RED SEA CRISIS IMPACTS ON GULF OF ADEN'S MARITIME SECURITY

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ABSTRACT
The post-October 2023 Red Sea Crisis, driven by persistent attacks on commercial shipping by Yemen's Houthi movement, has fundamentally transformed the security architecture of the adjacent Gulf of Aden. Applying the Copenhagen School's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), this article argues that the crisis represents a successful securitization act by a non-state actor that has displaced the long-standing multilateral counter-piracy regime and generated a complex security dilemma in the region. This securitization has compelled a strategic redeployment of international naval assets from broad anti-piracy patrols to focused anti-missile defense in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait resulting security vacuum in the wider Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin has, in turn, enabled a documented resurgence of Somali piracy and fostered the emergence of new hybrid threats, including collaboration between Houthis and other regional armed groups amid the divided security focuses from the governments in the region. In its investigation, this research uses qualitative approach by extracting the data from diverse sources from news coverages, academic articles, official releases from involved governments and international organizations, as well as reports from think tank organizations. This analysis demonstrates the profound capacity of localized, asymmetric conflicts to reconfigure regional security dynamics, challenge established global governance models, and degrade security in contiguous maritime spaces.

Keywords: Red Sea crisis, Gulf of Aden, Middle-East, Maritime Security, Regional Security Complex Theory

ABSTRAK
Krisis Laut Merah pasca-Oktober 2023, yang didorong oleh serangan terus-menerus terhadap pelayaran komersial oleh gerakan Houthi Yaman, telah mengubah arsitektur keamanan Teluk Aden secara signifikan. Dengan menerapkan Teori Kompleks Keamanan Regional (Regional Security Complex Theory - RSCT) dari Copenhagen School, artikel ini berargumen bahwa krisis ini merupakan langkah sekuritisasi yang sukses oleh aktor non-negara yang telah menggantikan rezim anti-pembajakan multilateral yang telah berlangsung lama serta menciptakan sebuah dilema keamanan kompleks di kawasan tersebut. Hal ini ini telah memaksa pemindahan strategis aset angkatan laut internasional dari patroli anti-pembajakan yang luas ke pertahanan anti-rudal yang terfokus di Selat Bab el-Mandeb sebagai respon dari serangan Houthi Yaman yang melakukan sekuritisasi sebagai dampak dari serangan Israel. Kekosongan keamanan yang dihasilkan di Teluk Aden dan Cekungan Somalia yang lebih luas, pada gilirannya, memungkinkan kebangkitan perompakan Somalia yang terdokumentasi dan mendorong munculnya ancaman hibrida baru, termasuk kolaborasi antara Houthi dan kelompok-kelompok bersenjata regional lainnya. Dalam melakukan investigasi, penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan berbagai sumber data mulai dari pemberitaan media massa, artikel akademik, laporan resmi pemerintah dan organisasi internasional, serta laporan lembaga think tank. Analisis ini menunjukkan kapasitas mendalam dari konflik asimetris yang terlokalisasi untuk mengkonfigurasi ulang dinamika keamanan regional, menantang model tata kelola global yang sudah mapan, dan menurunkan keamanan di ruang maritim yang bersebelahan.

Kata-Kata Kunci: *BERTopic; Debat Umum Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa; Pemodelan Topik*

INTRODUCTION

The Red Sea Crisis that began in 2023 with the conflict of Hamas in Gaza, Palestine and Israel has sparked complex sequences with even devastating impacts towards not only Palestine-Israel, but also all of the Middle-East and the rest of the world. By the time this article is written in June 2025, the conflict has spread into Hamas in Palestine, Israel, Houthi in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran, and the US, creating a complex geopolitical crisis in the Middle East that could potentially escalate even further. While the negative impacts on the political economy are complex, the direct impacts on maritime security in the Gulf of Aden have generated major setbacks to the region's maritime security, which has been relatively peaceful for a decade, with Houthi attacks on commercial passage in the Gulf of Aden (Sainz, 2025).

