

**A Report on the Symposium on *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis: Implications for Horn of Africa Countries* held at The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies on 27th July, 2017 at
2.30pm**



Prepared by

Communications Department

The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies

Introduction

The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies convened a group of expert scholars, ambassadors, practitioners, policymakers, and the civil society actors to examine the issue of Qatar and the Gulf crisis; trace the genesis of the issue and examine implications for Horn of Africa countries. More importantly, the three hour Symposium was designed as a working forum to have an in-depth understanding of how the potential spillover of this crisis can affect Horn of Africa countries politically and economically. The *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis: Implications for Horn of Africa Countries* symposium took place on the 27th July, 2017 at 2.30pm in the HORN Institute boardroom and a total of 24 participants attended the event. A programme was developed for the Symposium to serve as an action planning guide and the symposium lasted three hours.

Background

In June 2017, a host of countries led by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain abruptly cut-off ties with Qatar claiming that the country was supporting terrorism, thus violating a 2014 agreement with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The current crisis surrounding Qatar represents the most severe conflict among Gulf Arab states since the end of the Cold War. Of significance are the implications on African countries especially those in the Horn of Africa region. According to IGAD, The Horn of Africa comprises of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. All of these countries are more or less linked to most of the states in the Gulf Region through historic economic, cultural and political interdependences. Effectively, this makes these countries susceptible and easily affected by any political, economic and religious transformation that takes place in the Gulf. It is on this basis that The Horn Institute convened scholars, practitioners and experts to deliberate on the potential implications of this seemingly interminable crisis.

Symposium

Dr. Hassan Khannenje, Director, The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies

The symposium was facilitated by Dr. Hassan Khannenje, the director, The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies and a Conflict Analysis and Resolution expert. Dr. Khannenje opened the symposium with an elaborate introduction of the The Horn Institute, describing what the institute does, mission and objectives. He emphasized that the research institute is committed

to bringing change in the Horn of Africa through informed research. He noted that countries can ill afford to isolate themselves because there are numerous economic and political benefits of interconnectedness. After these remarks, Dr. Khannenje invited Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali, the guest speaker.

Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali

Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali, a Conflict Resolution Expert, acknowledged the attendance of the participants noting that it was an excellent opportunity for exchange of ideas (as opposed to a debate) as well as a forum to help bring to the fore key issues in the Horn of Africa vis a vis *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis*. To set the pace, Dr. Mustafa posed the following questions:

- Are the issues really related to terrorism or are some countries seeking hegemony?
- What do we stand to lose and what do we stand to gain?
- Should the Horn of Africa countries remain neutral or should we take sides?

Dr. Mustafa proceeded to state that, the Horn of Africa is already feeling the effect of this crisis, and there was need to look at the importance of the Middle East to the Horn of Africa. He further spoke on the geostrategic value of the Gulf to the Horn of Africa which included economics, political, security and military, faith, ideology, and emotional attachment. At the economic level, the Middle East is important because of oil, trade, trade routes, investments and employment. Kenya for instance, imports an estimated Kshs. 180 billion from United Arab Emirates alone, and has had its citizens work at the Middle East.

The guest speaker further noted that GCC is capital rich whereas Horn of Africa is capital poor and at the moment, there has been a huge number of investors from Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar. In terms of security, conflict in Middle East have been localized in the Horn of Africa (radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism) in the sense that the narratives on war on Islam find a home because local grievances are manipulated to fit into global grievances. Also under security, Saudi Arabia is in agreement with Djibouti to build a military base. Faith, ideology and emotional attachment is a key factor in the sense that, Muslims go to Makkah in Saudi Arabia to pay pilgrimage, as Christians go to Jerusalem, albeit with varied frequency.

He concluded his presentation by mentioning the war in Yemen and that the longer the war goes on, the more there will be a crisis in the Middle East, Gulf and Horn of Africa. He acknowledged

the fact that Kenya has not sided with any country, although in the Horn of Africa, Djibouti and Somaliland have backed Saudi Arabia. There is competition for influence in Somalia, especially the struggle for political influence and addressing terrorism would be worse if the crisis persists.

