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# The Red Sea..Features of Conflict & Cooperation Opportunities

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*Abstract-* *Purpose:* The study aims at showing the geostrategic importance of the Red Sea that makes it a venue of competition and conflict among many local, regional and international powers, showing the aspects of the conflict through determining its elements, introducing existing and future cooperation opportunities and determining the type of relationship between the aspects of the conflict and the opportunities of cooperation in the Red Sea.

*Design / Methodology / Approach:* The study is based on using "The New Functionalism Approach", this approach is an automatic and transitional approach in the same time so that integration among States shall necessarily start in the economic field that automatically leads – if necessary conditions are met – to move to other fields until the integration process reaches its peak. According to the new functionalism approach, the spillover factor is considered the major drive for the process of integration and merging.

*Keywords:* *conflict – cooperation – security – red sea – horn of africa – suez canal –bab al-mandab – piracy – gulf security.*

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# The Red Sea..Features of Conflict & Cooperation Opportunities

Dr. Abou Bakr Fathi Al Desouki

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The New Functionalism Approach emerged following the criticisms that were addressed to the original functionalism approach that focused on the impossibility of combining and unifying the interests of peoples and the impossibility of segregating between political issues and their remarkability over other issues and eventually, the impossibility of convincing the States to waive part of its sovereignty in favor of the new functional institutions. The New Functionalism Approach came to place a different approach for integration and merging and developing new standards and indicators for this phenomenon. The New Functionalism Approach cares for the existence of the integration phenomenon among sovereign sector in States under the pressure of economic temptation.

The New Functionalism Approach includes a number of hypotheses of which the importance of placing some integrated sectors of independent States under monitoring, supervision and co-management as the integration section must enjoy vital and strategic importance for the economies of those States. This sector shall also enjoy the competitive feature that does not lead to the conflict of the interests of States and their feeling with threat.

The theory is also based on the concept of area integration instead of the integration approach within its international frame. The new functionalists believe that attempting to combine between a large group of States that differ in the economic, social and political sides is a kind of Utopia or idealism. Therefore, it is a must to focus on the area integration that starts from certain geographic regions that meet some preliminary conditions for the process of integration and merging.

*Findings:* Though the aspects of conflict in the Red Sea still continue, the opportunities of cooperation plays a positive role in neutralizing or delaying the conflict on the short run through maximizing the joint interests, deepening cooperation cases and mutual dependence through joint and institutional work that varies from bilateral to multiple in a way that might, by time, eliminate the sources of conflict, and realize security and stability in the Red Sea.

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## I. Introduction

The Red Sea is a strategic water artery that links the east and the west. Therefore, it becomes one of the most important international trade routes. It is also the basic bridge for the transport of Gulf oil to world markets. Recently, the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa territory have become one of the most important regions in the world for attracting investment. The inauguration of the Suez Canal on 17th November 1869 was the basic turning point in the importance of this sea as it became a world strategic waterway. In the seventies of the twentieth century, the Arabs said that the Red Sea is an "Arabic Lake" considering its importance. Considering the development of this importance, the United States placed the sea region under Africa related American military command AFRICOM, since 2008 after it had been under the Central Command (Salem, 2021). Meanwhile, States became interested in developing external polices under the name "Red Sea" and sometimes under the name "The Horn of Africa and the Red Sea" (Rajab, 2021).

### *a) Main research question*

This study investigates the following main research question: Would cooperation opportunities succeed in neutralizing, postponing or terminating the features of conflict in the Red Sea?

### *b) Research Assumptions*

The basic assumption of this study is "Cooperation opportunities play a role in determining the future of the conflict in the Red Sea".

## II. The Geostrategic Importance

Geographically, the Red Sea lies between the two continents; Asia and Africa. Its entrance is from the north of the Suez Canal and from the south Bab Al Mandab. It is the connecting ring between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea and therefore, it becomes on the most important international waterways (Khan, 2018).

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New geostrategic landscape started to be formed in the Red Sea region for many reasons of which the military operation headed by the Arab coalition in Yemen since March 2015, the increasing influence of the international and regional powers in the Red Sea, the appearance of international-regional coalitions in addition to the increasing international competition over the development of ports in the Horn of Africa that becomes a major route for communications and Internet cables that link the world. The region has also become a target of competition between China, India and the United States to control the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian influence in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa has escalated during the last two decades (Rajab, 2021) in parallel with the escalation of the influence of Gulf States whether in the form of military presence or economic interests. Consequently, one of the American reports described competition among Gulf States as the greatest threat for the security of the Horn of Africa (United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

This is in addition to the internal challenges that encounter the States of South Red Sea such as the appearance of the failed States, the emergence of border and internal conflicts and the increasing role of actors of non-States in piracy and terrorism crimes (Rajab, 2021). The Horn of Africa has also become an incubating environment for illegal trade of arms, human trafficking and drug trading as around (30-35) ton Afghan heroin is smuggled into the East Africa annually (Africa Union, 2010).

