

'Gulf crisis threatens E Africa peace efforts'



Diplomatic tensions between countries in the Gulf are threatening peace efforts in East Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa, the EU's special envoy has warned.

The crisis, which erupted nearly a year ago, has pitted Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain against Qatar, with Riyadh and its allies accusing Doha of fostering close ties with Iran and backing Islamic extremists. Qatar has denied all the allegations and the accusers have failed to submit any evidence to support their claims.

But the fallout has had direct repercussions in the Horn of Africa where it has exacerbated already-existing tensions, notably in Somalia, said Alexander Rondos, Europe's special envoy to the region.

In particular, tensions have escalated steadily between Somalia and the United Arab Emirates, which has sought to extend its influence there as the war in Yemen rages on.

Although the two countries have been traditionally close, Mogadishu's attempts to remain neutral over the Gulf divisions have not gone down well.

One of the EU's "most important objectives" is to make sure that East Africa "is as well protected as it can be from what is a rapidly shifting geopolitical environment" in the Gulf, he said on Friday following a two-day seminar of EU envoys to the region.

Political strife between Gulf states and their alliances with east African players was "the biggest strategic issue because

it could easily undermine all of the efforts to overcome East Africa's own particular crises, whether it's South Sudan or Somalia," Rondos said.