

Regional and International Powers in Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden: Between Competition and Conflict

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Summary

This study deals with the strategic significance of Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden. It explores the outcomes that arose from this and other factors, including piracy that came to the fore two decades ago, and developments in Yemen and the Arab region in recent years. It highlights regional competition and struggle for influence, which is a top priority of the superpowers, as it has always been for old and new colonial powers over the past four centuries.

The study examines the main factors that account for the competition of regional and international powers and their pursuit of establishing military bases and bolstering their political and economic influence. It also explores the consequential outcome of the Yemeni war in strengthening competition and pushing it to the forefront of local, regional and international events, especially with the emergence of the sponsors of the respective Yemeni warring proxies as main actors in the competition for and conflict over this vital waterway. The study also deals with the most important powers and parties involved in the competition through their military presence in the Red Sea and in the ports and islands near Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden, while figuring out indicators as well as declared and hidden agendas of competition.

The study concludes with summarizing the key repercussions of regional and international competition in Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden, whether those extending to the entire region or those limited to Yemen, which has been the scene of war and conflict for nearly 9 years.

Strategic Significance of Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden

Bab al-Mandab Strait is one of the most important international waterways due to the strategic importance of the Red Sea, the distinctive geographical location of the strait, its control of the southern entrance to the Red Sea, and the fact that it constitutes the territorial waters of Asian and African countries (Yemen, Djibouti and Eritrea), which made it one of the top colonial priorities of the major powers since the sixteenth century.¹

Bab al-Mandab gains importance from the fact that it constitutes a busy crowded pass of the international maritime route, and from its location at the southern end of the Red Sea— which is the shortest sea route linking east and west by virtue of its geographical characteristics. Therefore, it is particularly important because it controls world trade,² in addition to being the southern gateway to the Red Sea,

which it connects to the Gulf of Aden, and leads further afield to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, then to Southeast and East Asia overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It is also the waterway that connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea through the Red Sea via the Suez Canal and the Atlantic Ocean. ³

Bab al-Mandab Strait is considered one of the most vital international maritime routes because it connects the east and the west, and due to the volume of international trade and oil traffic that transit through it. A study found that Bab al-Mandab Strait is vital for international trade, compared to other waterways, since it serves as a crucial meeting point of international trade. In fact, most of the trade traffic between the European Union on the one hand, and China, Japan, India and other Asian countries on the other, passes through the strait. It is also a major route of more than 30% of the global oil traffic, especially from the Arabian Gulf and Iran.⁴ It acquired more significance after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the discovery of the largest oil reserves in the Arabian Peninsula. ⁵

The strategic importance of Bab al-Mandab Strait is linked to several geographical and political factors, which directly affect many countries in the Arab world and Africa. This significance derives from the struggle over Bab al-Mandab. The Red Sea is a passageway of oil tankers, commercial vessels and warships, economically and militarily connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal, which serves as a busy oil line from the Arabian Gulf to Europe and America. Moreover, the strait controls the entrances and exits of the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf. ⁶

Bab al-Mandab Strait is the third busiest strait in the world, next only to the Straits of Malacca and Hormuz. Approximately 3,300,000 barrels of oil, representing 4% of the global demand for oil, pass through it daily, and 21,000 ships pass through it annually, which means that commercial shipments that pass through the strait amount to 10% of global commercial shipments. ⁷

The military significance of the strait lies in the fact that it represents the southern through area of the Red Sea and provides the advantage of defending the southern entrance to the sea, from fortified points located either on the naturally fortified high shores, or from Perim Island that divides the strait in two. Monitoring and control points, radar stations, or military bases can be established by virtue of the geographical location of Bab al-Mandab Strait. ⁸



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The Strategic Importance of Bab al-Mandab Strait

- ▶ One of the vital international waterways
- ▶ Controls the southern entrance to the Red Sea
- ▶ Constitutes territorial waters of Asian and African countries (Yemen, Djibouti, Eritrea)
- ▶ An intensive throng point of the international maritime artery
- ▶ Has the advantage of linking east and west, and the great volume of international trade and oil transits through it
- ▶ A crucial meeting point of international trade
- ▶ A major route of more than 30% of the global oil traffic, especially from the Arabian Gulf and Iran
- ▶ It acquired more significance after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the discovery of the largest oil reserves in the Arabian Peninsula.

