

Research Paper

By a Team Specializing in Security and Armed  
Groups Affairs



The History of Piracy in the Red Sea and the  
Gulf of Aden (1800-2024):

Motives and Ramifications

SOUTH 24

# **The History of Piracy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (1800–2024):**

## **Motives and Ramifications**

**By a Team Specializing in Security and  
Armed Groups Affairs**

*The cover photo shows the British vessel 'Rubymar' which sank in the Red Sea on March 2, 2024, following a Houthi attack. The photo has been edited by South24 Center' using Artificial Intelligence (The original photo is via AFP)*



South24 Center for News & Studies

## Content

Introduction	4
The importance of the Red Sea	5

### **Attacks in the Red Sea in the 21st Century** 7

The Houthi attacks	7
Iranian-Israeli attacks	11
Attacks by Somali pirates	14
Al-Qaeda's operation	18

### **Attacks in the 20th Century** 20

The 1st and the 2nd World Wars	20
The Suez Canal	22
The 1967 and the 1973 wars	22
The Israeli presence	23
The Tanker War	24
Different operations	24

### **Attacks in the 18th and 19th centuries** 26

Ship 'Doria Dowlut'	26
The Qawasim's attacks in the Gulf	27
The oldest reference to pirates	28

### **Conclusions and Recommendations** 30

## Summary

This research paper by 'South24 Center' examines and analyzes the piracy phenomenon in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. These includes attacks carried out by non-state groups such as the Iran-backed Houthis of Yemen, the Somali pirates, the Al-Qaeda, and even goes back to the times of the European pirates, as well as the recent involvement of national states such as Iran. The paper also explores the motives behind these activities and their evolution over the past three centuries. It highlights the negative impact of piracy and the attacks against vessels on international trade.

The research explains how these have affected the local, regional, and global economy, in addition to the security, stability and investment opportunities in the region. The paper ends with some conclusions which help to understand the different contexts of these events. It submits some recommendations which can contribute to reducing the challenges that this important maritime region faces and thereby have a positive impact on Yemen and the regional states.

## Introduction

Piracy has constituted a well-established historical phenomenon in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. It has particularly flourished over the past three centuries, which have witnessed major political conflicts and economic crises, that have been big contributors to its rise. Piracy has resulted in increased attacks on commercial ships and threatened the maritime security in the region.

Combating piracy operations in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden over the past three centuries has undoubtedly been of historical, political and economic significance. This importance has increased today due to the challenges posed by the attacks of the Houthi militia in the Red and Arabian Seas as well as the involvement of major states in an escalating conflict in this strategic maritime region.

## Objectives of the Research Paper

Besides tracing the piracy operations in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden over the past three centuries and analyzing its reasons, the paper also recounts the most prominent piracy incidents marked by violence and confrontation in this maritime region. This includes the involvement of both non-state groups and national states with their different historical and political contexts as well as their military and religious motives.

The paper also aims to create a deeper understanding about the phenomenon and compares the incidents that have taken place in the Red and Arabian Seas. It provides a comprehensive assessment of the negative effects of piracy on maritime traffic, and regional security and stability.

Additionally, the paper's conclusions and recommendations are aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the piracy phenomenon in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. This could help in finding effective solutions to combat this menace, thereby guaranteeing maritime security and possibly even preventing it from turning into a subject of fierce global power struggle.



*Illustrative map of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (Mapbox)*

## Importance of the Red Sea as a Global Waterway

The Red Sea is considered one of the most important waterways in the world. It serves as a link between Asia, Africa and Europe. It connects between the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea to the south and the Mediterranean Sea to the north via the Suez Canal and the Bab Al-Mandab Strait.<sup>1</sup> It's strategic importance is illustrated in the following points:

1- It is a main trade route through which about 12% of the global maritime trade and 14% of the trade exchange between Asia and Europe passes. The narrow strip of water – measuring roughly 1,200 miles (1,900 km) long and, at its widest point, over 190 miles (300 km) wide -- also serves as a lifeline for the global economies, as huge quantities of commodities and oil products are transported through it. It is an important gateway to the Arab Gulf countries and also links them with other states in the world. The sea also comprises one of the main strategic routes on which China has based its promised 'Belt and Road' project.

2- The Red Sea is an important geopolitical location in the heart of the world. This makes it the focus of attention of major international forces. It is bordered by countries of political and economic importance such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. For this reason, it is considered a theater of regional and international conflicts.

<sup>1</sup> Bab\_alMandab\_Strait\_Ar.pdf (south24.net)

3-Huge natural resources: The Red Sea has an abundance of natural resources such as oil, natural gas, and minerals.<sup>2</sup> This forms an important income source for the regional states, and contributes to development of the local economies and attracting foreign investments. The sea is also an important source of fish for a large section of local residents, including fishermen, especially in Yemen.

4-Unique biological diversity: The Red Sea is home to a unique biological diversity, including more than 1,200 species of fish and around 350 coral species. It is considered an outstanding tourist destination for those who love swimming, diving, snorkeling and other water sports. The Red Sea is also one of the warmest and saltiest seas of the world. It hosts some of the most productive and diverse coral reefs globally. The corals are known for their ability to tolerate the heat and the rising temperatures, making the Red Sea the last coral refuge globally. The sea also supports extensive seagrass beds and mangroves. All these factors help in maintaining the environmental balance of the region.

Since early times, the Gulf of Aden-Red Sea-Suez Canal route has faced several security challenges, such as piracy, terrorism, and attacks related to political motives. However, these challenges have increased at an alarming pace since November 2023. To combat this, strategic international cooperation is necessary to guarantee the security of the maritime navigation and stability of the global economy. The riparian countries are mainly responsible for securing the waterway's safety. Recent days have seen an increase in the international presence and conflict there, following the Houthi attacks on vessels. Consequently, this has enlarged the scale of the geopolitical challenges and the importance of positive and effective engagement by the regional states in drafting the future of the surrounding waterways.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Red Sea Gas Project (marefa.org Arabic)



*British ship 'Rubymar' that sank off the Mocha coast in the Red Sea, two weeks after Houthis attacked it on February 18, 2024 (AFP)*

## Attacks in the Red Sea in the 21st Century

### The Houthi attacks

Although the Red Sea has witnessed several incidents of piracy and violent attacks on vessels over the past centuries, the occurrences during late 2023 and early 2024 have been very different. In late 2023, the Iran-backed Houthis began offensive operations against vessels in the Red Sea with alleged links to Israel, under the pretext of supporting Gaza. Although the United States quickly responded to this threat by launching a maritime coalition and carrying out counter-attacks using naval forces, these measures haven't prevented the ongoing Houthi assaults. The American response has been almost unilateral as many countries have refused to participate in the US-led maritime coalition 'Operation Prosperity Guardian'.<sup>3</sup> Due to this position, the latest confrontations in the Red Sea appear to be only an American-British-Israeli problem despite the fact that the Houthi attacks have impacted different countries economically. It seems that the US' partiality toward Israel in the Gaza war has

---

<sup>3</sup> The Houthis welcome the rejection of some countries to enter the naval coalition(RT Arabic)



impacted the international stance in terms of the Red Sea incidents<sup>4</sup>. This is in addition to other calculations for some countries, especially the Arab states.

