

Impact of the Red Sea Crisis on the Global Maritime Security: India's Strategic Role

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64938/RIJ.v12i4.26.May017>

Abstract

The Red Sea is an important shipping route connecting Europe, Asia and Africa. It has a southern opening, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a vital choke point that annually carries most of the world's traffic, including oil, LNG and containerised commodities. This route has been targeted by Houthi militants in recent years, interrupting trade and driving up shipping prices and impacting the global supply chain. India's energy security and economic growth is largely dependent on sea-borne trade and so the safety of these sea-borne routes is of vital importance to India. The essay underlines the relevance of Red Sea and security concerns and the role of Indian Navy in safeguarding the maritime stability by adopting pro-active measures. The research highlights the complex interrelations of regional conflicts, international trade and national security and the need for ongoing attention, collaboration and action to protect the security and access of these vital maritime transit routes.

Keywords: Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, Global Trade, Container Shipping, Houthi Attacks, Maritime Corridors, Cargo, Chokepoint



Manuscript ID:
RIJ-2026-May-04-017

Subject: Polical Science

Article History:

Received : 15.05.2026

Accepted : 25.05.2026

Published : 30.05.2026

Recommended Citation:

Priyanka, et al. "Impact of the Red Sea Crisis on the Global Maritime Security: India's Strategic Role." *Roots International Journal of Multidisciplinary Researches*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2026, pp. 132–40.



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Introduction

The maritime domain is an important component of global trade and economic connections. Most international trade, from energy resources to manufactured goods, is handled by sea. The Red Sea is a major shipping lane between Asia, Africa and Europe. It lies on the path from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal and cuts the distance and time needed by vessels moving between Europe and Asia. The southern entrance, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, is a critical choke point and many vessels carrying oil, liquefied natural gas and container cargo cross the strait each year. This small route is of the utmost importance for the security of countries who rely on maritime commerce. Disruption can affect global supply chains, raise the cost of travel and trigger turbulence in international energy markets.

For India, which relies on sea-borne trade for practically all its economic and energy security, stability in corridors like the Red Sea is of tremendous strategic importance. It accounts for much of India's trade with Europe, West Asia and parts of Africa. India's maritime security strategy is built on the two pillars of secure navigation and freedom of marine lines of communication.

Also the Red Sea is becoming more geopolitically important in recent years. The corridor from the Suez Canal to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and then to the Gulf of Aden provides a route for international trade and energy transfer. Much of the world's commercial shipping traffic runs through these oceans. Clearly it is crucial as a bridge to the world economy. Meanwhile, shifting alliances, regional disputes, and rising competition among countries like the U.S., China, and other Gulf states have made this corridor strategically more

important. They have a footprint in the region with military installations, port improvements and marine security operations.¹

The major aim of this research is to investigate the impact of the current situation in Red sea on the international maritime security and global trade routes. The report seeks to analyse the changing security threats to the critical sea lines of communication with special reference to the Suez Canal and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. The report also attempts to assess India's strategic interests and the role of the Indian Navy in defending maritime trade, securing navigation and contributing to regional maritime stability.

The area is strategically important but has had heightened security concerns in recent years. The safety of navigation and stability of sea commerce routes have been challenged by a variety of regional wars, piracy and the global organised crime. Such threats not only cause damage to ships, but also deter investment in port infrastructure and regional maritime trade. In this sense, in 2021 the European Union declared the Regional Programme for Maritime Security in the Red Sea Area.

The plan is executed with the support of international organisations such as the International Maritime Organisation, Interpol, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. It is committed to strengthening marine governance, law enforcement capacity and maritime domain awareness in partner states, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. The strategy shall seek to enhance standards of maritime security through regional cooperation and institutional capacity building, and shall contribute towards the general objectives of Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (IMS 2050).²

The research is largely concentrated on the study of the implications of the existing situation in the Red Sea on the international trade and global security. The aim of the paper is to tackle the existing security concerns of the vital marine lines of communication, in particular those between the Suez Canal and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. Further, the study will focus on India's strategic interests and the role of Indian Navy in securing maritime trade, safe navigation and peaceful conditions in the Indian Ocean region.

