Maritime Security Concerns in the Emerging Global Order: An African View on the Red Sea

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The Red Sea has become a microcosm of intensifying militarization, great power projections and strategic architecture plays unfolding at the global scale alongside regional conflicts. While linked intricately with the geopolitics surrounding the Suez Canal, it also poses distinct security challenges like weapons smuggling, human trafficking and piracy emanating from multiple conflict zones in proximity like Yemen, Sudan and Somalia. These have prompted external responses like the Saudi-led Coalition's naval blockade of Yemen and expanding foreign military bases ringing the Red Sea, even as maritime governance remains an imperative for littoral states. This paper explores maritime security in the Red Sea against the backdrop of globally fluid geopolitics from an African perspective. It surveys the evolving maritime security landscape and key issues like piracy before situating African interests, strategic postures and engagements amid a phase of heightened militarization of the Red Sea arena. The paper analyzes how wider global transformations and emerging rivalry affect African capacity in securing neighborhood zones and asks what collective maritime governance frameworks could address both regional and Pan-African needs. The paper also examines continental strategy documents along with perspectives, roles and challenges for players like the African Union (AU), before proposing policy ideas. The premise is to argue for pragmatic yet assertive African agency blending external partnerships, local capacity building and multilateral initiatives as crucial for constructive and enduring maritime stability governance.

Keywords African perspective, geopolitics, maritime security, Red Sea

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INTRODUCTION

The Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Significance of the Red Sea

This article presents a broad framework for scholarly research on maritime security in the Red Sea region, focusing on Africa's role in the evolving global maritime order. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the strategic significance of the Red Sea, not only as a critical conduit for international commerce, especially to and from the Suez Canal, but also as a critical player in regional stability due to its proximity to areas of conflict and its relevance to various African and Middle Eastern nations. It tries to shed light on a spectrum of security issues prevalent in the Red Sea, including piracy, human and drug trafficking, illegal fishing, and territorial conflicts. Moreover, the article delves into how regional turmoil affects maritime security and examines opportunities and challenges arising from the geo-strategic importance of the Red Sea and its surrounding fragile states. The article also explores the historical factors that have influenced maritime security in Africa while emphasizing the contributions and collaborations of regional bodies and the international community in addressing these challenges.

Despite its importance, the concept of maritime security does not have a universally accepted definition, which hampers the development of effective strategies. While the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) addresses aspects of marine security issues, it does not explicitly define 'maritime security'. According to Bueger (2015), maritime security issues can be divided into four areas: environmental, economic, national, and human security. According to Bateman (2005) maritime security is an obligation that maritime areas be free, safe, and accessible to all authorized sea users within the context of national, regional, and international governance systems.

In Africa, evolving maritime security challenges have led to enhanced regional cooperation and changes in the security architecture. In Africa, there has been a historical bias towards national and military interests in maritime policies, overshadowing the importance of economic and human security. This military-centric approach is inadequate and ignores the multifaceted nature of maritime threats.

The rise of piracy along the East Coast of Africa shifted attention to maritime concerns and underscored the impact of piracy on human security. While the Yaounde Declaration expanded the scope of maritime crimes in West Africa (Brits and Nel, 2018), it was in the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIM Strategy) that a comprehensive, sea-focused approach to human security emerged in Africa's overall strategy. This shift represents a changing understanding of security within the African context, recognizing the importance of maritime domains in human security.

RED SEA AS A MARITIME DOMAIN

The Red Sea is a crucial global trade route, facilitating the movement of goods worth approximately $700 billion annually (de Waal, 2016). It carries a significant portion of Europe-Asia maritime trade. In addition, it plays a central role in the competition for hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean and Africa. This competition is

characterized by US-China rivalry, with the US seeking to counter China's potential dominance in the resource extraction sector and regional tensions among nations such as Egypt, Israel, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey.

The strategic importance of the Red Sea is expected to grow due to broader geo-economic trends and the ongoing contest for commercial, political, and security influence in the connected Indian Ocean and Mediterranean regions. The vulnerability of the Red Sea is underscored by its critical chokepoints, namely the Suez Canal in the north and the Bab-al-Mandeb Strait in the south (Senior Group Report,2024). Gaining control of these two points, which could be achieved through a well-executed attack, would equate to controlling international shipping and would have severe consequences for the global economy (de Waal, 2016). Rerouting shipping lanes around the Cape of Good Hope off South Africa, the only alternative to the Red Sea, would triple the distance and expose shipping to new security vulnerabilities. Moreover, damage to the essential infrastructure along the Red Sea could lead to significant political, security, and economic ramifications. Given the recent increase in coastal infrastructure development among Middle Eastern countries, control over these strategic assets has intensified (de Waal, 2016).

