

# Qatar as a Security Governance Actor in the Horn of Africa

## Abstract

*This paper is based on qualitative interviews and observations and examines Qatar's security governance role in the horn of Africa. The finding shows that though Qatar having a mixed record of both failures and success, its influences of region's security edges many of the traditional actors. On one hand it has successfully mediated conflicts in Somalia and in Sudan, and between Eritrea and Djibouti. On the other hand its mediation in Yemen has failed. However, though Qatar's modus operandi in peacemaking shares some similarities with that of western actors yet it diverges from it in a number of ways. Its effective use of diaspora as frontrunners, side payments, and the involvement of religious networks in its peace endorsement and mediation efforts are some of the specific characters of the Qatari model. These traits coupled with personalized rather than institutionalized nature of its mediation makes Qatar a puzzling but yet formidable actor that influences conflicts and the security in the Horn of Africa region.*

## Introduction

Qatar as small country with tiny populations of around a quarter million has transformed itself since last century rapidly from a peripheral state into global mediator. Qataris adoption into active foreign policy driven to mediate conflict has accelerated it to emerge as a global security actor mediating many complex conflicts around the world.<sup>1</sup> It has mediated range of conflicts in the Middle East and in Africa. By 2010 Qatar has emerged as an experienced peace broker with initiatives in Jordan/Hamas, Iran/UAE, Lebanon, Palestine, Darfur, Western Sahara, Eritrea/Djibouti and Yemen.<sup>2</sup> Qatar has frequently attempted to mediate in conflicts in the Horn of Africa with success and failures. It involved in mediations in Sudan, Eritrea-Djibouti and Somalia. Perhaps less known, it has interfered diplomatically to assist in resolving kidnapping cases in Yemen, and to secure the release of confiscated fishing boats in Eritrea.<sup>3</sup> In that, Qatar has for the last decade emerged as security governance actor involved in peace-making and mediations in the horn of Africa. Its mediation and peace-making in the Horn of Africa region, a region that is highly volatile with an unparalleled history of ethnic, clan, and succession and border conflicts has been increasingly felt.<sup>4</sup> In relation to this, according to the 2006 EU Strategy Paper for the Horn of Africa, argues that the Horn faces not only a series of separate conflicts, but also a regional system of insecurity in which conflicts and political crises feed into and fuel one another,<sup>5</sup> and has an impact on the region as a whole. In that, politically unresolved conflict poses a threat to the overall stability and security of the region. The interconnected of region`s conflicts where any one conflict can ignite or fuel another makes small nation, like Qatar`s involvement in it even more interesting and puzzling.<sup>6</sup> International society puzzled by Qatar`s involvement often asks if that is incompatible with more traditional western efforts of security governance.<sup>7</sup> It has often

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<sup>1</sup> Hansen, Gaas and Leiere(2014) Prestige, religion and windows of opportunity: Qatari foreign policy and peace-engagement. Noragric working paper 61.

<sup>2</sup> Hansen and Gaas(2011). Design suggestions for the Project “Revealed Political Preferences and Political Behavior of Conflict Parties in South-Central Somalia”. Consultancy report, Life and Peace Institute, Uppsala, Sweden.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Hansen, Gaas and Leiere(2014) Prestige, religion and windows of opportunity: Qatari foreign policy and peace-engagement. Noragric working paper 61.

<sup>5</sup> “Strategy for Africa: An EU regional political partnership for peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa; COM (2006) 601 final.