## III. Features of Conflict

The more the strategic importance of the Red Sea, the more the sources of threat the Red Sea encounters. Challenges that reflect incompatibility among international and regional powers over the rules of competition. There is a state of interconnection and complication that govern many of the frames of political, economic and security competition and cooperation that the region witnesses. These all changes indicate that the frames of traditional regional interaction are no more guaranteed or effective. Therefore, some experts believes that the region is about to step into a new time era that is characterized by more interaction, rush, conflict and competition with the presence of a degree of turbulences and tensions so that it would not affect the strategic interests of great States (Abdel Wahab, 2021).

The elements of conflict and threat in the Red Sea region is determined through the following:

*a) The increasing presence of international powers*

The presence of these powers on the coasts of the Red Sea has been increased in light of the dissemination of the phenomena of leasing seaports. This often comes in parallel with the establishment of military bases close to these ports and consequently military bases of the United States, France, Russia, China, Turkey, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Emirates have been disseminated in Djibouti, Somalia, Eretria and the Sudan with the aim of realizing their related interests, contributing in securing the free international navigation, and combating piracy operations at Bab Al Mandab and Aden Gulf (`Emirates Center for Policies, 2021).

Competitive policies among international powers are multiple through relying on the dissemination of troops, establishing military bases, executing big projects in the field of developing the infrastructure and developing ports overlooking the Red Sea.

We refer to these powers as follow:

i. *The United States and Western Powers*

They seek enhancing their military presence in the Red Sea and expanding their influence in a way that serves their interests related to military domination in the Indian Ocean. The concept of "free navigation" represents a strategic target that governs these powers and therefore becomes one of their first task for their military dissemination. Then, came the phenomena of piracy in the Gulf of Aden that pushed the western powers to promptly form a Combined Maritime Forces to encounter this threat (Sallem, 2021).

The United States hired Camp Lemonnier in 2003 against 63 Million Dollars a year. The camp include the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CTF-HOA) in addition to the permission to use Djibouti seaport and airport by the American Air Force within its operation in the Gulf region and the Horn of Africa. The base includes around 4 thousand persons in addition to around 180 Japanese persons since 2011 under the name "Deployment Air Force for Counter-Piracy Enforcement (DAPE) (Salem, 2021).

The United States also established a base in Socatra on Yemeni coasts since 2010 to fight Al-Qaeda organization and piracy opposite Somali Coasts (Rajab, 2021). The United States also pursued to renew its partnership and enhance its security cooperation with the Sudan through the "US Africa Command (AFRICOM)" forces after deleting the Sudan from the list of States sponsoring terrorism (El Shark El Awsat, 2021).

As for the European Union, it has a special representative in the Horn of Africa region who is concerned with the improvement the European Union involvement in the region. The European Union physically military exists through EU NAVFOR Operation Atlanta to counter piracy. The European Union also allocated over (3) Billion Euros for the Horn of Africa during the period 2014/2020 through an investment fund related to Africa (Council of the European Union, 2018).

As for other Western powers, they exist in the French base "Heron" that include forces from France, Germany and Spain in accordance with a treaty concluded in 1977. The size of the French force is around 1,700, the German force is around 330 and



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Spain has around 50 individuals that conduct air reconnaissance flights in the Horn of Africa region. Italy also maintains its own base "Base Militare Nazionale di Supporto" that could host around 300 individual and drones. Britain has bases in Kenya and Oman and its activating in Somalia (Salem, 2021).

ii. *China*

China follows a long run developmental perspective and is keen not to be involved in any competition with the great powers and the non-involvement in the internal affairs of the region countries. It is also pursue the execution of "the Belt and Road Initiative" that includes "the Maritime Silk Road" through the Red Sea to East Mediterranean ports then south of Europe (Rajab, 2021).

China also leased a base in Djibouti against 20 Million Dollars per year. It is its first base abroad and was inaugurated in 2017 and host around two thousand individuals in addition to a capacity to host 10 thousand soldiers (Salem, 2021).

China is considered the prime source of weapons in the region. It has distinguished relations with a number of African countries. It executes projects to expand Djibouti port in a way that grants Ethiopia an access on the Red Sea beach. Presently, China invests in the development of the port of "Doraleh". It owns (23.5%) of Djibouti related Free Zones and Ports Authority. China also controls the industry of developing the infrastructure in Ethiopia to connect it with the ports of Djibouti (Rajab, 2021). It is observed that the Chinese strategy in South Red Sea concentrates on Ethiopia, Eretria and Djibouti through basic infrastructure projects. It is a partner in Djibouti 2035 strategy (Vision 2035) to develop the ports that target turning Djibouti into "Africa Singapore") (United States Institute of Peace, 2020). Moreover, China participates in the UN Peace Keeping Force in South of Sudan with around one thousand soldiers as well as other UN tasks of peace keeping in Africa (Salem, 2021).