However, the security landscape in the Red Sea routes in East Africa is experiencing significant transformations driven by various factors. Pirates now engage in more sophisticated and purposeful criminal acts such as robbery and kidnapping for ransom, target specific types of vessels, and have improved information about merchant ships and their cargo. Extremist groups like Al-Shabab exploit lawless coastal areas to conduct attacks, including using captured vessels as weapons (Liisberg, 2014). In addition to piracy concerns, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden face emerging threats such as human and weapons trafficking, the use of "bomb boats," attacks on shipping lines, remote seizure of navigation systems, hacked controls of oil pipelines (IMO,2014) and cutting undersea cables that could disrupt up to half of the world's internet access (Senior Group Report, 2024). Recent incidents, such as those involving the MV Muskie on May 31, 2017, and the MV Galicia Spirit on October 25, 2016, near the Bab al-Mandeb (BAM) strait, highlight the region's changing nature of maritime threats. On January 6, 2018, other two insecurity incidents occurred approximately 45 nautical miles off the port of Al Hudaydah, Yemen (Senior Group Report,2024). These incidents were instigated by groups operating in Southern Yemen and, in both cases, involved armed speedboats and unscrewed boats approaching commercial ships. The incidents highlight the ongoing threats in the region and the need for international efforts to address maritime security.

Governance challenges in Somalia and Yemen have a massive contribution to piracy and smuggling in the region (Bandel and Crowley, 2010). The increase in transnational smuggling and migration, facilitated by established routes outside state control, poses additional security threats. Moreover, the sea lanes in the Gulf of Aden and adjacent high seas are crucial corridors for irregular migration and human trafficking. Migrants from Somalia and parts of southeastern Ethiopia are transported from jumping-off points along the Somali coast to the coastlines of Yemen and Saudi Arabia (UNODC, 2014). Given demographic pressures and limited opportunities, young Africans are vulnerable to recruitment by smuggling networks. These are another form of transnational maritime criminal activity that has received negligible attention.

The conflict in Yemen and tensions in the nearby sea lanes impact strategic decision-making. When viewed from a broader perspective, the area where the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden meet also serves as the western border of a new arena of rivalry between major global powers in the Indian Ocean (Vertin, 2019). Furthermore, the war has resulted in lawless coastal cities that serve as departure points for small, fast boats regularly targeting cruise ships. In addition, since 2023, the internal dynamics in Yemen, where the Houthis have gained domestic support and recruitment, partly due to their stance on the Palestinian cause, have added layers to the conflict (the Guardian, 2014), making it a challenging international security issue.

Houthi attacks in the Red Sea have become a significant development in the ongoing conflict in Yemen and the broader Middle East. These attacks primarily target commercial shipping vessels, and the Houthis claim that their attacks are retaliatory measures against Israel's "crimes in Gaza" and have pledged to continue their military operations until Israel ceases its activities in Gaza and allows for the unobstructed flow of essential supplies like food, medicine, and fuel to the besieged population (the Guardian, 2014). The escalated attacks in the Red Sea have raised severe international concerns due to the disruption of major global trade routes. A maritime protection force led by the United States has been established to address Houthi attacks and ensure safe navigation. However, the Houthi group has shown resilience and determination to persist with their military operations, highlighting the complex nature of the issue. This ongoing challenge creates tension in the already disrupted geopolitical landscape.

The Red Sea Maritime Security and Global Trade

The Red Sea, an essential maritime corridor that connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean and extends to the Pacific, has had historical significance as a strategic and economic lifeline. Its importance is so great that a US defense official once described it as the "interstate-95% of the planet," emphasizing its global importance (Vertin, 2019).

The Red Sea's status as a global maritime security concern is grounded in its vital economic importance and the impact of security challenges on international trade and development. The Red Sea serves as a crucial artery for global trade (Vertin, 2019). It is strategically significant as it facilitates the flow of goods between European and Asian markets. More than 10% of world trade moves through the Red Sea basin annually, which is expected to rise due to the expansion of the Suez Canal's capacity. The Red Sea's role as a critical waterway for trade underpins its global importance, making its security a matter of international concern.