<sup>6</sup> Hansen and Gaas(2011). Design suggestions for the Project “Revealed Political Preferences and Political Behavior of Conflict Parties in South-Central Somalia”. Consultancy report, Life and Peace Institute, Uppsala, Sweden.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

been argued that western actors has developed a special approach to security governance that includes internal consensus, the will to commit economic and military resources for peace processes, including increases in aid, the will to draw upon the expertise and NGOs as well as helping out with holistic solutions that include more than just the negotiation process it-self. This paper based on qualitative interviews and observations<sup>8</sup> and examines Qatar`s role as a security governance actor in the horn of Africa. It analyses the Qatari peace engagement and mediation in the region with specific emphasis on its involvement in Somalia and Djibouti and Eritrea. Here to traverse the confusion that emanates from security`s duality in theory and in practice which is further complicated in situations of conflict-torn states as in the case of states at the horn of Africa region, the paper adopts security from an end-user respective. The paper is divided into four sections, and subsections followed by a conclusion. The first section brief over review on Qataris involvement in the region and its peace engagement. Second, section details its involvement in Somalia and the third examines its mediation between Eritrea and Djibouti. The fourth sections analyses the model operandi of Qatari involvement in the Horn of Africa. The final section is the conclusion that sums the Qatari role and indicate possible future trajectory of its involvement in the region as a mediator.

### Qatar`s peacemaking in the Horn of Africa

Qatar`s progressive peace-making and involvement in the Horn of Africa begun indirectly through its engagement in the Eritrean-Yemeni Hanish Island crisis of 1996, leading to a special relationship with Eritrea that lasted until 2013. Though other States and actors as Djibouti, Ethiopia and various Somali factions, viewed this special relationship with suspicion it did not hamper Qatar from mediating a successful cease fire between Djibouti and Eritrea, and attempted to facilitate contact between various Somali factions.<sup>9</sup>

Although entering into the Horn through the Eritrean-Yemeni conflict in 1996, the Qatari engagement was relatively limited until the emergence of the short-lived UIC that ruled over much

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<sup>8</sup> The paper is based on fieldwork in the horn of Africa in 2013.2014 and was part of the larger report on Qataris foreign policy and peace engagement

<sup>9</sup> Wikileaks (2008)“ Qatar clarifies policies and action on Somalia”, <http://cablegatesearch.net/>; Interview with Ali August 2012

of the south-central regions in Somalia in 2006.<sup>10</sup> Ever since, it has directly and indirectly tried to mediate between the UIC and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2006, between the former UIC factions in 2007/2008, between the Alliance for Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) in 2008, between Hisbul Islam (HI) and the TFG, between Al Shabaab (AS) the TFG, and later between the Muslim Brothers in Somalia, who saw a split in 2006.<sup>11</sup> It has also attempted mediating between AS and the federal Somali Government (SFG).

### Qatar's involvement in Somalia

Qatari involvement in Somalia can be distinguished into an informal humanitarian and relief aid phase followed by an escalation and formalization phase. Qatar engaged with Islamist factions of various types, and often took sides. Often, the Qatari influence went through networks, at times personal networks, but at other times diaspora and religious networks as well.<sup>12</sup>

Qatar had no peacemaking involvement in the region until 2006. Several factors may well explain this absence. The Horn of Africa region is highly volatile with an unparalleled history of ethnic, clan, succession and border conflicts meaning that a small State like Qatar had limited leverage due to the absence of local connections and legitimacy. Its relations with Eritrea coupled with its diaspora and religious networks seemed to have offset this, although there was a price to pay, partly the Qatari-Ethiopian relationship. Indeed, Qatar was until 2012 playing along Eritrean as well as its own channels of influence, to the extent that it occasionally planned to use Eritrea as a facilitator for its peace attempts, particularly in relation to Hizbul Islam and Hassan Dahir Aweys.<sup>13</sup>

Qatar's involvement in Somalia started as early as 1996 through targeted aid programmes, support to schools and hospitals, often through institutions owned and run by the official Muslim Brotherhood chapter in Somalia, the Al Islah. Support was limited in scale and without the actual presence of any Qatari humanitarian organizations in the country. However, this support has

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Abdi 14 November 2012; Interview with Ali 11 December 2012

<sup>11</sup> Ibid; Gaas and Hansen(2010) feasibility study for the "Revealed Political Preferences and Political Behavior of Conflict Parties in South-Central Somalia" project, December 2010 LPI-Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>12</sup> Phone interview and Email correspondences with a former TFG minister March 2013