During the 1967 war launched by the Israeli forces against the Arabs (also known as the 1967 setback), Israel asked its ally, Britain, to keep military forces on the strategic island of Perim with the aim of maintaining control of Bab al-Mandab Strait. In the October 1973 war, the strait was closed to Israeli navigation, following Yemeni-Egyptian coordination.⁹ This closure deprived the Zionist entity of an important strategic resource; namely, the oil transported from Iran to the port of Eilat. It also deprived it of contact with East and South Africa and Southeast Asia, causing it to suffer great economic damage.¹⁰ This was one of the reasons of the Egyptian Arab victory over Israel in that war. From then on, the strategic importance of Bab al-Mandab Strait increased.

Regional Rivalry in Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden

The strategic importance of Bab al-Mandab extends to the 100 plus Yemeni islands in the Red Sea, the most important of which is the island of Perim, which controls the eastern and western passages of Bab al-Mandab. Therefore, Yemen enjoys a strategic location that distinguishes it from the rest of the countries overlooking the Red Sea. This location gives it many advantages, paramount among which is its full control of the southern entrance of the Red Sea.¹¹

To the north, the strategic value includes the Red Sea, which is considered one of the most important waterways in the world, as it connects the ancient world (Asia, Africa and Europe). During the past decades, regional and international powers have tried to consolidate their influence in this vital waterway. However, recent years have witnessed unprecedented moves of enhancing the presence of external powers and building military bases on the Red Sea, especially on its African coasts. This move has sparked much controversy about the factors that prompted many actors to find a foothold in the Red Sea region, and the strategic repercussions of the intensive military presence, especially by foreign countries, on the security and stability of this very peculiar region.¹²

This importance also extends to the Gulf of Aden and the port of Aden, which are linked to Bab al-Mandab Strait. The port of Aden is considered a strategic controller of local and international trade. The location of Aden on a distinctive strategic strip to the north of the Gulf of Aden and its proximity to Bab al-Mandab Strait has allowed the states dominating the city to control the geostrategic and geopolitical balance between competing international and regional powers in the western Indian Ocean, militarily, economically, commercially and politically,

especially in light of intense international and regional competition in the region extending from Bab al-Mandab to the Arabian Gulf, which represents an extension of a historical rivalry that prevailed over the past four centuries, to control the trade of the East. It is noteworthy that the Port of Aden can play a vital role in what is known as the Chinese "Belt and Road Initiative," if the necessary conditions are created after the current war stops, within the context of the roles of regional competitors that have made great strides in the field of maritime transport industry, such as Jebel Ali Ports (UAE) Duqm and Salalah (Oman), Gwadar (Pakistan), and Djibouti.¹³

In Aden, many of the strategic interests of the country are concentrated, such as Aden International Airport, the free zone (container terminal), and the Aden Refineries Company, through which processed oil is exported to local and regional markets. The refinery has an annual production capacity of about 8 million tons. The Oil Terminal in Aden receives tankers and provides services such as loading and unloading of oil shipments through 6 berths and a set of hydraulic bearing pullers. As for the port of Aden, it is the most important sea port, extending over an area of 8 nautical miles from east to west. It is about 5 nautical miles in width, from north to south.¹⁴

With the outbreak of the war in Yemen, many prominent regional powers revealed their ambitions in this strategic region, which covers the southern gateway to the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab, and the Gulf of Aden, especially the parties associated with the war through their support and patronage of the local parties involved in the conflict, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE. The former shares land and sea borders with Yemen across the Red Sea, while Tehran supports the Houthis to achieve its goals of finding a foothold in the international waterway within the framework of regional and international competition.