China also seeks to support developmental projects in the region by providing attractive loans (Zach, 2020). Western sources accuse China of adopting "Debt-Trap Diplomacy" where big projects are financed in poor countries that fail to repay. The debt of some countries of the Horn of Africa to China escalated (34% of the debt of Ethiopia as an example) (United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

Although China is keen not to play a direct role in keeping the security of the Gulf and Red Sea regions, it is clear in confirming the importance of securing "Strategic Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs)" that are related to power supply lines. Therefore, Chinese Navy joined in the international counter piracy operations in 2008. It also contributed in evacuating Chinese workers from Yemen. Chinese – American cooperation mechanisms are also observed such as the "US-China Strategic & Economic Dialogue" though the stand of the consecutive American Administrations fluctuated in terms of welcoming understanding with China in this file (United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

iii. *Russia*

Russia seeks to equalize the American influence in the Red Sea by its attempt to establish a military base in Berbera in Somalia and the port of Zeila in Somaliland close to the borders with Djibouti (Stratfor, 2018). It also maintains good relations with Egypt in the North of the Red Sea that guarantee many economic and military privileges including the sale of weapons, joint maneuvers, and establishing nuclear reactors. In the South, Russia sought to establish a base in Djibouti, but the United States refused. In December 2020, Russia announced that it reached an agreement with the Sudan for the establishment of a navy military base in the port of Port Sudan for a period of 25 years liable for renewal for another ten years (Business Insider, 2020) with the aim of "enhancing peace and stability in the region" against providing arms to the Sudan (United States Institutes of Peace, 2020).

iv. *India*

India attempts to compete the Chinese presence in the Red Sea in order to control the western part of the Indian Ocean. It adopts the strategy of developing navy forces in the "blue waters" in order to equalize the Chinese strategy "Pearl Chain" (Institut De Relations Internationals Et Strategique, 2017).

Militarily, India has a reliable navy force that expands in the Indian Ocean. It concluded treaties with the United States and France to benefit by their bases in the Indian Ocean. It also joined counter piracy operations in the Horn of Africa and UN operations in south of the Sudan (Salem, 2021).

*b) The Increasing Influence of Regional Powers*

Regional powers also compete in order to find a leap in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, of which:

i. *Turkey*

Turkey seeks investment in countries of the Horn of Africa. It works on equalizing its economic presence with a military presence and has an access to the Red Sea. Turkey signed an agreement with Al Bashir government in the Sudan in 2017 in order to develop Suakin Port to be used by navy forces and commercial ships. They also signed other agreements related to agriculture, industrial, military and financial cooperation that worth (650) Million Dollars (Lofaso, 2018).

Turkey inaugurated a base in Somalia in 2017 at a cost of 50 Million Dollars hosting 200 soldiers. This presence is linked with the military presence of Turkey in Qatar and the joint maneuvers that are conducted between them. Meanwhile, Turkey provides Somalia military learning and training in the field of combating



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terrorism. It inaugurated its biggest embassy in the world in Mogadishu in 2016. Turkey airlines are the only international airlines that regularly fly to Mogadishu. Turkey handles the management of Mogadishu port through a company called "Albairak" (Salem, 2021).

ii. *Iran*

Iran believes that the permanent presence in the entrance of the Red Sea is an important strategy in order to increase its capability "to deal with the cautious action in face of the Gulf States and in particular Saudi Arabia in addition to providing a base to support its regional allies such the Houthis, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Syrian regime (Fahmy, 2021).

At first, Iran sought to infiltrate into the Red Sea region through the soft power until it established a multi task military base in the Eritrean port "Massawa" as Eritrea remained an ally to Iran for a long period. Iran also seek to establish a permanent influence amid the Islamic communities in east and west Africa. It also seeks to push the Shiite movement in the Horn of Africa region particularly in Ethiopia and exploit the religious factor through the role of embassies and cultural centers (Fahmy, 2021).

iii. *Israel*

Israel seeks to create an influence in the Red Sea region. It seeks to invest the Sudanese – Israeli peace process in a way that achieves its interests and work on containing the Sudan that was a station for Israel enemies such as Al Qaeda organization and Iran. Israel also seeks to complete its expansion in the Horn of Africa and enhance its relations with Ethiopia, Kenia, Somali and Eritrea. It established its military bases in "Assab", "Massawa" and "Dahlak", "Haleb" and Fatima) ilands and eavesdropping center in the mountains of "EmbaSoira". The Israeli presence in Eritrea aims at gathering intelligence information to detect any movements of hostile parties in the Red Sea (Fahmy, 2021).