The United States' response to the Red Sea attacks shows that it is having to deal with a unique threat. This has been indicated by the American gradual response to the Houthis. It began with the establishment of the maritime security coalition<sup>5</sup> 'Prosperity Guardian' on December 19, 2023. Following this, the US-led coalition launched<sup>6</sup> six aerial operations against the Shiite group in Yemen with an aim to weaken its military capabilities. On January 17, 2024, Washington designated the Houthis as a 'Specially Designated Global Terrorist group', with the clause that it would take effect after 30 days<sup>7</sup>. Regardless of the consequences, the Houthis have continued with their attacks in the Red Sea. They have even expanded their circle of operations to reach the Gulf of Aden in the Arabian Sea. Washington probably didn't expect such persistent and audacious attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as can be seen from its random responses. It appears that Washington has been taken aback by the unproductive outcomes of its operations against the group. According to Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, deputy commander of the US Central Command, the Houthis are "the first entity in the history of the world to use anti-ship ballistic missiles against shipping".<sup>8</sup> It is a fact that Iran's presence as a supporter of the Houthis has complicated the American military mission in the Red and Arabian Seas. However, the outcomes of the security mission have been very frustrating, at least till the time of writing this paper.

The Houthi attacks in the Red Sea are the most prominent of this century, and perhaps in history. This is despite the development of technology which is supposed to reduce the threats against navigation in this important waterway. Piracy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden saw a decline over the 20th and the 21st centuries, due in many ways to the technological advancement in the world. However, the Houthi's attacks haven't apparently been impacted by such a development. They perhaps make use of this to carry out their attacks against vessels, tankers and sea ports.

The Houthis possess capabilities of a geopolitical entity and enjoy regional support. They carry out their attacks in the Red Sea under a convenient moral cover, citing the "Palestine cause" that touches the sentiments of millions of Arabs and Muslims. This is probably the core difference between the attacks by the Houthis and those carried

---

<sup>4</sup> The Reason for the Arab Reluctance from Joining the Coalition for Protecting Navigation in the Red Sea/23-12-2023(DW Arabic)

<sup>5</sup> The US announces a new coalition to confront the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea(france24.com Arabic)

<sup>6</sup> An American official: The US carries out new strikes against the Houthis(CNN Arabic-Arabic)

<sup>7</sup> Washington Re-designates the Houthis as a terrorist organization((skynewsarabia.com-Arabic)

<sup>8</sup> The Houthis in Yemen were the first to use ballistic missiles as anti-ship missiles in a war(Udefense- Arabic)

out by other “non-state” actors in the international waterways. This is regardless of the Houthis’ actual intentions and goals behind their attacks. The continuing Houthi attacks aren’t related to their military power but to their exploitation of the Palestinian cause. It is an ongoing crisis that has witnessed divisions cropping up among major countries. Therefore, the Chinese<sup>9</sup>, Russian<sup>10</sup>, and even the Saudi positions,<sup>11</sup> which call for reducing tensions in the Red Sea, draw a link between the Houthi attacks on navigation and the situation in Gaza. But the point to be noted here is that the main Houthi goal behind their operations is to embellish their image among local residents who are subjected to poverty and repression, especially in the areas controlled by the group in North Yemen.<sup>12</sup>

Against this backdrop, the Houthi attacks can be considered different from the previous piracy operations in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Nonetheless, in essence, they are related to power struggle. They appear to resemble previous examples of conflicts among states in the region. The difference is that the implementing actor here is perhaps a mere agent to regional parties.

Although the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea began much earlier, -- in March 2015 against ships affiliated to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen--, they were different from the current model. This was due to the Houthi’s poor military capabilities at that time.<sup>13</sup> It now appears clear that the reopening of the seaports in the Houthi-controlled areas in February 2023, under international pressure, has facilitated the arrival of Iranian weapons and experts there. It is difficult to hypothesize here about indigenous military development by the Houthis that has led to this qualitative enhancement of the group’s maritime operations. Notably, during the years when ports in the Houthi-controlled areas remained inoperative, the group wasn’t able to exert pressure for opening them despite launching attacks in the Red Sea, which were also few and far between. However, today the group has been launching daily attacks which aren’t limited to commercial vessels but even to the warships.<sup>14</sup>

The first Houthi incidence of hijacking vessels in the Red Sea took place on January 3, 2022, when they hijacked the Emirati ship ‘Rawabi’, dragging it and its foreign crew to the coast of Al-Hodeida. At the time, the Saudi-led coalition termed it “a piracy and

---

<sup>9</sup> China: Ending the conflict in Gaza quickly will ease tensions in the Red Sea(aa.com.tr Arabic)

<sup>10</sup> The Security Council rejects Russian amendments to a draft resolution linking the Houthi demands to stop their attacks to addressing the situation in Gaza(RT -Arabic)

<sup>11</sup> Saudi Foreign Minister: The attacks in the Red Sea are linked to the Gaza war... and there is a need for a ceasefire( SWI swissinfo.ch Arabic)

<sup>12</sup> The Houthis’ Role in the Hamas-Israel Conflict(Dr. Marta Furlan (South24 Center)

<sup>13</sup> Houthis detain the cargo ship (Rawabi), which flies the UAE flag(BBC News Arabic)

<sup>14</sup> Bold Houthi Attacks Give Biden Stark Choices - WSJ

armed hijack operation against the cargo ship ‘Rawabi’ by the terrorist Houthi militia off Al-Hodeida”.<sup>15</sup> Later, the Houthis released it through Omani mediation.<sup>16</sup>

Bolstered by their current spate of success, the Houthis claim that they have the ability to strike any vessel in the Red Sea from anywhere on land<sup>17</sup>. Many of the ballistic missiles that targeted vessels in the Red Sea and Bab Al-Mandab Strait were launched from Houthi camps in the governorates of Ibb, Dhamar, Taiz, Al-Bayda, and other places.<sup>18</sup>

The Houthi attacks haven’t been limited to targeting vessels in the Red Sea. In October-November 2022, the Houthis targeted the oil exporting ports of South Yemen<sup>19</sup>, where the Yemeni Internationally-Recognized Government is based. The attacks were aimed at halting the Yemeni government’s oil exports, and proved successful. Houthi Leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi bragged about the accuracy of their military strikes against the Yemeni ports, saying: “We were able to hit the oil tap.”<sup>20</sup>

The challenge posed by the Houthi attacks can be gauged from statements by American officials who have spoken about the hardships their mission faces in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.<sup>21</sup>