The maritime corridor connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal, Red Sea, and Gulf of Aden represents one of the world's most critical geostrategic chokepoints. Approximately 12% of global commerce, including 30% of all container traffic and a significant portion of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG), transits this waterway annually (J.P. Morgan, 2024). Its importance extends beyond commerce to global communications, hosting a dense network of subsea fiber-optic cables vital for data transmission between Europe, Asia, and Africa (International Crisis Group, 2025). Sea routes have also become important in the last 10 years for their relatively safer waterways in contrast to the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa (Arifin & Juned, 2023).

From an international relations perspective, this corridor is more than a mere transit route; it is a crucial seam where the security dynamics of two distinct but increasingly intertwined Regional Security Complexes (RSCs), the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, converge and collide. Analysts have noted a "merging of the security systems" across the Red Sea, where the political, economic, and military interventions of Middle Eastern powers such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, and Turkey increasingly shape and are shaped by the fragile security landscape of Horn of Africa states such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.). This transregional dynamic, characterized by overlapping rivalries and the projection of power across the water, makes the region exceptionally volatile and analytically complex (Feierstein, 2020).

Against this already fractious environment, the sustained campaign of attacks by Yemen's Houthi movement beginning in October 2023 acted as a powerful catalyst, precipitating a full-blown international crisis. The Houthis claim that these attacks are in solidarity with Palestinians amid the conflict in Gaza, and they have multiple and layered motivations, including bolstering their domestic legitimacy after a protracted civil war, asserting their role as a key member of Iran's "axis of resistance," and projecting power onto the global stage (Aguiar, 2025). Using a sophisticated and expanding arsenal of anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), cruise missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and direct seizure tactics, the Houthis have targeted dozens of commercial and naval vessels (Lewis, 2025). This offensive prompted a swift international military response, most notably the formation of the U.S.-led Operation Prosperity Guardian and the European Union's Operation Aspides, aimed at defending freedom of navigation (International Crisis Group, 2025).

The academic and policy literature on security in this maritime space has historically been bifurcated. One substantial body of work focuses on the geopolitics of the Middle East, the Yemeni civil war, and the proxy competition between Iran and a Saudi-led bloc, often analyzing maritime incidents as extensions of land-based conflicts (Feierstein, 2020). A second, equally robust body of literature has concentrated on the international counter-piracy regime established in the Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin after 2008. This scholarship details the successful multilateral efforts—including Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151), EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta, and NATO's Operation Ocean Shield–that suppressed Somali piracy from its peak to near-negligible levels through coordinated patrols, industry best practices, and regional capacity building (Maritime Crimes, 2025).

The critical research gap that this study aims to fill lies at the intersection of these two issues. There has been insufficient systematic analysis of how the state-level security crisis in the Red Sea is

directly and causally impacting the pre-existing maritime security architecture of the adjacent Gulf of Aden. While many reports acknowledge the spread of Houthi attacks into the Gulf of Aden, the secondary and tertiary effects of the international response to these attacks on the broader security environment remain under-theorized.

This article addresses the central research question: How has the Red Sea Crisis, precipitated by Houthi attacks, transformed the pre-existing maritime security architecture and threat landscape of the Gulf of Aden? To answer this question, this study employs a qualitative process-tracing methodology. This approach is ideally suited for establishing the causal mechanisms that link the Houthi offensive to tangible changes in the Gulf of Aden by examining the sequence of events, actors' decisions, and the shifting allocation of security resources. The analysis is grounded in a theoretical framework that combines Regional Security Complex Theory with the concept of securitization to explain how a non-state actor can fundamentally reorder a regional security agenda.

Developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver of the Copenhagen School, the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides a powerful analytical lens for this study. RSCT posits that international security is best understood from a regional perspective, as most threats travel easily over short distances. The theory defines a Regional Security Complex (RSC) as "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another" (Buzan & Waever, 2012). The structure of an RSC is defined by three key elements: the arrangement of units and their differentiation, patterns of amity and enmity, and distribution of power (Jones, 2025).

The geography of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden places it at the intersection of two distinct RSCs: the Middle Eastern and Horn of Africa RSC. The Middle Eastern RSC is a classic "conflict formation," characterized by deep-seated patterns of enmity, primarily the rivalry between Iran and a bloc composed of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel, with significant penetration by global powers, historically the United States (Yossef, 2020). The Horn of Africa RSC is defined more by the internal fragility of its states (e.g., Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia), which creates vulnerabilities to both internal conflict and external interference

(Gebru et al., 2023; United States Institute of Peace, n.d.).