<sup>13</sup> Wikileaks (2008)" Qatar clarifies policies and action on Somalia", <http://cablegatesearch.net/>;

provided an important entry, building up local connections and a positive image that, along with its Islamic credentials, enhanced its legitimacy not necessarily in the wider Somali population but in the eyes of Islamic charities and Islamic organizations including the Muslim Brotherhood in Somalia.<sup>14</sup> According to local sources, the Qatar foundation provided support to hospitals in Mogadishu and educational facilities such as Mogadishu University, established by Al Islah.<sup>15</sup> In Puntland, North East Somalia, and Somaliland, Qatar supported the Nawawi schools that are run by the Islamic organization.<sup>16</sup> However, in general, the Qatari efforts were limited, and were unnoticed by the average Somalis. This trend of Qatari involvement has, however, changed in 2006 at the time when various Sharia courts supported by many of the business leaders in Mogadishu, joined forces to defeat the Somali warlords of Mogadishu, and Qatar now entered directly into Somali politics. Parts of the renewed efforts nevertheless were humanitarian; Qatari medical doctors arrived in Mogadishu and were hosted by the International Red Crescent and Red Cross alliance where they provided much needed treatment.<sup>17</sup> Qatar also engaged directly with the UIC leadership. With the help of Somali diaspora members in Qatar, then leader of the UIC, Sheikh Sharif, met with the Emir and the Foreign Minister of Qatar in 2006.<sup>18</sup> Following this, a Qatari needs assessment team was dispatched and eventually the Qatari Red Crescent established its presence in Mogadishu, Somalia, and Sheikh Sharif was to remain close to the Qatari efforts up to 2012.<sup>19</sup> Seemingly, Qatar also attempted to convince the United States to talk to Sheikh Sharif, although this strained the Qatari-US relationship.<sup>20</sup>

In December 2006, Ethiopian troops invaded Somalia and fighting on different scales took place between Ethiopian troops and the UIC forces in the Bay, Bakool, Hiiraan, and Galgudud regions. At the height of this conflict, and on December 27, the UN Security Council chaired by Qatar ended in a deadlock. Qatar demanded the exclusion of Ethiopian troops and their immediate withdrawal from Somalia.<sup>21</sup> Somali diaspora members through their contacts with important Qatari individuals, paved the way for the arrival of some of the UIC leadership into Qatar. Initially,

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Omar August 2012; Interview with Boodaaye February/March 2013

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Yusuf July 2012; Ibid via phone March 2013

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ali and Abdi July 2012

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Ali(who travelled with Sharif to Qatar) July 2012

<sup>19</sup> Ibid; interview with Boodaaye March 2013

<sup>20</sup> Wikileaks (2008) "Cda Meeting: Somali Ambassador To Qatar Plays Down Talk Of Impending Mediation", <http://cablegatesearch.net/>;

<sup>21</sup> Ibid; Interview with Osman August 2012;

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomatic\\_and\\_humanitarian\\_efforts\\_in\\_the\\_Somali\\_Civil\\_War#cite\\_note-SOMALI-PEACE-TALKS-STALL-AT-UN-11](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomatic_and_humanitarian_efforts_in_the_Somali_Civil_War#cite_note-SOMALI-PEACE-TALKS-STALL-AT-UN-11)

Sheikh Sharif, along with some of the top UIC officials, arrived in Qatar early in 2007.<sup>22</sup> Sheikh Sharif, after meeting with Qatari leadership, was even interviewed and broadcasted by Al Jazeera TV.<sup>23</sup>