Israel also seeks to make port of Eilat on the Red Sea an access to African countries that is establishing a wide scope continental commercial movement between Africa and its Western and American counterparts the center of which shall be the port of Eilat (Abdel Rahman, 2018).

iv. *Ethiopia*

Ethiopia seeks to become a basic part in the regional equation of the region and to overcome the geopolitical that made it a landlocked country. This enhanced its attempts to own shares in ports of "Doraleh" in Djibouti, "Port Sudan" in the Sudan, "Lamu" in Kenia and "Berbera" in Somaliland. It is fully engaged in some integrated regional projects (Emirates Policy Center, 2021).

The Ethiopian Prime Minister, "Abiy Ahmed" declared in June 2018, two months before assuming office – declared the rebuilt of the naval capabilities of the Ethiopian army. Therefore, Addis Ababa signed in March 2019 a defense cooperation treaty with France to develop the Ethiopian navy force, enhance air cooperation and joint operations. This was followed by the appointment of Admiral KinduGezu to lead the establishment process of navy forces provided that the headquarter of the forces shall in the city of "Bahir Dar" the capital of "Amhara" region in the north of Ethiopia that overlook lake "Tana" (El Am, 2018).

In December 2019. An Ethiopian Djiboutian agreement was unveiled that provides the establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Djibouti where 95% of Ethiopian import and export pass through Djibouti. Then Addis Ababa launched negotiations with Djibouti to participate in the development of port of "Doraleh". The Ethiopian ambition aspires to establish other bases in ports of Eritrea, Kenia, Somaliland, and the Sudan (Fahmy, 2021).

No doubt, the Ethiopian announcement of establishing Ethiopian military bases on the Red Sea is almost connected to the failure of negotiation among Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (BBC, 2021) that forms a threat to the shares of Egypt and the Sudan in Nile water in violation to the international treaties in addition to Ethiopia continuity to build the Grand Renaissance Dam without reaching a satisfactory agreement with Egypt, a matter that makes Egypt exposed to the limit of water poverty (Al Dessouky, 2019). Ethiopia and Russia also signed a military cooperation agreement on 12th July 2021 that would concentrate on turning the capabilities of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces into the fields of knowledge, skill and technology. It is well known that Russia is the main source for arming Ethiopia since long time ago (African Military Blog, 2021).

v. *Gulf States*

The influence of the Gulf Cooperation Council States has increased in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa region with the conflict around Yemen and within the frame of linking the security of the gulf with the security of the Red Sea and the Suez Canal in addition to the economic motives related to investment opportunities and the pursuit to enhance food security through military presence and providing aids. The influence of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia appeared and Djibouti, in 2017, welcomed the presence of a Saudi base on its land. Some tension occurred between the United Arab Emirates and Djibouti regarding the activity of DP World Company that was nationalized. Meanwhile, the Emirates preferred to rely military in the two ports; the Eritrean "Assab" (that it lately withdrew from) and the Somalian "Berbera" in addition to its control over the Yemeni ports and islands. A tension also occurred between Somalia and



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the Emirates due to the agreement concluded between the Emirates and "Somaliland" to establish a base on its land (Salem, 2021).

vi. *Egypt*

Egypt interest in the security of the Red Sea for being a natural extension of the Suez Canal in addition to the future hopes placed on the promising economic zone in Suez Canal region (Al Dessouky, 2018). Egypt's commitment with the security of the Red Sea is an extension to its commitment with the security of the Arabian Gulf that Egypt considers part and parcel of its national security. Egypt always emphasize that the security of the Gult is a "Red Line" (Salama, 2017). Egypt seeks to diversify its military forces in the Red Sea as it inaugurated the Command of the South Fleet in the port of Safaga (Arabic CNN, 2017). Egypt also inaugurated the biggest military base in the Red Sea region on 15th January 2020, that is "Barnis" base (Keshk, 2020).

The Egyptian Navy Forces also participate in securing the entrances to the Red Sea within the Arab coalition to counter the Hothi aggression in Yemen. It also conduct military maneuvers with the Red Sea countries and the international powers of which maneuvers with the United States, France, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Emirates, Jordan and Djibouti (Rajab, 2016).

c) *Maximization of Internal Challenges*

Some countries overlooking the Red Sea are witnessing many internal challenges of which:

i. *The Continuous State of the Failed Country*

Somalia is still suffering from the absence of the role of the State and the incapability of the federal government to perform its functions, exercise sovereignty over its national soil, and inability to achieve peace and stability for its people (Hashem, 2018). Still Mujahedin Youth Movement is capable to exercise violence, dictate its control over some parts of the Somali capital, parts of South of Somalia and some areas located on the borders with Kenia and Ethiopia (Abdel Wahab, 2021).

