

## Neocolonialism and Resource Exploitation



The United Arab Emirates' expanding neocolonial practices in Africa have justifiably elicited indignation among the continent's populace. While other neocolonial powers have faced consistent scrutiny, the UAE's involvement has not received adequate attention until recently.

The UAE has sought to exploit valuable natural resources, particularly in the Sudan as well as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which have an abundance of minerals such as gold, diamonds, copper, cobalt, and coltan. It manages to obtain, under murky details, some favorable exploitative deals. One such deal is the 1.9-billion-dollar contract which allows it complete monopoly of at least four mines in eastern Sudan. This agreement, signed between Abu Dhabi's Primera Group (which obtains exclusive rights to export hand-mined gold at the exceptionally favorable tax rate of 0.25%) and state-owned Sakim, grants the United Arab Emirates access to tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold. While it is presented as a solution to address "smuggling and substantial losses in tax revenue," it is worth noting that the smuggled African gold always finds its way to Dubai.

The economic benefits generated from these natural resources rarely reach the local communities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, and in some instances continued conflict and instability. This echoes the historical legacy of European colonialism, as former and newly emerged colonial powers continue to exercise economic and political influence in Africa.



### Sudan

The United Arab Emirates' involvement in Sudan extends beyond mere economic endeavors. In the context of the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis and the displacement of millions of individuals, the UAE has actively contributed to the escalation of hostilities.

Through the provision of arms, financial support, and diplomatic backing, the UAE has empowered the RSF paramilitaries whose mercenary forces are recruited from neighboring countries. This intervention carries the potential for long-term demographic shifts within Sudan. The RSF have a notorious record of inhumane war crimes including mass killings, sexual violence, and forced displacements. It is important to also note that, despite their professed divergent perspectives, the United States and the United Kingdom, have both utilized the United Arab Emirates as a strategic intermediary to safeguard their shared interests in the country.

### Libya

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been actively involved in the Libyan conflict, providing military aid, funding, and logistical support to the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar. This support has been driven by the UAE's geopolitical interests in North Africa, with the aim of gaining influence in the region. By backing Haftar, the UAE has contributed to the prolongation of the conflict and complicated efforts for a peaceful resolution. Many Libyans believe that the UAE's involvement exacerbates divisions within Libya and undermines international efforts for stability and reconciliation in the country.

### Ethiopia

Since 2020, the Ethiopian government has utilized arms and drones supplied by the United Arab Emirates against various rebel groups demanding an end to Addis Ababa's brutal crackdown that seems to echo the 3 decades under the TPLF regime. This has resulted in substantial civilian casualties and widespread destruction. Independent analysts have meticulously documented numerous instances of indiscriminate attacks and killings raising grave concerns regarding the UAE's covert involvement in the country's numerous conflicts. This involvement has not only exacerbated the armed violence but has also contributed to one of the most severe humanitarian crises in recent history, resulting in millions of displaced individuals in dire need of immediate assistance.

The UAE's considerable influence in Ethiopia, which some perceive as a form of state capture, has contributed to tensions and conflicts in the Horn of Africa region. The UAE's substantial investments in key sectors and financial support have created a situation where the Federal Government of Ethiopia is heavily dependent on and swayed by the UAE's interests and plans for the region. This level of involvement is viewed as a strategic move by the UAE to undermine regional stability, exploiting Ethiopia's internal conflicts to assert its dominance and counterbalance other influential powers. The UAE's support has exacerbated mistrust and rivalries among regional actors, further complicating efforts to achieve peace and cooperation in this volatile region.

### Somalia

It has been suggested by various Somali stakeholders and international observers that the United Arab Emirates' involvement in the country may be contributing to ongoing conflicts rather than promoting stability and development. In 2018, the central government of Somalia confiscated \$10 million from a plane belonging to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), alleging that the funds were intended to influence and gain support from regional politicians. This incident brought to light the UAE's contentious involvement in Somalia's internal political affairs, which was perceived as an attempt to undermine the federal government and strengthen the various enclaves within the country.

Additionally, the UAE provides direct financial support and arms to over 15,000 soldiers from the Federal Government's troops, as well as those from Puntland, Somaliland, and Jubaland regions in Somalia, contributing to the ongoing violence and instability in the country. Furthermore, concerns have been raised regarding the UAE's aggressive acquisition of ports in the Horn of Africa, particularly the irregular acquisition of Berbera and Bosaso in Somalia.

These actions have not been coordinated with the federal government, potentially violating international law and undermining Somalia's sovereignty. The UAE has also been pushing for the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the separatist group in the Somaliland region and Ethiopia. By many accounts, this is considered illegal and infringes upon Somalia's territorial integrity and political independence.

### Djibouti

Djibouti, situated along the bustling shipping routes, has been the subject of interest from the UAE. In 2018, Djibouti terminated a port management agreement with the UAE, alleging that the latter was exerting undue economic influence to gain control and undermine sovereignty. This action resulted in a prolonged legal dispute and a deterioration in diplomatic relations.

In recent years, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been expanding its influence in Africa. However, this involvement has been controversial due to concerns about the UAE's meddling and interventionism, ruthless exploitation of natural resources, and other such practices that have earned it the label of an emerging neocolonial power.