The former UIC leader, free parliament members of the TFG, as well as Somali nationalists, held a conference in Doha in July 2007 where they rejected reconciliation, seemingly also indicating that Qatar had become a hub for unifying efforts for achieving Ethiopian forces withdrawal.<sup>24</sup> A conference was held from 6 - 14 September 2007 in Asmara, Eritrea, where the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) was announced.<sup>25</sup> Although Eritrea hosted the conference, Qatar played a major role in facilitating the developments.<sup>26</sup> This, together with the fact that Al Jazeera gave ample coverage of the conflict in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, including violent abuse by the Ethiopian army against the population in the region, led to worsening relations with Ethiopia. Indeed, in April 2008, Ethiopia cut its diplomatic ties with Qatar accusing it of supporting its arch enemy Eritrea, and aiding insurgent groups opposing Ethiopian troop's presence in Somalia. Qatar denied the Ethiopian allegations and stated its belief in a peaceful resolve of all conflicts.<sup>27</sup> However, Qatar engaged in a war of words with Ethiopia even claiming that "Ethiopia threatens the security and stability of a number of States in the Horn of Africa".<sup>28</sup> Qatar continued to attempt to unify the oppositional forces in Somalia; a new round of talks between these factions was held in Yemen with Qatari and Libya mediation that failed.<sup>29</sup> The rumors of attempts to bring the radical Al Qaeda affiliated Al Shabaab into negotiations were also strong, although this cannot be confirmed by the writer, and such attempts seemed to have been blocked by the United States.<sup>30</sup> By 2009, Qatar's old favorite, Sheik Hassan, had, through negotiations hosted in Djibouti, gained the presidency of a new unitary government consisting of former elements of the UIC and the TFG. In one sense it seemed that Qatar had succeeded, and

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Abdi(via skype) February 2013

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ali July 2012; Interview with Abdi(via skype) February 2013

<sup>24</sup> Wikileaks (2011) "Somalis Meet In Qatar Reject Reconciliation Conference", 1 Sep. 2011 Doha embassy Doha, Qatar

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Abdi(via skype) February 2013; see also Gaas and Hansen(2010) feasibility study for the "Revealed Political Preferences and Political Behavior of Conflict Parties in South-Central Somalia" project, December 2010 LPI-Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>26</sup> Mohamed Gaas & Stig Jarle Hansen Hansen(2010)"Revealed Political Preferences and Political Behavior of Conflict Parties in South-Central Somalia" project, December LPI-Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>27</sup> Staff writer (2008) "Ethiopia breaks off diplomatic relations with Qatar" *New York times* 21 April (available at : <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/21/world/africa/21iht-21ethiopia.12201267.html>)

<sup>28</sup> Aklilu Shiketa(2013):"Qatar: Peacemaker in the Horn of Africa", *Africa Portal* <http://www.africaportal.org/articles/2013/01/31/qatar-peacemaker-horn-africa>

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Ali July 2012; Interview with Abdikarijm and Ibrahim via phone March 2013

<sup>30</sup> Stig Jarle Hansen and Muhamed Gaas(2010)"Suggestions for project designs for "the Revealed Political Preferences and Political Behavior of Conflict Parties in South-Central Somalia" project December 2010 LPI-Nairobi, Kenya

Qatar and the United States were reconciled, as the latter ended up supporting its old enemy, Sheik Sharif. However, it seemed that the Qataris wanted to pressure Sharif to expand the government towards including other Islamist organizations such as Hassan Dahir Aweys and his Hisbul Islam, and also the radicals in Al Shabaab. According to Somali Cabinet leaders, the Qataris attempted to put conditionality on aid in order to get the new Cabinet to negotiate with oppositional groups, although Qatar denied this.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the most astonishing Qatari effort was the sponsoring of Yusuf Qaradawi's peace mission to Somalia in 2009, where the goal was to put pressure on the President to engage with in particular Hassan Dahir Aweys and his Hisbul Islam.<sup>32</sup> By 2012 the situation in the Horn was changing, as was Qatar's policies. Qatar was engaged in Syria and saw Iran's friendship with Eritrea as potentially problematic; moreover, it was more or less clear that Eritrea and their ally, Hassan Dahir Aweys, were a spent force in Somalia. A new Somali President was elected, hailed from the fringes of the Muslim Brotherhood. Local commentators quickly claimed that Qatar was 'changing horses', accusations of Qatar supporting the candidacy of Hassan Sheik Mahmoud with money.<sup>33</sup> The new President and Qatar grew closer, and Qatar became to be seen as a backer of the re-invigorated Mogadishu-based Somali government, a move that many saw as facilitated by members of the Qatari-Somali diaspora. Qatari connections with oppositional groups as Al Shabaab, weak from the start, seemed to fade away.<sup>34</sup> In fact, in the end, Qatar was seen as such a staunch ally of the new Federal Somali Government that a Qatari convoy was targeted by a Shabaab suicide bomber in May 2013. Interestingly, Qatar chose to support a, albeit former, Muslim Brotherhood activist, with ties to a Muslim Brotherhood break-out group, the so-called *Dam Jadiid* (new blood). Local reports also suggest Qatar to have supported the candidacy of Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo with funds in 2017. Such reports has been strengthened by the increasing cozy bonds d developing between the SFG and Qatar at the present.