Moreover, Cybersecurity in the Red Sea region is a critical concern due to undersea cables that supply a third of the world's internet service (Senior Group Report,2024). Disruption to these cables, such as the incident off the coast of Egypt, poses a severe threat to regional stability and the global economy. Cyberattacks in this region have varied, ranging from email scams to more sophisticated hacking of Gulf pipelines. The advancement of autonomous shipping increases the risk, as it opens up the possibility of ships being remotely hijacked by hackers. This vulnerability highlights the importance of robust cybersecurity measures to protect these vital communication links.

In recent times, however, this crucial region has become increasingly entangled

in the complex geopolitical rivalry of the Gulf states and nations in the Horn of Africa. This escalating competition has added to the existing turmoil in the area, exacerbating tensions and complicating regional dynamics.

With the longest mainland coastline in Africa and proximity to some of the busiest global shipping lanes, Somalia's maritime domain can potentially significantly propel the nation's socio-economic progress (UNODC, 2014). Nonetheless, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) faces challenges in efficiently managing this space, a concern underscored by ongoing piracy issues. Many perceive piracy as not a wholly resolved threat but rather a latent risk, partly due to unregulated fishing by foreign vessels in Somali waters. Although the deployment of international naval forces in the Horn of Africa region has effectively curtailed piracy, its impact on broader maritime security concerns remains limited. Somalia continues to be perceived as a hub for terrorism, piracy, human trafficking, and smuggling activities. This negative reputation impedes the country's commercial efforts to exploit its marine resources and poses significant obstacles to its stabilization efforts (UNODC, 2014).

Influential maritime security forces and awareness have resulted in a rise in illicit activities in the region. Illegal trafficking in Yemen presents a significant challenge, involving not just firearms and explosives but also components and precursors for weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The profits from smuggling Somali charcoal and sugar by sea are believed to support terrorism. Additionally, the failure of both countries to patrol the area effectively and prevent crimes is consistently identified as a critical factor contributing to instability (UNODC, 2014).

The strategic significance of the Red Sea, coupled with these contemporary geopolitical challenges, emphasizes its enduring importance in international relations and global trade. It also underscores the delicate balance required to maintain stability in a critical and historically contested region.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND MAJOR POWER INVOLVEMENT IN THE RED SEA

Since 2007, there has been a notable shift in the international community's approach to maritime security in the Horn of Africa (Smed, 2016). This response has involved various initiatives and substantial resource allocation. The international reaction to maritime insecurity in the Horn of Africa, especially Somali piracy, has engaged legal, military, and non-state actors' initiatives. While this response has decreased piracy incidents, it also underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to address broader maritime security challenges in the region.

The global community's efforts have primarily concentrated on Somali piracy, mainly due to its significant impact on crucial international shipping lanes and economic implications. Accordingly, international conventions such as UNCLOS of 1982 and the Geneva Convention of 1958 frame the legal response to piracy. Both conventions recognize piracy as a crime of universal jurisdiction, allowing states to act against piracy in international waters. However, there are limitations to these conventions, including their narrow definition of piracy and applicability only in international waters (UNCLOS

Article 107). Moreover, the United Nations has passed several resolutions since 2008, creating a framework for states and multilateral actors to undertake measures against piracy. These resolutions, while emphasizing capacity building in Somalia, have maintained a focus on a securitized approach to piracy without granting a mandate to target illegal fishing and waste dumping in Somali waters (UNSC Resolutions, 2020). Furthermore, various naval and military operations have been significant in combating piracy; deploying naval forces from Europe, China, and India has also been crucial in the region.

Interpol is also involved in the efforts against piracy; it established a Maritime Piracy Task Force in January 2010. The Task Force focuses on improving evidence collection, facilitating information exchange, and increasing the capacities of police investigation units and personnel deployed against pirates (INTERPOL, 2012). In addition, private security firms and NGOs have played vital roles in anti-piracy efforts.

