrastructure program very much applies not just to the parts that we've discussed today, not just the parts of the Middle East, not just around Dubai, and also parts of Egypt as well. We should definitely watch because military changes, the relationship between the militaries especially but also economic investment in Egypt has really increased in the last few years.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. Thank you.

Karen?

MS. YOUNG: I don't think I have anything to add.

MR. O'HANLON: That was quick. I may think of one for you before we're done. We'll see.

Okay, Alex, over to you, please.

MR. RONDOS: Yeah, Barbara, lovely to see you after so many years.

Difficult one. So look, the point is there's a ball in the air. There's more than one ball up in the air. Now, are others going to juggle it and we're going to watch who lets it drop? Or do we start seeing whether we need to help in this and get engaged? And it's not just a United States issue. I do think, the only appeal I make more generally is those of us like from my side of the European Union, the United States, we need to engage everyone in something in which we're experienced in doing. Not to do it competitively but to try to get everyone around the table to see where's the common ground so that we don't just -- we minimize damage but maximize where are the opportunities. And there are. There are some very interesting discussions actually occurring right now on building towards a whole new kind of approach to invest in the Horn of Africa, building on what Abe has asked for in Ethiopia, which is more integration. And there's a serious discussion now beginning with the funds from the Gulf, World Bank, ourselves. That's one. But to do that, simpolitics has got

to be got right as well, within the region as well as outside.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Zach?

MR. VERTIN: I'm going to jump on Barbara's question as well.

In terms of the U.S., yes. I've spent the last six or eight months on each side of the Red Sea and on both shores the word is "absent." So you may not be surprised by that but, you know, it's not just a matter of this administration though. Right? I mentioned those sort of bureaucratic scenes previously. You know, given the number of items on the agenda of an assistant secretary of state for Near East, I can tell you that the Horn of Africa doesn't make the list. Right?

QUESTIONER: There's a special envoy for the Great Lakes but not for the Horn of Africa.

MR. VERTIN: Yeah, right. And I don't have -- I'm not religious about how this happens. This could be an anomaly. It could be -- I think there are other ideas, right? I've talked to the assistant secretaries for Near East and Africa, and I think for starters they could go together on a tour around both regions to show actually we're interested. We care about this issue. And I think there's some fairly low hanging fruit in terms of minimizing the damaging impacts of this and fill in that space in the near term and I think I'm with Alex. I think there's a larger role to play more broadly.

I'm going to close on this issue that Alex mentioned earlier, this idea of a Red Sea Forum. Right? There are various efforts underway that are just seeds that are germinating now and we're all learning, we're all trying to take examples from other models elsewhere in the world, whether it's the Baltic Sea States or ASEAN or what to try and give this the best chance of success. Alex has made efforts on this. Paid news here from USAP and others. We're working on various ideas. They held a meeting on this recently. The Saudis you will have seen recently convened a meeting on this as well. But in each of these efforts, or most of these efforts so far we've seen reticence, we've seen divisions about who



should be at the table. Alex mentioned the question of Ethiopia. I think there's some important sort of frames to think about in this. And again, the idea of a Red Sea Forum is in my mind not necessarily an organization but a venue where these states can come talk because the rules of this game have not yet been written to talk about maritime security, to talk about irregular migration, to talk about food security, to talk about the refugees from Yemen coming west across the Red Sea and the irregular migrants from Ethiopia going east across the Red Sea. So there are a whole host of issues. One, I think it's very important that this idea, which I support and it remains an aspirational idea but I think it's a good one. One, this should not be misappropriated as a strategic or security block either as part of the GCC crisis or more broadly vis-à-vis Iran.

Second, and this is to Alex's point, I think there should be some hard thinking about whether or not this need not include states that are only 60 miles away. As Alex mentioned, what happens in Ethiopia will determine what happens in the Horn more broadly. So I think there needs to be a role for those states, potentially for some of the states we've mentioned, Gulf States, who may have legitimate interests and legitimate opportunity to help with new kinds of development aid and other things to be a part of this conversation. And lastly, there may be some kind of mechanism. Maybe not a seat at the first table but a mechanism to engage outside powers, this third tier we mentioned, the U.S., China, the EU, and others. The reality is that the whole world has interests in this narrow body of water and that's not going away.

So I think there are some obstacles to this right now but I think -- I really support the ongoing efforts to try and forge a Red Sea Forum and we'll hopefully see it come to fruition in time.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. Thank you all for being here. Please join me in thanking the panel.

(Applause)

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