Strategic Importance of the Red Sea for the Global Trade and Energy Routes

Importance of the Red Sea Route

The Red Sea route is one of the most important maritime routes of the world commerce system. It connects Asia and parts of Africa to Europe via the Suez Canal. It is the fastest and least expensive sea route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The corridor provides the lifeblood for a significant proportion of world seaborne trade including petroleum products, agricultural products and containerised freight. The Red Sea region carries around 15 per cent of the world's sea borne trade, including large volumes of the world's grain, oil and liquefied natural gas supplies. The density of economic activity along the maritime route is an obvious indicator as to how crucial its stability and security are for smooth operating of the global trade networks.³

Another indicator of the economic importance of this route is the variety of commodities transported along it. About 30 per cent of global container shipping and consumer goods commerce, which includes electronics, clothing, industrial and household equipment, uses the Suez Canal route. It also ships huge volumes of oil, gas and other energy

commodities every year. The route linking Asia's manufacturing centre with consumer markets in Europe, but also carries petroleum exports from the Gulf to North America. This is the fastest and most efficient connection between these regions, and it is essential for the seamless operation of global supply chains.⁴

Impact of the Red Sea Crisis on the Global Trade

Recent security disturbances in the Red naval have greatly affected global trade and navy logistics. Several major shipping companies like Maersk, Mediterranean Shipping Company and CMA CGM have suspended or redirected ships from the Red Sea amid threats on commercial boats. Today many ships are travelling around the Cape of Good Hope. This is a diversion which adds greatly to the distance of the route, the time taken for shipment and the operating costs. That has generated bottlenecks in the global supply chain and driven up freight charges and insurance premiums for ships passing through the region.⁵

These disruptions have also damaged the Suez Canal, one of the world's most important shipping chokepoints. Reports say the number of container ships and oil tankers transiting the canal has dropped substantially since the strikes. Increased shipping through the Cape of Good Hope has led to increased transport costs and fuel use, increased freight rates and a larger environmental footprint. "This is a textbook example of the interconnectivity of the global supply chain, and how instability in one important maritime corridor can send ripples around the globe harming businesses, sectors and consumers."⁶

Emerging Maritime Security Challenges in the Red Sea

The Red Sea, a key conduit for global trade, has become a furnace for emerging marine threats. In recent years the Houthis' insurgency in Yemen has expanded its operational scope to include attacks on commercial vessels and to disrupt what was a relatively secure northern transit route. For example, a missile strike on the Liberia-flagged tanker *Scarlet Ray* off Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, on 31 August 2025. The tanker was very minimally damaged but the action was the first verified Houthi attack in the Upper Red Sea and marked a significant escalation in regional insecurity.⁷

This is not a unique instance. An unknown explosive device also hit the *NS Pride* cargo vessel in the Black Sea, a reminder of the continued threat non-state actors poses to maritime operations worldwide.⁸

These examples indicate that vital maritime corridors such as the Red sea are no longer passive water conduits of trade but active theatres where geo-political tensions are translated into operational threats. Countering the risks requires a multi-layered approach. Authors such as Bueger and Germond have pointed to the need for a combination of legal, operational and technological measures to protect maritime trade. They support local law enforcement operations and coordinated international naval action, especially in semi-closed seas such as the Red Sea where collective action is necessary to reduce threats and ensure secure transit for the global economy.⁹

For a country like India where seamless maritime connectivity is an economic and operational need, disruptions have far reaching economic and operational effects. Emerging threats to the Southern Red Sea, including missiles, sea mines and Water-Borne

Improvised Explosive Devices (WBIEDs) pose collateral risks to merchant vessels. The *MV Muskie* (2017) and *MV Galicia Spirit* (2016) are not piracy attacks. Ships are advised to transit via Maritime Security Transit Corridor (MSTC) and implement MSCHOA/UKMTO recommendations and Vessel Hardening Plans to ensure safety.¹⁰

Finally, the emerging problems in the Red Sea are a reminder that marine security is intricately tied to the global trade, regional geopolitics and national economic resiliency.

