

# The Importance of Africa in the African-Asian Geopolitical Nexus: the Red Sea and the Yemeni Sea



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## ABSTRACT

Over the last 20 years, there has been a notable trend of power centers engaging in efforts to establish or enhance their military presence in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have become a tense intersection point between imperialism, which operates on an inseparable logic of collaboration and power unity, and Asian power centers, which have been unable to break away from sacrificing continental interests for regional ones. Due to its critical waterway characteristics, this region, as a major geopolitical power field, has seen Africa being unable to protect its interests for centuries. This article aims to draw attention to what is happening at the Afro-Asian junction, which will shape the future of the world, and highlights the pivotal role of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, especially for Africa and other oppressed parts of the world in search of a secure future.

**Keywords:** Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Djibouti Bases, Horn of Africa, maritime banditry, Red Sea.

## Introduction

AFRICA, WHICH THE IMPERIALIST WEST labeled as the “Hopeless Continent” in 2000, the “Rising Continent” in 2011, and the “Hopeful Continent” in 2013, has re-emerged as a dynamic area of competition for global power centers (The Economist, 2000; 2011; 2013; Aydın, 2019). In this rivalry, Western powers, which have been dominant politically, economically, and militarily, exert a considerable advantage on African countries, which continue to be dependent in reality despite being ostensibly independent for on half a century. Moving away from traditional approaches, the West frequently resorts to “paternalistic” methods in Africa, imposing liberal political systems and free-market economies

(Altınbaş, 2011). Most African states strive to maintain their “official” independence, hard-earned through endurance and struggle, under the shadow of their former colonizers. For the West, wearing a humanitarian mask, neo-colonialism has become easier and cheaper. In summary, Africa, possessing about 1/7 of the world’s population and geography, can only account for 1/20 of the world’s production (Taştan, 2023). Furthermore, the Western world, by hindering Africa’s maritime development, has kept it far from utilizing the strong geopolitical potential of the seas (African Union, 2012).. Additionally, with its incredible cultural diversity, evident in its 3315 ethnic groups and over 2000 spoken languages, Africa represents an effortless domain for imperialism (Özçelik, 2020).

In recent years, the West's presentation of a "strong image" towards Africa is noteworthy. For example, in November 2021, U.S. Secretary of State Blinken stated, "In the future, Africa will shape not just the destiny of its people, but of the entire world (The White House, 2022)." In the undoubtedly reshaping world, the narratives that portray Africa as strong have geo-economic and geopolitical foundations. It is known that today the African continent, comprising 54 countries and covering a total area of 30.8 million km<sup>2</sup> along with its surrounding islands, has a geo-economic potential that will mark the future. Research indicates that the African continent possesses (TASAM Afrika Enstitüsü, 2022; Yilmaz, 2014; Şöhret, 2023):

- 60% of the world's unused arable agricultural lands,
- 9.6% of its oil fields,
- 90% of its cobalt and platinum reserves,
- 64% of its manganese reserves,
- 70% of its tantalite reserves,
- 98% of its chrome reserves;
- Two-thirds of its uranium reserves (and 18% of its annual uranium production),
  - Half of its gold reserves (and its annual supply),
  - 30% of its diamond reserves (more than 45% of its annual supply and 90% of its annual diamond production),
- The second-largest rainforest.

Guinea alone is the world's largest exporter of bauxite, while the Democratic Republic of Congo owns 70% of the world's coltan (used in cell phones) and 30% of its diamond reserves. This robust economic potential has triggered power centers' struggle to capture economic domains in Africa and the need to maintain military presence for the security of open economic areas (TASAM Afrika Enstitüsü, 2022; Yilmaz, 2014; Şöhret, 2023).

Africa, located on (or blocking) key trade routes

through the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, Mediterranean, and Atlantic Ocean, stands in the upper league of geopolitical power potential. Politically and demographically, Africa offers strong potential, as evidenced by:

- Being one of the largest regional voting groups in the United Nations (UN) with a 28% share,
- Holding three non-permanent seats in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC),
- Anticipated to have a quarter of the world's young population by 2050,
- Continuing population growth even after 2100 while the global population stabilizes towards the end of the 21st century (The White House, 2022).

### **Method Employed to Preserve Fish Resources: Maritime Piracy**

In African waters, despite the West's illegal fishing activities, there exists a fishing sector that generates over \$24 billion annually and provides jobs to more than 12 million people (Chatham House, 2013; Kirval, 2022). In Africa, where over 50% of total protein consumption can be obtained from fish, this is a critical nutritional component for the poorest 40% of the population. However, trawler fishermen from all over the world, converging in Guinean and Somali waters, are engaging in fish theft to an extent that leads to the depletion of fish resources. The "illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU)" fishing activities, which weak African maritime states are unable to prevent, pose a significant security issue for Africa (Chatham House, 2013). For example, in 2017, 53% of the 405,000 tons of tuna consumed annually by the European Union was fished from East African waters (Onyango-Obbo, 2019). The "illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing" activities, a priority concern for Africans over issues like oil

theft, maritime piracy, or armed robbery at sea, are neglected by imperialists who leave the solution to weak African states. Additionally, there are claims that the West has been dumping nuclear and toxic wastes in Somali waters, causing extraordinary damage to the ecosystem (and fish stocks) (Kabba, 2009; Morabito, 2016).

**Keeping the Suez Canal, a vital route for 12% of global maritime trade and seizing the geopolitical power of the Afro-Asian junction comprising the Suez Canal, Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, and Gulf of Aden from Africa and Asia, or at least preventing their real owners from using it, are goals consistent with the spirit of imperialism.**

In Somalia and Nigeria, unable to cope with the threat of losing fisheries and the ecosystem due to reasons like political fragmentation/lack of authority, local people have resorted to asymmetric solutions that evolved into “maritime piracy” or “armed robbery” in a state of “madness”. The general view in Somalia and Nigeria is that poor, heroic, and patriotic fishermen have taken up arms to keep illegal trawl vessels out of their waters or at least reduce the amount of stolen fish. Especially in Somalia, the collapse of General Mohamed Siad Barre’s dictatorship regime in 1991 and the ensuing civil war and chaos have exacerbated the issue of illegal fishing, along with maritime piracy and armed robbery in territorial waters. After 2001, incidents of “maritime piracy or armed robbery” in the Gulf of Aden have

drawn Western attention (Kabba, 2009; Morabito, 2016). The unsuccessful attack on the luxury passenger ship *Seabourn Spirit* carrying 151 passengers and weighing 10,000 tons on November 5, 2005, by Somali pirates, caught the Western public’s attention (Williams, 2005; Hürriyet, 2005; CBS News, 2005). Maritime piracy in Somalia, initially started by the impoverished local population, later transformed into a sector providing economic resources to destabilizing tribes and radical Islamist terrorist organizations within a few years (Kırval, 2022).

