Committee: Arab League
Topic: Strategies to eradicate the attacks held in the Red Sea and safeguard international shipments
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Overview of the Problem

The Red Sea serves as a maritime corridor for international shipping. This waterway is a vital highway for cargo ships that carry everything from clothes and technology to oil between Asia and Europe. Currently, the Houthi movement in Yemen is carrying out attacks on commercial ships using drones and long range projectiles.

Yemen has been in a civil war since 2014. Houthi Rebels took over the capital and forced the government out. This resulted in Saudi Arabia leading an armed group coalition.

Introduction

In late 2023, missiles and drones were fired by the Houthis, causing disruption to civil transport hubs.

The Arab League was formed in 1945. It is a collective of close to a couple of dozen Arab nations dedicated to working together on various issues such as economic matters.

The Arab League is directly connected to this situation because the Red Sea is an important international waterway bordered by several Arab League member states, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Jordan, and Yemen.

The main groups involved in the attacks in the Red Sea are the Houthi Forces.

Abdul-Malik al-Houthi is the supreme political and spiritual leader of the Houthi movement in Yemen.

Another group that also contributes to the attacks is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that provide the Houthis with military hardware, training and real-time intelligence to track commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

Several international task forces have deployed naval assets to protect commercial vessels from these strikes.

- The United States leads Operation Prosperity Guardian. It consists of a defensive naval force focused on intercepting incoming drones and missiles aimed at merchant ships.
- The United Kingdom is one of the main coalition forces providing RRoyal Navy warships. A new defensive maritime security operation has been created by the European Union. The operation is called Operation Aspides where European navies will be deployed to protect trade routes.

Most importantly, the victims are the commercial shipping giants, meaning the major global shipping operators, whose captains and crews navigate the threat zone daily. Most have diverted their routes around Africa, restructuring global trade routes.

Due to these attacks, shipping companies like Maersk, Hapag-Lloyd, and Evergreen Marine, are concerned that their boats will get hit.

This forces them to avoid this “highway” entirely and take a detour around the bottom of Africa, making everyday goods much more expensive and delaying deliveries worldwide.

Beyond the shipping and navigation issues, the crisis in the Red Sea creates severe operational, economic, and strategic challenges for global trade. One example is time and fuel costs: the detour that the ships take adds 10 to 14 extra days of travel time for ships traveling between Asia and Europe. When taking this route, a normal container ship burns thousands of additional tons of fuel. (Lu, 2023)

The Houthis attack using low-cost available tactics, such as anti-ship missiles and drones. Intercepting inexpensive drones with multimillion-dollar air defense missiles creates an unsustainable financial concern for Arab naval forces.

Many Arab countries are concerned about what the Houthis will do if they get too aggressive. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates has critical oil facilities and tourist spots within missile range. They worry that if their navies start heavily attacking the Houthis, the rebels will retaliate against them by firing missiles directly at their very expensive infrastructure, not only damaging that but their community too.

The Arab League has faced difficulties in dealing with the Houthi's naval attacks on the Red Sea. While the organization has constantly punished Houthi actions, defended navigation rights, and aligned behind regional defense efforts, its collective strategy faces severe structural, financial and political challenges.

Some aspects that should be addressed are:

- Some members of the League may want coordinated defense or a joint Arab naval force to protect marine borders. But other states fear that military strikes will drag the region into a wider war or ruin current peace talks in Yemen.
- While intercepting missiles and inspecting cargo ships solves today's threat, it does not stop the Houthis from collecting more weapons in the future.
- Despite leading the naval war in the Red Sea, many Arab League nations are reluctant to join western led coalitions such as the US and UK due to the politics and public opinion in reaction to the conflict in Gaza.
- How can the Arab League ensure naval security while also ensuring humanitarian aid reaches Yemen?

The rebels do not manufacture sophisticated missile technology and drone components but instead have them smuggled into the country from foreign nations, one of which happens to be Iran.

The UN has an inspection mechanism called UNVIM, which reviews and inspects commercial vessels carrying cargo to certain Yemeni ports.

But as of right now, small boats can still sneak past inspectors without being checked. The Arab League wants to eliminate this shortcut so the rebels run out of ways to attack.

It is important to remember that the Arab League is a group of 22 different countries and some of them do not see the Houthis as the same level of threat.

For example, Egypt cares deeply about the Red Sea, due to the billions of dollars lost from fewer ships using its Suez Canal to transport, but, on the other hand, Saudi Arabia cares more about protecting its cities, airports and oil pipelines from being exploded by Houthi missiles.