The naval objectives of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the Yemen war played a fundamental role in directing the compass of the conflict. The military intervention of the Saudi-led Arab coalition in March 2015 sought to defeat the Houthis and help the internationally recognized Yemeni government restore its authority. The Saudis and Emiratis sought to control the main waterways. They invested in establishing ports and military bases in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, allowing the two countries to protect their maritime borders, impose their territorial authority, and enhance their commercial interests.¹⁵

In addition to the local dimensions of the Yemeni conflict, observers believe that the main goal of the coalition is "to prevent Iran from expanding its sphere of influence inside and around Yemen. Saudi Arabia and the UAE maintained concerns that Tehran would launch attacks on the main shipping lanes of their strategic interests in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait, in addition to potential attacks on the neighboring Gulf countries."¹⁶ The two countries were also keen to find a foothold for themselves in African ports on the other shore near Bab al-Mandab, where the UAE played a major role in financing and building container and oil terminals in Doraleh in 2009. This port is 12 kilometers west of the old port of Djibouti. The UAE also established a military base in Eritrea and another base in Berbera, Somaliland. Saudi Arabia is also contributing to the development of the new port of Tadjoura in northern Djibouti, and has signed an agreement with it to establish a military base in the country.¹⁷

Due to its strategic location, Yemen is of vital importance to Saudi and Emirati regional and maritime ambitions. Controlling the Yemeni coasts not only affects global shipping traffic via the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait, but also allows the two countries to bypass the increasingly troubled Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has threatened to close on more than one occasion.¹⁸

For Iran, on the other hand, Yemen's unique strategic location in southwest Asia, its control of the Bab al-Mandab Strait, its border sharing with Saudi Arabia, and the colonial rivalry that Yemen gave rise to in the last century, in addition to the sectarian (Shiite) affinity between Iran and the Houthi group, are considered pillars of the Iranian strategy towards Yemen. This strategy is based on basic objectives, the most prominent of which is Yemen's geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia, which the Iranians are trying to encircle from the south after they succeeded in encircling it from the north by overthrowing the regime of President Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and expanding their influence there through their ruling Shiite militias.¹⁹

As for the UAE, its ambitions in the region are not new, nor are they a byproduct of the current war in Yemen. Those ambitions have surfaced since the 1990s when it tried to control the port of Aden after the announcement of Yemeni unification between former north and south Yemen in 1990. The Yemeni government's approval of the establishment of a free trade zone in Aden was a decision that gave rise to Abu Dhabi concerns that this would greatly affect the activity in Jebel Ali port in Dubai. The UAE worked to disrupt and thwart any negotiations with international companies to develop the port and operate the free zone until the Yemeni government gave way and handed over the port to the Dubai Ports company, which deliberately procrastinated in developing the port and the free zone.²⁰

The Yemeni government managed to restore the port after the popular revolution in 2011, but Abu Dhabi reimposed its control of the port after the outbreak of the war in 2015 and its participation alongside Saudi Arabia in the Arab coalition supporting the legitimate government. Aden port and a number of other ports and islands located in the south and east of Yemen are currently under the control of the UAE and the local military formations created by it during the past few years, including the formations that control Aden and other provinces, as well as the armed formations associated with Tariq Saleh—the nephew of the late Yemeni President Ali Saleh. The UAE-backed Saleh's troops have much influence in the southwest of the country, near Bab al-Mandab Strait.

Since 2018, the UAE began reorienting its strategy by giving priority to its interests over those of its allies in the Saudi-led coalition. Its main goals were to control Yemen's coasts and shipping lanes, and implement the "chain of ports" strategy. However, these measures kindled the flame of rivalry between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, as they exposed the divergence of their respective interests in Yemen. The UAE tightened its grip on key southern ports and surrounding areas. This prompted it to sponsor the secessionist agenda in southern Yemen. However, Saudi Arabia maintained that such strategy weakened its main ally represented by the internationally recognized Yemeni government, so the anti-Houthi coalition disintegrated, in the eyes of observers. The kingdom now faces the Houthis alone on its borders. Although the UAE naval priorities have strained the air with Saudi Arabia, the two sides have been cautious enough to avoid a rift between them, in large part because they share the same primary goal in Yemen; namely, defeating the Houthis. However, even if they succeed in this endeavor, each of them will still have a different set of priorities in Yemen that are difficult to reconcile with those of their ally-competitor. Therefore, it is likely that they will continue to be entangled in their struggle for influence.²¹

Other countries are also involved in this regional competition in Bab al-Mandab, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. Turkey, for example, established its largest military base in the world in Somalia, and inaugurated it in 2017. Israel, which realized the importance of controlling this waterway after the October 1973 war, has already managed to build military bases on a number of islands belonging to Eritrea during the past decades,²² and has sought to strengthen its relations with several African countries. In addition, the developments that the Arab region witnessed in the past years prompted many actors to search for positions for themselves in this most important geographical area.