Therefore, Western sources do not limit their reasons for maintaining a military presence in the region to merely maritime piracy; they also assert the impacts of terrorism, terror-crime nexus, arms and drug trafficking, marine pollution, and environmental disasters related to oil, affecting them, and claim that coastal states are not powerful enough to handle these issues (Ghosh, 2004). However, keeping the Suez Canal, a vital route for 12% of global maritime trade and seizing the geopolitical power of the Afro-Asian junction comprising the Suez Canal, Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, and Gulf of Aden from Africa and Asia, or at least preventing their real owners from using it, are goals consistent with the spirit of imperialism.

When examining the above table, it becomes apparent that the incidents of “maritime piracy” at the entrance and exit of the Red Sea have never escalated to a level that would necessitate the West’s exaggerated military measures. During the 2003-2010 period, the risk of facing a “maritime piracy” attack, varying between 3 to 64 in 10,000, is not significant enough to stop or slow down the annual maritime traffic of 30,000 vessels through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (Kırval, 2022).

Figure 1. Numerical Comparison of Maritime Piracy Incidents in Global Seas and Yemen/Somali Waters During the 2003-2010 Period

Years	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total Events on Earth (Including Failed Events)	445	329	276	239	263	293	406	445
Total Incidents in Yemen and Somali Seas (Including Unsuccessful Incidents)	21	10	45	20	44	111	187	192
<b>Ratio</b>	<b>%5</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%19</b>	<b>%8</b>	<b>%17</b>	<b>%38</b>	<b>%46</b>	<b>%43</b>
<b>The Risk of Sea Banditry Attack on a Merchant Ship Passing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (Attention: Not the Risk of Capture.)</b>	<b>1/10.000</b>	<b>3/10.000</b>	<b>15/10.000</b>	<b>7/10.000</b>	<b>15/10.000</b>	<b>37/10.000</b>	<b>60/10.000</b>	<b>64/10.000</b>

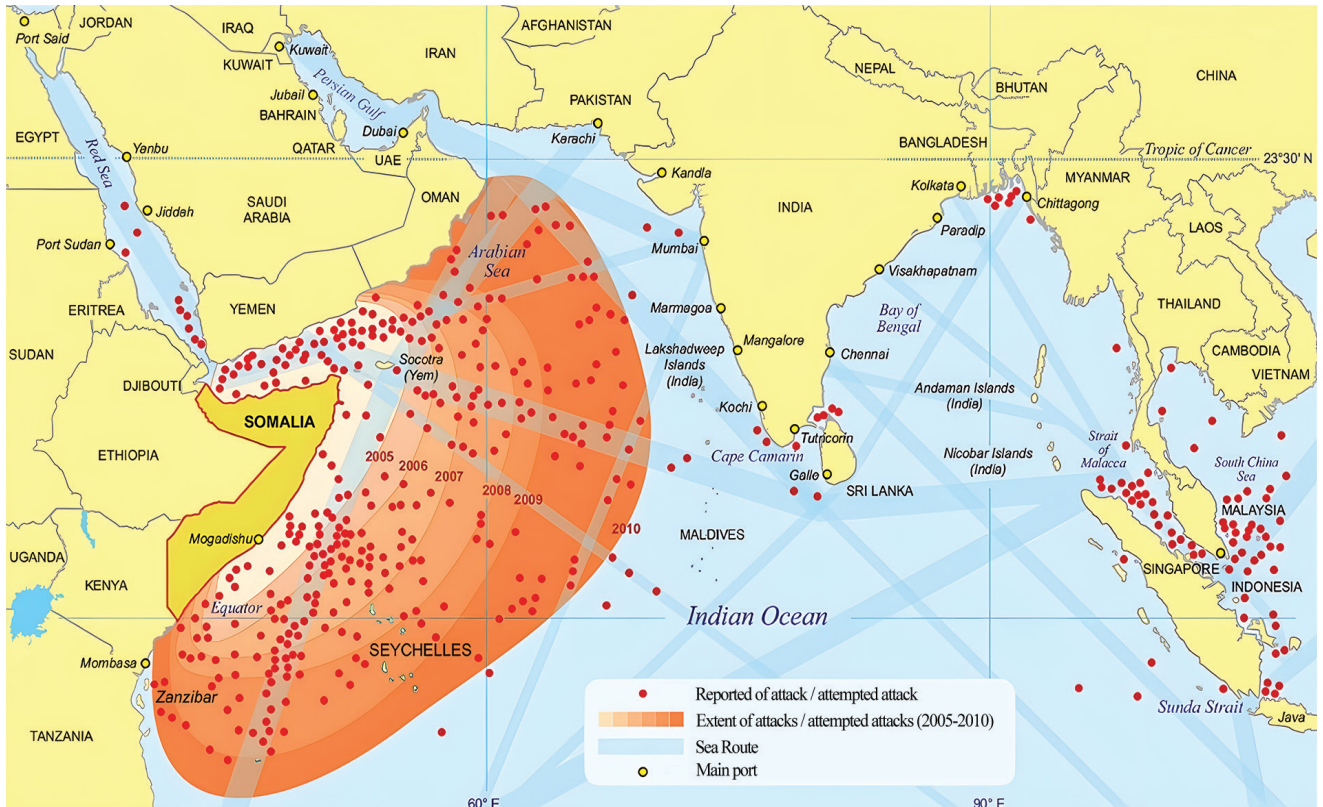
This table was prepared based on Kirval's (2022) numerical data on maritime banditry incidents in Yemen and Somali seas. (Figure: Özsarac, 2023).

Even in 2010, when maritime piracy in the Horn of Africa waters was at its peak, only 15 of the 192 attacks were successful; the 326 sailors taken hostage along with these ships were eventually released following ransom negotiations (Onyango-Obbo, 2019). This means that out of the annual 30,000 ships passing through the Horn of Africa waters, only 15, or 5 in 10,000, fell into the hands of pirates. In other words, only 15 of the 77,768 commercial ships in the world's seas in 2010 were captured by Somali pirates, and their release along with their sailors, secured by paying a ransom, does not justify the Western

military reaction (EMSA, 2010). After all, maritime piracy is common in all the world's seas, even in American waters. Moreover, in 2021, the 192 "ship robbery" incidents in Somali waters should have been considered less significant in priority compared to the 1,964 "bank robbery" incidents on U.S. soil alone (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021).

According to Western sources, the financial damage caused by Somali pirates to the global maritime industry is not excessively high. A study by The One Earth Future Foundation in Colorado (USA) titled "Oceans Beyond Piracy," conducted in 2011, estimated that maritime

Figure 2. Pirate Threat in the Northwest Indian Ocean (2005-2010)



Map showing the incidents of maritime banditry in the Indian Ocean during the period 2005-2010.  
(Figure: Venter, 2018)

piracy in Somali waters had caused damage to the global maritime industry between \$6.6 and \$6.9 billion over ten years (Onyango-Obbo, 2019). Accordingly, during the 2000-2010 period when piracy in Somalia escalated, the world maritime industry incurred annual losses of approximately \$660-690 million. With the global GDP in 2010 being \$65 trillion, it raises the question: Has the Horn of Africa waters been occupied by the West just for 1 in 100,000 of the world's income?