ii. *Continuity of Border Disputes*

The colonization policy lead to drawing borders among countries in an artificial way that serves its interest and contradicts the fact and privacy of the African peoples (Badawy, 2018). These disputes are still going on between the Sudan and Ethiopia and Ethiopian and Eretria – currently postponed due to the agreement of the two countries over other priorities in the Horn of Africa. There is a dispute between South of Sudan and the Sudan over the future of Abyei Area. Kenia and Somalia are also disputing over their maritime borders in the Indian Ocean (Oponeo, 2021) in addition to the dispute between Djibouti and Eretria due to the later occupation of "Dimayrah" area in 2008 (Badawy, 2018).

iii. *Domination of Internal Conflicts*

These are multi conflict in the region the most prominent of which is in the Tigray Region in Ethiopia between the federal government and the government of the region due to the attempts of Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia Prime Minister, to consolidate his internal ambition by changing he equation of the federal ruling and present himself as being the strong man in the Horn of Africa Region (Oponio, 2021).

In November 2020, Abiy Ahmed launched an attack against Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) promising to end the fight within few weeks (Walsh, Dahir, 2021). However, the conflict continued until Tigray troops recovered the capital of "Mekele" region and major cities in Tigray on 28th June 2021 after the retreat of the Ethiopian troops (The African Report, 2021).

The civil war in Ethiopia raises a number of fears of which the possibility of dividing Ethiopia, a matter that would lead to shaken the stability of the Horn of Africa as a whole, in particular that the crisis lead to the death of thousands and 1.7 million persons are homeless. This is in addition to ethnic cleansing crimes and sexual abuse by Ethiopian government troops and it Eritrean allies (Walsh, Dahir, 2021).

iv. *The Dissemination of Terrorist Organization*

The Horn of Africa region is witnessing the dissemination of extremist organizations that could threaten the security of the region. Of the most dangerous organizations; Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen in Somalia, Daesh Cells in North Somalia, Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Hothi Group in Yemen and the terrorist cells in South Yemen. These organizations are very dangerous and of very high capabilities to perform tough terrorist acts whether in the Horn of Africa or in the neighboring countries (Tawfik, 2018).

v. *The Continuity of War in Yemen*

The continuity of this war form a real threat to free navigation. Hothi rebels supported by Iran planted mines along the coasts of Yemen and used explosive boats and anti-ship projectiles to attack maritime vessels. This was clearly manifested in attaching the Saudi oil tanker in April 2018 (Abdel Rahman, 2020).

Along with the Yemeni crisis, a highly environmental threats appear of which the docking of the oil tanker "Safer" since for years in Ras Eissa port in El Hudaydah Governorate. This tanker carries around 1,148 million barrels of oil. The Hothis refuse to allow a UN inspection team from reaching it to verify its status and maintenance. Therefore, it became a time bomb that threatens with an environmental catastrophe in the Red Sea since the vessel is out of age and its body is liable for erosion. The Hothis used the tanker as a bargaining paper and extortion to obtain privileges without considering the risks oil leakages or the explosion of the tanker (Al Ain, 2020).



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The United Nations declared that the negotiations of the tanker maintenance reached a dead end. Then the Security Council later demanded the Hothis to facilitate a safe unconditional access of UN experts to conduct a comprehensive evaluation and preliminary maintenance without delay. The United Nation declared that the inspector mission is still ready to go to Yemen to execute its task (D.W, b, 2021).

The continuity of the conflict in Yemen caused the great humanitarian crisis in the world. According to UN reports in 2018, 80% of the population in Yemen (30 million) needs one or another form of assistance. Almost 20% Yemeni suffer food shortage (Harden – Knights, 2019) and 11.3 million children need humanitarian assistance (UNICEF, 2018).

Estimates show that (230) out of 333 Yemeni district is expose to the risk of famine (Sharp, 2019) in a country that depends on importing 90% of food on which 22 million citizens live (The Soufan Center, 2018).

## IV. Cooperation Opportunities

Cooperation opportunities in the Red Sea are multiple the most important of which are; the agreement of great powers to guarantee free navigation, the increase of regional or bilateral cooperation projects, the establishment of new regional conglomerations and turning the region into a major destination for investments and international trade.

*a) Agreement of Great Powers to Guarantee Free Navigation*

The free navigation in the Red Sea is a strategic priority of the great powers and there is an agreement over removing any threat that might impede the free navigation (Abdel Rahman, 2020). The Red Sea has always been a vital crossing point for international trade as being a low cost passage compared with other alternative routes for European goods heading to Asian markets and vice versa. What is worth USD (700) billion of total trade between Europe and Asia pass through Bab El Mandabstraight annually in addition to (4.8) million barrel of crude oil and petroleum products equivalent to 4% of total oil trade in the world pass daily (US Energy Information Administration, 2017).