Moreover, the involvement of major powers in the Red Sea maritime security activities presents challenges and opportunities. Countries such as the United States, China, France, and Britain have a considerable presence in the region through their military bases in Djibouti, with frequent patrol across Red Sea routes. Establishing bases by these significant powers demonstrates global military interest in the Red Sea. The P5 of the UN Security Council, namely China, France, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, have either established bases or have plans to do so in strategically important locations like Djibouti or Sudan (Smed,2016). The Red Sea's crucial role in Sino-European trade and its position as a gateway between Africa and the Middle East are influential factors contributing to the militarization of this region. The presence of these bases reflects ongoing rivalry among great powers in the area. Djibouti has attracted Western powers and regional actors like Turkey and the UAE, who seek to establish and enhance their geopolitical footholds.

Smed points out that these dynamics raise questions about the balance of power in the Red Sea. While competition may lead to tensions, it also presents opportunities for collaboration in stabilizing the region. The military activities of global powers significantly influence regional security. The region's history of conflict and current geopolitical maneuvers by regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and global actors, such as China and the United States, indicate ongoing strategic competition for influence and control in the Red Sea. China's establishment of its first-ever overseas military base in Djibouti (Reuters, 2017), close to Western bases, has drawn attention to Beijing's economic investments in the region and raised concerns about its expanding global aspirations.

Generally, the strategic interests of major powers create challenges and opportunities in the Red Sea. This situation influences regional and global maritime security and trade, highlighting the need for a careful balance between national interests and regional stability. These powers' militarization of the Red Sea affects naval security and the flow of global trade. The region's stability is crucial for the smooth operation of vital shipping lanes, particularly for oil and commercial goods. Therefore, the actions of these powers in the Red Sea have implications for international trade, economic growth, and the political landscape of surrounding countries.

The Red Sea Maritime Security Issues and Africa's Perspective

a. Historical events shaping maritime security in Africa

Maritime activities are crucial for the economic vitality of the globe, often pivotal in food self-sufficiency and Human Security. Africa, the second-largest continent in the world, shares borders with the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean. Of its 54 nations, 38 are coastal or island nations. The continent is globally recognized for its abundant natural resources, making it the wealthiest continent.

The phrase "no shipping, no shopping" accurately illustrates the essential nature of sea-based trade for every nation, even those without coastlines (Africa Center, 2014). African ports handle significant imports and exports, traditionally focusing on natural resources such as gold, diamonds, fish, and agricultural products. However, there is a growing trend in exporting manufactured goods and artisanal products, highlighting the need for secure sea routes for global market access. Additionally, marine fisheries are vital for food supply in many African countries, with fish serving as a primary source of protein. Therefore, disruptions in maritime access or environmental damage to fisheries impact the economy and threaten national food supplies and the countries' sovereignty.

Despite such vital contributions, African security has primarily focused on land-based conflicts, land occupation, and resource exploitation neglecting maritime threats and protecting maritime areas (Hersi, 2021). This is evident in the absence of any mention of seas or inland waters in the 1963 Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or the 2002 Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU). Bueger (2015) notes that African security policy needs to pay more attention to maritime security.

Despite having extensive maritime zones, most African countries do not have strong naval forces or coast guard capabilities for law enforcement (Brits and Nel, 2018). This deficiency leaves vast maritime areas unprotected and open to exploitation. It was only towards the end of the Cold War, with a shift from traditional to human security, that several African states began to recognize the impact of the marine environment on state economic development.

b. AU's Policy on Maritime Security

The African Union (AU) views human security as a multifaceted concept encompassing human development and human rights (Akuffo, 2011). This understanding of human security is consistent across the AU's key documents, including those concerning maritime security. The AU's approach to security in Africa is rooted in human security, as demonstrated in early documents like the Constitutive Act of the AU in 2001.

Throughout history, Africa has primarily focused on human security issues related to land (Ifesinanchi and Ngwangu, 2015), such as establishing the African Standby Force (ASF) and collaborations with organizations like NATO, specifically the East Africa Standby Force (EASF). The Constitutive Act addresses grave crimes like war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, typically associated with land-based conflicts.

The Lomé Charter, the AU's most recent policy on maritime security, aims to promote peace, security, stability, environmental protection, trade, and development in African maritime spaces (Lome Charter, 2016). Its success depends on the definition of

'maritime security,' which aligns with Bueger (2015)'s four themes: marine environment, economic development, national security, and human security.