Every country has different priorities, causing them to struggle to fully commit their militaries to execute a single unified plan.

Because of the detour cargo ships take around Africa, shipping companies have to burn millions of dollars in extra fuel and pay huge insurance fees. To compensate, they increase the cost of the items they transport. This causes global shipping delays, and a lack of stock in retail. Most parcels will be delayed due to the increased time it takes to ship, meaning factories will run out of components and retail outlets will be out of stock. This creates global shipping delays and a lack of stock in retail, This results in higher prices when consumers purchase fuel or pay municipal electricity utilities.

The ships' detour issue also drives up energy and gas costs.

The Red Sea is a major transit route for oil and natural gas tankers moving from the Middle East to Europe and the Americas. When these tankers are threatened or forced to take longer routes, global energy prices increase. This means higher prices when you fill up your car at the gas station or when you pay your electricity bill.

This is not just a problem for rich countries. Frontline Arab countries like Egypt rely on the money they charge ships to pass through the Suez Canal. With shipping traffic

being low, Egypt has lost billions of dollars. These financial difficulties can cause severe poverty, food shortages, and political instability in a region that is already unstable.

What is most concerning is that this conflict sets a dangerous example for the rest of the world. It shows that a small rebel group, using cheap technology can successfully disrupt one of the world's most powerful militaries and pause global trade. These actions might inspire other militant groups around the world to hijack or block other global water highways.

Some innovative solutions that can be discussed to collectively solve this issue and the limits that are already set are:

- Talking and Uniting

Bring all Arab countries along the Red Sea into one room to agree on a single strong regional strategy.

- Protecting trade and sovereignty

Share information, work together with local coast guards, help member states that are being attacked, deal with lost shipping revenue, and demand respect for international waters.

- What the Arab League cannot do

The Arab League does not have its own standing army or navy, so they can’t launch large scale air strikes or invade any territory.

The Arab League cannot deploy a joint navy to fight a war, but it can unite Arab nations politically, coordinate coast guards, and use regional diplomacy to protect Red Sea trade.

This background paper examines the underlying geopolitical tensions, divergent member-state priorities, and maritime security strategies facing the Arab League,

diverse and conflicting perspectives of all Arab League member states, and the main impact the attacks have on your daily life and overall wellbeing and peace.

Historical Background

Yemen's civil war began in 2014 when Houthi insurgents, Shiite rebels with links to Iran and a history of rising up against the Sunni government, took control of Yemen's capital and largest city, Sanaa, demanding lower fuel prices and a new government.

Following failed negotiations, the rebels seized the presidential palace in January 2015, leading President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his government to resign.

Though a six-month UN ceasefire lapsed in October 2022, both sides refrained from escalatory actions and hostility levels remained low. Peace talks between Saudi and Houthi officials resumed in April 2023, along with ongoing UN mediation efforts. However, concrete progress remained uncertain, and the first official Houthi visit to the Saudi capital since the war began, on September 14, 2023, revealed nothing beyond optimistic statements.

The Iran-backed groups constantly launched attacks on the Red Sea shipping in protest of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, drawing U.S. military retaliation and deepening Yemen's involvement in regional conflict. Houthi strikes targeting regional airports and shipping lanes in early 2024 heightened regional tensions and threatened ongoing peace negotiations.

Talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia in April 2023, mediated by China, had raised hopes of a political settlement to end the conflict in Yemen. The talks led to a breakthrough agreement to re-establish diplomatic relations and reopen both sides' embassies after years of tension.

Rather than relying solely on external naval task forces, regional Arab states have strengthened multilateral security arrangements to patrol vulnerable shipping lanes.

This neighborhood also guards borders and airspace. When the rebels launch flying drones or missiles at ships, the neighboring Arab countries do not just watch. Countries like Egypt and Jordan use their own military radar and defense systems to shoot these drones down before they can reach the cargo ships.

Although both sides had made efforts to keep the conflict under control, peace broke down after the Houthis began attacking the Red Sea ships to protest Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

Most recently, tension exploded again when the Houthis launched a missile and drone attack on Saudi Arabia's Abha Airport, officially shattering the quiet period and threatening to disrupt peace and renew a full-scale war.

Through late 2023 and 2024, Houthi forces consolidated coastal positions along the Red Sea, threatening passage through the strategic Bab al-Mandeb Strait. In response, Yemen’s internationally recognized government launched counter-operations in early October to push Houthi forces back from the Red Sea coast.