What confirm the importance of guaranteeing world trade movement in the Red Sea, the world losses caused by the stranding of the gigantic cargo ship "Ever Given" in the Suez Canal during the period from 23-29 March 2021. Egypt lost around USD 84 to 98 million without computing the charges that would have been received from the ships that turned its course towards the Cape of Good Hope (Al-Ain, 2021).

At the level of world trade, the cost of closing the canal for a week amounted to USD 6 to 10 Billion. Meanwhile, the prices of transport, insurance production cost and fuel have been doubled several times. Oil prices increased by 6% after less than 48 hours of the cargo ship running ground (DW, a, 2021). Meanwhile, the cost of shipping goods from Asia to the American Eastern coast increased to more than Five Thousand Dollar compared to USD 2,775 in March 2020 (Arabic.Sputniknews, 2021).

Losses also affected China, Europe, North African countries, Gulf States and Turkey as China became the one of the most important suppliers to the markets of these countries. We could say that two third of the goods exchanged between Germany and China passes through Suez Canal. Meanwhile, Gulf States export between one million to one million and half barrels of oil daily through Suez Canal to European and Turkish markets as well as markets of other countries (DW, a, 2021).

The closure of the canal pushed some ships to move towards the Cape of Good Hope bearing the cost of extending the voyage period for around two weeks including the cost of additional fuel. Experts argue that 45% of the volume of goods in the ports of Newyork, Newjersey in the United States passes through the Suez Canal and that around 9 billion 600 million Dollars of goods stuffed in containers passes daily through the Suez Canal (Al-Ain, 2021).

*b) The Increase of Regional & Bilateral Cooperation Projects*

The rhythm of bilateral cooperation among the countries of the region increased as Ethiopia depends on the ports of Djibouti. The relevant annual income Djibouti realize is arount (2) billion Dollars. Ethiopia started to operate a railway line between Ethiopia and Djibouti since 2018 to transport goods and people. Meanwhile, Ethiopia contribute in the development of the port of "Berbera" in Djibouti. There are also projects to develop a land transport road from Ethiopia and South of the Sudan to the port of "Lamo" and another road that ling the Ethiopian capital with Khartoum (Farid, 2021).

The countries of the Horn of Africa are heading to become oil and gas exporting countries as China is investing in the development of the Oil & Gas Sector in Ethiopia by developing the pipes that would transport the oil and gas to the refinery station that would be established in Damerjog in Djibouti instead of transporting it to the container terminal existing in Doraleh (Styan, 2018).

There are also new projects that increase the opportunities of cooperation in the Red Sea region of which:

i. *Suez Canal Axis*

Suez Canal is considered one of the most five sustainable sources of the Egyptian national income from hard currencies with annual revenues that reach more than (5.6) billion Dollars during the year 2020 (DW, a, 2021). Egypt bets to maximize its gains through promising investment opportunities in the Suez Canal



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region and in particular in the industry field. Global companies have already started investment there. The first stages of more than an industrial zone have already been completed the most prominent of which is the Chinese Zone (Suez Canal Authority Information Center, 2019).

ii. *Suakin Island*

Turkey and the Sudan concluded an agreement in December 2017 that allow Turkey to redevelop "Suakin Island" and invest this Archaeological area that goes back to the Ottoman dynasty to become a touristic area that could be a transit station to receive Turkish Muslim pilgrims on their to the Sacred Lands in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, though this agreement had been impeded by ousting President El Bashir and the internal Sudanese changes (Salah, 2017).

iii. *"NeomProject"*

The great investment project was announced in October 2017 with the participation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt with total investment estimated (500) billion Dollars. The project includes the establishment of a bridge that crosses the Red Sea to link the new city "Neom", Egypt and other African continent. It is expected to be inaugurated in 2025. The project aims to enhance the trade movement and the movement of individuals and investments among Africa, Asia and Europe (Shay, 2016).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also seeks based on it ambitious vision 2030 to develop around 200 km along the costs of the Red Sea including fifty small islands to enhance touristic initiatives that target attracting foreign investments. The city of "Neom" shall be inside the coastal strip (Abdel Rahman, 2021).

*c) Establishing New Regional Conglomerations*

On 6th January 2020, a charter for the establishment of "the Council of the Arab and African States Overlooking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden" to coordinate among eight countries; Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen, Somalia, Jordon and Eritrea in order to protect the international navigation and achieve integration and development in all fields (Independent Arabia, 2020). The GDP of the countries participating in this entity exceeds One Trillion One Hundred Billion Dollar while the number of population is more than 233 Million people (Abdel Wahab, 2021).

The newly born council is considered as a joint working system that targets increasing the level of cooperation and understating among the member countries, coordinating political stands among them, establishing close security cooperation, developing economic and commercial relations, enhancing investments among the member countries, enhancing maritime transport, enhancing cooperation among sea ports along the cost of the Red Sea, opening communications channels with the countries that do not overlook the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden with the aim of cooperation to protect the Red Sea from the risks threatening its security and stability and encountering the infiltration of some regional powers in the Horn of Africa that target crippling the Arab and African security of the countries of the Red Sea (Aaskar, 2020).