This study conceptualizes the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden as a "sub-complex" or an inter-regional space where these two larger complexes overlap and interact with intense security interdependence. The Yemeni civil war serves as a primary vector for this interaction, with Middle Eastern powers directly intervening in a conflict on the shores of the Horn of Africa, thereby merging the security dynamics of the two regions (Donelli & Cannon, 2023). This "penetration" is a core concept in RSCT, describing how external powers become entangled in a region's security dynamics, and is a defining feature of the Red Sea arena (Ferreira Souza, 2021).

Complementing the regional focus of RSCT, the field of maritime security studies provides vocabulary for the specific threats at play. As defined by scholars such as Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds, maritime security is a broad concept encompassing not only traditional inter-state naval conflict but also a range of transnational threats, including terrorism, piracy, smuggling of narcotics and weapons, illegal fishing, and environmental crime (Bueger & Edmunds, 2024).

Prior to October 2023, the dominant maritime security paradigm in the Gulf of Aden focused overwhelmingly on counter-piracy. Following the surge in Somali piracy from to 2008-2012, an unprecedented international coalition established a robust security architecture. This includes naval patrols by the Combined Maritime Forces (specifically CTF-151), EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta, NATO's Operation Ocean Shield, and independent deployers from nations such as China, India, and Russia. This architecture was remarkably successful, relying on a constabulary model of policing sea lanes, escorting vulnerable vessels, sharing intelligence, and promoting industry-led Best Management Practices (BMPs). By 2022, Somali piracy was largely suppressed (Maritime Crimes, 2025). This established a clear baseline security environment against which the changes wrought by the Red Sea Crisis can be measured.

This study integrates RSCT and maritime security by employing the Copenhagen School's concept of securitization. Securitization is the process by which an actor designates an issue as an existential threat to a specific referent object (e.g., the state or

the global economy), thereby justifying the use of extraordinary measures outside the normal bounds of politics (Hamzawy & Brown, 2025). A "securitizing move" is successful if the relevant audience accepts the framing of the threat as existential.

The central theoretical argument of this paper is that the Houthis, a non-state actor, executed a highly effective securitization move. By linking their attacks to the politically and emotionally resonant conflict in Gaza, they successfully framed international commercial shipping in the Red Sea as a legitimate military target associated with Israel and its allies (International Crisis Group, 2025). This move compelled a critical audience of global shipping companies, insurers, and Western governments to accept the threat as existential to the freedom of navigation and stability of global supply chains (J.P. Morgan, 2024). The result was the mobilization of extraordinary measures: the mass rerouting of global trade around Africa and the deployment of powerful multinational naval coalitions (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). This response fundamentally transformed the regional security agenda, displacing the low-intensity, cooperative counter-piracy policing model with a high-intensity, conflictual anti-missile deterrence military model.

This process highlights a crucial dynamic in contemporary international relations in the following ways. In a globalized system, the ability to successfully securitize an issue functions as a powerful form of asymmetric leverage. Traditional security analysis, often rooted in realism, posits that states with greater material capabilities and military and economic power are the ones that set security agendas. The Houthis possess a limited conventional military force compared to the U.S.. Navy and its allies should, by this logic, be marginal actors. However, by combining asymmetric military tactics with a potent political narrative, they elevated their actions to the level of an existential threat to a global public good: maritime trade. The international response, therefore, was not a proactive measure dictated by great power interests but a reactive one, forced by the Houthi threat. In this way, a materially weaker non-state actor successfully dictated the terms of the security competition, compelling powerful states to reorient vast resources to counter a threat on the Houthis' terms. This demonstrates that the discursive power to securitize can, under the right conditions, rival material power in shaping regional and global security dynamics.

METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative research design, which is optimal for conducting an in-depth analysis of a complex and evolving political phenomenon such as the Red Sea crisis (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A qualitative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of causal mechanisms, actor motivations, and the interpretive frameworks that shape state and non-state behavior, which quantitative methods would struggle to capture. The core methodology employed is process tracing. This method is designed to identify the intervening causal process—the causal chain and mechanism—between an independent variable (the cause) and the outcome of the dependent variable (the effect). In this study, process-tracing is used to establish the sequential and causal links connecting the initial Houthi attacks (the cause) to the transformation of the maritime security environment in the Gulf of Aden (the effect). The analysis traces the sequence of events from the Houthi offensive to the international military and commercial response, then to the strategic redeployment of naval forces, and finally to the observable changes in the threat landscape in the Gulf of Aden, such as the resurgence of piracy.