Houthi-affiliated media reported multiple Saudi-led coalition air strikes targeting the Red Sea port city of Mocha and Western Taiz province.

While direct shipping attacks in the central Red Sea paused following earlier truces, the broader conflict expanded significantly with Houthi missiles and drones targeting Saudi infrastructure, which have been intercepted by Saudi air defenses.

The Situation Today

The crisis reached a critical stage, most recently, on November 2, 2024, ground fighting broke out on the mountains overlooking the Bab al-Mandeb Straitmost as anti-Houthi government forces launched a desperate attack to reclaim the high ground. Nine soldiers were killed in a single day by Houthi missile defense strikes.

Right now, the Red Sea conflict has reached a critical flashpoint. The situation is no longer just a maritime threat to commercial ships. It has exploded into a bigger crisis, not only in the sea but involving satellite espionage, intense ground battles, and severe domestic disruptions like, fierce battles on the coast, severe economic fallout and real time targeting intelligence. The conflict has shifted from a distant missile war to brutal ground combat. Anti-Houthi Yemeni government forces launched a massive offensive to retake territory, and because shipping lines are entirely avoiding the Red Sea, Egypt has lost an estimate of $3.76 billion in Suez Canal revenue. (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2024).

Around the world, this issue has surfaced critical issues all over, including:

Asia-Europe

Avoiding the Red Sea means abandoning one of the most common global shipping routes from Asia to Europe. 40% of Asia-Europe trade normally transits the sea. Ships shunning the Red Sea will have to instead sail around the Horn of Africa, which can cost $1 million more round trip in additional fuel costs. (Lu, 2023)

Africa and Egypt

In Africa the attacks have produced a reallocation of resources among countries on the continent, depending on what side of the pendulum they sit. While traffic and revenue have crashed significantly in the Suez Canal, there has been an increased demand for bunkering and restocking service in alternative routes along the Southern Cape of Good Hope.

Egypt relies heavily on the Suez Canal for foreign currency and billions in annual revenue. With daily transit volumes dropping due to vessels avoiding the Red Sea, Egyptian state revenues have taken a heavy hit.

North America and Global consumers

The Houthi attacks in the Red Sea primarily affect global supply chain disruptions, higher shipping and insurance costs, and inflation on consumer goods.

Regarding this topic some examples that are easier to relate and capture are:

The financial loss of the Suez Canal

The Canal's revenue has dropped from $9.4 billion to $7.2 billion as total Red Sea container shipping traffic collapsed by up to 90%. (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2024).

Detour Cost

Redirecting ships to avoid the Red Sea adds 10 to 14 extra days of travel, and doubles container shipping fees.

Global trade impact

Approximately 12% of global trade transits the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait under normal conditions. (International Maritime Organization, 2024).

Key Stakeholders and Their Positions

The Red Sea Crisis includes international organizations, regional governments, armed groups, many companies and civilians. The different priorities of these groups make it difficult to reach a unified solution.

Members of the Arab League.

Egypt is suffering from disruptions in the Suez Canal, causing loss of foreign currency and cash flow, therefore they want to ensure safe navigation can be resumed. Saudi Arabia has an interest in ensuring the conflict does not affect their peace initiatives in Yemen. They have a strong interest in protecting their oil infrastructure, ports and land.

The internationally recognized Yemen government wants to re-establish control over all government facilities and land. The areas controlled by the Houthis remain the key

issue. Jordan has a main interest in protecting the trade routes linked to the Gulf of Aqaba.

Sudan and Djibouti have an interest in protecting trade at sea, protecting their ports, commercial interests, missile and drone protection and ensuring cash flow. The United Arab Emirates have an interest in ensuring safety for civilians, trade at sea, protection of ports, commercial interests and missile and drone protection.

The Houthi Movement

The movement presents its attacks as part of its opposition to Israel's military campaign in Gaza. This movement is led by Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. However, the attacks on commercial shipping threatened civilians, freedom of navigation, and interests beyond the conflicts.

Iran

Countries and organizations, like the U.S.A and the United Nations, have accused Iran of selling weapons to the Houthis. The influence Iran has in that region makes it important in diplomatic efforts to reduce attacks.

The United Nations

The UN Security Council has demanded the Houthis to cease the attacks on the merchant vessels. The UN Special Envoy for Yemen works toward negotiated political settlement. Other UN agencies are also working on maritime safety, humanitarian conditions and are trying to apply international measures to come up with a solution to end the problem.