Till March 6, 2024, the group has targeted about 61 commercial and military cargo ships in the Red and Arabian Seas, launching 64 attacks using ballistic missiles, drones, and other weapons, according to details revealed by the Houthi Leader in a televised speech.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Saudi channel “Al Ekhbariya”(X-Arabic)

<sup>16</sup> After detaining it for 3 months, the Houthis release an Emirati ship with Omani mediation(Al-Jazeera.net - Arabic)

<sup>17</sup> The Houthis: We are able to sink vessels in three seas((skynewsarabia.com-Arabic)

<sup>18</sup> The Houthis and the Red Sea attacks.. Launching Rockets from two locations in Yemen((skynewsarabia.com-Arabic)

<sup>19</sup> The Fourth Houthi Attack on South Yemen's Oil Port(South24.net)

<sup>20</sup> Text of the Revolutionary Leader’s speech on the anniversary of the martyr leader(saba.ye Arabic)

<sup>21</sup> American official: We did not expect this to happen to American ships(RT -Arabic)

<sup>22</sup> The Houthi Leader: We targeted 61 ships in the Red and Arabian Sea(aa.com.tr -Arabic)



*Photo of an Israeli ship in the Arabian Sea (The Times of Israel)*

## Reciprocal Israeli-Iranian attacks

While the United States and Israel accuse Iran of providing support to the Houthis in their attacks against cargo ships in the Red Sea, this waterway has previously seen direct mutual attacks between Iran and Israel.

In April 2021, an Iranian cargo vessel ‘Saviz’ was attacked with limpet mines in the Red Sea near the coast of Djibouti, causing damage. Although Israel didn’t announce responsibility for the operation, ‘The New York Times’ quoted an unnamed American official as saying that “Israel had notified the United States that its forces had struck the vessel”.<sup>23</sup> A week prior to this, some explosions had targeted the Israeli-owned vehicle carrier ship ‘Hyperion Ray’ near the Port of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>24</sup>

These two sea attacks are considered a major chapter in the protracted Iranian-Israeli conflict. Due to its war with some Iranian factions, Israel fears that any presence of

---

<sup>23</sup> Iran confirms that one of its ships was attacked in the Red Sea(BBC News Arabic)

<sup>24</sup> Hebrew media reports that an Israeli cargo ship was targeted near the coast of the Emirates( Euronews -Arabic)

Tehran in the waterways means smuggling support to them in addition to intelligence missions.

There were suspicions that ‘Saviz’ was being used as a center for collecting intelligence and as a floating weapons depot. A few months after the incident, Iran replaced<sup>25</sup> ‘Saviz’ with the spy ship ‘Behshad’, which was again deployed in the Red Sea during the launch of the current Houthi maritime operations against commercial and military vessels in the region<sup>26</sup>, a day before the US-UK air assaults began against the Houthis in Yemen.<sup>27</sup>

According to The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Israel seized at least four such Iranian spy ships-cum-floating armories between 2002 and 2014. The ships were being used to send weapons and ammunition to groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. In 2019, Iran disclosed that three of its tankers had been attacked off Saudi Arabia’s Red Sea coast within six months. The following year, six other Iranian ships were targeted by Israel.<sup>28</sup>

The Washington Institute quoted the ‘Wall Street Journal’ as saying that “Israel has targeted at least a dozen vessels bound for Syria, most carrying Iranian oil and some carrying weapons and material for Hezbollah’s precision missile program”. Meanwhile, The New York Times said that “the Israeli Navy’s Flotilla-13 commando unit had carried out at least ten such attacks using mines and other weaponry during 2020, primarily in the Red Sea but also in the east of Mediterranean”.<sup>29</sup>

In April 2021, media platforms said that a commercial ship owned by an Israeli company was attacked while sailing in the Sea of Oman. Israeli officials pointed the finger of blame at Iran.<sup>30</sup>

In July 2021, Tehran targeted an oil tanker managed by Israeli company ‘Zodiac Maritime’ in a drone attack off the Oman coast, killing two of its crew.<sup>31</sup>

In November 2022, navigation data disclosed that oil tanker ‘Pacific Zircon’, associated with a maritime company owned by Israeli billionaire Idan Ofer, was partially damaged when hit by an explosive carrying drone off the Omani coast. While Israel accused Iran of carrying out the attack with a Shahed-136 drone, the same that Tehran had supplied

---

<sup>25</sup> Iran replaced the Saviz ship with another spy ship.. Pictures revealed a secret(alarabiya.net -Arabic)

<sup>26</sup> South 24 Center(X)

<sup>27</sup> Iran and ‘Al-Aqsa Storm’ - a Major Player or a Mere Beneficiary?(South24.net)

<sup>28</sup> Iran and Israel’s Undeclared War at Sea (Part 2): The Potential for Military Escalation(Washington Institute)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> An attack on a ship owned by an Israeli company in the Sea of Oman(skynewsarabia.com-Arabic)

<sup>31</sup> The "Zodiac" ship was bombed and two of its crew were killed. Sources confirm that Iran claimed responsibility for the attack, and Israel threatens a harsh response(aljazeera.net -Arabic)

to Russia for use in the Ukraine war, Iran blamed Israel for the attack saying it was aimed at distracting attention away from the World Cup that was set to begin in Doha.<sup>32</sup>

In February 2023, Tasnim News Agency, affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, said that an Israeli tanker 'Campo Square' was attacked by an Iranian suicide drone (Shahed-136) in the Arabian Gulf.<sup>33</sup>

In view of these attacks, it can be said that Iran paved the way for the Houthi war against vessels in the Red Sea by gathering intelligence over the past years. What is happening now is a part of Tehran's maritime battle against Israel, with the initial outcome appearing to be in favor of Iran as of now.