Furthermore, the calculated damage includes not only the paid ransoms but also additional costs such as:

- Costs of route changes,
- Security equipment and private protection costs,
- Additional fuel consumption due to the speed increase required for safe passage,
- Increase in risk payments to personnel,
- Rise in insurance premiums for passing through risky areas,
- Costs of prosecuting and imprisoning pirates,
- Expenses of military operations by warships,
- Costs of multinational organizations created against piracy.

Therefore, most of the mentioned damages are additional expenses made by the West, unwilling to pay the ransom (Çınar, 2022).

The limited and low-damage incidents of maritime piracy have been used as an opportunity by the West for systematic control of the waters forming the Afro-Asian junction. A similar instance occurred in 1984.

### **Implications of Suspicious Naval Mines in the Red Sea for African Geopolitics in 1984**

On July 9, 1984, the Soviet-flagged cargo ship Knud Jepsersen sustained minor damage due to an underwater explosion while sailing south from the Suez Canal. Since the batteries of mines laid during the Arab-Israeli wars would not have lasted after 1973, it was clear that this was not a missed bottom mine from those conflict zones. Between July 27-29, 1984, when seven more commercial ships incurred minor mine damage, it became certain that there was an active minefield south of the Suez Canal. Between July 31 and August 2, 1984, six new explosions in the southern Red Sea indicated that mines had been “secretly” laid in various areas of the Red Sea. Besides Egypt, which feared losing Suez Canal revenues, Saudi Arabia also panicked, concerned about the safety of tens of thousands of pilgrims who would arrive by ferries at the ports of Jeddah and Yanbu for the Hajj pilgrimage starting on September 4, 1984 (Çınar, 2022).

On August 3, 1984, when the Chinese container ship Tang He also suffered minor mine damage, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were compelled to formally request Western assistance on August 5-6, 1984. A naval force consisting of British, French, Dutch, and Italian minehunters, along with the USS La Salle and USS Shreveport am-

phibious ships carrying two fleets of mine-sweeping capable helicopters, was dispatched to the region (Çınar, 2022).

The United States rapidly completed its mine-searching operations in the Gulf of Suez, relying on its helicopters. To prove that the area where no mines were found was clear, the aircraft carrier USS America passed through the Suez on August 19. The speed of the U.S. mine-searching operations and the use of Sea Battalion RH-53D helicopters, designed not for bottom mines but solely to detect moored mines, were suspicious. However, the inadequacy of these helicopters was not questioned at the time by states other than the United States, as it was not known (Özsaraç, 2024).

Dutch and Italian minehunters, which also searched Saudi waters in the Red Sea in addition to the Gulf of Suez, did not encounter any mines in their searches until the end of October 1984. French minehunters found 10 obsolete bottom mines left from the Arab-Israeli wars in the Gulf of Suez on their return route. The British minehunter HMS Gavinton, on September 12, 1984, in the Gulf of Suez at a depth of 42 meters, examined a mine stuck in the mud using remotely operated underwater devices and divers and then destroyed it in place. The discovered mine was a Soviet bottom mine, capable of causing more than minor damage with its 720 kg explosive, but it was not set to explode. This meant that the found Soviet stock mine had no relation to the mines being searched for (Çınar, 2022; Özsaraç, 2024).

Although a little-known terrorist organization called “Al Jihad” claimed responsibility for the incidents, this group, lacking the capability to lay mines, was not taken seriously. No live mine samples were found, yet a state suspected of secretly laying

mines was sought based on assumptions. Initially, the West tried to blame Iran, which in turn accused the United States and Israel. In reality, Iran, engaged in a war with Iraq at that time, lacked the capability to lay mines, as it did not have a single mine in its inventory until mid-1985. Realizing that Iran, being the 4th largest user of the Suez Canal at that time, would also economically suffer from the mines in the Red Sea, the West then attempted to accuse Libya, which used the Suez Canal less frequently (Mobley, 2022; O'Flaherty, 2019; Öz Saraç, 2024; Chicago Tribune, 1987; Christ, 2009; The New York Times, 1984).

**Although Gaddafi denied the allegations, the West declared Libya, a state causing problems for them, as the scapegoat for the Red Sea mines.**

According to the CIA and Egyptian Intelligence, the Libyan-flagged Ghat Ro-Ro vessel, carrying mine-trained Captain Suheir Adham, set sail to the Red Sea on July 6, 1984. The Libyan ship, which took cargo from the port of Assab, remained in the Red Sea for 7 days longer than usual, exiting on July 21, 1984, which raised suspicions. According to the U.S., the Ghat Ro-Ro had laid the bottom mines timed to activate on July 27; the mine that exploded on July 9 had detonated early due to a timing mechanism failure. It was a highly speculative and forced accusation without solid evidence (Mobley, 2022; O'Flaherty, 2019; Öz Saraç, 2024).

On August 23, 1984, while in Marseille, the Ghat Ro-Ro was temporarily detained by French authorities for a few hours under the pretext of a

commercial dispute. Examination of photographs taken during this process led to the interpretation that slight wear on the stern ramp was evidence of mine laying. However, finding a Ro-Ro ship without wear on its ramp is nearly impossible. Although Gaddafi denied the allegations, the West declared Libya, a state causing problems for them, as the scapegoat for the Red Sea mines (Mobley, 2022; O'Flaherty, 2019; Öz Saraç, 2024).


To summarize, in 1984, 17 commercial ships sustained minor damage from mine explosions in the Red Sea, but none sank, suffered heavy/medium damage, or had casualties. The explosives in the mines were just enough to cause alarm. During the four months of mine searching by Western states, no ready-to-explode mines were found in the Red Sea. The world maritime industry appeared to be briefly panicked; in reality, only Egypt and Saudi Arabia were the ones truly alarmed (Öz Saraç, 2024).

### **Western Consolidation in the Afro-Asian Maritime Junction With the Pretext of Suppressing Piracy in the Horn of Africa**

Article 101 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines attacks within territorial waters as “armed robbery,” leaving the responsibility to the coastal state, while terming ship attacks outside territorial waters as “piracy (United Nations, 2020).” This distinction laid the groundwork for international intervention in attacks beyond territorial waters and served as a justification for the West’s establishment of a permanent military mechanism in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and Gulf of Aden, preventing coastal states from utilizing their geopolitical power of the Red Sea.





Countries on the route from Bab el-Mandeb Strait to the Red Sea (Figure: BRIQ , 2024).