The 2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIM Strategy) emphasizes economic and human security while acknowledging national security, suggesting that the Lomé Charter should adopt a similar focus. However, existing maritime security documents like the 2009 Revised African Maritime Transport Charter and the Djibouti Code of Conduct primarily focus on maritime transport, safety, piracy, and transnational crimes. However, the Jeddah Amendment to the Djibouti Code represents a shift to human security and the blue economy (Bueger, 2015). Implementing these documents with land and sea initiatives that address the root causes of insecurity through human development would be more effective. The Lomé Charter, intended to enforce the 2050 AIM Strategy, is expected to prioritize development. However, training, capacity building, and improving social welfare are not well-covered. Strong political will and effective leadership are necessary for its implementation (Cordner, 2014). Despite 31 countries signing the Charter, its ratification and implementation remain challenging.

A key obstacle to this cooperation is the entrenched notion of state sovereignty (Ifesinachi and Ngwangu, 2015). The success of the Lomé Charter relies on member states coordinating their maritime security efforts. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have different security concerns, with states prioritizing risks that affect their interests. Africa's history shows the negative consequences of fragmented regional approaches (Williams, 2018), as seen in conflicts in the Horn of Africa.

The success of the Charter in addressing maritime insecurity depends on various uncertain factors. The African Union (AU) and its member states must set ambitious goals and develop practical strategies to enhance maritime security (Chintoan –Uta and Silva,2017). While the AIM Strategy has clear goals, it needs more legal authority. The Lomé Charter provides the legal framework for implementing the Strategy's human security and developmental aspirations. To achieve success, the Lomé Charter requires a comprehensive and cooperative approach, strong political commitment, and a shift in focus to holistic development and regional security strategies (Brits and Nel, 2018).

c. Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD)
Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) is a regional block in the Horn of Africa Five of its members have a coastline (Somalia (with a coastline of 3,025 km), Eritrea (2234 km), Sudan (853 km), Kenya (536 km), and Djibouti (314 km), while South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda are landlocked but access the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean via the territories of the aforementioned countries therefore, a significant portion of the population relies on the marine domain for their livelihood. The region's trade primarily relies on the sea, with crucial maritime zones such as the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden playing a vital role (IGAD, 2014).

IGAD adopted its Maritime Safety & Security Strategy (IMSS 2015-2030) on December 15, 2015. It focuses on evaluating the regional maritime domain and addressing challenges related to maritime security strategy (Hersi, 2021). It remains the guiding instrument for developing IGAD Member States' capacity for maritime safety and security.

The IGAD Security Sector Programme (IGAD SSP) Maritime Security Pillar,

established in May 2013, assesses the regional maritime domain and identifies each Member State's maritime priorities, concerns, and requirements. A key objective is to implement the 2015-2030 IGAD Integrated Maritime Strategy (IMS), which encompasses the aspirations of the AU 2009 Maritime Transport Charter and the AIM 2050 strategy and strives to create a robust marine and maritime sector in the IGAD region (Alwan, 2021).

However, the Maritime Pillar of IGAD SSP has met challenges in addressing the region's diverse maritime needs and integrating its strategies with broader regional security initiatives. These difficulties arose due to the region's instability, including political turbulence, territorial disputes, piracy, illegal fishing, and trafficking that undermine efforts towards maritime security and impede the effective implementation of security policies. There needs to be more clarity between the policy framework and its practical execution, which can be attributed to varying levels of commitment and capacity challenges among IGAD member states. This fact hinders unified action and poses significant challenges to enforcing maritime security policies and monitoring extensive maritime areas.

d. The Red Sea Forum

The Forum was established in 2020 by "the Red Sea Littoral States" in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia become members of this newly established forum. This forum connects the African and Arabian states adjacent to the Red Sea. It is expected to aid in convening a forum in the case of a security event in the Red Sea region that could effectively manage the problem, prevent further escalation, and coordinate an appropriate response (Vertin, 2019). In the context of a post-war transition in Yemen, the importance of such a forum becomes even more pronounced.

However, establishing the Red Sea Forum to address regional needs has faced challenges due to its restrictive "Littoral states only" membership policy. IGAD and AU wanted some institutional cooperation with the Red Sea Forum. IGAD, in particular, has actively sought engagement with the forum, given that half of its members are also part of IGAD. However, most members of the Red Sea need to be more welcoming of these broader institutions. Egypt, the key initiator of the forum, excluded non-littoral states like Ethiopia, a country only 60km away from the Red Sea coast, for geopolitical reasons (Vertin, 2019). This exclusion has sparked resentment from Ethiopia and some East African states, who have advocated for some form of institutional arrangement allowing them to participate in the forum's activities. Like the UAE, the Gulf States also highly feel this resentment and face the same exclusion.