After the remarks by Dr. Mustafa, Dr. Khannenje fielded questions that would inform the symposium:

Amb Yusuf A. Nzibo asked about the involvement of the United States, France and other states that have strategic interests in the Middle East especially in oil, the impact of Al Jazeera and the fear of al Jazeera being a mouth piece for extremists.

Dr. Mumo Nzau, a conflict and resolution expert, posed two main questions; where are the sub



regional entities in this whole issue? For example, the Arab league, what intervention and mediatory steps have been taken? Is the region losing a grip to its own affairs?

Said Abdalla, a member of the BRAVE Steering Committee, talked about

A section of the participants during the plenary session

Al Jazeera being singled out as problem and asked whether some of the issues were internally informed (e.g the cultural changes).

Dr. Sellah Kingori from National Cohesion and Integration Commission asked about the likely reverberations of the crisis in terms of relationships that are and will be, and how we should work around issues of cyber space.

PLENARY

Dr. Mustafa was first to respond to Amb. Nzibo's questions where he explained that traditionally, some of the cases in the Middle East were fronted by the West as a result of colonialism and that the West contributed to the instability in the Middle East. He also responded to Dr. Mumo's

question agreeing that the sub regional entities have been doing some work but initiatives have been done mostly by other states, for example, Turkey.

On Said's question, Dr. Mustafa explained that most countries in the Gulf are not used to open media and that these are not open societies and therefore, free media is not part and parcel of their culture.

Amb. Mehmet, the deputy ambassador of Turkey in Kenya, gave remarks on the issue and he started by pointing out that Turkey approached the issue through peaceful mediation and achievement of a solution through dialogue. He insisted that it is important to use any means available to avoid escalation. The ambassador talked about the Turkish military base that is of great importance, and how it has been singled out and made a region of instability. Amb. Mehmet concluded by stating that Turkey was pleased by the UN Secretary General's statement on this issue and that diplomacy and mediation are very important.

Prof Campbell also gave his comments regarding the issue. He pointed out that the issue of Qatar is important because it affects Africa directly. He then said that current conflict is war against Iran (economically and politically) by Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United States. The professor insisted that al Jazeera has to shut down since one cannot fight the war without media. He pointed out that the media plays both positive and negative roles. On the positive front, media allows open media in a traditionally closed society, but on the flipside, it was used negatively especially in Libya on the war against Gaddafi. Amb. Nzibo then added that the AU needs to come to the fore and forestall a crisis in these countries and not pretend that it is a regional issue out of their jurisdiction.

Mr. Katani, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that the Ministry had engaged envoys from the Gulf region and that they had agreed to give dialogue a chance. He also stated that Egypt had a serious post in the AU (Peace and Security Council), and this may affect AU's stand in the matter. Dr. Swaleh insisted that the war in Yemen ought to be taken more seriously and there is need to look at how Kenya can support Yemen owing to its proximity to Kenya than Qatar. Musa Mwale added that scholars really need to engage with practitioners in informing policy decisions.

SYMPOSIUM CLOSING

Dr. Mustafa gave his closing remarks making it clear that Middle East has special attachment to Horn of Africa and it is erroneous to look at the Middle East as a homogenous region because Israel, Turkey and Iran are non-Arab and Middle East being highly unstable will highly affect countries of Horn of Africa and Africa. Dr. Khannenje closed the symposium by the words “I am because you are, and you are because we are” and therefore it is upon us to make a difference because we are all interconnected as one people. We need to talk, and if we do not talk, we need to find a way forward.

CONCLUSION

The symposium was an ambitious experiment bringing together researchers, scholars, ambassadors, government officials and other practitioners with the intention of initiating dialogue regarding *Qatar and Gulf Crisis*. The symposium succeeded in being a true knowledge, research and practice exchange as well as a catalyst for follow-up activities and more symposiums by the participants, most of them in influential positions. The symposium made it clear that there is a likelihood of a spillover as well as the implications for Horn of Africa countries especially Kenya and various actors such as AU should be decisive in dealing with this issue.