International Naval Coalitions

Countries like the United Kingdom and the United States have worked in maritime defense and military responses. EUNAVFOR ASPIDES is an operation run by The European Union to protect shipping and defend freedom of navigation. They prioritize protecting vessels, citizens, deterring future attacks, and preventing disruptions in international trade.

Shipping companies and civilian crews.

Many shipping companies must decide if they want to sail through the Red Sea or divert and go through Africa. These decisions cost resources companies do not have, like fuel consumption, insurance costs, delivery times and the safety of the people who travel in the vessels. Civilians in Yemen, and close regions also are affected by the escalation of these problems.

Altogether, the central disagreement is if this problem should be treated with military tactics, diplomatic negotiations, arms restrictions or a combination of everything together.

Past Attempts and Existing Frameworks

Several Organizations have tried to put an end to this problem, and though some have partially achieved, no country or organizations have been able to permanently eliminate the threats in Red Sea shipping.

UN Security Council resolution 2216 (2015)

The Security council imposed a strict arm restriction and demanded the Houthis to take steps towards ending the conflict in Yemen. This solution provided important legal frameworks, but still, the enforcement challenges limited the success of this resolution.

UN Security Council resolution 2722 (2024)

In January 2024, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2722 (S/RES/2722), condemning Houthi maritime attacks (UN Security Council, 2024). This resolution demanded the Houthis to stop the attacks on merchant and commercial vessels. It also recognises the rights of states to defend the vessels of foreign attacks. However, it is impossible for this resolution to protect every single vessel in the Red Sea.

Operation Prosperity Guardian (2023)

This international operation, mostly led by the United States, brought together the participating countries to improve the security of the Red Sea and defend the commercial shipping against attacks. However despite naval interdiction, political conflict in Yemen still occurs so the Houthi can continue to gain more weapons.

European Union operation ASPIDES

Operation ASPIDES was launched on February 19th 2024, aims to provide protection and escort services to ships while increasing maritime awareness. There is no authorisation to conduct land attacks. This gives an example of maritime security operations which do not aim to attack.

UN-led peace negotiations and regional diplomacy

The United Nations has brokered talks between Yemeni parties and regional diplomacy has attempted to ease tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. With the announcement of a Saudi-Iranian deal in March 2023 aiming to re-open diplomatic ties, there was an opportunity to increase regional cooperation. Yet there has not been an overall permanent solution to the conflict in Yemen.

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The IMO Maritime Safety Committee issued a condemnation of attacks on commercial vessels in May 2024, urging an end to attacks on ships and seafarers. Their work demonstrates the importance of protecting civilian crews.

Success and Gaps.

Whilst naval patrols, interdictions, international condemnation and diplomatic engagement have provided mechanisms to address the crisis, weapon supply chains, political division within Yemen, risk of regional escalation, and absence of a lasting peace deal have not been fully addressed. A coordinated strategy that protects ships, supports diplomatic negotiations, enforces arms restrictions, and addresses Yemen's political and economic situation is still needed.

Challenges and Complications

Political disagreements

The Arab league contains members with differing priorities. Egypt will be specially concerned about their income from the Suez Canal whereas Saudi Arabia will prioritise protecting their territory and avoiding further attacks. Other nations may be hesitant to take part in military action due to potential repercussions.

Risk of regional escalation

By attacking Houthi positions there may be a reduction in their ability to attack ships however this can cause the group to retaliate against neighbouring countries. Delegates will need to decide whether military pressure will create an opportunity for negotiation or make a political solution harder to reach.

Financial and technological challenges.

It may be difficult to intercept low-cost missiles and drones with high level equipment and expensive defensive ammunition. Not all the members of the Arab League have the same naval capacity or intelligence resources and finances. Therefore, a cooperative strategy would need to be put into place so that the costs and responsibilities would need to be shared fairly among member states.

Weapon Smuggling

Preventing weapons from getting to armed groups can be difficult. To ensure inspections are carried out without issues, they should be carried out legally using sound intelligence. Inspections should also be carried out appropriately. However if inspections are too extensive it can cause disruption to legitimate trade.

International law and national sovereignty.

There are many different waters within the Red Sea including Territorial Waters, International Straits and International Waters. Any proposal that includes Naval patrols,

inspections or military operations should be respectful of State Sovereignty and follow applicable International law.