This research is based on a comprehensive review and synthesis of publicly available open-source data from a diverse range of sources. The data collected include official government reports and documents such as policy papers from the involved countries, academic articles such as text books and journals, and reports from credible think tank organizations, news coverage from well-known media. The diverse sources of data are essential to capture the complexity of the issue as well as to ensure data validity through rigorous data triangulation to support data sources credibility checks. For instances, third party reports from the think tank organization such as International Crisis Group is essential to be compared with the US, as a party that is involved both Gulf of Aden piracy eradication as well as the Red Sea Crisis itself, on the perspective on handling Red Sea Crisis complex impacts manifested in its government release.

The collected data were subjected to rigorous thematic analysis. Information was systematically organized, coded, and categorized according to the core concepts of the theoretical framework: elements of RSCT (penetration, amity/enmity), securitization (securitizing actor, move, audience), and maritime security threats (piracy and terrorism). This process involved identifying patterns in actor behavior, threat perception, and the evolution of security practices over the crisis timeline, allowing for the construction of a coherent causal narrative grounded in empirical evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Anatomy of a Crisis: Houthi Attacks and the Global Response

The Red Sea crisis began in earnest on October 19, 2023, when the USS Carney intercepted missiles and drones launched from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen towards Israel (International Crisis Group, 2025). This marked the beginning of a sustained and escalating campaign. In November 2023, the Houthis shifted their focus to maritime targets, hijacking the vehicle carrier Galaxy Leader and initiating a series of attacks on commercial vessels they claimed were linked to Israel. However, the attacks quickly became indiscriminate, affecting ships with no clear connection to Israel and impacting the commerce of over 40 nations. Between October 2023 and March 2024, the Houthis launched attacks on more than 60 vessels, employing a diverse arsenal that included one-way attack UAVs, anti-ship cruise missiles, and, most significantly, anti-ship ballistic missiles, a capability rarely seen in the hands of non-state actors. The geographic scope of these attacks rapidly expanded from the southern Red Sea to encompass the critical Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the western Gulf of Aden (Lloyd's List, n.d.).

The international response was swift but fragmented. On December 18, 2023, the United States announced the formation of Operation Prosperity Guardian, a multinational naval coalition under the umbrella of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), with the stated objective of ensuring freedom of navigation (Imtiaz, 2025). Key participants included the United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, and France, which deployed destroyers and frigates to the region (Gordon, 2023). This was followed by the EU launching its own distinct naval mission, EUNAVFOR Operation Aspides, in February 2024, with a purely defensive mandate to protect shipping (Council of the EU, 2025). Alongside these protective missions, the U.S. and UK have conducted multiple rounds of offensive airstrikes against Houthi military infrastructure inside Yemen since January 2024, aiming to degrade the group's capacity to launch attacks. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 2722 in January 2024, condemning the attacks and affirming the right of member states to defend their vessels (United Nations, 2024). The following table provides a condensed timeline of the key events illustrating this escalation.

Table 1: Selected Timeline of Key Maritime Security Incidents and Responses
(October 2023 - January 2024)

Date	Incident Type	Location	Actors Involved	Description/Outcome
19-Nov-23	Hijacking	Red Sea	Houthis, MV Galaxy Leader	Houthis seize the Bahamas-flagged vehicle carrier and its crew, taking it to Yemen (Lloyd's List, n.d.)
03-Dec-23	Multiple Missile/Drone Attacks	Red Sea	Houthis, Unity Explorer, Number 9, AOM Sophie II	Three commercial vessels are struck by missiles or drones in separate attacks

