

# France's Geostrategic Interests in the Horn of Africa: The Red Sea, Djibouti and Somalia

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Global Research, March 11, 2021

Region: [Europe](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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*“Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate.” - **Edward W. Said.** (Los Angeles Times, July 20, 2003)”*

*“Geographically, the Horn of Africa is normally understood to comprise Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. As foreign military forces operate in ways that link deployments on land, in the air and at sea, for the purposes of this paper the Horn of Africa region is defined as a security space comprised of the four core countries plus Kenya, the Seychelles, South Sudan and Sudan, as well as key adjacent maritime areas—the southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait” 1*

## Introduction: Historical Background

The Horn of Africa is a complex site of geopolitical and geostrategic importance, inextricably linked to key aspects of its history and geography. The uptick in engagement by external actors, and their attendant interests, alliances and agendas, underscore the pivotal role of geopolitics in shaping the security and economic trajectory of the region. The proximity of the Horn of Africa to the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf, and the vital commercial lanes that transit the Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden, reinforce the region as a crucial maritime chokepoint and port of call in an increasingly connected global order. 1)

France had African colonies since the European Colonial powers Berlin Conference in 1884, which they divided and took positions of Africa among themselves.

The **French** presence in **Africa** dates to the 17th century, but the main period of **colonial** expansion came in the 19th century with the invasion of Ottoman Algiers in 1830, conquests in West and Equatorial **Africa** during the so-called scramble for **Africa** and the establishment of protectorates in Tunisia and Morocco and much of Equatorial and Central Africa.

French colonialism always were interested in Egypt even before Napoleon's war Egypt in 1789. They also were interested in the countries along the red sea and the Bab el Mandep strait which allows the passage of goods safely through the narrow strait.

And thus, Djibouti (The **French Territories of Afar & Isse**) came to play when France took

possession of Djibouti (called **French Somali-land**) in 1884. As the Territory of the **Afars and the Issas**, it remained part of the French republic until independence in **1977**,

France is interested in the following :

- 1) The Safety and continuity of passage of goods and peoples through Bab el Mandep straits and the Red Sea.
- 2) French power projection in the Horn of Africa region and the littoral states of Red Sea i.e. Egypt, Saudia, and Yemen.
- 3) The Protection and Preservation of Christian Ethiopia with in the Muslim HOA region.
- 4) French economic, political and soft-power projections in the HOA and Red Sea litterol nations.
- 5) French imperial occupation, exploitation under the coattails of **AFRICOM/EU/NATO** empire of Africa and the littoral states of **Egypt, Eritrea, Saudia, Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti** which plays a major role as a Hub of western military bases, currently housing US/French/Italian/Chinese/ and Japanese military bases in such small country.

#### French Neocolonialism in Africa

To protect and influence its interests in post-Independence Africa, France, opted to institutionalize its relationships with its former colonies by signing comprehensive bilateral economic, political, military and cultural accords that binds effectively french control, domination, and presence of the former colonies.

Besides Djibouti, the French controls military bases in Reunion, Seychelles and Kerguelen Islands in the Indian Ocean which connects to the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea via Bab El Mandep straits which is strategically important for economic, military and Geo-strategic purposes.

Thus, France uses and employs its political, economic, military and its United Nations Security Council (UNSC) membership. And as an ally of the US, through **NATO and AFRICOM**, it projects its powers in the region.

Although the French Colonial Empire is long gone, Paris is still attempting to maintain its global influence through its former colonies, not only in the Red Sea and HOA region, but also in Central and Northern Africa, Another point to note is that the French energy company Total is one of the most important partners for Gas and Oil explorations, operations, sells and marketing in Ethiopia and Kenya - 1950 and 1955 respectively.

The **French Oil conglomerate Total** holds a 45% interest in three offshore exploration licenses in the **Lamu Basin** (Near the disputed Somali Maritime border) namely L11a, L11B and L12. 3)

#### Conclusions

Historically it is evident, that the French seeks to use its former African colonies in the indian ocean Basin and The Red Sea littoral countries for its Geostrategic interests in the

region and its competition with Turkey, China and Russia.

There is a Turkish-French Competition in Africa since 2000. Turkey and France are acting as rivals in Africa by creating cooperation with the East, HOA and West African countries. France has joined strategic marriage of convenience with Anti-Turkish Arab countries of Egypt, Saudi, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates may work against Turkey to create their influential zone.

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## Notes

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