Humanitarian concerns

Yemen is experiencing significant humanitarian issues. Increased military activity could disrupt ports and restrict imports, leading to shortages of food, fuel, and medical supplies. Any proposals should not cause any unnecessary hindrance to humanitarian aid.

Public opinion and international collaboration.

Some states may want to work together with a Western led Naval operation. However, some may be concerned about public backlash from the overall conflict in Gaza. A proposal that would be politically acceptable may need to focus on regional leadership, protecting civilians, being transparent and working with international partners.

Lack of unified enforcement mechanism

The Arab league does not have any centralized joint navy which means that the implementation of a regional military campaign is not entirely independent. The organization relies heavily on the willingness of member states to give resources.

This demonstrates that delegates must think about not just how to prevent individual attacks but also the political, economical, legal and humanitarian factors which are allowing this crisis to continue.

The Committee's Role and Powers

This committee's main objective is to manage the political response of the Arab League member states regarding the Red Sea crisis. This should seek to ensure the security of shipping, maintain stability and promote peace.

Powers

The Arab League can assist with negotiations, take a united political stance, promote information sharing between countries, and make voluntary contributions from member states. In addition, it can provide suggestions to improve water security and work with the United Nations and other international bodies to ensure legal action can be taken to combat arms smuggling and threats to commercial vessels.

However, the Arab League does not have any direct control over any military force. Military action will depend on each country's decisions and contributions. The Arab League will not have the ability to directly instruct the UN Security Council to take action and cannot give permission for military action.

Document

Generally, delegates will negotiate and produce a resolution that may include clauses to encourage international cooperation between countries in the region. They may suggest ways to improve information sharing between countries, protect civilian crews and humanitarian vessels and ask to work with the UN, IMO and others.

This committee can work alongside the UN security Council to improve water security and arms control, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen to aid negotiations and the IMO to improve ship and crew safety. They can also work alongside international naval missions.

Rules

Delegates should respect some international laws in order for their resolution to be acceptable, such as: state sovereignty, international water law, the UN charter and conference rules. Delegates should not suggest any action outside of what the committee can do and should consider humanitarian factors. A successful resolution will need to be realistic politically, affordable, financially, justifiable legally and acceptable to a variety of Arab states.

Guiding Questions for Debate

1. How can the Arab League help protect commercial vessels in the Red Sea without causing regional conflict?
2. Should this be done through a regional coordination system within the Arab League? How will the cost be divided between member states?
3. How can the Arab League ensure increased intelligence sharing and prevent missile smuggling while respecting member state sovereignty?
4. Should the Arab League focus on diplomatic talks with the Houthis or supporting more aggressive defensive actions against them? Can this happen simultaneously?
5. How can the Arab League encourage Iran and the other outside parties to reduce their military support?
6. How can the League ensure civilians are protected while ensuring commercial ships are not hindered?
7. Should richer Arab states financially support countries who have suffered major financial damage such as Egypt?
8. How can the League work alongside the US led and European navies while still remaining politically independent in the region and ensuring people are not worried about the conflict in Gaza?
9. How can the Arab League ensure that collective naval actions remain strictly defensive and compliant with international maritime law?
10. How can delegates create a sustainable solution looking at political reasons behind the conflict in Yemen rather than just focusing on intercepting missiles and drones?
11. What should be put into place to monitor and report on whether the resolution being suggested will reduce the amount of attacks, delays to vessels and financial loss?

12. How can the Arab League ensure the security council agreement will help create a sustainable political solution and not worsen the humanitarian crisis in Yemen?

Conclusion and Call to Action

The Red sea crisis has many effects on the region politically, but also affects international trade, economic security and people and the future of Yemen.

It has brought attention to issues that are caused through instability on this important sea route. Disruptions to supply chains, increased costs for shipping firms, dangers to crew members and less revenue from countries that rely on the sea can all be found. Although the naval operations and diplomacy have given an opportunity to deal with these issues, there is no guarantee that there will be long term stability.

The main difficulty that the Arab League faces is ensuring that they can come up with an overall plan that considers the differing priorities of each country within the league, whilst also looking after shared interests. Egypt has worried about their revenue from the Suez Canal while Saudi Arabia has focused more on their safety and preventing any future attacks. Different members of the league have various commercial, economic and security concerns.

There are multiple intertwined issues involved in the Red Sea crisis, Maritime security, economic stability, political differences and Yemen are all important factors. The importance of working together across the region is key to overcoming these challenges. How can the Arab League overcome the differing priorities of its members to respond to something that will affect the whole region?

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