				(Lloyd's List, n.d.)
31-Dec-23	Attempted Boarding / Naval Engagement	Red Sea	Houthis, Maersk Hangzhou, U.S. Navy	Houthi small boats attack a container ship; U.S. Navy helicopters engage and sink three boats (Wilson Center, 2024)
09-Jan-24	Large-Scale Attack Interception	Red Sea	Houthis, U.S. & UK Navies	U.S. and UK forces shoot down a complex barrage of 21 drones and missiles (J.P. Morgan, 2024)
15-Jan-24	Missile Strike on U.S.-Owned Vessel	Gulf of Aden	Houthis, M/V Gibraltar Eagle	A U.S.-owned bulk carrier is struck by an anti-ship ballistic missile, sustaining minor damage (J.P. Morgan, 2024)
08 June 2024	Anti-ship ballistic missile	Gulf of Aden	MSC Tavvishi (Liberia) Containership, Houthi	Houthis launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles at the vessel. One hit, and the other was intercepted by a coalition ship (Lloyd's List, n.d.)
17-Nov-24	Missile Attack	Red Sea	Anadolu S, Unknown	Master reported missiles exploding in close proximity. Vessels and crew reported safe. (UKMTO) (Lloyd's List, n.d.)

Source: (J.P. Morgan, 2024; Lloyd's List, n.d.; Wilson Center, 2024) visualised by the author

Geopolitical and Economic Impacts

The Houthi campaign has generated profound economic and geopolitical consequences that extend far beyond its immediate conflict zones. Economically, the crisis triggered one of the most significant disruptions to global shipping in recent history. Major shipping lines, including Maersk, MSC, and Hapag-Lloyd, quickly suspended transits through the Red Sea, opting for the longer and more expensive route around Africa's Cape of Good Hope (Rodriguez-Diaz et al., 2024). This diversion adds 10-14 days and thousands of nautical miles to voyages between Asia and Europe, leading to soaring operational costs. Freight rates for key routes, such as Shanghai to Genoa, surged by as much as 350%, and war-risk insurance premiums for vessels willing to transit the region skyrocketed from less than 0.1% of a ship's value to as high as 2% (J.P. Morgan, 2024). The impact on regional economies has been severe, particularly for Egypt, which saw its revenues from the Suez Canal fall by 40-50% in early 2024 (Reuters, 2024).

Geopolitically, the crisis has dramatically elevated Houthi status. Previously viewed primarily through the lens of the Yemeni civil war, they have successfully demonstrated their capacity to hold a critical global chokepoint at risk, thereby asserting themselves as formidable regional actors (Aguiar, 2025). This has complicated the strategic

calculus of the regional powers. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, despite their long-standing opposition to the Houthis, have reacted cautiously, seeking to avoid derailing the fragile peace process in Yemen and being drawn into a wider confrontation with Iran. The crisis simultaneously intensified the long-running US–Iran proxy conflict, with Washington and its allies viewing Tehran as the primary enabler of the Houthi campaign through the provision of weapons, intelligence, and training (Robinson, 2025).

The most significant, yet least analyzed, impact of the Red Sea crisis is the fundamental transformation of the security environment in the contiguous Gulf of Aden. This transformation has been driven by a cascading series of effects, beginning with the redeployment of international naval forces, which created a security vacuum that other malign actors have been quick to exploit.

RSCT approach captures this issue in three aspects: the nature of relations between actors, the interlink regions of Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, and the power dynamics within the region. In aspects of the relations between actors, it is essential to understand the nature of Iran backed Houthi Yaman and its relations to Israel as well as its ideologically link with the Al Shabaab group in Somalia. Securitization by Houthi Yaman in the Red Sea is a response from the on going threat of the Israel attack which further disrupt the stability in the Red Sea. The Houthi Yaman amplifies instability and insecurity by targeting the commercial sea vessels in order to adds global pressure towards Israel to stop their attack so the Houthi will no longer target the commercial vessels.

Houthi yaman securitization also depends on the how Somalia government and Al-Shabaab response in the Gulf of Aden. This two region are not clearly perceive as two region regarding the close relationship in both cultrural and politics in addtion to the geographic factors. In this regard, If the disruption in the Red Sea also generates similar escalation of insecurity in the Gulf of Aden by the increasing sea piracy, it will generate more pressure for the Israel to stop the attacks. In this regard, the position of both Houthi Yaman and Al Shabaab as non-state actors is the leverage as direct actions toward them will also be affect Somalia and Yaman. In contrast, Israel as state-actors will face more pressure of responsibility for the chaos in addition to humanitarian crime in Gaza.