Indeed, in 2008, the Somali Federal Transitional Government, unable to withstand Western pressures and lacking the capacity to ensure maritime security, prevent piracy, and prosecute pirates on its own, sought cooperation from various states and organizations. In response, the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed five separate resolutions during the period of June 2, 2008, to November 30, 2009 (Evin, 2012).

The fact that the majority of ships passing through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait carried Chinese trade, and the incidents of piracy in the Horn of Africa began to affect Russia's interests, facilitated the UNSC's adoption of these resolutions. For instance, the seizure of the Belize-flagged Ukrainian ship MV *Faina* by Somali pirates on September 8,

2008, angered Russia. The MV *Faina* was carrying hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of cargo, including 33 T-72 tanks, 73 tank maintenance kits with spare parts, numerous weapons, and ammunition, while en route via the Bab-el-Mandeb. It was later captured by 50 Somali pirates, identifying themselves as the "Central Region Coast Guard," demanding a \$35 million ransom for the ship's release (Reuters, 2008). Although the ship's captain claimed to be transporting the military cargo to South Sudan, the governments of Ukraine, Kenya, and the administration of South Sudan denied this. However, there were reports that over 100 T-72 and T-55 tanks had reached South Sudan during those months (Van Oudenaren, 2008). Following negotiations, the Ukrai-

nian ship was released after a payment of \$3.2 million to the pirates. Kenya subsequently claimed to have purchased the tanks on the ship for its own army. The involvement of 6 U.S. warships surrounding the hijacked Ukrainian vessel and preventing the Kenyan Armed Forces from boarding operations also drew attention (McGreal, 2009). Considering that the Kenyan Armed Forces used British Vickers Mk3 tanks and not Soviet weapons, Kenya's role in the arms shipment to South Sudan, despite UN embargoes, seemed to be a cover-up. The exposure of such incidents by piracy facilitated Russia's endorsement of UNSC resolutions.

### **The United States, seizing the opportunity of the Yemeni Civil War spilling into the Red Sea, clearly intends to solidify its position in the region using CTF-153.**

Based on UNSC resolutions, NATO initiated the "Allied Provider" Operation from October 24, 2008, deploying warships in the region. From December 2008 to August 2009, the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) operated under the "Atalanta" Operation, followed by the establishment of the multinational Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151), led by the U.S., from January 1, 2009 (Evin, 2012). It should be noted that CTF 151 is a multinational force composed of warships from U.S. allies or partner states. Among the U.S. fleets, the 5th Fleet has the smallest area of responsibility. Nevertheless, the United States tends to maximize the use of its allies and partners to maintain or enhance maritime control in the areas of responsibility of the

5th Fleet, which includes the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Somali waters, Arabian Sea, and Persian Gulf. The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a multinational naval force led by the U.S. and significantly relieving the burden of the 5th Fleet, includes CTF 151, a highly effective force supported by about 15 countries, tasked with combating piracy (Combined Maritime Forces, 2010a; 2010b). Among these 15 countries, Pakistan (10 times), Türkiye (6 times), South Korea (6 times), Singapore (5 times), and Japan (4 times) have been the most active in assuming command duties every six months; while the United States, Kuwait, Denmark, Thailand, New Zealand, UK, Brazil, Jordan, Philippines, and Bahrain have tended to be relatively passive. The effective presence of CTF 151 has led to the eastward expansion of the area of maritime piracy activities in the Horn of Africa waters during 2009-2012 (Morabito, 2016).

Alongside CTF-151, which controls the southern entrance of the Red Sea, a multinational naval force named Combined Task Force 153 (CTF 153), composed of U.S. and Egyptian warships, was established on April 17, 2022, for the security of the Red Sea (Combined Maritime Forces, 2010a). The United States, seizing the opportunity of the Yemeni Civil War spilling into the Red Sea, clearly intends to solidify its position in the region using CTF-153. Indeed, CTF-153 has targeted the asymmetric capabilities of the Houthis in Yemen that can be used at sea. According to U.S. sources, the number of Houthi attacks on Israel-linked civilian trade ships in the Red Sea starting on November 19, 2023, rose to 23 by December 31, 2023; most of these attacks failed to hit their targets, and the drones that did hit caused no significant damage (Anadolu Ajansı, 2023; Gambrell, 2023).

The United States, aiming to eliminate the Houthis' weak attempts to regain control of Yemeni waters, invited Saudi Arabia, Israel, UAE, Bahrain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the UK to join CTF-153 (Bowman, 2023). However, when the United States launched "Operation Prosperity Guardian" against the Houthis on December 18, 2023, Egypt withdrew from CTF-153, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE, hostile to the Houthis, refused to join.

According to a U.S. Department of Defense statement dated December 18, 2023, "Operation Prosperity Guardian" was joined by the United States, UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, and Spain. On December 21, 2023, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder stated that about 20 countries intended to support the operation, but Spain and Italy were considering withdrawing their support (Helou, 2024). Like CTF 151, CTF-153 should be seen as blocking the geopolitical power of East Africa's seas. The gradual decline of maritime piracy incidents in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, Gulf of Aden, and Somali waters from 2012, and their almost negligible level from 2018, can only be attributed to "imperialism," using Houthi attacks as a pretext for the persistent presence of CTF 151 and CTF 153 in the region (Kalay, 2023).

### **Global Power Rivalry for Establishing Military Bases on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, attempting to recover from the economic slowdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, experienced in 2020 the worst locust invasion in the last 70 years, leading to significant agricultural production losses and a food security crisis

(Smith, 2020). However, in recent years, African countries where China has invested have generally exhibited economic performance above the world average (Mürsel, 2018). Among these states, Ethiopia and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa particularly stand out. While the IMF predicts a global growth average of 2.9% in 2024, the figure is projected to be 6.2% for Ethiopia and 6% for Djibouti (Visual Capitalist, 2023). Ethiopia, promising as an agricultural country, is unfortunately landlocked. Djibouti, Ethiopia's eastern neighbor with a 370 km coastline, acts as a lifeline for Ethiopia's foreign trade. Since the end of the Ethiopia-Eritrea War in 2000, Ethiopia, having lost hope of accessing the sea, relies on Djibouti for 90% of its imports. Djibouti, with a population of only 1 million and a GDP of \$5.6 billion, is a dwarf in terms of national power but a geopolitical giant due to its location at the entrance of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. Lacking the capacity to utilize its geopolitical potential independently, Djibouti has recently turned into an international military garrison (Cabestan, 2019).

### **Presence of the European Union on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

French air and naval base, hosting about 1,450 troops (1,000 of which are elite Légion étrangère soldiers), has been present in Djibouti since 1978. Since 2009, this base also accommodates 30-80 German and 50 Spanish soldiers providing support for the Atalanta Operation conducted by EUNAVFOR; they use the Kempinski and Sheraton Hotels in the region for accommodation and rest. Additionally, an Italian air base is located in the same area (Styan, 2020; Cabestan, 2019; Downs, 2017).