If inclusive and effectively structured, the forum offers a vital opportunity to address a broad spectrum of regional interests, including peace and security (UNHCR, 2019). It offers an opportunity for greater cooperation and less reliance on the patron-client model states. Both coastal states and the Horn would greatly benefit from engaging in collaborative dialogue, particularly on the migration flows, marking a step towards a new regional order involving the Gulf and the Horn of Africa.

e. Challenges for inter-African collaboration on maritime security

A predominant capacity challenge throttling collective maritime security cooperation in Africa stems from stark asymmetry in abilities to secure extensive EEZs, choked surveillance systems, and limited enforcement platforms constraining threat monitoring and responses from illegal fishing to trafficking rackets exploiting turmoil as evident in Bight of Benin piracy (Ejiofor, 2022). Large coastlines, such as Namibia's 1.6 million square kilometer EEZ and Kenya's more than 2700 nautical miles, highlight the major resource and capacity shortages that African coastal regions face.

Bureaucratic fragmentation also hinders coordination with multiple agencies from environment, and ports to navies overseeing distinct functions and policies despite possessing poor intra-agency communication. Such disconnects defeated earlier Gulf of Guinea frameworks until the 2013 Yaounde Architecture introduced improved information-sharing processes target hardening against further external shocks (Chapsos,2022). Interstate tensions driven by economic nationalisms and unresolved territorial disputes similarly complicate waters like the Zambezi Delta encouraging unilateral exploitation over joint conservation allowing IUU syndicates to ease maritime crimes.

The absence of enforcement unity due to disjointed legal regimes across adjacent maritime boundaries also advantages malicious actors. Differences whether in acceptable hot pursuit duration for foreign forces or restrictions over piracy classifications impede coordinated deterrence in African regional waters as scholars' highlight (Mubaya and Adisa, 2021). Universal ratification and harmonizing such statutes can enable collective deterrence against maritime threats through unified application, interpretations, and asset pooling.

Without sustained investments in capabilities upgrading, maritime domain awareness systems integration, and policy harmonization, African maritime governance institutions risk being outpaced by rapidly evolving threats whether non-state militant networks or globalized trafficking cartels undercutting the rule of law at sea. Hence elevating maritime security cooperation requires renewed priority across interlinked domestic, regional and continental levels.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Mubaya and Adisa argue that the security situation in the Red Sea is intertwined with the broader geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East and Africa. Rivalries among African countries, the broader regional conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the involvement of global powers add complexity to the Red Sea's security landscape. These tensions and rivalries have implications for maritime security in the region, as they can potentially escalate into broader conflicts that threaten the stability of this crucial naval corridor.

The growing attacks on ships in the Red Sea by the Houthi rebels from Yemen have led to heightened concerns for global supply chains. The presence of the Iranian warship in the Red Sea (Vertin, 2024), following US Navy actions against Houthi vessels, signifies the potential for further escalation. This situation has caused significant

shipping companies to alter routes, increasing costs and insurance premiums. The global economic implications are substantial, with the possibility of continued escalation posing risks to shipping costs, oil prices, and the fragile recovery from high inflation (Vertin, 2024).

Involvement from the Horn countries like Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti adds more complexity. Djibouti's strategic position at the entrance to the Red Sea has made it a hub for international military bases and a critical point for maritime security. Military bases from global powers such as the United States, China, and France emphasize Djibouti's significance in Red Sea security.

As a landlocked nation, Ethiopia's access to the Red Sea is critical, relying on ports in neighboring Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somaliland for import-export activities (Vertin, 2024). Eritrea's strategic location along the Red Sea coast is vital for Ethiopia's maritime trade routes. The peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia has eased border tensions, but the maritime domain remains a potential source of contention.

The recent inking of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland on January 1, 2024, to establish a naval base and use Berbera's port has brought regional implications (BBC News, 2024). The agreement enables Ethiopia to diversify its seaport access, reducing its reliance on Djibouti and enhancing its strategic position with direct access to the Red Sea. Analysts view this MoU as a strategic and diplomatic triumph for Ethiopia and a peaceful and pragmatic solution to Ethiopia's landlocked dilemma, offering mutual benefits to Ethiopia and Somaliland (Addis Standard, 2024). However, the agreement also implies recognizing Somaliland as an independent entity, separate from Somalia, leading to a wide range of controversies (BBC News, 2024). The new development holds broader implications for the Horn of Africa, especially considering the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait's strategic significance. The analysis warns against escalating geopolitical imbalances in the already turmoil region and stresses the need for diplomatic efforts to prevent instability (BBC News,2024).