International Competition: Indicators and Parties

Indicators of International Competition:

1. Bolstering US military presence

More US forces have been deployed recently to the Middle East and the waterways in Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea in particular. Early in August, the US Navy Fifth Fleet announced the arrival of more than 3,000 US soldiers to the Red Sea on board two warships: USS Bataan and USS Carter Hall.²³ According to observers, the deployment of these forces comes in an active context previously announced to bolster the American presence in the Middle East. In late March, the United States sent military aircraft to the region, and in July it announced a decision to deploy additional forces, including thousands of marine personnel, F-35 and F-16 fighters, in addition to the destroyer USS Thomas Hunder. Although it is not clear where exactly the new US forces will be stationed, the Fifth Fleet's area of operations includes international waters extending from the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman to Bab al-Mandab Strait, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal, in addition to parts of the Indian Ocean.²⁴

2. The growing Chinese military presence

International competition in Bab al-Mandab and nearby ports, including the ports of the Horn of Africa, is evidenced by several indicators, foremost of which is the presence of China. Chinese presence has been evident in recent years through the establishment of the first Chinese naval base in Djibouti. This step is a remarkable departure from traditional Chinese foreign policy, which has always avoided the display of military force outside its borders and away from its traditional focus on East Asia and Pacific region. This change is attributed by observers to the growing interests of China in Africa and the Middle East. This development can also be seen in the framework of the Chinese project, the Belt and Road Initiative (One Belt, One Road), which seeks to establish land and sea routes linking the regions of Asia and the Indian Ocean. While the initiative is usually understood to be of an economic nature in the first place, the Chinese base in Djibouti reflect the other side that Beijing seeks to demonstrate, especially in the context of its international competition with the US, as Washington was disturbed by China's building of this base, which is located just a few miles away from the US base in Djibouti.²⁵

Therefore, for the United States, the growing Chinese military presence represents a threat to its interests and alliances, especially with the continued flow of Chinese war fleets to the Gulf of Aden, since 2008, and the increase of this Chinese move during the period 2020-2022.²⁶

Moreover, China showed a departure from its traditional approach, when it mediated the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement efforts, the two arch-rivals in the Middle East, in early 2023, after it had long remained reluctant to enter into political conflicts, especially in this turbulent region. Western researchers describe this Chinese shifting of gears as a "diplomatic victory for China" and "a sign that there is room to challenge US hegemony in the Middle East."²⁷

3. Maritime security alliances

In January 2020, the establishment of the Council of Arab and African states Bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden was announced in Riyadh, and comprised 8 Arab and African countries: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Yemen, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti. According to the founding statement, the council is created "based on a sense of the importance of coordination and consultation on the waterway, given that the Red Sea is the main passageway of East Asian and European trade."²⁸ The founding states emphasized the fact that the Council will seek to "preserve common interests, face all risks, and cooperate in benefiting from the available opportunities."²⁹

The announcement of the council came a few days after the escalating tension in the region in light of the reciprocal threats by Washington and Tehran. The latter had vowed to avenge the killing of Quds Force commander, Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in a US raid in Iraq. Subsequently, Iran participated in tripartite naval maneuvers with Russia and China in the Gulf of Oman and the Pacific Ocean. This makes it likely that the founders of the new council took Iranian threats into account, especially in light of the movements of Iran and its Houthi allies in the Red Sea, near the international waterway, Bab al-Mandab Strait.

In April 2022, the US Navy announced the formation of Combined Task Force 153 to patrol the Red Sea and combat "terrorist activities and smuggling." According to commander of the US Fifth Fleet, Admiral Brad Cooper, the force will enhance cooperation with regional maritime partners to achieve security in the Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean, the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden.³⁰ The timing of this announcement has much to do with the rapid developments in Yemen and the international waterway, as it came shortly after Houthi detention of a UAE-flagged cargo ship carrying Saudi medical supplies. This incident confirms the existence of an Iranian threat to the passageway itself and to international shipping traffic.