French Naval Base in Djibouti (Photo: SSI, 2017).

### U.S. Presence on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

In October 2002, the U.S. established a military unit called ‘Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa’ (CJTF-HOA) under CENTCOM, consisting of 1,500 personnel (200 civilians), and stationed it at Camp Lemonnier, a former French base in Djibouti. The operational area for CJTF-HOA includes all the land and airspace of Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Seychelles, and Yemen, along with their coastal waters in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean. CJTF-HOA was established to “identify, disrupt, and defeat international terrorist groups operating in the region (Ploch, 2007),” and its additional tasks include:

- Providing freedom of movement for the United States in East Africa,

- Protecting U.S. military personnel, diplomats, facilities, and interests in the region (Yüksel, 2016).

As the rationale behind the establishment of CJTF-HOA suggests, the United States uses terrorist organizations to legitimize its military presence in Africa (Şimşek, 2020).

On February 6, 2007, U.S. President Bush directed the establishment of a new structure called ‘U.S. Africa Command’ (U.S. AFRICOM). Using the headquarters infrastructure of ‘U.S. European Command’ (EUCOM), AFRICOM became an independent command under the U.S. Department of Defense on January 1, 2008, with its area of responsibility being all of Africa, except Egypt (Yüksel, 2016). The decision by the United States to approach Africa holistically is thought to be driven by the increasing influence of many new actors in Africa, including China, Russia, Brazil, Japan, and Türkiye.

The rising competition in the African continent has been interpreted by some experts as a “New Cold War unfolding in Africa (TASAM Afrika Enstitüsü, 2020).” Some sources summarize the establishment purpose of AFRICOM as U.S. desire to expand its “offshore balancing” strategy, compete with China’s growing diplomatic, political, economic, and cultural presence in Africa, increase trade and investment with African countries around mutual interests, and improve the United States’ tarnished image (Conteh-Morgan, 2018; Özel, 2020; Bekar, 2021).

**The creation of an independent strategic command for Africa reflects the continent’s increasing geopolitical significance and indicates the long-term nature of the U.S. military policies towards Africa**

Prior to AFRICOM, responsibility for Africa was divided among the European Command (EUCOM), responsible for Europe, the Central Command (CENTCOM), responsible for the Middle East, and the Pacific Command (PACOM), responsible for the Pacific and countries with Pacific coastlines. The creation of an independent strategic command for Africa reflects the continent’s increasing geopolitical significance and indicates the long-term nature of U.S. military policies towards Africa (Yüksel, 2016). AFRICOM has supported operations aimed at stabilizing conflict zones, establishing strategic relationships, and promoting military cooperation, as well as supporting the efforts of U.S. soft power institutions like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) (Buğra, 2012).

With the transfer from CENTCOM to AFRICOM, the strength of CJTF-HOA was increased to 2,000-2,500 military and civilian personnel. Although CENTCOM retains primary responsibility against “maritime piracy” in the waters of the Horn of Africa, the regional CFTF-HOA force under AFRICOM plays a critical role in providing land support to the U.S. “blue water” navy operating in the region (Ploch, 2007). Today, CJTF-HOA carries out its missions using Camp Lemonnier Naval Base, which accommodates 4,500 U.S. troops (2,000 of them marines), and Chabelley Air Base located in the desert area of Djibouti. Since 2017, the U.S. Camp Lemonnier Naval Base has also hosted a British platoon. Since 2011, the U.S. has used Chabelley Air Base for continuous MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper Armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) flight operations over Yemen and Somalia (Cabestan, 2019).

Despite the presence of numerous U.S. bases in Africa, the U.S. military presence is perceived as an occupation in many parts of Africa, still bearing the fresh traces of Western colonialism. Consequently, no African state has agreed to host the AFRICOM headquarters, so it remains in Stuttgart, Germany. This situation has created an irony of an Africa command not located in central Africa (Yüksel, 2016).

In recent times, China’s use of the allure of its economic investments in Ethiopia and Djibouti to gain military presence in Djibouti has forced the United States into economic competition with China. The \$1.55 billion, 550 km long Horn of Africa (Djibouti-Ethiopia) Fuel Pipeline is a product of this competition, an investment by the U.S. Extending from Damerjog Port in Djibouti to a storage facility with a capacity of 950,000 barrels in Awash, central Ethiopia, the 20-inch



Map of the World showing the Locations of AFRICOM and CENTCOM (Photo: USNI, 2013).

diameter Horn of Africa Pipeline can transfer 240,000 barrels per day. Completed in 2018, this pipeline enables the United States to transport refined diesel, gasoline, and jet fuel from Africa or the Middle East to Ethiopia (VOA, 2015; Ecofin Agency, 2015; Sudan Tribune, 2015; CGTN Africa, 2023).

The spillover of the Yemeni Civil War into the Red Sea since 2015 has served as a pretext for the West, supported by UAVs or warplanes from imperialist bases in Djibouti, to establish a firmer presence in the Red Sea and engage in shows of force. For instance, on October 1, 2016, a high-speed hybrid catamaran military cargo vessel owned by the UAE, Swift-1, was damaged by a C-802 missile launched by the Houthis from land. Subsequently, on October 10, 2016, the USS Mason, a U.S. destroyer, and the USS Ponce, a U.S. amphibious ship,

assessed two objects launched from the Yemeni coast while crossing the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait as a suspected guided missile attack. The USS Mason quickly launched two Standard Missile-2 (SM-2) and one Evolved Seasparrow Missile (ESSM) air defense missiles towards the aerial objects, also deploying Nulka decoys as a passive measure. The Houthis, through the Saba News Agency, denied the allegations of attacking the USS Mason and USS Ponce (Lagrone, 2016; Vaughan, 2016). There is no available information on whether the two aerial objects were anti-ship missiles, launched by the Houthis, targeted at U.S. ships, or if they were shot down by the SAMs launched by the USS Mason. However, the U.S. government, sharing its military sources' speculative information and reactions with the global public, has created the perception that the Houthis attacked U.S. warships.

### **Japanese Presence on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

Since 2009, Japan, maintaining a constant naval presence in Somali waters and the Gulf of Aden, has built a runway suitable for fighter jets at its logistical base in Djibouti in 2016, which houses 600 troops (Pajon, 2017).

### **Israeli Presence on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

It is claimed that since 2012, Israel has had some small naval units stationed in the Dahlak Archipelago and Massawa in Eritrea and even an intelligence facility on Mount Soira (Amba Sawara) in Eritrea to monitor Iran's activities in the Red Sea. Indeed, in 2017, a Houthi spokesperson threatened that Israeli targets in Eritrea could be struck (Melvin, 2019).

### **Chinese Presence on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

In recent years, China's peaceful policies in global competition, challenging the dominance of the United States, are based on principles of:

- Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,
- Non-aggression,
- Non-interference in each other's internal affairs,
- Equality,
- Mutual benefit (Yüksel, 2016).