The involvement of the Gulf States in the Horn of Africa political transitions, along with the increased interest of global powers, is reshaping the region's geopolitical dynamics. The maritime security in the Red Sea, especially considering the involvement of the major powers and regional dynamics, posits both opportunities and challenges for African maritime security in the emerging global order. While this competition provides economic opportunities, it poses risks and vulnerabilities for regional states.

African nations must adopt a more comprehensive approach toward maritime security that goes beyond military strategies. The AU's over-reliance on military policies disregards the diverse impacts of maritime threats on economic and human development and fails to address the multifaceted nature of such threats. Given the diverse effects of maritime security issues on various African states and actors, the one-size-fits-all approach is also inefficient (Cordner,2014). African nations need a shared understanding of maritime security to develop a cohesive regional strategy. Moving forward, Africa must shift its focus towards an all-inclusive approach that integrates economic development and human security to secure its maritime domain effectively. Such a comprehensive strategy would tackle immediate security challenges and promote long-term stability and prosperity in Africa's maritime environment.

Weak maritime governance and a lack of robust regional naval security have

contributed to piracy and other maritime insecurities. This problem is rooted in inadequate governance and security systems of coastal states. The regional states and IGAD have yet to establish effective systems or frameworks to oversee activities in their maritime territories (Fantaye,2014).

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the Red Sea's status as a global maritime concern is thus shaped by global and regional actors' economic, political, and security interests and broader international geopolitical interests. The interconnected nature of these issues necessitates a coordinated approach to ensure the security of this vital maritime corridor. Security challenges in the Red Sea and East African maritime routes are interconnected with political, economic, and social issues on land. Responding to these challenges involves international cooperation and a multifaceted approach to address immediate threats and root causes.

The paper makes the following recommendations for the different players in the security dynamic of the Red Sea.

AU and Africa: African countries must navigate these complex dynamics carefully, particularly those in the Horn of Africa and along the Red Sea. Policies should ensure the security and openness of their maritime domains for trade. Collaborative efforts, such as the Djibouti Code of Conduct/Jeddah Amendment, offer platforms for regional cooperation. Engaging in these platforms could help African states address evolving security threats in the Red Sea and ensure the safety and security of navigation in this essential region.

There exist a number of possible strategies for African countries to safeguard interests amid geopolitical tensions. The first essential strategy entails upholding Pan-African multilateralism and rejecting unilateralism in securing African maritime spaces. Joint continental platforms allow the amplification of limited capabilities through improved surveillance coordination, patrols, and response capacity pooling. Inter-state policy harmonization around issues from port standards to information-sharing protocols also enhances resilience against external shocks and probes.

Moreover, African states and regional organizations must work towards establishing a unified approach to securing the Red Sea. The AU should prioritize Africa's maritime domain and implement the Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050. While progress has been made at various levels, the AU has yet to demonstrate interest in consolidating these efforts for a comprehensive approach to African maritime security. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) should assist member states in conducting scientific and economic studies to understand the value of their maritime domains and explore the potential for sustainable and responsible development. Collaborations among regional and international players are crucial to safeguarding maritime security in the Red Sea.

The IGAD Sub Region: IGAD and its member states should focus on enhancing regional collaboration, increasing resource allocation, and prioritizing capacity building. This focus is essential for effectively monitoring and enforcing maritime

security policies. Leveraging member states in the Red Sea Forum and securing direct membership would be a key strategy. Additionally, consistent international funding and technical support are vital to address resource constraints faced by IGAD.

De-escalating the tensions in the Gulf region would significantly alleviate regional strains, fostering an environment more conducive to productive engagement. This reduction in tensions would allow Gulf states and their African allies to engage more effectively in forums and discussions, free from partisan limitations (Vertin,2019)[1]. By adopting a stance of collaboration and constructive dialogue in the Horn of Africa, Gulf states can build stronger, more positive regional relationships. This approach could lead to more stable and mutually advantageous outcomes for all parties involved, underscoring the importance of diplomatic efforts and regional cooperation.

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