Impact of the Red Sea Crisis on the Global Maritime Security

The Red Sea issue has important ramifications for the security of international maritime routes and major choke points. Tensions in the region have been rising and attacks on commercial ships have raised concerns about the security of international maritime and commerce routes. Houthi (Ansar Allah) Houthi (Ansar Allah) is a Yemeni political and armed terrorist group that emerged in the north of the country. The group has been active in the Yemeni civil war and has been charged with attacks on civilian infrastructure and international maritime routes inside the Red Sea region. The UN Security Council said the Houthis have been targeting commercial vessels with sea mines, drones and other explosives, posing a threat to regional stability and maritime security.¹¹

The Red Sea problem is also linked to the violence raging in Yemen. The Houthi movement is native to northern Yemen and has been engaged in a long civil conflict with Yemen's internationally recognised government and other regional players. More recently, the Houthis have begun to target commercial ships in the Red Sea, especially in response to bigger regional changes like the Israel-Hamas war. The

attacks have raised concerns about maritime security and have hindered travel across the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, one of the world's most important trading routes.¹²

As a result, the continuing insecurity in the Red Sea region has raised severe worries over the security of key maritime chokepoints. In recent years, Houthi activity has increasingly targeted commercial vessels and marine infrastructure, particularly in and near the strategically vital Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The Red Sea is a vital corridor and a main maritime choke point for international marine trade linking the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea. Much of the world's oil transit and container traffic passes through the waterway. Missile or drone strikes in this region might disrupt global supply chains and energy flows and highlight the increasing sensitivity of critical marine lines of communication to regional hostilities.¹³

The unrest in the Red Sea region underscores the connection between regional conflicts and global maritime security. The disruption of this crucial canal threatens economic and energy pathways. It highlights the need for international collaboration to protect vital shipping lane

India's Strategic Role and Naval Response

The ongoing tensions in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have presented severe challenges to global maritime security. Attacks by Houthi rebels on commercial shipping and a return of Somali piracy are threatening one of the world's most vital maritime commerce routes. In reaction to these events, the United States and other countries have committed naval forces to protect sea lanes and international shipping. Amongst all these actors, India has emerged as a proactive and responsible provider of marine security in the Indian Ocean Region.¹⁴

Rising Maritime Security Challenges in the Red Sea

Risks to Red Sea maritime security are rising. The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are vital maritime links between the Indo-Pacific region and Europe via the Suez Canal. But, the safety of these waterways has become a concern in recent years, with the Houthis assaulting commercial ships and the re-emergence of Somali piracy. The threat to the global shipping routes has been highlighted by a recent run of attempted hijackings and attacks on commercial vessels.¹⁵

The occurrences have also brought up questions regarding the safety of maritime trade and the necessity of combined naval operations of the major countries of the world.

Operation Sankalp and India's Maritime Security Operations

To tackle these increasing threats, the Indian Navy has been bolstering its maritime security campaigns under Operation Sankalp from December 2023. More than 20 warships deployed with maritime surveillance planes, special troops in Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden and surrounding Somali coast. More than 5,000 navy personnel participated in the operation, which included routine patrols, surveillance missions and security escorts to ensure the safe passage of commercial vessels.¹⁶

These prolonged deployments sharpened the Indian Navy's understanding of the maritime domain and showcased its ability to operate effectively across a vast stretch of the Indian Ocean Region.

Anti-Piracy Operations and the Rescue of MV Ruen

One of the most impressive exploits of the Indian Navy in mission Sankalp was the

recovery effort of the hijacked Maltese-flagged bulk ship MV Ruen. The Indian Navy is closely watching the situation. Somali pirates hijacked the ship in December 2023. INS Kolkata conducted a 40-hour operation in March 2024. India's marine commandos stormed the ship and made 35 pirates surrender and freed 17 crew members safely.¹⁷

The exercise aims at displaying the operational preparedness and professional competence of the Indian Navy to counter the dangers of piracy and to safeguard the international economic routes in the remote seas.

