



# Research Report

Security Council

Red Sea Crisis

Rudra Sinha

Deputy President

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## Introduction

The Red Sea Crisis is a geopolitical conflict that has many implications for regional and global security. The crisis concerns the Red Sea, a body of water that borders several key countries, including Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. This area is crucial due to its strategic location, as it is an important maritime route that links the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal. The Red Sea is a critical maritime route for international trade, specifically for oil and gas shipments.

The Red Sea also has other important implications, other than geopolitical. This region is rich in natural resources, such as hydrocarbons, making it an area of economic interest for many countries.

However, in recent years, the situation has been worsening due to external interventions by other countries and the militarization of the region. Countries such as China and the United States have established military bases in Djibouti, showing the strategic aspect of the Red Sea. These foreign military presences have introduced new facets to the crisis, making it more complicated.

The humanitarian impact of the Red Sea Crisis is significant, with millions of people affected by the conflicts. The civil war in Yemen, has led to a devastating humanitarian situation, with famine, disease outbreaks, and displacement of many people(Partington).

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Biodiversity**

The variety of life in a particular habitat or ecosystem. The Red Sea is rich in marine biodiversity, which is threatened by ongoing conflicts and environmental issues.

### **Civil War**

A war between groups within the same country. The Yemeni Civil War is a major component of the Red Sea Crisis, involving multiple factions and foreign interventions.

### **Diplomatic Efforts**

Initiatives by countries and international organizations to resolve conflicts through dialogue and negotiation.

### **External Interventions**

Involvement of foreign powers in the internal affairs of a region, often through military, political, or economic means.

### **Humanitarian Crisis**

Events that pose critical threats to the health, safety, and well-being of large groups of people, such as the situation in Yemen.

### **Hydrocarbons**

Organic compounds found in oil and natural gas. The Red Sea region is rich in these resources, making it economically significant.

### **Maritime Security**

The protection of maritime resources from threats like piracy and terrorism, crucial in the Red Sea due to its global shipping routes.

### **Piracy**

The act of attacking and robbing ships at sea. The Red Sea is a hotspot for piracy, particularly near Somalia.

### **Suez Canal**

A man-made waterway in Egypt connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, crucial for global shipping.

## **General Overview**

### **Historical Context**

The Red Sea has historically been a crucial maritime route, for trade and cultural exchange between Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Its strategic importance dates back to ancient civilizations, including the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Greeks, who utilized the Red Sea for trade routes. The creation of the Suez Canal in 1869 made it more important by creating a maritime route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Red Sea became a gateway for shipping oil from the Middle East to other locations, making it a key economic trade route.

### **Colonial Legacies**

The colonial time period led to a different situation in the Red Sea region, with European powers such as Britain, France, and Italy establishing control over various territories. These colonial powers made artificial borders that did not consider the ethnic, tribal, and cultural implications among the local populations, leading to future **territorial disputes**. For example, the borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia were made without consideration for the ethnic and historical ties, leading to various conflicts.

### **Geopolitical Rivalries**

The strategic location of the Red Sea has made it a key point for **geopolitical rivalries**. During the Cold War, the superpowers fought for influence in the region, with the Soviet Union and the

United States aiding different countries. In the post-Cold War era, regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran have tried to assert their dominance, while external powers like the United States and China have established military bases and increased their naval power in the region. For instance, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been engaged in a proxy war in Yemen, with each side supporting different sides.

### Current Situation

Yemen is at the center of the **humanitarian crisis** in the region, with a civil war that began in 2014 when Houthi rebels, supported by Iran, overthrew the government. The war has caused widespread destruction, displacement, and a severe humanitarian situation, with millions facing famine and disease outbreaks.

Somalia, another key player in the region, has struggled with political violence. The central government, supported by international powers, has limited control outside the capital, Mogadishu. **Piracy** off the Somali coast peaked in the late 2000s, severely disrupting international shipping. Although piracy has declined, the threat remains due to the ongoing instability. The presence of military groups like Al-Shabaab contributes to the instability, and frequent attacks on the government hinder development efforts.

### Maritime Security Threats

The Red Sea is one of the world's most important **strategic waterways**, connecting Europe, Asia, and Africa. Ensuring maritime security is critical, given the volume of global trade passing through this route, including a significant portion of the world's oil supply.

**Piracy:** Although international naval patrols have helped to reduce the piracy, the threat remains, especially off the coast of Somalia. The underlying issues of poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and weak governance continue to drive young men towards piracy for their means of living.

**Militarization:** The presence of foreign military bases, particularly in Djibouti, shows the strategic importance of the Red Sea. Djibouti hosts military bases from countries including the United States, China, France, and Japan. This **militarization** has introduced new security changes, with foreign powers showing their power mainly because they want to show their interest in the Red Sea area.

## **Economic Interests**

**Hydrocarbons and Natural Resources:**

The Red Sea region is rich in **hydrocarbons**, particularly oil and natural gas, making it an economically significant area. Countries like Saudi Arabia and Sudan have huge oil reserves and they still are looking for more. The control of these resources are important to the economic agendas of both regional and external powers. The revenues from oil and gas exports are vital for the economies of these countries.

**Trade and Shipping:**

The Red Sea is a major shipping route, particularly through the Suez Canal, showing its economic benefits. The shipping route is essential for global trade, reducing the journey of the shipments to Europe and Asia. The blockage of the Suez Canal in 2021 by the Ever Given container ship highlighted the vulnerability of this critical area and its impact on global supply chains. Ensuring the security and smooth operation of the Suez Canal is therefore a priority for Egypt and the international community.

