

المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES



The Arabs and the Horn of Africa: Issues of Regional Neighborliness and Belonging

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Doha, Qatar

About the conference:

The phrase “Horn of Africa” has multiple definitions: while some use that name to define only Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia, others also include Sudan in the Horn of Africa. Still other groups of people would add Kenya and Uganda to the list of countries included in the Horn of Africa. Of course, three of the countries named above, being Djibouti, Sudan, and Somalia, are also members of the Arab League .

The Horn of Africa is of vital interest to the Arab Center for Research and Studies: it being a close neighbor to the west and the south of the Arab Homeland. While Turkey to the north, and Iran, to the east, receive their fair share of attention from Arab policymakers, leaders, and think-tanks, the Horn of Africa is relatively neglected, despite its strategic importance to the safety and security of the Arab Homeland.

The Horn of Africa does after all overlook one of the most important international water pathways in the world, through which 60% of world trade travels. The region also controls the path of the Nile River, which is of immeasurable importance to the security of the water-scarce Arab East. The Horn of Africa is also the source of many valuable natural resources, and has a high population density, making it an attractive location for Arab capital investments and, overall, a region which is complementary to wider Arab interests. These interests will not be met without the establishment of a regional umbrella for the maintenance of economic and security matters, which will prevent the countries of the region from being dragged into a conflict of trans-national power games and polarization; they will work to protect the region's ability to move development forward.

In addition to the above, the Horn of Africa has strong historical and cultural ties to the Arabian Peninsula, and the wider Arab East in general, which ought to make it easier for relations between the two sides to progress to newer, higher levels. The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is thus pleased to invite scholars and researchers from the Horn of Africa, all Arab countries, and other specialists to join this research forum .

The aim of this forum will be to brainstorm and shed light on the factors that have brought relations from the two sides to the level they are now, to think of ways of how they can be improved, and to form a common vision of what shape future relations should take .

Aims of the conference:

The conference aims to :

- Heighten the exposure and profile of the Horn of Africa in the Arab countries, as it has historically not received the attention it deserves from Arab policymakers. This has been despite the Horn's vitality to Arab security concerns, which is no less than that of Turkey or Iran .
- Objectively and critically re-examine the bonds that tie the Arab homeland to the Horn of Africa region, which stretch back in history and cover relations with the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula and both central and northern parts of Nile Valley. This means the re-assessment and re-formation of historical understanding of these historical bonds, seeking to understand them in a new light, free from previous misconceptions that have been hostage to aged ethnically and religiously bigoted ideas. Researchers will also look to find ways to place these desired new relations in the context of other global conflicts, to formulate a vision of integration, and to build common interests .
- Shed light on the vast economic potentials provided by the Horn of Africa to the Arabs, including the immense labor pool and natural resource wealth of the region, and what the Horn of Africa can do to solve the problem of food security for the broader area. The same is true of the possibility of the Horn providing for wider water security, energy self-sufficiency, and the possibility of an expanded integrative market .

- Examine the status quo of relations between the Arab states and the countries in the Horn of Africa, in the fields of cooperation, trade exchange, including quantified studies of the economic trade between them, cultural relations, security coordination, and other fields .
- Foster closer ties between think tanks, research centers, and researchers in the Arab Homeland and those in the Horn of Africa, in a bid to create a new environment of rapprochement, understanding, and joint cooperation .
- Assess the risks posed by the intervention of external powers, such as the US, Israel, France, China, Russia, Turkey, and Iran in the Horn of Africa .
- Promote increased educational, cultural, media and touristic cooperation between the Arab states and the Horn of Africa .

The proceedings of the conference will be collected in a book to be published in Arabic and English .

Themes to be discussed:

Historical Relations :

These discussions will focus on the historical relations between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, which date to antiquity; they will also look at the spread of Islam in the Abyssinian Plateau and the Horn of Africa region. These discussions will be open to an examination of the conflict between Christianity and Islam in the region, and the impact of the expansion of Khedival Egypt (pre-monarchical Egypt) nearby in the Horn of Africa on Ethiopian-Arab relations .

Strategic and Security Aspects :

The Strategic Aspect: This part of the discussions will involve itself with the geostrategic importance of the Horn of Africa, and will critically examine the present strategic state-of-play as far as current Arab strategic policies in this region are concerned, showing the way for a new set of Arab policies for dealing with this vital region. Further, the discussions on this aspect may delve into the role played by Sudan as a bridging country between the Arab states and the Horn of Africa .

The Security Aspect: The discussions for this part of conference will examine the impact of the Horn of Africa on the national security of the Arabs, in particular as it relates to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. It will also look to how the political and security vacuum in Somalia, as well as its implications, is making itself felt on both the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Other topics might include: Israeli meddling plans in the Horn of Africa, Iranian interference attempts in the Horn of Africa, and proxy wars being fought in the Horn of Africa. More indirectly, it includes the sharing of the Nile River and issues related to dams across it .

Political Aspect:

This part of the conference proceedings will try to tackle the social make-up of the countries in the Horn of Africa, and the issues resultant from ethnic and cultural diversity within them, and how this has impacted political stability in the region. These discussions will also look at problems attendant to democratization, the role of civil society organizations, and the possibility of building better people-to-people relations with countries in the Horn, as well as an exploration of the roles played by the ruling elites and intellectuals. In addition, this part of the debates can look at the aspects of the region's politics which are related to wider global conflict (the politics of the US, China, France, Iran, Israel, Russia and so on). Finally, it will also look at how the secession of South Sudan has been felt on the overall geostrategic status of the Horn of Africa .

Economic Aspect:

Opportunities for Arab economic investment in the Horn of Africa will also be brought forward here, as well as other related talking points: shifting economic patterns in the Horn of Africa, possibilities for sustainable development and linking infrastructures between the two sides, trade exchange opportunities between the Arab states and the Horn of Africa, and increased internal trade within the Horn of Africa .

Discussions on Intellectual, Cultural, and Social Bonds:

These talks will cover in detail the issues of the Arab-Islamic culture and the cultural connection linking Arab countries to the Horn of Africa in the field of thought, arts, and literature. These questions also include the possibility of the expansion of the area in which the Arabic language is spoken, expanded Arab cultural investment in the Horn, and the enhancement of all means of cultural and educational exchange. Finally, these discussions can take into account the enhancement of media networking opportunities between the Arab states and the Horn of Africa, prospects for joint training sessions, and the expansion of the Arab media region to cover the Horn of Africa .

Participants

This conference aims to attract the attendance of a select group of researchers, academics, and intellectuals from Arab states, the Horn of Africa, and beyond .