It is noteworthy that the Combined Task Force 153 is the fourth division of what is known as the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), which also include the Combined Task Force 150, the Combined Task Force 151, and the Combined Task Force 152. The division undertakes maintaining maritime security and building the capabilities of states, in direct cooperation with the Combined Task Force 151, the naval units of which are deployed in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia.³¹ In December 2022, Egypt took the command of operations of the combined maritime forces, which is the first time it has assumed leadership since joining the maritime partnership which consists of 34 countries in April 2021.³²

Parties to Regional and International Competition

In view of these alliances and the most prominent participating countries, competition and struggle for influence is evident in this geographical area of strategic importance. Recent developments in the Red Sea basin and the Middle East generally have shown that a number of major powers are present in the region through military bases or forging alliances and relations of different scopes and dimension. The most remarkable global powers in this respect are the United States and its allies, Britain and France, and more recently China, the most prominent competitor with US influence. There are also the emerging regional powers, Turkey, Iran and Israel. The presence and influence of forces vary from one country to another.

In the framework of regional competition in Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden, we have already referred to the most prominent forces and parties present in this race, especially in light of the war in Yemen between the Saudi-backed internationally recognized government, on the one hand, and the Iran-backed Houthi group, on the other. The UAE, Saudi Arabia's ally against the Houthis, appears supportive of local Yemeni parties and forces in the south and southwest of the country, in parallel with its remarkable expansion in strategic areas that include Yemeni ports and islands of great importance. In this race, it seems to be more present than Saudi Arabia, which has sea and land borders with Yemen connected to the strategically important waterway, the Red Sea, but its presence at its southern entrance is incomparable with its weight and presence at the political and economic levels and its network of alliances in the region and the world.

In addition to their presence in Yemeni ports, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have a presence in Djibouti, Eritrea and Somalia.

Iran, whose Houthi allies control several ports on the Red Sea, has managed to build military bases in Eritrea.

As for the countries of the Horn of Africa, just as in the case of Yemen, their presence on the international arena is also linked to their internal circumstances. Therefore, the ports of African countries bordering Bab al-Mandab Strait have become a theater of regional and international competition.

A small African country like Djibouti hosts several military bases of major countries that are at the forefront of this crucible of competition in this geographical area. Djibouti hosts the American military base, which is the largest American base in Africa. Moreover, Djibouti now represents the main logistical hub of the United States and its allied operations in East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. It is also a platform for launching and monitoring drone attacks, as well as a center of counter-piracy and other multinational operations in the region.³³ In addition, Djibouti hosts the French base, which is the oldest base in the country, and consists of about 2,000 troops. French influence in Djibouti has continued despite the country's independence from France in 1977.

Following the piracy operations that escalated since 2008, which resulted in an increased international military presence in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, Djibouti has turned into a center for new forms of military and maritime cooperation between the NATO and the European Union forces. It became the logistical hub of the first combined naval mission of the European Union anti-piracy Atalanta Operation (EUNAVFOR) in 2010. Since July 2012, the European Union launched a new naval mission, (EUCAP Nestor), aimed at completing the tasks of Atalanta Operation by strengthening local naval capabilities.³⁴

Since 2010, Djibouti has hosted Japan's first military base outside its borders since its defeat in the Second World War (1939-1945). In Djibouti, too, China opened its first military base in Africa in August 2017.

In the same vein, Turkey, which had previously established its major military base in Somalia, seeks to consolidate its presence in the region, and so does Israel, which has strengthened its relations with several African countries in recent years and has gained influence through which it seeks to enhance its presence in Arab strategic regions, especially after it managed to normalize relations with the UAE and Bahrain. Some observers believe that a UAE control means an Israeli presence in this strait, albeit indirectly, especially after building cordial relations between the two countries. Bab al-Mandab means for Israel what it means for Egypt, especially if the Ben-Gurion Canal project, which is being promoted by the Jewish state as an alternative to the Suez Canal, is implemented.³⁵



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Regional Competitors

in Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden:



Saudi Arabia

(Djibouti and Yemen)