## **Key Factors**

**Strategic Waterways:** The Red Sea's role as a critical **strategic waterway** is shown by its connection to the Suez Canal, one of the world's most important maritime routes. The security and stability of this route is crucial for global trade, making it very important to make sure it is kept safe and operable at all times.

**Environmental Concerns:** The Red Sea's unique marine environment and **biodiversity** are under threat from overfishing, pollution, and the impacts of conflict. Conservation efforts are made

more difficult by the ongoing instability, which hinders international and local initiatives aimed at protecting the marine ecosystem. The degradation of coral reefs and the decline in fish populations have significant effects for local communities that depend on fishing for their livelihoods.

Humanitarian Impact: The humanitarian effect of the Red Sea Crisis is essential, with millions affected by conflicts and instability. The situation in Yemen is particularly poor, with famine, disease outbreaks, and displacement of populations. The international community also aims to solve this.

## Timeline of Key Events

**1869 Opening of the Suez Canal**: The Suez Canal was opened, connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.

**1967 Six-Day War**: The closing of the Suez Canal following the Six-Day War between Israel and neighbouring Arabs.

**1991 Collapse of the Siad Barre Regime in Somalia**: The fall of the Siad Barre regime led to the fragmentation of Somalia, resulting in decades of political instability and the rise of piracy.

**1998-2000 Eritrean-Ethiopian War**: A border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia turned into a full-scale war, causing a lot of casualties and displacement.

**2008-2012 Peak of Somali Piracy**: Piracy off the coast of Somalia peaked, severely disrupting international shipping.

**2011 Arab Spring**: The Arab Spring protests led to political changes in the region, including the removal of Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh, which set the stage for the civil war.



**2014 Start of the Yemeni Civil War:** Houthi rebels, supported by Iran, overthrew the Yemeni government, triggering a devastating civil war.

**2018 Peace Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia:** Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a peace agreement, formally ending the two-decade-long conflict and raising hopes for regional stability.

**2019 Continued Clashes in the Ethiopian Tigray Region:** Tensions in the Tigray region of Ethiopia led into conflict.

**Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen:** Yemen continues to face a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions suffering from famine, disease, and displacement(Fernando).

## Stakeholders

### Regional Powers

**Saudi Arabia:** Saudi Arabia plays a crucial role in the Red Sea Crisis, because of its strategic, economic, and security interests. Saudi Arabia is investing in significant infrastructure projects along its Red Sea coast, aimed at boosting tourism and economic diversification under its Vision 2030 initiative. The Red Sea Project, a luxury tourism development, is a key part of this vision, aiming to attract international tourists and generate more revenue.

**Egypt:** Egypt's control over the Suez Canal makes it a key player in ensuring the stability and security of the Red Sea. The canal is a major source of revenue for Egypt and also is related to its ties with other countries.

**Israel:** Israel's involvement in the Red Sea crisis, particularly near the strategic Bab el-Mandeb Strait, has been driven by concerns about maritime security and regional stability. The strait is a critical area for global trade and energy supplies, and Israel has been concerned with Iranian influence and the activities of Houthi rebels in Yemen, which might affect navigation and

security. Israel has reportedly worked with local allies, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to address these threats, showing its wider goals of keeping safe maritime routes in the region.

## **External Powers**

**United States:** The United States has a huge military presence in this region, with a base in Djibouti serving as a location in order to counter terrorism and ensure maritime security. The strategic importance of the Red Sea for global trade and energy supplies makes it a key area of protection and interest for the U.S.A.

### **China:**

China's growing presence in the Red Sea region, shown by its first overseas military base in Djibouti, shows its strategic interests in keeping maritime trade routes and protecting its investments in Africa and the Middle East. China's involvement in the region is driven by its need to secure energy supplies and ensure the safety of its nationals working on various projects across Africa(Bar).

## **Non-State Actors**

### **Pirates:**

Pirates continue to pose a threat to maritime security. Although international naval groups have reduced piracy incidents, and also the root causes, such as poverty and lack of governance, it still hasn't stopped. Piracy disrupts shipping, increases insurance costs, and threatens the safety of seafarers, making it a huge concern for the global maritime industry.

### **Military Groups**

Military groups, including the Houthi rebels in Yemen and various Islamist groups in Somalia, play significant roles in the regional instability. The presence of these groups complicates efforts to achieve peace and stability, as they often have opposite agendas and operate outside of the law, requiring more resources to keep them from not breaking the law.

## Possible Solutions

### **Diplomatic Efforts and Peace Negotiations**

A good solution to the Red Sea Crisis involves better diplomatic efforts and peace negotiations among conflicting parties. International organizations such as the United Nations can help with dialogue and mediation to resolve the problem.

### **Humanitarian Aid and Development**

Addressing the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and other affected regions requires a collaborative international response. Increased humanitarian aid, including food, medical supplies, and infrastructure support, is essential to help the suffering of millions. Long-term development projects aimed at rebuilding infrastructure, providing education, and creating economic opportunities can help stabilize communities and reduce the root causes of conflict.

### **Maritime Security and Anti-Piracy Measures**

Enhancing maritime security through more international naval patrols and cooperation can help the threat of piracy and ensure safe passage through the Red Sea. Additionally, supporting the development of local coast guards and law enforcement agencies can provide sustainable, long-term solutions to piracy.

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