Strategic Significance of India's Naval Response

The Indian Navy also contributed to increasing stability beyond its own missions. Naval officers responded to over 18 incidents, investigated more than 250 boats and ensured the safety of merchant shipping transiting the zone.¹⁸ India's involvement is economic and geo-political too. India's trade with the globe through the Red Sea is around 240 billion, and Indian citizens form a substantial portion of the world's maritime labour.¹⁹

India's forward deployment bodes well for its wider desire to be a 'net security provider' in the Indian Ocean region. The security of maritime trade and stability of the region are reinforcing the Indian role as a responsible maritime power. These initiatives highlight the importance of the Indian Navy's modernisation plan, involving the Kolkata-class destroyers and the MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones, to the cause of maritime security and regional stability.²⁰

India's response to the Red Sea scenario has underlined the growing role of India's naval power in maritime security. The Indian Navy has reiterated its resolve to secure the maritime communication routes with frequent

deployments, anti-piracy operations and protection of foreign vessels. These actions are in India's national interest as well as in the larger interests of peace, stability and freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Recent Developments and Current Scenario in the Red Sea Region

Escalation of Attacks on Commercial Shipping

The latest developments show that the security situation in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden remains precarious. After the Israel-Hamas ceasefire at the end of 2025, Houthi leadership announced a limited suspension of assaults on vessels associated with Israel, although maritime security assessments indicate the suspension is conditional and might be undone if hostilities in the region intensify. International maritime advisories continue to caution shipping operators about the threats in the region including piracy, armed robbery and obstructions to navigation. The episodes underscore how vulnerable the commercial shipping lanes in the Red Sea remain, even as direct threats have eased.²¹

Expansion of International Naval Operations

The security concern has caused many states and international organisations to bolster their naval presence in the Red Sea region to protect sea-trade routes. Since late 2023, Houthi attacks on commercial ships have prompted the deployment of multinational naval patrols to promote freedom of navigation and protect trade shipping. Among the steps launched to accompany vessels are patrol and boost maritime surveillance in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, such as the US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian, and the EU naval operation Aspides.²² At the same time regional

actors have also boosted their military preparedness against any threats. Israel also raised its naval alert level in the Red Sea and deployed its navy to meet threats from Yemen of missiles and drones. According to reports, the Israeli navy has increased its operational tempo and boosted coordination between naval, aviation and ground forces to rapidly respond to any likely strikes on military or civilian vessels.²³

Such developments underline the increasing necessity for international and regional maritime cooperation to ensure maritime security and the preservation of important water lanes in the Red water region.

India's Continued Maritime Security Operations

The tensions and attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have posed severe challenges to the security of the international commerce routes at sea. In response, the Indian Navy has ramped up maritime security operations and sent naval ships to protect commerce vessels and maintain regional stability.²⁴ India has also taken coordinated steps to protect Indian sailors and shipping interests through cooperative marine safety programs and regulatory oversight. These steps highlight India's increasing role as a dependable source of maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region and India's commitment to the protection of maritime trade and regional stability. India continues to promote regional cooperation against piracy, terrorism and illicit marine activities through joint exercises, partnerships and capacity building with its Neighbours.²⁵

Conclusion

More than just a vital shipping route linking Europe, Asia and Africa, the Red Sea is also... It has developed into an area of increasing geopolitical and strategic significance. The report says regional hostilities, piracy and attacks by the Houthi pose a growing threat to commercial shipping, with ramifications for world trade and energy flows. India's economy and energy security is heavily reliant on sea-borne trade and the protection of these maritime lines is a major strategic priority. "India has demonstrated its capability to safeguard shipping and maintain maritime stability and regional security through proactive naval operations like Operation Sankalp and anti-piracy patrols. The study highlights the connections between regional conflicts, the global trade and national security and the necessity for continued monitoring, international cooperation and sound marine policy. Free flow through the Red Sea is important not only for India but for the resilience and stability of the global commerce and energy grid.

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