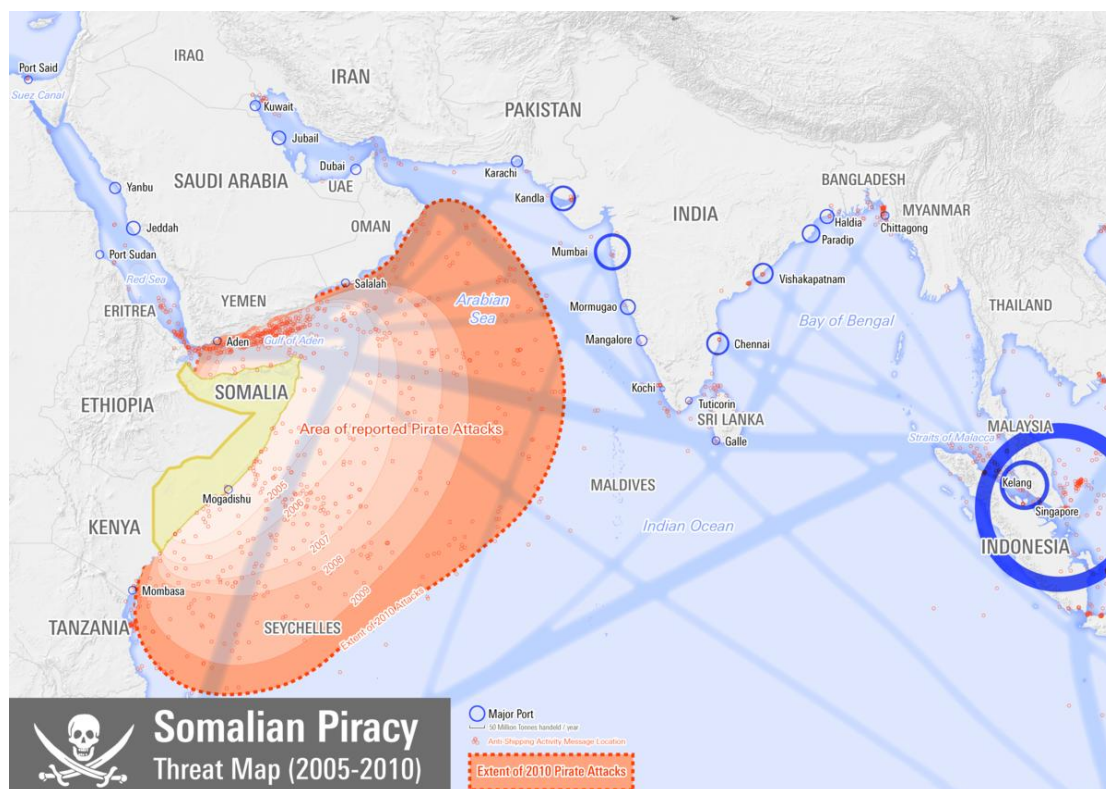
The war launched by Israel in Gaza following Hamas' October 7 attack has provided Iran with the proper camouflage for this phase of operations. Moreover, this war has demonstrated how closely the Houthis are linked to Iran and Tehran's goals.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup>Tehran and Tel Aviv exchange accusations of attacking the oil tanker, and Hebrew media: The tanker is not Israeli (aljazeera.net -Arabic)

<sup>33</sup> Report: An Israeli oil ship is attacked by Iranian ships with a drone in the Gulf of Oman-I24NEW Arabic

<sup>34</sup> Iran and 'Al-Aqsa Storm' - a Major Player or a Mere Beneficiary?(South24.net)



*This map shows the extent of the Somali pirates' control over large parts of the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, and the north-west Indian Ocean (Wikipedia)*

## Attacks by Somali pirates

The operations related to Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea are very different from those carried out by the Houthis in terms of motives, tools, and capabilities. However, they are similar in terms of being piracy that threatens this key waterway which is badly affecting the global economy, besides being one of the reasons for the militarization of the Red Sea.

The Somali operations can be described as acts of piracy and armed robbery against passing civilian vessels to obtain money by exploiting the absence of a central authority in the country. Such piracy operations increased between 2005-2011,<sup>35</sup> and pose a serious threat to international navigation.

According to a report published by Al-Jazeera in 2012, “the annual number of people who joined piracy activities in Somalia was then estimated to be 3,000 young men

<sup>35</sup> Facts - Bab al-Mandab's vital navigation artery becomes a target amid the repercussions of the Israel-Hamas war (SWI swissinfo.ch- Arabic)

whose ages range between 20-30. They are divided into four groups, the majority of whom are former coast guards. They have superior capabilities to hijack vessels up to 240-300 miles inside the seas, and sometimes up to 1,000 miles as per the International Maritime Bureau".<sup>36</sup>

It can be said that the main motive for the Somalian pirates is purely financial. According to Somali economic experts, the pirates represent an economic power as their annual income is estimated to be \$100 million. They had an impact on the economy of the semi-autonomous state of 'Puntland' in north-east Somalia which was unable to pay the salaries of its employees.<sup>37</sup>

Although the number of ships hijacked by Somali pirates reached about 149, this was attained over years since the first hijacking incident was reported in 2005, according to a 2013 World Bank report.

In 2008, the Kenyan Foreign Minister said that the Somali pirates collected about \$150 million in ransom from their operations in the past year. This has emboldened them to continue their piracy.<sup>38</sup>

The Somali pirates' continuing threat to maritime traffic required a foreign response. An agreement was reached to deploy foreign forces off the Somali coast to confront piracy in the Red Sea, via a UN Security Council Resolution (No. 1838) in 2008.<sup>39</sup> The resolution was adopted unanimously despite the conflict of interests in this vital area.

The UNSC resolution asks nations with vessels in the region to apply military force as a means of repressing acts of piracy and armed robbery of vessels off the Somali coast. They were also asked to deploy warships and military planes, according to international law.

In December 2008, the European Union launched 'Operation Atalanta' to deal with the attacks of Somali pirates on cargo ships. The following year, 'Operation Ocean Shield', affiliated with NATO, as well as a multinational naval task force was launched to combat piracy and protect vessels in the area.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the countries whose warships and military planes were operating in the high seas off Somalia were asked to use all possible means in line with international law to combat piracy and to cooperate with the transitional Somali federal

---

<sup>36</sup> Somali piracy | Encyclopedia | (aljazeera.net- Arabic)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Somali piracy | Encyclopedia | (aljazeera.net- Arabic)

<sup>39</sup> Normal.dot (un.org)

<sup>40</sup> Operation "Atlanta" is in the strategic balance (aljazeera.net- Arabic)



government. This was in accordance with the UNSC Resolution (No 1814) in 2018 and Resolution (No 1816) to take measures to protect maritime convoys affiliated with the World Food Program.<sup>41</sup>

## **What are the differences between the Houthi operations in the Red Sea and Somali piracy?**

The Houthi operations in the Red Sea are different from Somali piracy, in terms of motives, goals, attack methods, impact, and international responses.

### **1. Motives:**

The Houthis: Their actions are prompted by political and military motives with an aim to pressure the United States and Israel, according to their statements. They also seek to attract the attention of the international community.

Somali pirates: They are driven by financial motives, with an aim to secure hefty ransoms from the owners of the hijacked ships.

### **2. Goals:**

The Houthis: Their aim is to basically target vessels linked to Israel, the United States and Britain. It is remarkable that Washington has repeatedly stated that the ships targeted by Houthis have no links to Israel. This has been confirmed by independent international organizations, such as Human Rights Watch.

Somali pirates: They target commercial ships without discrimination, and regardless of their nationalities or destinations.

### **3. Attack methods:**

The Houthis: They use guided missiles, drones and explosive boats to hit vessels. In February, the US Central Command confirmed that the Houthis for the first time used an unmanned submarine in their attack.

Somali pirates: They use machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, grappling hooks and ladders to wreak havoc on regional shipping.