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<sup>31</sup> Wikileaks (2008)" Cda Meeting: Somali Ambassador To Qatar Plays Down Talk Of Impending Mediation", <http://cablegatesearch.net/>;

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Phone interview with a former minster March 2013; Interview with Yahya July 2012; Interview with Ali, July 2012

<sup>34</sup> Roland Marchal (2012):"Somalia on Hold" *NIS foundation Paper*

## Qatari Mediation of the Eritrean-Djiboutian border conflict

The border conflict between Eritrea and Djibouti was in many ways influenced by the Somali case, and influenced it in return. It was a mediation between two very unequal partners, a mediation where Qatar and one of the parties, Eritrea, had cooperated politically since 2006. Again Eritrea came out as the ‘biased negotiator’ but it also came out as a very successful mediator.

The border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti was rooted in disagreements over the Ras Doumeira Mountains that in general are claimed to belong to Djibouti (but are deserted). The border was regulated in a Franco-Italian treaty in 1900, but France yielded territory in order to secure Italian support against Germany in Europe in 1935; the latter treaty was never ratified properly by France, but Eritrea publicly maintains the position that this was the correct interpretation, while the international community in general preferred the 1900 treaty. This almost led to serious clashes between the two countries in 1996, but tensions eased eventually.<sup>35</sup>

Eritrean troops mobilized along the border in the early months of 2008. In response to this, Djibouti sent its troops to reinforce its border control and on June 10 the fighting between the countries broke out which resulted in the death of nine Djiboutian soldiers.<sup>36</sup> It seemed like the situation was uneven, as the Eritrean army was 22 times larger than the Djiboutian army. However, Djibouti had strong friends. During the border tensions the late Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, stated that ‘the recent Eritrea-Djibouti row was a threat to the peace and security of the whole Horn of Africa’. He added that ‘Ethiopia has a capacity of protecting the safety of the Ethiopian-Djibouti trade corridor’.<sup>37</sup> He did this partly because Djibouti was the best port Ethiopia had and has access to. France and the United States also had bases in Djibouti, and France in the end shares intelligence with the Djibouti.

According to the Djiboutian, there were attempts to bring in a variety of mediators, France even suggesting to bring in Iran due to its political closeness to Eritrea and its investments in Djibouti.<sup>38</sup> Both Libya and Sudan tried to mediate between the two countries but to no avail. However, both Eritrea and Djibouti enjoyed a good relationship with Qatar, the former due to negotiations over a business partnership.<sup>39</sup> In June 2010, a seven point agreement was announced

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<sup>35</sup> Mesfin, Beruk (2008), ‘The Eritrean-Djiboutian border dispute’ *ISS situation paper*, 2

<sup>36</sup> Kumaran Ira and Alex Lantier(2008) ‘Fighting erupts over Eritrean armed incursion into Djibouti’ available at: <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2008/06/djib-j18.html>

<sup>37</sup> Mesfin (2008)

<sup>38</sup> Wikileaks (2008) ‘Djibouti Fonmin On Somalia, Eritrea’, <http://cablegatesearch.net/>;