Similarly, the Somali government will also face the potential turmoil due to uprising of Al Shabaab in the Gulf of Aden as the result of Red Sea Crisis since the crisis provided changes for Al Shabaab uprising as well as weakening the collective maritime security in Gulf of Aden that indirectly support the stability of the governent.

It is clear that Houthi Yaman generates power dynamics in the region not only in its relations towards directly involved parties such as Houthi Yaman, Al Shabaab, Somalia, Yaman, and Israel, but also the indirectly involved parties from the private sectors whose its goods sails in the region and the external countries which participate in securing the Gulf of Aden such as the US. The securitization act of Houthi Yaman by targeting the commercial vessels in response to Israel attacks is not only a leverage for them in the ceasefire negotiation but also generates pressure from the private sectors for more comprehensive securitization in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden which in turn shift the focus of from maintaining the maritime security in Gulf of Aden to eliminating threats from the Houthi Yaman towards their vessels. This condition is dangerous to the maritime security in region which the devided security focus is proven to be key formula for failures as it happens in the Gulf of Guinea's countries inability to maintains the security and stability in Gulf of Guinea as the result of devided focus between the gulf and Boko Haram in the North (Arifin & Juned, 2023).

Strategic and Security Architecture Dynamics in Gulf of Aden

The nature of the Houthi threat—fast-moving, technologically sophisticated missiles and drones— demands a commensurate naval response. International warships participating in missions such as Operation Prosperity Guardian and Aspides have been forced to concentrate their assets in the relatively confined, high-threat areas of the southern Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Their primary mission shifted from broad maritime policing to high-end air and missile defense. This strategic necessity has had a direct and debilitating effect on pre-existing counter-piracy missions. Naval assets and surveillance aircraft that were once dedicated to patrolling the vast expanses of the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin under the mandates of CTF-151 and EUNAVFOR Atalanta were either formally reassigned or functionally

reprioritized to the anti-Houthi mission (International Crisis Group, 2025). This strategic displacement has thinned the naval presence across the wider region, creating what can be described as a security vacuum: a reduction in the surveillance and deterrence posture that had successfully suppressed piracy for nearly a decade (Sardella, 2025).

The direct consequence of this security vacuum has been the documented and alarming resurgence of Somali-based piracy. After years of dormancy, the period since November 2023 has seen a spike in piracy-related events, including the first successful hijacking of a commercial vessel for ransom since 2017 (Combined Maritime Forces, n.d.). Incidents have occurred far out into the Indian Ocean, indicating that pirate action groups feel emboldened by the reduced naval presence (The Maritime Executive, 2024). This revival of a "traditional" maritime threat is a direct, albeit unintended, consequence of the international focus on the "new" threat in the Red Sea region. More ominously, the crisis fostered the emergence of new hybrid threats. There is growing evidence of collaboration between the Houthis and Somali-based actors, including the al-Shabaab terrorist group and other criminal networks (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025). This cooperation reportedly includes weapons smuggling from Yemen to Somalia and intelligence sharing, with Somali actors potentially helping the Houthis identify maritime targets in the Gulf of Aden in exchange for weapons or training. This development points towards a dangerous "threat fusion," where the profit-driven motives of piracy could merge with the ideological and geopolitical objectives of terrorist and insurgent groups, creating a more complex and dangerous security challenge for the region.

The degradation of maritime security in the Gulf of Aden has significant destabilizing effects on the fragile states of the Horn of Africa. For Somalia, the resurgence of piracy threatens to undermine hard-won gains in state-building and security sector reform, potentially empowering clan-based militias and extremist groups, such as al-Shabaab, who may profit from or facilitate piracy (Hamzawy & Brown, 2025). For Djibouti, which hosts a multitude of foreign military bases (including American, Chinese, and French), heightened military tension and direct attacks in its immediate maritime vicinity create profound risks

and complicate its delicate geopolitical balancing act (Nandini et al., 2024). The crisis also intersects with other regional tensions, such as landlocked Ethiopia's persistent quest for sovereign sea access, which becomes more fraught in an environment where the entire maritime corridor is increasingly securitized and militarized. The table below starkly illustrates this transformation of the security landscape.