The Red Sea also represents with all that it contains wasted wealth potentials that has not been optimally exploited by the countries of the region. Therefore, this council could enhance the opportunities of economic cooperation among them to exploit the resources and wealth of the sea. It could also be a nucleus for the establishment of a greater and more comprehensive entity that target enhancing African Arab integration and cooperation. It could also enhance the opportunities for agreement between the member countries and the international and regional powers present in the Red Sea as being an arena for negotiation in the future (Aaskar, 2020).

*d) Joint Security Cooperation in Encountering Piracy*

The continuous threat from maritime piracy during the last two decades pushed the international powers to form Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). These forces are composed of three working teams; the First is Combined Task Force 150 (CTF 150) that conducts Maritime Security Operations (MSO) beyond the Arabian Gulf to guarantee the free navigation crossing the region and seeks to resist criminal and terrorist organization as well as illegal activities. The activity of this force overs the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman in addition to the routes leading to the three water passages; Straight of Hormuz, Bab Al Mandab and Suez Canal. A large number of regional and international power participate in this force (Combined Maritime Forces).

As for Combine Task Force 151 (CTF 151), it is concerned with deterring and preventing piracy and armed robbery in the Sea, participating with regional partners in enhancing the capabilities of securing free navigation. This force was formed in January 2009 to combat piracy and was approved by virtue of the International Security Council decision no. 2500 (2019). The scope of its activity was expanded to include wider maritime security to support Combined Maritime Forces.

As for Combined Task Force 152 (CTF 152), it enhance maritime security cooperation in the Arabia Gulf. It also contribute in protecting the maritime infrastructure including oil platform from any terrorist threat (Combine Maritime Forces).

The European Union also participates in the operation of securing the Horn of Africa through "Atlanta" operation that performs deterrence, protection and oppression against piracy and armed robbery works before the Horn of Africa up to the west of the Indian ocean. It also protect the ships of food program and other shipment vessels that are exposed to threat.



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The operation started in December 2008. The European Union renewed its mission for the year 2020 (Arabic Sputniknews, 2018).

e) *The Red Sea a Major Destination for Investment & International Trade*

The Red Sea region has become a major destination for investment and international trade where China is pursuing the execution of "The Belt & Road Initiative" and consequently executing the strategy of "String of Pearls" that targets the development of sea port at the entrance of the Red Sea and the investment in the basic infrastructure projects in the Red Sea countries (Rajab, 2021) as it seeks to invest around (120) Billion Dollars in its new projects with expectations of investments that amount to (700) Billion Dollars as per the preliminary estimates (Putten, Meijnders, 2015).

China also aims at increasing the volume of its trade exchange with the Red Sea countries where it amounted to around USD 93 Billion in 2018 and reached USD 187 Billion in 2020 by adding the Gulf States with the Horn of Africa countries – that is double the trade exchange between the United States and these countries (Zach, 2020). The volume of China trade with the continent of Africa amounted to around USD 215 Billion annually (United States Institute of Peace, 2020). China's investment in the African continent amounted to USD (200) Billion (Arman, 2015).

Japan also targets enhancing investment in the Horn of Africa in a way that maximizes its strategic interests there particularly in the field of exporting infrastructure. This comes within the frame of its commitment with investments amounting to USD 10 Billion within a batch of investment that amounts to USD 30 Billion the ex-Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, undertook during TICAD conference that was held in Kenya in August 2016 (Anadolu Agency Website, 2019).

Japan enhances cooperation with India in order to establish the Asian African Development Trajectory that basically focus on the fields of importance for economic and social development in Africa. It is a Japanese Indian alliance that aims at investing around USD 200 Billion – though has not yet been activated. It combines the Indian expertise and understanding of the African market with the Japanese technological advancement and financing capabilities. This trajectory aims at enhancing the joint efforts to improve development aids in Africa based on the principle "gains for all" and consolidating peace and stability through economic growth and development (Aaskar, Japan).

The volume of the Indian trade exchange with Africa amounted to around USD 62 Billion in 2018. The volume of exchange with the Horn of Africa jumped from USD 550 Million in 2001 to USD 5.4 Billion in 2017 (Associated Press, 2020). India also succeeded to be the first trade partner for the countries of the Red Sea region during 2018 surpassing China (Institut De Relations Internationals et Strategiques, 2017).