---

<sup>41</sup> Sea Piracy- Al Moqatel-Arabic

#### 4. Impact:

The Houthis: Their attacks have caused severe damage, claimed human lives and caused material damage to commercial ships, including igniting fires. In their latest attack on March 7, 2024 in the Gulf of Aden, three sailors from the crew of 'True Confidence'<sup>42</sup> were killed and four others were injured. The Houthi's February 18, 2024 attack on the British ship 'Rubymar' off the Yemeni coast led to its sinking two weeks later on March 2. This came amid warning by experts about an environmental catastrophe threatening the Yemeni coasts and marine life,<sup>43</sup> as a result of the toxic cargo it was carrying.

In addition to threatening the navigation security in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, the Houthi attacks have led to a sharp increase in the cost of securing vessels and global trade. The attacks have also harmed the supply chains of some products.

Somali pirates: Their attacks hampered maritime traffic and threatened navigation security. In addition, they hijacked several ships and detained their crew, releasing them in exchange for hefty ransom.

#### 5. The International Response:

The Houthis: Many states and the UNSC condemned the Houthi attacks, while some countries like the United States and Britain imposed sanctions on leaders of the militia. In addition, an international naval force led by the US, called 'Operation Prosperity Guardian', was formed in December 2023 to secure navigation in the Red Sea. The European Union launched 'Operation Aspides'<sup>44</sup>, on February 19, 2024, contributing its share to the maritime security. The US and UK launched joint airstrikes on military facilities used by the Houthis in Yemen to weaken the group militarily.

Somali pirates: An international maritime task force, 'Combined Task Force 151', was formed in January 2009 to counter piracy off the Somali coast. Additionally, international aid was delivered to Somalia to combat poverty and help develop its economy. This aspect takes into consideration the fact that poverty and the pitiable living conditions in the country are one of the main reasons for the incidences of piracy against commercial ships.

---

<sup>42</sup> A Houthi attack on a ship in the Gulf of Aden kills three persons(independentarabia.com-Arabic)

<sup>43</sup> The Environmental Ramifications of Rubymar's Sinking in the Red Sea(South24.net)

<sup>44</sup> The European Union launches a naval mission to protect navigation in the Red Sea - SWI swissinfo.ch- Arabic)



*An archive photo of October 29, 2000, shows a boat affiliated with the Yemeni police pass beside the stricken 'USS Cole' while being pulled from the Port of Aden by Yemeni tugboats to the deep waters following an AQAP suicide attack (AP/Hassan Jamali)*

## **AQAP's sole operation: Targeting 'USS Cole'**

The 'Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula' (AQAP) didn't initially claim responsibility for its suicide bombing of the 'USS Cole', a guided missile destroyer of the US Navy, on October 12, 2000, near the Port of Aden in South Yemen. AQAP suicide pilots steered their small bomb-laden boat into the side of the USS Cole, as it was preparing to refuel in Aden Port. The blast ripped a 40-foot wide hole in its hull, and left 17 sailors dead and 39 wounded. Later, AQAP elements claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>45</sup>

It is not known if the AQAP has carried out other naval operations following the USS Cole attack. This is despite the terror group claiming numerous attacks in Yemen and also targeting Westerners at home and abroad after 2009, with operations in Saudi

---

<sup>45</sup> Attack on USS Cole (Aden, Yemen | October 12, 2000)((rewardsforjustice.net)

Arabia, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. Besides, the targeting of 'USS Cole' doesn't resemble the attack style of the Houthis or Somali pirates. It is part of Al-Qaeda's operations against American interests in the sea and land.

Following this operation, the security cooperation between Sanaa and Washington increased as well as their coordination and counterterrorism training. The cooperation reached its peak during the joint operation to eliminate the then AQAP leader Abu Ali Al-Harithi on November 3, 2002. Yemen has officially admitted to participating in the killing of Al-Harithi and five other AQAP operatives in a Hellfire missile attack that hit their vehicle east of Sanaa.<sup>46</sup>

On July 27, 2009, General David Petraeus, the then Commander of the US Central Command, said, during a meeting with then Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, that the two sides discussed military cooperation, including joint training, counterterrorism, and implementation of cooperative security in Yemen and the entire region.<sup>47</sup>

At the time, the US also announced its intention to increase the size of its development and security aid to Yemen to over \$150 million, in contrast to its current model of direct military intervention against the Houthis.<sup>48</sup>

At the time, General Petraeus confirmed that the United States had no intention to send any ground forces to Yemen to combat the AQAP. However, Washington hasn't so far shown any willingness to support the Internationally-Recognized Yemeni Government and the military forces in South Yemen to confront the Houthi threat.

---

<sup>46</sup> Yemen officially admits participating in the killing of Al-Harithi and his companions((aljazeera.net- Arabic)

<sup>47</sup> |The Red Sea Security-Al Moqatel-Arabic

<sup>48</sup> US Intelligence: Yemen's commitment to fighting Al-Qaeda is unclear (reuters.com)



*Italian destroyer 'Francesco Nullo' which served during the 2nd World War. It was based in the Red Sea off the Italian colony of Eritrea and participated in military attacks there. (Wikipedia photo)*

## The Red Sea attacks in the 20th Century

During the 20th Century, the Red Sea witnessed incidents of rivalry and international conflicts rather than piracy operations, even though they led to the same outcome in terms of threatening global navigation. Of course, a few piracy operations did occur during that period.

The Red Sea during the 20th Century witnessed several important events that affected its historical path. We will review here some of the most important events as shown below:

### The two World Wars

Britain had managed to extend its influence over the Red Sea during the First World War. This led to a brief closure of the Suez Canal. The British control over the Red Sea had contributed to securing its supply lines to India and other colonies in the Middle East.

The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have been a theater of fierce battles between the Allies and the Axis states, especially the Red Sea battle in 1940. Controlling the Red Sea helped in securing the supply lines for the Allies, particularly after the United States engaged in the war in 1941.

Some of the major naval events and skirmishes that took place in the Red Sea are briefly recounted below:

According to historical references in Wikipedia, Italy had eight submarines that were part of its 'Red Sea Flotilla' based mainly at the Italy-ruled Eritrean port city of Massawa. However, four of them were lost during WW2, including one that ran aground due to crew poisoning caused by a leak of methyl chloride (used as a cheap substitute for freon in the air conditioning system). On June 16, 1940, the Italian submarine 'Galileo Galilei' caused the sinking of Norwegian tanker 'James Stove' sailing independently, about 12 nautical miles (22 km) south of Aden. However, the 'Galileo Galilei' was captured a few days later, with one of the reasons being signs of methyl chloride poisoning of its crew. On June 19, HMAS Hobart of the Australian Navy sent its Supermarine Walrus amphibian patrol aircraft to bomb an Italian wireless station on Centre Peak Island between Massawa and the Arabian coast.<sup>49</sup>

In another major incident, British cargo ship 'MV Bhima' suffered damage in an Italian airstrike that also killed one man in September that year. The ship was towed to Aden and beached for repairs.<sup>50</sup>

In October 1940, a joint European convoy 'BN 7', which was heading north through the Red Sea and comprised of 32 commercial ships -- British, Norwegian, French, Greek, and Turkish--, was targeted by an Italian naval and aerial attack. The convoy was approaching Perim (Mayyun Island) located at the entrance of Bab Al-Mandab Strait in South Yemen when an Italian plane attacked it with bombs.