<sup>39</sup> AC(2013) ‘Qataris Cold Shoulder’ *Africa Confidential* Vol 54 N<sup>o</sup> 4: 15th February 2013; Interview with anonymous may 2012

by Qatar. As a result, Eritrea withdrew from Ras Doumeira and both countries accepted the establishment of a committee consisting of two members from each country led by the Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim to be appointed for resolving the demarcation of the border.<sup>40</sup> The committee itself was scheduled to have a committee will be set up under the chairmanship of the Qatari Premier with a member each from Eritrea and Djibouti 200 peace keepers from Qatar was stationed along the border, some were actually Somalis.<sup>41</sup> The so-called Gordofa Agreement also included provisions for the exchange of prisoners of war and the demarcation of the border conducted by a private company. The Qatari mediated a ceasefire between the two countries is holding despite the withdrawal of Qatar troops after both Djibouti and Eritrea governments supported the recent Saudi and Emirati sanctions against Qatar earlier in 2017.

## Modus operandi: Diaspora, money and personal ties

Qatar`s modus operandi in its peacemaking in the horn of Africa is interesting in a number of ways as the Somalia and Eritrea and Djibouti cases illustrate.

The Somalia case illustrates a number of points. In many ways Qatar was an ardent supporter of the UIC and ARS, and even HI at some stages, along with Eritrea, which it had a close relationship with, cost Qatar its diplomatic relation with Ethiopia (though the relationship between the two is now warming with visits of the Ethiopian Prime minister and the Qatari Amir visiting each other`s countries). Despite having relationships with actors defined as terrorist organizations by the United States, Qatar was able to keep its close relation with the latter. However, it remains to be seen whether Qataris approach of peacemaking, especially through networks of Brotherhood organizations and individuals is sustained in the face of the recently pressures and siege against it by coalition of countries led By Saudi Arabia and Emirates.

Qatar supports its wider involvement approach in Somalia with building up social infrastructure such as schools, supporting hospitals and funding other humanitarian efforts often through local Muslim Brotherhood NGOs and the diaspora. Such approach is backed with funds

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<sup>40</sup> Staff Writer (2013) "Qatar to mediate between Djibouti and Eritrea on border dispute". *The Free Library* 8 June <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Qatar+to+mediate+between+Djibouti+and+Eritrea+on+border+dispute.-a0228381086>

<sup>41</sup> Email correspondence with Abdulrahman January 2013

and an increased presence of Qatari NGOs. They draw their competence from the Somali diaspora in Qatar, especially qualified individuals working at Qatari institutions as connectors, and front runners. While similarly, the diasporas involvement at is clear also for the Eritrea and Djibouti case, the e agreement was partly brokered directly by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who also was the Qatari signatory. Unlike Qatar's Somalia approach, its mediations between Eritrea have been largely formal. Further friendship networks are another aspect that facilitates the Qatar mediation. For instance, Qatar's Emir is a personal friend of Isaias Afewerki, the Eritrean President.<sup>42</sup> And there are several other examples of personal friendships.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that Qatar influences in conflict in the region to hold foreseeable future even possibly seeing a new Qatari initiative of mediating the unresolved Eritrea-Ethiopia border conflict as a Qatari strategy for final resolution of the Eritrea-Djibouti case but also for stabilization of Somalia but also drawing Egypt and Ethiopia together resolve a possible conflict over the sharing of Nile water. However, the current political situation biting Qatar against power regional hegemonies as Saudi Arabia and emirates brings clouds in the sky of the Qatari position in the horn of Africa as a security actors mediating conflicts in the region. After all, Qatar seems better suited to understand nontraditional ways of peaceengagement especially in Muslim countries by its ability to use diaspora as front runners, Muslim brotherhood networks, and side payment. These modus operandi makes Qatar able to navigate its mediations and peace engagement through difficult terrains characterized by cleavages of tribal and factional, politics and ideological rivalry and conflict. May be it is for that reason why Qatar has been able to successfully mediate conflict between Djibouti and Eritrea and influence conflicts within countries as Sudan and Somalia. After all, Qatar is the only country that contributed to ascendance three successive presidents to come to power in Somalia since 2009.

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<sup>42</sup> AC(2013) "Qataris Cold Shoulder" Africa Confidential 4 (54): 15th February 2013; Interview with anonymous may 2012