These peaceful policies have facilitated China's investments in Africa under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). A 2019 study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that China is involved in at least 46 of

the existing, operated, and planned port projects among 172 Sub-Saharan African ports, having a role in the construction of 41, financing 27, and controlling 11 of them (CSIS, 2014). In short, Sub-Saharan African port investments have become one of the primary ways for China to establish commercial superiority in the region. This is believed to provide strategic depth to the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in meeting future logistical needs (CSIS, 2014; Devermont, Cheatham, & Chiang, 2019).

Since its first military presence in Africa in 2003 with peacekeeping duties in the Democratic Republic of Congo, China has increased its trade relations with Ethiopia over the last 20 years (Cabestan, 2019). This economic relationship has also benefited Djibouti, Ethiopia's gateway to the sea. Indeed, the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway, originally built by France in 1890, was renovated by Chinese companies China Railway Group Ltd. and China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation as part of a \$3.95 billion project from 2011-2017 and opened in January 2018 (Downs, 2017). The railway line, now with a capacity of 3,500 tons per trip (seven times its original capacity), reduces the travel time between Addis Ababa and the Doraleh Port from three days to 12 hours, also cutting the cost of freight transport by a third (Çelik, 2023). Following the completion of this large-scale transportation infrastructure, China continued its investments in Djibouti with the \$340 million Doraleh Port, a \$320 million daily 100,000 m<sup>3</sup> capacity freshwater pipeline between Ethiopia and Djibouti, the \$64 million Ghoubet Port, and the \$30 million Djibouti International Free Trade Zone (Downs, 2017).

Since 2008, China has conducted anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, where 40%

of its total imports pass, and until 2017, tried to support its warships sent for this purpose from regional civilian ports (Cabestan, 2019). It is claimed that some Chinese warships could not port for 124 days during these missions (People's Daily, 2013). Between 2009-2013, Chinese warships made at least 23 port visits in Djibouti (Downs, 2017). During this period, as economic relations between China and Djibouti continued to rise, they also began to gain a military dimension. Indeed, a security and defense agreement signed between China and Djibouti in 2014 was vehemently protested by

the United States. In 2015, China and Djibouti signed agreements for 14 mega projects worth \$9.8 billion as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (Edens, 2015).

During this time, China frequently expressed the need for a naval base in Africa to evacuate hundreds of thousands of Chinese nationals when necessary, citing the evacuation of 36,000 Chinese citizens from Libya in 2011 as an example (Cabestan, 2019). Indeed, China's use of civilian ports in Djibouti to evacuate 900 Chinese nationals from Yemen in March-April 2015 confirmed this thesis (Zhen, 2016).



Evacuation of Chinese Nationals from Yemen to Djibouti (Photo: People's Daily, 2019).



In November 2015, China announced its decision to establish a logistics facility to escort merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters and to support UN peacekeeping/humanitarian aid/evacuation missions (Cabestan, 2019; Jacobs & Perlez, 2017). Although the Chinese Government tries to mask it as a military area, this facility possesses all the characteristics of a military base.

The Chinese Djibouti Naval Base, operational since August 2017 under a 10-year leasing agreement between China and Djibouti, houses approximately 2,000 military personnel (Wong, 2015; Cabestan, 2019). According to some sources in Western media, China has built the base in Djibouti with the capacity to accommodate up to 10,000 soldiers (Winsor, 2016; Dube, 2016; Cabestan, 2019).

The Chinese Djibouti Naval Base, adjacent to the Doraleh Multipurpose Port and costing \$590 million, allocates one of its six docks for Chinese warships (Zhen, 2016). This particular dock can

accommodate all Chinese warships except aircraft carriers and Type 071 Yushao-class amphibious transport docks (LPD) (Downs, 2017).

The Chinese Djibouti Naval Base, situated 8 miles from the U.S. Base at Camp Lemonnier, covers 36 hectares. The base includes four-story logistics warehouses, a helipad with a helicopter runway, hangars, and maintenance facilities. It also has a hospital and sports facilities and is surrounded by an 8-meter high security wall and patrol roads. The helicopter runway (Bhat, 2017) is suitable for drone take-offs and landings, but a major disadvantage of the Chinese base is the absence of a runway suitable for aircraft take-offs. The Chinese Djibouti Naval Base is five times smaller than the U.S. Base at Camp Lemonnier (Cabestan, 2019).

Since the opening of the Chinese Djibouti Naval Base in 2017, regular heavy weapons firing training exercises have been observed for the security of the base's Chinese military units (Zhao, 2017).



Satellite map showing the locations of 1.China Djibouti Naval Base, 2.Doraleh Multipurpose Port and 3.Doraleh Container Terminal (Photo: BRIQ, 2024).

The U.S. forces in Djibouti meet their logistic needs through the Doraleh Container Terminal, located near the Chinese Djibouti Naval Base. This situation, implying an additional security problem for the U.S. Base at Camp Lemonnier, is uncomfortable for the United States (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2020).

In Djibouti, due to the proximity of the bases, tensions between China and the United States are on the rise. For instance, it has been alleged by the United States that “10 separate laser attacks were carried out from the Chinese Djibouti Naval Base against U.S. warplanes, resulting in serious eye injuries to two U.S. pilots (Dahir, 2018).” Besides these “allegation-level” tensions, the U.S. Government closely monitors multinational exercises conducted by the South African, Chinese, and Russian Navies in the southern waters of Africa and by the Iranian, Russian, and Chinese Navies in the Indian Ocean. According to reports presented to the U.S. Congress, during joint military activities, China has allowed Russian warships to use its base in Djibouti (Shainn, 2020).

### **Russian Presence on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

Seeking to increase its influence in the Red Sea, Russia has been searching for a base near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait since 2009 (Ramani, 2018). Amid the Russia-Ukraine tensions and seeking political support internationally, Russia’s visibility in Africa began to increase, leading to the signing of 19 military cooperation agreements with African countries between 2015 and 2019 (TASAM Afrika Enstitüsü, 2022). Although not officially acknowledged by the Moscow administration, Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group are stationed in Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sudan,

which has a coastline on the Red Sea (Siegle, 2021; Lindén, 2023).

According to statements made in August 2017 by former RF Naval Forces Commander Admiral Feliks Gromov, Russia’s need for a naval base in the Gulf of Aden has become vital. The Moscow-based Institute of Oriental Studies, after extensive research, has suggested Yemen’s Socotra Island as an ideal location for a Russian naval base. Russia continues negotiations with the al-Hadi Administration in Southern Yemen regarding this. Similarly, Russia has been intensively pursuing the establishment of a naval base in Eritrea since September 2018, alongside a logistics center, to facilitate trade in agricultural products and minerals in the Red Sea and in Berbera, a major trade port in Somaliland on the Gulf of Aden (Ramani, 2018; Tesfa News, 2018).