However, the Italian attack failed, with the bombs landing in the water, and only one commercial ship suffered minor damage. As part of the same mission, the British destroyer 'HMS Kimberley' torpedoed an Italian destroyer 'Francesco Nullo', which had beached on a coral reef in the Eritrean Harmil Island and suffered major damage. The torpedo attack split the damaged Italian destroyer into two. However, Italian shore batteries on Harmil Island fired shells on Kimberley, disabling the British

---

<sup>49</sup> Attack on Convoy BN 7 - Wikipedia

<sup>50</sup> Rohwer, Jürgen; Hümmelchen, Gerhard (1992) [1972]. *Chronology of the War at Sea, 1939–1945: The Naval History of World War Two* (2nd rev. ed.). Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press. ISBN 978-1-55750-105-9.

destroyer, which was towed away to the Port of Sudan by another British destroyer, *Leander*.<sup>51</sup>

## The Suez Canal crisis

The Suez Canal is also linked closely to the Red Sea's maritime importance. Lying at the northern edge of the Red Sea, the Egyptian-owned Suez Canal connects it with the Mediterranean. In 1956, Egypt under President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, which had been owned by the Suez Canal Company that was controlled by French and British interests. The decision triggered a major reaction from Britain, France and Israel and they launched a tripartite aggression against Egypt to regain control of the Suez Canal for the West and remove Nasser from power. This struggle, known as the 'Suez Crisis', ended only after the Egyptian forces, before being defeated, sank 40 ships in the canal rendering it useless. As a result, the United States, Soviet Union, and United Nations intervened, forcing Britain, France, and Israel to withdraw.<sup>52</sup>

As is apparent, the Egyptian action cannot be classified as piracy. It was related to defending its sovereignty and national interests. Furthermore, Egypt in this case was an independent state and also a Member of the United Nations.

## The 1967 and 1973 wars

The 1967 War between the Arabs and Israel led to the closure of the Suez Canal again. Following the Six Day War that started on June 3, 1967, Egypt closed the Suez Canal for eight years. The decision affected the global oil trade severely and set off the energy crisis of the 1970s and the oil crisis of 1973. Only after the canal was cleared of sunken ships, bombshells and mines did they reopen the Suez on June, 5, 1975. According to a UN study, closure of the canal cost the world \$1.7 billion in lost trade and increased shipping costs, while it cost Egypt \$250 million in lost toll revenues annually. This factor enhanced the importance of the Red Sea as a commercial path.<sup>53</sup>

During the Egyptian-Israeli war in 1973, Egypt and the then People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) decided to close the Strait of Bab Al-Mandab, with

---

<sup>51</sup> Attack on Convoy BN 7 - Wikipedia

<sup>52</sup> How Houthi attacks in the Red Sea impact shipping in the Suez Canal | Reuters

<sup>53</sup> The Suez Canal (wikipedia.org-Arabic )

an aim to impose a maritime siege on Israel, which used to import 18 million tons of Iranian oil at the time. The narrow Bab Al-Mandab Strait connects the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The blockade prevented ships from leaving or entering Israel's port of Eilat, nearly 1,000 miles to the north. Egyptian ships enforced the blockade at the Bab Al-Mandab and forced back many oil tankers. The strait was reopened several months later on December 13, 1973, according to the then Yemeni Defense Minister Ali Nasser Mohammed.<sup>54</sup>

## The Israeli presence

Following the Six-Day war of 1967, Israel captured many territories, including the Sinai Peninsula and took control of Sharm el-Sheikh, overlooking the Straits of Tiran, which helped it to regain control over shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba. The Red Sea came into focus again as North and South Yemen raised concerns over Israeli activities.

In June 1971, the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine', a Maoist guerrilla organization, claimed responsibility for an attack on an oil tanker, 'Coral Sea', heading to the Port of Eilat, south of Israel. The attack occurred near the Bab Al-Mandab Strait in the Red Sea.<sup>55</sup>

In response, Israel began working to undermine Yemen's control over the navigation lane. It adopted a policy of supporting the neighboring non-Arab states in the Red Sea.<sup>56</sup> It sent its military officials to Ethiopia to secure access to islands located in the Red Sea, which were then under Ethiopian control.<sup>57</sup>

However, with the normalization of relations between Egypt and Israel in 1977 this allowed the latter freer maritime navigation through most of the Red Sea. Israel also returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt.

The navigation issue in the Red Sea thus took on different meanings that suited the nature of the moment and its interactions, according to Egyptian experts. "With the transformation of Arab states' interactions with Israel toward seeking a political settlement, the matter changed. Accordingly, the concept of the Red Sea security is no longer presented as a military one. There is a focus on maintaining the marine environment and the fluidity of its navigation traffic".<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Al-Ayyam Newspaper((alayyam.info -Arabic)

<sup>55</sup> Tanker Bound for Israel Attached Near Red Sea - The New York Times (nytimes.com)

<sup>56</sup> Israel's Maritime Security in the Red Sea: Historical Competition and the New Houthi Challenge(sanaacenter.org)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> The Somali Piracy Rehabilitates the Red Sea Security(SWI swissinfo.ch- Arabic)



## The Tanker War

The ship traffic in the Red Sea was badly affected by the Iraqi-Iranian War between 1980-1988, as the oil tankers in the Arab Gulf were strategically stricken. The war between the two countries was dubbed as 'the Tanker War'. According to Wikipedia's references, the Iraqi air force targeted most of the oil ports in Iran, with an aim to prevent it from exporting oil after losing the Faw Port which is considered as its oil artery and its only maritime outlet on the Gulf. On the other hand, the Iranian naval and air strikes focused on the Gulf oil tankers, claiming that the Gulf states support Iraq. The Kuwaiti oil tankers were the most affected. This pushed the Kuwaiti government to ask for international protection of their tankers.

The 'Tanker War' led to the sinking of 224 oil tankers belonging to different nations, in addition to 540 commercial vessels. Moreover, nearly 430 sailors were killed during the war.<sup>59</sup>

It can be said that the events in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden during the 20th Century led to big changes in the region, especially in terms of trade, politics, and security. Besides, the Red Sea has become more important as a global commercial route. This has increased the competition among countries to control it. The events of the Red Sea have also raised awareness about the importance of maritime security in the region.