## V. Conclusion

Challenges in the Red Sea region are multiple and are potential sources to trigger conflicts whether between competing major and regional States or among or inside the Red Sea States themselves. Meanwhile, the presence of extremely dangerous non-state organizations whether the Houthi in Yemen or Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen in Somalia could conduct terrorist acts that threaten the security and stability of the region or the disruption of maritime navigation in the Red Sea. The conflict has multiple feature and the potential of its occurrence is possible at any time, but in the meantime, cooperation opportunities are many and multiple and could have potential positive impacts on the future of the conflict.

We notice that there is an agreement among the various power to guarantee free navigation in the Red Sea. They all agree to protect and secure it. We could imagine the world anxiety when the navigation movement was disrupted in the Suez Canal because of the "Ever Given" vessel ran aground and the volume of world losses to which we referred to some of them. This means that the suspension of navigation causes huge losses for all while free navigation is always a gain for all. Meanwhile, major powers do not have a desire to be involved in regional and international conflicts in order to preserve their interests.

Meanwhile, participating in interests through bilateral or group cooperation projects prevents conflict because mutual interest postpones the conflict and might end it. Conflict is always very expensive and causes huge losses. Border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia has been temporary neutralized due to the presence of other mutual interests between the two parties in the Horn of Africa whereas existing or undergoing bilateral projects would cost enormous sums. Total expected investment of Saudi "Neom" project amounts to USD 500 Billion as mentioned in the research. However, such projects would yield great gains to their parties and definitely all seek gain not loss.

Sources of threat are not uniform in the Red Sea. If the presence of some international powers in seaports or in military bases represents a threat to the security of the Red Sea from the view point of some, this presence is considered an economic interest for some other. Djibouti is an example because it considers leasing bases and seaports is an important source of income.

Meanwhile, working through institutional conglomerations prevents conflict due to the existence of a framework that gathers countries within which long discussions are held about the posed problems. All parties whether the parties participating in the conflict or



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others, consult each other. In addition, these institutions have mechanisms to resolve disputes in accordance with definite procedures set out in the charter establishing such conglomerations that all parties accepts in the event of participating in such institutions. There is no doubt that such mechanisms often exert the best efforts to totally resolve or neutralize the dispute. These institutions consolidate the state of cooperation and increase its opportunities based on its numerous targets.

Countries that accept joint work through regional organizations often depend on each other when interests overlap, a matter that makes the notion of disagreement between them irrelevant and if it exists, it would be in lowest level possible in a way that do not negatively impact the other field of cooperation.

The presence of international successful experiences in joint work as in the case of the participation of international and regional powers to encounter piracy within the Combine Maritime Forces becomes a motive to continue the success, repeat the experience of cooperation in other fields and consolidate mutual reliance and understanding among all parties.

Turning the region into a destination for investments and international trade makes various parties keen to protect their interests and avoid damaging them whether by themselves or by others. The presence of this quantity of huge investment and exchanged trade creates thousands of work opportunities that youth need and consequently improves the level of economic and social life and in turn prevent and limit crimes that make people be involved under poverty and need.

Consequently, in the event of the proper and effective employment of cooperation opportunities, it could neutralize or postpone the conflict in the near future. They might eliminate the conflict on the long run in light of the entanglement of interest and deepening cooperation cases that is if we assume that the aspects of conflict remain silent and do not escalate. The conflict is existing and extended in light of the nature of international relations, the contradictions of strategies of States and the nature of relationship that control it whether with friendship or enmity indicators. However, the joint interest might compel States to change their enmity strategy towards some, neutralize conflicting beliefs, belongings and ideology.

## VI. Recommendations

- The importance of working on intensifying cooperation frameworks and maximizing the joint interests between regional and international powers from one hand and the countries of the Red Sea the other hand in a way that helps enhancing and activating cooperation opportunities and ultimately ends any areas of disagreement and in turn escalation and conflict.
- Encouraging regional conglomerations at the top of which the Arab and African States overlooking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to continue and provide their opportunities of success. Such conglomerations are a great opportunity for the States considering them as an arena for discussion and interaction that may lead to joint vision around all the issues of the region. They may also lead agreements to launch regional cooperation projects among the States of the Red Sea to benefit by their huge wealth.
- Establishing relations for geostrategic interaction and dialogue between the Arab and African States overlooking the Red Sea and the regional and international powers existing in the Red Sea as well as the Red Sea neighboring States in various forms whether permanent as in granting those States the observer membership adopted with some or in non-permanent form through establishing forums or round table discussion about certain issues that join those States of mutual interests in the Red Sea Region.
- Ensure the continuous harmonization among the powers existing in the Red Sea region about guaranteeing the free international navigation across the Red Sea course through its two inlets; the Southern at Bab el Mandeb and the Northern at the Suez Canal and enhancing the security of the region or combating certain crimes such as piracy, weapon smuggling or human trafficking. Agreement over the minimum limit of security and enhancing security cooperation in a certain qualitative issue results in the gradual agreement over more comprehensive security systems and generalizing cooperation in various issues.

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