Since May 2019, Russia has been in talks with the Sudanese Government and successfully signed a military cooperation agreement in November-December 2020. This agreement granted Russia a “logistical support point” in Port Sudan and allowed for the establishment and operation of a military facility by 300 Russian military and civilian personnel for 25 years, providing Russia with the convenience of basing in the Red Sea for short-term shelter of warships. However, this agreement was canceled in April 2021 (Kollakowski, 2022; Saballa, 2021). Negotiations between Sudan and Russia continue regarding the reinstatement of the military cooperation agreement (Reuters, 2022).

In recent years, Russia’s persistent search for permanent military bases in African countries, including Sudan, Egypt, Eritrea, the Central African Republic, Madagascar, and Mozambique, particularly in the Red Sea waters, has been closely monitored by the global community (Ersozoglu, 2021; Lindén, 2023; Nia, 2020).

### **Saudi Arabian Presence on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

Led by Saudi Arabia and with the participation of some Arab countries, a coalition launched military operations against the Houthi-Saleh forces starting March 25, 2015 (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2014). Due to the multifaceted Yemeni Civil War, weapons like anti-ship missiles, naval mines, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) used in the south of the Red Sea have impacted a small number of merchant ships, in addition to the warships participating in the conflict (Kozanhan, 2020). Particularly, the attacks by the Houthis on Saudi Arabian war/commercial ships using drones, boats, and explosive devices (especially during 2017-2018) have been a major topic in the global public discourse (Kalay, 2023).

In an attack near Yemen's Al-Hudaydah Port on January 30, 2017, a fast boat loaded with an unmanned bomb used by the Houthis struck the Saudi Al-Madinah (RSN 702) frigate near its helicopter platform, resulting in the death of two and injury of three Saudi soldiers. Saudi Arabia reported that the attack involved two remote-controlled, bomb-laden fast boats, of which two were detected and evaded by Al-Madinah, but the third boat hit the ship (Lagrone, 2017; BBC, 2017; RSN AL Madinah, 2017).

Months after this incident, in 2017, Saudi Arabia joined the list of countries with military bases in Djibouti (Downs, 2017; Cabestan, 2019; Al-Abyadh, 2017). The number and function of Saudi personnel in Djibouti remain largely undisclosed.

During 2018-2019, Saudi Arabia entered into close military cooperation with Egypt in the Red Sea, exemplified by their joint execution of "The Red Wave" Exercise in December 2018 in the Red Sea. Following the drone attack on two Saudi oil facilities in the Persian Gulf on September 14, 2019, the armed forces of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan, Djibou-

ti, Yemen, and Somalia decided to make "The Red Wave" series of joint exercises a regular event to be repeated annually in the waters of Jeddah in the Red Sea. The fifth of these series, "The Red Wave-5," was conducted in June 2022 (Muhammed, 2019; Khan, 2019; Arab News, 2022).

### **United Arab Emirates Presence on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

To support its military operations in Yemen, the UAE, which has deployed troops in Eritrea and Somaliland, had its 2015 request to establish a naval base rejected by Djibouti (Cabestan, 2019; Meester & Lanfranchi, 2021; Chegraoui, Lyammouri, & Skah, 2021). Although the UAE's military activities have recently decreased, it has a naval and air base in Assab, Eritrea, which it has leased for 30 years since April 2015 for use against the Houthis in Yemen. The Assab base in Eritrea has also served as a transportation terminal for the transit of 10,000 Sudanese fighters to Yemen and is alleged to have been used for transporting military equipment to Haftar in Libya (Taşkömür, 2023; Alexandre, 2020).

### **Turkish Presence on African Coasts near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**

In 2002, Türkiye only had 12 embassies in Africa, but with its "Africa Opening Policy," it has increased this number to 44 in 20 years. Today, Türkiye has the second-highest number of embassies in Africa after France. Similarly, while only 10 African countries had embassies in Ankara in 2008, this number has now risen to 37. Expanding rapidly in Africa, Türkiye opened embassies in Somalia in 2011, and in Eritrea and Djibouti in 2013, and then began to implement its "Africa Partnership Policy." Closely monitoring terrorism, civil wars, coups, social and humanitarian crises, political

chaos, and security threats arising from climate change in Africa, Türkiye has gained sympathy as an advocate of “African solutions” by sharing its experiences (TASSAM Afrika Enstitüsü, 2022).

The port visits to 24 African countries by the Barbaros Turkish Naval Task Group, consisting of two frigates, one corvette, and one replenishment oiler, during its 102-day journey starting from Gölçük on March 14, 2014, have strengthened Türkiye-Africa relations (Mavi Vatan, 2023).

### **Following the economic hardship caused by 20 years of U.S. sanctions and the loss of over 70% of its oil revenues, with South Sudan’s independence in 2011, Sudan under Omar al-Bashir’s regime grew closer to Türkiye after 2014.**

Türkiye’s use of the waters of Africa, including the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, stands at a high level. In fact, according to 2019 figures, 5.3% of the north/south cargo transported through the Suez Canal consists of Türkiye’s imports and exports. Among the countries using the Suez Canal, Türkiye ranks:

- 5th for southbound petroleum products,
- 7th for southbound ore and metals,
- 4th for southbound fertilizers,
- 1st for southbound processed metals,
- 3rd for northbound petroleum products,
- 5th for northbound LNG,
- 4th for northbound chemicals,
- 2nd for northbound processed metals,
- 4th for northbound vegetable oils,
- 1st for northbound coal,
- 2nd for northbound fertilizers (Mavi Vatan,

2023; Suez Canal Authority, 2019).