## Different operations

Although the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have been the focus of territorial rivalry and skirmishes dating back to centuries, they didn't cause the same damage to maritime trade and the global economy as the actions by the Houthis have done.

Referring to some examples of piracy operations that this important waterway has seen during the 20th and 21st centuries, it can be said that their impact was limited.

Additionally, combating the piracy menace was relatively an easy task as 38 countries participated in operations with an aim to thwart the threats, coordinated with each other, and established nearby naval bases such as the foreign bases in Djibouti. Furthermore, cargo ships adopted simple but effective defense measures like barbed

---

<sup>59</sup> The Tanker War in the Gulf..How Did it Start and How Did it End? (majalla.com-Arabic )

wire fences, fire hoses, and water cannons, to prevent pirates from climbing on board. They also used Molotov cocktails, empty bottles filled with gasoline and stuffed with burning cloths, successfully against marine pirates, to protect themselves and avoid human and material losses.

Moreover, the procedure to secure ships against piracy is also relatively an easy task. The armed forces of nearby vessels escort and protect commercial ships from the Gulf of Oman until they pass the Strait of Bab Al-Mandab. In comparison, the US-led 'Operation Prosperity Guardian' hasn't been as effective in protecting ships. This is due to the fact that the Houthis have used drones and ballistic missiles to target ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden for the first time.

Christopher Long, Intelligence Director at Neptune P2P Group, a maritime security company, said: "The thing that stopped piracy was armed guards on board.<sup>60</sup> Thus, pirates didn't want to get killed; they just wanted money and if they got shot at, they would go away."

Therefore, Long believes that "even with such on-board protection, in a situation where heavily armed state-backed or politically motivated attackers, such as the Houthis, were to board a vessel, a security team would probably not be able to engage them".

"We're not able, not mandated, if you like, to get involved in any state-actor attack," he said. "If, for example, the Houthis tried to get on board, our guards would put their weapons down and let them."

---

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20231215-red-sea-cargo-ship-hijack-how-to-keep-merchant-vessels-safe-from-attack>(BBC)



*British and Dutch commercial centers in the Yemeni city of Al-Mocha (Wikipedia)*

## Attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in the 19th and 18th centuries

### The Doria Dowlut ship and occupation of Aden

During the 19th Century, Britain was a major imperial force interested in expanding its influence across the world, especially the waterways. Aden meant a lot to the English imperialists as it is a coastal city located in the Arabian Peninsula on an important commercial route between Europe and the Far East. At that time, Aden was ruled by the Sultan of Lahj and Aden, Mohamed Houssain Fudthel.<sup>61</sup>

On January 19, 1839, Britain exploited the grounding of 'Doria Dowlut', a ship affiliated to the 'English East India Company', in the coast of Aden in 1837, as a pretext to occupy the city later. Although the ship's crew was rescued, Britain accused the residents of Aden of looting the vessel, according to messages by its Captain Syed Nouradeen bin Jamal.<sup>62</sup>

This incident was used as a reason to secure the British commercial interests in the region, enhance its influence in the Indian Ocean, and occupy what was later known as 'South Arabia' till 1967.

---

<sup>61</sup>How the Doria Dowlut Crashed Into Aden's History(South24.net)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid(South 24 Center for News and Studies)

## The Qawasim Tribe's attacks against British ships

The Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Gulf of Oman region was rife with piracy and mutual attacks during the 19th century. However, the background of these attacks is very different from what occurred in this waterway over the next two centuries. The British and the Qawasim Tribe in addition to the first Saudi state are considered the main players of these incidents.

For many reasons, including a rise in Arab tribal activity in the Omani coast and the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula and the growing influence of the Qawasim Tribe that threatened Britain, the clout of the 'English East India Company' had been declining in terms of the fierce competition for trade in India, China, and South Asian regions.<sup>63</sup>

In order to restore the influence of the 'English East India Company' and to control the trade, it was necessary to displace or weaken local commercial competitors, foremost of who were the Omani merchants, the Bahraini people, and members of the Qawasim Tribe in Ras Al Khaimah and Sharjah.

Indeed, the British managed to reduce the influence of Omani and Bahraini merchants and ships by exaggerating the danger of the Qawasim Tribe to both parties. They began a propaganda campaign against the Qawasim who were depicted as being pirates. They dubbed the places where the Qawasim lived in Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, Umm Al Quwain, Ajman, Al Hamriyah, and Al Hamra Island as "the coast of pirates".

The Qawasim extended their influence in the 18th Century and the first quarter of the 19th Century to the areas located today on the Iranian coast overlooking the Arabian Gulf. Maritime trade represented the only source of livelihood for the Qawasim who inhabited barren land not suitable for agriculture.<sup>64</sup> For that reason, they looked at Britain as a dangerous rival that could deprive them of their source of earning. This was especially after the British requested that all ships engaged in trade in the Arabian Gulf should carry English permits.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, the attacks by the Qawasim against British ships in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea was increased. They were able to seize many British vessels. By 1809, the Qawasim's fleet included about 1,400 small and big ships. The number of men who worked in these ships was 8,700. They were the basis on which the Qawasim leader asked the British government in India to pay money in exchange for allowing British

---

<sup>63</sup> A confrontation over the waters of the Gulf... This is how Al-Qawasim crushed the legend of Great Britain for decades (aljazeera.net -Arabic)

<sup>64</sup> Book: The Myth of Piracy in the Arabian Gulf

<sup>65</sup> A confrontation over the waters of the Gulf... This is how Al-Qawasim crushed the legend of Great Britain for decades (aljazeera.net- Arabic )

vessels to move in the Gulf freely. For that reason, Britain launched, in November 1809, a naval military campaign with 12 warships against Ras Al Khaimah - which is currently part of the UAE-, with an aim to destroy the naval capabilities of the Qawasim. This led to the signing of a peace treaty which collapsed later and the Qawasim resumed their attacks against vessels.

In November 1819, a British military campaign was launched from Bombay to destroy the Qawasim's fleet. This led to the signing of the Ras Al Khaimah Agreement on January 20, 1820.

Later, this agreement became the basis for the British political and economic hegemony over the Arab Gulf states and through which Britain secured its empire in India.

## The Oldest Reference to Pirates

Thanks to research conducted by 'South24 Center', it can be said that the oldest recorded piracy incident - that occurred in Bab Al-Mandab - dates back to the 17th Century and was led by some British pirates. In 1695, Captain Henry Every (an English pirate) reached the Strait of Bab Al-Mandab on board his ship 'Fancy'. He was joined by five other pirates. According to Wikipedia's historical references, they attacked the largest ship of the Indian-Mongol fleet (Jan-I-Sawa) while it was on its regular voyage to the city of Mokha (now part of Yemen), accompanied by the ship 'Fateh Mohammed'.<sup>66</sup>

There is a piracy incident mentioned in a message written by 'William Boyer' that dates back to 1767. He described the Persian pirate Mir Mohanna by saying: "In his era, he was a main source of worry to all who were sailing along the Arabian Gulf. His feats were an earlier factor that led the East India Company to be, for the first time, a partner in the region's policy for its purely commercial interests."<sup>67</sup>

British accounts describe Rahma Ibn Jabir Al-Jalhami, an Arab ruler in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, as a strong pirate who had exploited the Arabian Gulf during that time. However, most sources confirm that Rahma's operations did not deviate from the context of resistance to oppose Western influence. Seen in that light, the Qawasim's operations were an extension of this. English traveler and author James Silk Buckingham described Rahma as being "the most successful and the most generally tolerated pirate, perhaps, that ever infested any sea."