# Mapping UAE's Port Presence in Africa

Connectivity and Geostrategy



Sources: Bloomberg 2021, notes from the author

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## String of Ports Strategy

Over the past decade, prominent Emirati entities, including Dubai-based DP World and Abu Dhabi's AD Ports, have sought to expand their global footprint in Africa's leading ports. These strategic initiatives aim to ensure the preeminence of the United Arab Emirates' port infrastructure over competing regional ports. However, concerns have been raised regarding the potential infringement of host countries' constitutional principles, national sovereignty, and security.

The UAE's assertive territorial expansion, including the provision of financial support to militias and rebel groups, has been linked to increased conflict and instability on the African continent. Given the implications of these actions, it is imperative that countries involved in such neocolonial agreements, as well as those considering similar arrangements, give urgent attention to the potential consequences before committing to such partnerships.



## Land Acquisition and Displacement

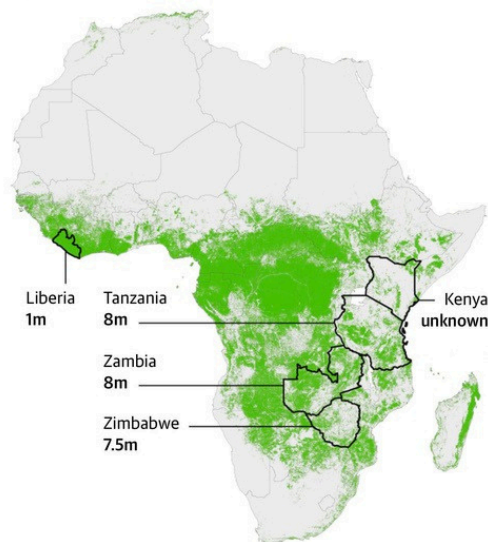
Sheikh Ahmed Dalmoock al-Maktoum, a prominent figure within the Dubai ruling family, has engaged in extensive land acquisitions across various African nations through his company, Blue Carbon. These acquisitions, ostensibly undertaken for carbon offsetting initiatives, encompass substantial portions of forest land in Zimbabwe (up to 20%, equivalent to 7.5 million hectares), Liberia (10%), Zambia (10%), and Tanzania (8%). Collectively, these acquisitions span an impressive 25 million hectares, an area larger than the United Kingdom itself. In contrast, the United Arab Emirates possesses a mere 160,000 hectares of cultivable land. This stark disparity has raised concerns among stakeholders regarding the potential implications for local rights, biodiversity, and the overall well-being of affected communities. Furthermore, the adverse effects of these land acquisitions have already manifested in the displacement of indigenous Masai communities due to land appropriations for trophy hunting ventures in Kenya and Tanzania. These developments underscore the human cost associated with such undertakings and necessitate a comprehensive assessment of their social and environmental impact.

In reference to the UAE's hosting of COP28, it is important to note that the deals in question are presented as a means of facilitating climate action. Under the Paris Climate Agreement, numerous countries have committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions. Consequently, any entity seeking to offset its pollution can now invest in environmentally friendly projects, such as forests, and receive corresponding 'carbon credits.'

To illustrate the potential exploitative nature of such arrangements, let us consider the case of Liberia. Under the agreement, Liberia grants access to one million hectares of land over a 30-year period, while the UAE's Blue Carbon company retains 70% of the credit sales. It is crucial to assess the profitability of this deal from Liberia's perspective.

### Blue Carbon deals in Africa

- Tree cover in 2021
- Countries with deals, deal size in hectares



Guardian graphic. Source: Guardian Research, Impact Observatory for Esri, Sentinel-2

## UAE's Military Outposts and Bases

In order to safeguard its expanding economic and political interests in the Red Sea waterways and Africa, the UAE, at one point or another since the mid-2010s, established military outposts in eight African countries. The bases are usually shrouded in secrecy, and in what seems like an effort to minimize its own financial expenditures, they are usually constructed from the ground up, expanded from existing installations, or temporarily utilized by the Emiratis in allied nations.

Since last year, however, the UAE has more openly initiated the establishment of full-fledged military bases in strategic locations. In addition to its base on Abd Al Kuri, it commenced the construction of facilities in Kismayo, Somalia, and in Amdjarass in Chad, bordering Sudan. Interestingly, the construction of these outposts or bases is usually preceded by military training and cooperation agreements with local forces, and is presented as collaborative efforts to "maintain regional stability".

## The UAE's Scramble for Africa

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) UAE seems to be using African countries as a source of food security, access to critical minerals, and a growing consumer market. It also effectively serves as a facilitator for previous colonial powers and contemporary neocolonial entities, necessitating a thorough analysis.



The United Arab Emirates' caustic engagement in Africa, exemplified by the recent endeavor to incentivize South Africa to withdraw its case against Israel concerning the Gaza genocide, underscores the evolving role of the UAE in continental affairs. This engagement serves the dual purpose of bolstering the UAE's own influence and countering, for Western interests, the growing presence of China and Russia in the region.

As the UAE expands its influence, the continent must strike a delicate balance between development and partnerships that fuel its member states' instability. African countries must ensure that progress benefits their own citizens and not opportunistic latecomers to history.