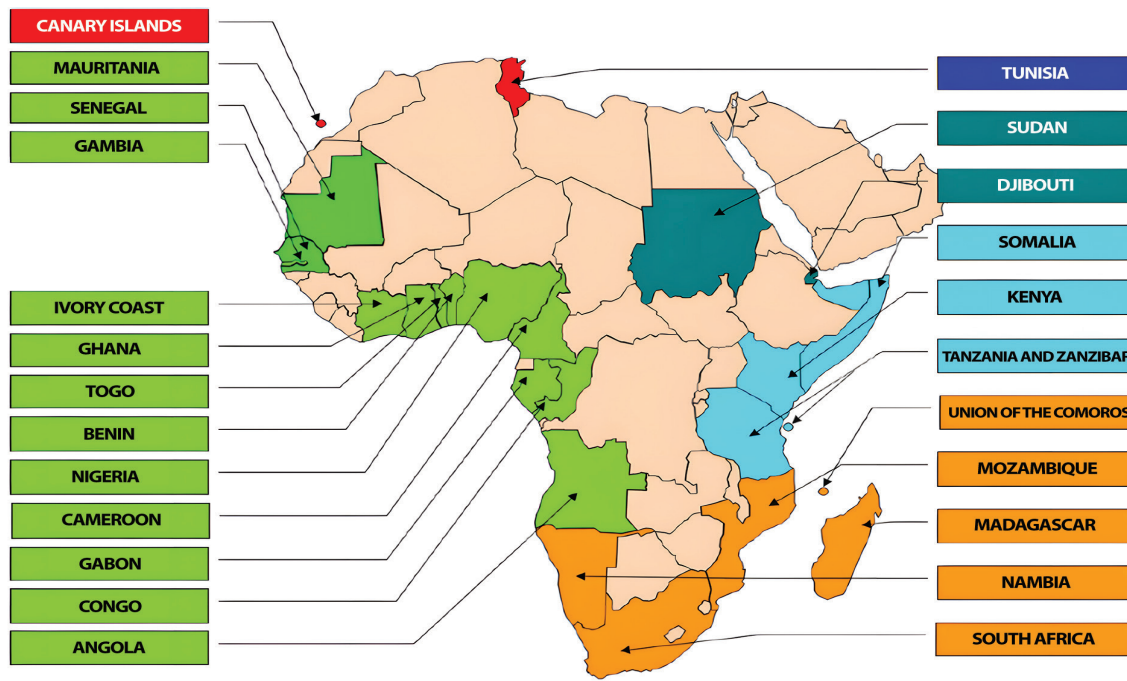
According to these statistics, Türkiye is among the

top users of the Red Sea. As can be seen, Türkiye, which vitally depends on the waterways of the Afro-Asian junction, is compelled to have a military presence in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, where Western imperialism is militarily concentrated.

Since 2017, the Turkish Task Force in Somalia has been based in Mogadishu to provide training support to the Somali Armed Forces (Al-Jazeera, 2017). However, the distance from Mogadishu to the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait is about 1,400 nautical miles by sea. There have been reports that Türkiye, seeking a base closer to the strategically important Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, has acquired land for a military base in Djibouti (Erandaç, 2018). It is unclear if the land mentioned in these reports is the 500-hectare area allocated to Türkiye for 99 years to establish a “Special Economic Zone” under an agreement signed on December 10, 2014 (DEIK, 2023).

Following the economic hardship caused by 20 years of U.S. sanctions and the loss of over 70% of its oil revenues, with South Sudan’s independence in 2011, Sudan under Omar al-Bashir’s regime grew closer to Türkiye after 2014 (Mashamoun, 2022). In this positive atmosphere, on December 29, 2017, Türkiye and Sudan signed 22 agreements, including leasing Suakin Island for 99 years for \$650 million and increasing bilateral trade volume to \$10 billion annually. Although Türkiye claimed it intended to restore the dilapidated old Ottoman port on Suakin Island and turn the island into a cultural and tourism center, this assertion was not found credible by Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia (Cagaptay, 2019; Habertürk, 2018’ Arpa, 2019; Mashamoun, 2022; ASSAM, 2022). According to some reports in the Turkish and Egyptian media in 2018, Türkiye planned to complete the construction of a military base on Suakin Island by 2020 and additionally make a \$4 billion investment to renovate Suakin Port (Mourad, 2018). These reports triggered the formation of a reflexive anti-Türkiye axis comprising Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt in the Red Sea (İnanç, 2023).

Figure 3. Port Visits of the Barbaros Turkish Naval Task Group in 24 African Countries in 2014



Barbaros TGDD travelled the entire continent in 102 days (Figure: Bilgen, 2023).

In 2019, Sudanese Vice President Ibrahim es Senusi stated that Türkiye would not establish a military base on the island, but he found it difficult to understand the reaction to this agreement by those who did not object to the many foreign military bases in the Red Sea (Bag, 2019). Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour said that Türkiye would first construct a port on the island for the repair and maintenance of military and commercial ships (Kaya, 2021).

After the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir’s regime in Sudan in 2019, the transitional government canceled the lease agreement of Suakin Island to Türkiye (Sofos, 2022). Abdulfettah el-Burhan, the head of the Sudanese Transitional Military Council formed in 2019, announced on social media his opposition to the allocation of Suakin Island to Türkiye for 99 years and his intention to work for its cancellation.

Amid increasing debates, former Sudanese Minister of International Relations Idris Suleiman defended that the agreement was legally signed at the state level and could not be changed (Kaya, 2021). Despite these controversies, the momentum between Türkiye and Sudan did not diminish, and in a bilateral meeting between Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay and Sudanese Sovereignty Council Deputy Chairman General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, it was stated that the agreements signed during the Omar al-Bashir era between the two countries would remain in effect (Mashamoun, 2022). Moreover, Türkiye expressed its willingness to mediate the ongoing issues between Sudan and Ethiopia (Orakçı, 2021). Finally, in August 2021, President Erdogan met with Sudanese Sovereignty Council Chairman Abdel Fettah al-Burhan to sign a series of agreements and restart cooperation (Sofos, 2022).

## Conclusion

This article has highlighted events such as the mysterious seabed mines in the Red Sea in 1984 causing minor damage to a few merchant ships over about a month, the descent of impoverished Somali fishermen into piracy due to the theft of fish resources and pollution of marine ecosystems in the early 2000s, the transformation of regional piracy into a profitable finance sector for terrorist organizations, and the spillover of the Houthi struggle for survival into the Red Sea since 2016.

These incidents, occurring at different times and involving different actors, share two overlooked common features. First, contrary to popular belief, none of these incidents were severe enough to halt or significantly slow Red Sea traffic. Second, Western imperialism, despite creating a contrary perception, has used these incidents as pretexts to seize or consolidate control over the Afro-Asian junction comprising the Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, and Gulf of Aden. The geopolitical power of this Afro-Asian joint area, an area of common power for Africa and Asia, has historically belonged neither to Africa nor to Asia. Africa and Asia must work to remove imperialism from these semi-enclosed seas and their surroundings.

During World Wars I and II, the homelands of imperialists, other than the United States, were turned into ruins as they became battlegrounds. With the current expectation of a transition to multipolarity, or even significant shifts in hard power, the question arises, “Will the upcoming wars, involving a struggle for power, occur in the homelands of these powers and their surrounding seas?” It seems plausible that global/continental/regional power centers, unlike previous world wars, might prefer to conduct their power struggles in geographies far from their own territories and living spaces. The African continent, being a potential geography for a bloody, hybrid-natured world war aimed at changing the world order, could be the most likely - and expendable - choice. Such a scenario would spell new devastation for Africa.

African nations, historically unaware of their own geopolitical power, now face an urgent need to embrace the Red Sea as a geopolitical lifebuoy, considering its strategic importance as a busy and narrowing waterway. The Red Sea, which fortuitously did not become a primary battleground in previous world wars, could be at the very center of a potential Third World War. To prevent this, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia, still not fully aware of their responsibilities, need to urgently seek policies to end the imperialist military presence in the Afro-Asian junction, without further delay. 🌸

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