In his book 'The Blood Red Arab Flag: An Investigation Into Qasimi Piracy 1797-1820',

---

<sup>66</sup> Burgess, Douglas R. (2009)The Pirates' Pact: The Secret Alliances Between History's Most Notorious Buccaneers and Colonial America(Wikipedia-Arabic)

<sup>67</sup> Piracy in the Arabian Gulf(Wikipedia)

Charles Davies claims that the piracy phenomenon apparently escalated in 1797.<sup>68</sup>

Historical references mention piracy in the previous centuries. These references confirm that European piracy had repeatedly emerged in the Arabian Gulf in the 16th and 17th centuries. It basically targeted the Indian ships on their way to Makkah.

In this regard, Edward Balfour stresses that the Arabs of Muscat were very “predatory” from 1694 to 1736. Bombay records indicate the existence of systematic piracy in the Arabian Gulf.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, it can be observed how the reasons behind piracy or maritime attacks have varied over the past centuries (livelihood, food, financial, colonial control, religious, political, and national motives). The reasons varied with the difference of the parties’ identities and geographies as well as their religious, racial, national, and colonial ideologies.

---

<sup>68</sup> The Blood-Red Arab Flag – University of Exeter Press

<sup>69</sup>Piracy in the Arabian Gulf(Wikipedia)

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This research paper examines the most prominent piracy operations and military attacks by countries and non-state groups in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden over the past three centuries. It analyzes them and determines the differences among them, in terms of motives, methods, and ramifications. It arrived at the following conclusions:

- Piracy has witnessed a remarkable transformation in terms of motives, goals, and methods used. In the past, piracy was mainly driven by seeking for spoils and looting. However, today it has become more relevant to the extremist armed groups and organized crime as well as in the conflict for global influence.
- The latest Houthi operations in the Red and Arabian Seas are different from the previous piracy and other sea skirmishes over the past centuries, at more than one level. The Houthi actions have been accompanied by serious threats that threaten the region's maritime stability and water security as well as the long-term national and international strategic projects. Additionally, clear challenges have emerged to combating the Houthis, including the ability to confront their assaults and deterring them, in comparison to the measures taken against piracy operations in the past.
- The counter-piracy strategies have largely evolved over the last three centuries. In the past, the ships basically depended on the armed guards for protection. Currently the measures include a more comprehensive approach, that combines international efforts, regional cooperation, and economic and political sanctions.
- The persistent Houthi operations in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have highlighted the need for a new and effective global strategy to fight such maritime attacks. There is a need to draft a more comprehensive vision to deal with these attacks from a perspective that does not depend on the outcomes alone but addresses the root of the problem as well as the reasons and circumstances that have created or facilitated the emergence of these threats or those that enable such proxy groups to become what they have turned into today.
- At the community level, the danger of these (Houthi) operations lies in the fact that those behind them invent new methods to justify their motives. This includes exploiting the humanitarian issues (Gaza) that are deeply linked with the sentiments and awareness of the local communities. Instead of helping

resolve the issue, the international bodies adopt biased, futile, and duplicitous positions toward these issues.

- Piracy continues to be a menace to maritime security and international trade, especially in light of their increasing use of high-tech and dangerous weapons, and the diversity and sophistication of their attacks.
- Countering piracy faces several challenges, such as the vulnerability of the coastal countries, the rise in poverty among their people, climate change, and the pirates' recent transformation into becoming part of the current conflict's agenda in the region, as is seen in the case of the Yemeni Houthis.
- In light of the development and diversity of the attacks witnessed in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden over the past years, it can be suggested that Iran has prepared the ground in the region for a phase of global maritime escalation, in which the Houthi involvement has become an outcome, not a reason.

## Recommendations

By analyzing the old and recent attacks against ships in the Red Sea, we can extract the following recommendations:

- There is a need to strengthen international cooperation to combat piracy, through the exchange of intelligence information and coordination of military efforts. This includes an active and extensive involvement of the influential Arab countries in the process of securing the navigation route in the Red and Arabian Seas.
- Providing support to the coastal states to build their maritime capabilities and enhance the rule of law in their territories. It is remarkable that the Yemeni Internationally-Recognized Government and the armed forces in South Yemen or the western coast haven't so far received any relevant support and haven't been assigned any task. This is despite the calls by members of the Presidential Leadership Council - the executive body of the internationally recognized government - for this.
- There is a need to treat the root causes behind piracy, such as poverty and unemployment, through economic and social development programs and by promoting stability and sustainable development. This is in addition to serious and urgent work to end internal conflicts in a drastic and fair manner.
- In the Yemeni case, there is a need for delivering logistics, intelligence, and training support to the Yemeni government to complete its control over the areas that are currently under Houthi control in North Yemen. This is in



addition to avoiding the failed policies of Washington and Western countries in the Yemeni crisis that have increased the Houthi threat against maritime navigation, which occurred after they got control of the Port of Al-Hodeida in the Red Sea, thanks to the Stockholm Agreement of 2018.

- In terms of an urgent mechanism and long-pending solution, the local security and military forces in the South and West of Yemen should be supplied with sophisticated defense systems to intercept the ballistic missiles and drones fired over the skies of South Yemen toward the Gulf of Aden and Bab Al-Mandab.
- There is no one magical solution to lessen the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. There is a need to use a mix of military, political, and economic solutions such as:
  - Supporting the Yemeni forces by providing logistic, military, and training support to confront the Houthi threat.
  - Pressuring Iran by imposing effective sanctions to stop it from delivering support to the Houthis, including by way of supplying them with weapons, missiles, and drone spare parts as well as other forms of support.
  - Pressuring the Houthis by synchronizing punitive military measures with political and legal actions.
  - Addressing the Yemeni crisis by finding a comprehensive solution that would end the war and solve the main issue in a fair way, in addition to enhancing the impression of the state and institutions.
  - The problem of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea can't be resolved without solving the Yemeni crisis in general.
  - The solutions to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden crisis should be comprehensive and sustainable to guarantee the long-term stability of these vital waterways.

**By a team specializing in security and armed groups affairs**

South24 Center for News and Studies

March 09, 2024



SOUTH24. NET

SOUTH 24