The UAE

(Eritrea, Yemen and Somaliland)



Iran

(the Houthi-controlled Red Sea ports) (Eritrea and other African countries)



Israel

International Competitors

in Bab al-Mandab:



The USA

(military bases, fleets and combined maritime forces)



China

(military base in Djibouti)



France

(military base in Djibouti)



Japan

(military base in Djibouti)



Turkey

(the largest military base in Somalia)

Objectives and Consequences of Competition

The goals of regional and international competition in Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea range between declared and hidden goals. Declared manifest goals include protecting freedom of navigation, escorting oil tankers and commercial ships, combating terrorism and piracy, protecting the interests of competing countries, using bases for launching military operations and missions, and securing the largest number of friends and allies. Hidden goals include seizing wealth and building capabilities, controlling the strategic region and markets, interfering in the internal affairs of the countries of the region, imposing military and security hegemony, in addition to placing other parties in the region or monitoring their movements and limiting their influence.³⁶

Consequences of regional and international competition, on the other hand, can be summarized as follows:

- Expansion of the theater of operations of the Yemeni war to include the main sponsors and their influence in the international waterways, especially Bab al-Mandab Strait. Similarly, regional and international competition pushes the competitors to strengthen their local clients in Yemen, which will likely feed the conflict and keep it aflame in one way or another.
- The spread of military bases raises many problems and portends many malicious consequences, especially with regard to the main powers in the Red Sea. The increase of foreign military bases in the Red Sea affects the regional balance between the Arab countries. The escalating developments in the Middle East will push towards the formation of the Red Sea region as one of the regions of the Middle East.³⁷
- Despite the assumption that the US military moves will contribute, through the pressures they pose on Iran and the Houthi group, to advancing the peace process and ending the conflict, the measures may end up with the opposite result. These military moves may make Iran more conservative and push it to stick to the rationales it cites as the reasons for delaying a resolution of the Yemeni issue supposedly until the vision becomes clear about other issues, such as the Iranian nuclear issue.³⁸
- The militarization of the region as a result of the heavy military presence, which makes the situation in the region liable to explode at any moment, with the possibility of military confrontations and wars between countries with the support of external parties (proxy wars).³⁹

- The difficulty of establishing an effective collective security system in the region as a result of the interventions of external powers.⁴⁰
- The outbreak of political crises, military escalation, and planting of naval mines with the aim of affecting the movement and freedom of maritime navigation in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab, as well as assaulting marine installations and vessels such as commercial ships and oil or gas tankers as a means of settling scores between the competing parties.⁴¹

Conclusion

Recent developments in the Arab region since 2010, and the war in Yemen in particular, contributed to raising the pace of regional and international competition in Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden, as they are part of the most important international waterways through which international trade passes. The study referred to several factors that emphasized the importance of the strait, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden as well as the nearby islands and ports, both on the Yemeni and African territorial waters, especially after the increase in piracy since 2008.

Events and developments in recent years have revealed the continuous competition among the major powers regionally and internationally through the establishment of military bases in the Red Sea and in ports and islands close to Bab al-Mandab Strait, especially the great powers that have influence and military, political and economic presence at the world stage. As the war in Yemen partially triggered the threat to international shipping in the strait and beyond, it has also doubled the pace of competition, hidden conflict, and frantic racing for consolidating presence and building military bases.

However, the competition, which has clearly become evident in recent years, reveals a number of repercussions that would keep the situation in the contested region risky and dangerous, especially in view of the rising pace of conflict between the major powers over several issues in other regions of the world.

Consequences of regional and international competition in Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden:

Perpetuating the Yemen war, expansion of the theater of operations and strengthening local clients

Feeding conflict and disturbing regional balance between the Arab states

Perpetuating tension and fears among the parties involved in competition and conflict

Militarization of the region as a result of the intensive military presence, making the situation potentially explosive, with the possibility of military confrontations

Difficulty of establishing an effective collective security system in the region as a result of the interference of external powers

The outbreak of political crises, military escalation, and planting of sea mines with the aim of affecting the traffic and freedom of maritime navigation in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab

Assaulting maritime facilities and vessels, including commercial ships and oil or gas tankers as a means of settling scores between competing parties



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