This crisis has done more than just add a new layer of danger to a volatile region; it has actively dismantled one of the most successful examples of multilateral security governance in the 21st Century. The international counter-piracy regime was a model of cooperative constabulary action against a transnational criminal threat. It was built on the principles of information sharing, coordinated patrols, and public-private partnerships through the implementation of Best Management Practices. However, this model proved exceptionally fragile when confronted with a hard geopolitical security threat. The introduction of a state-like military challenge from the Houthis, rooted in the broader conflicts in the Middle East, forced an immediate and fundamental shift in the international response. The required posture changed from a low-intensity cooperative policing mission to a high-intensity conflictual military deterrence mission. This shift inevitably drained resources, assets, and political attention away from counter-piracy efforts, causing its effectiveness to collapse and allowing the old threat of piracy to re-emerge in the resulting vacuum. This sequence reveals a critical vulnerability in global security architectures: cooperative governance models designed to address transnational crime are not resilient to geopolitical conflicts. The latter will almost invariably supersede and unravel the former, a lesson with profound implications for maritime security at other contested chokepoints around the world.

Furthermore, I argue that the case of how the Red Sea Crisis affects the Gulf of Aden Piracy is a perfect example of the vulnerability of the collective security regime in a region to geopolitical tension. The consequences of this situation is not limited to chain effects of the disrupted global supply chain, particularly the maritime vessels that regularly pass to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden route, but also acts as potential detonation for similar crises elsewhere. For

instance, the rise of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Aden could decrease traffic and income from the Suez Channel and force the commercial maritime vessels to use the Cape of Hope and Gulf of Guinea route is also prone to the piracy as the result of divided security focus from the countries around Gulf of Guinea. Therefore, rather than focus on building normative consensus as the base of collective security act, multi-parties actual interest based approach would be an alternative by stressing on the complex negative consequences of regional insecurity.

CONCLUSION

This analysis demonstrates that the Red Sea crisis, initiated by the Houthi movement's attacks on international shipping, has profoundly and negatively impacted maritime security in the Gulf of Aden. Framed through the lens of Regional Security Complex Theory, the crisis is the result of long-standing patterns of enmity and external power penetration within the Middle Eastern RSC spilling over to intersect with the fragile security dynamics of the Horn of Africa. The Houthis, acting as a potent non-state securitizing actor, successfully reframed the security agenda, compelling an international response that, while necessary to protect shipping in the Red Sea, had severe unintended consequences.

The core finding of this study is that the strategic displacement of international naval assets from broad counter-piracy patrols to focused anti-missile defense has created a security vacuum in the Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin. This vacuum has been directly exploited by Somali pirate groups, leading to a measurable resurgence of a threat that had been eradicated. Furthermore, the crisis has fostered the emergence of new and dangerous hybrid threats, blurring the lines between piracy, terrorism and insurgency. The primary maritime security paradigm in the region has been fundamentally transformedfrom a successful multilateral low-intensity policing effort to a tense, fragmented, and high-intensity geopolitical standoff.

Theoretically, this case study offers a compelling contemporary application of RSCT, illustrating the fluidity of regional security boundaries and the powerful role that non-state actors can play in reshaping security agendas through successful securitization of their concerns.

This underscores that in an interconnected world, security interdependence means that a crisis in one part of a subcomplex can rapidly degrade security in another.

From a policy perspective, the conclusion is stark: a purely military response focused on deterring Houthi attacks in the Red Sea is insufficient and, in some ways, counterproductive, as it exacerbates the insecurity in the Gulf of Aden. Achieving durable maritime security in this vital global waterway requires a multi-layered, politically led strategy. Such a strategy must seek to de-escalate the conflict in the Red Sea by addressing its root causes, which are intrinsically linked to the war in Yemen and wider regional competition involving Iran. Simultaneously, the international community must find a way to rebuild a resilient and cooperative security architecture for the entire Red Sea-Gulf of Aden corridor—one that can concurrently manage both high-end geopolitical threats and lower-end transnational criminal activity. Failure to do so risks allowing the Gulf of Aden to revert to the high-risk area it once was, while the Red Sea remains a flashpoint for major power conflict, creating a compound crisis that would endanger global trade and regional stability for years.

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