The Red Sea and the Ring of Fire

(Translated)

Al-Rayah Newspaper - Issue 623 - 28/10/2026

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Military developments in Yemen are unfolding concurrently with escalating internal conflicts and regional tensions surrounding Ethiopia, at a time when Eritrea, Sudan, and the Horn of Africa are themselves experiencing rapid security and political transformations. At first glance, these developments might appear to be governed by their own internal dynamics and confined within their national borders. However, approaching these crises as separate files obscures a significant part of the picture.

By widening the perspective beyond colonialist borders, the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait emerge not merely as a geographical separator between these crises, but as a space where they intersect. The events in Yemen could reshape the calculations of powers on the African shore, while tensions stretching from the Horn of Africa to Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea could, in turn, impact the security and strategic environment surrounding Yemen. From this angle, the military movements and political conflicts on both sides of the Red Sea appear less as adjacent crises and more as parts of an interconnected strategic theater, where the repercussions of conflict travel from one arena to another via sea lanes, networks of influence, the calculations of regional and international powers, and the schemes of the Jewish entity. It was expected that the flames of strategic attrition would reach beyond the Strait of Hormuz to Bab el-Mandeb.

At this point, the Red Sea becomes one of the keys that allows these crises to be read within a single regional context. A conflict on one of its shores could alter the calculations of powers on the opposite shore, and a localized disturbance within the borders of a single state could transform into a pressure factor that rearranges the balances across the entire region.

This is the precise meaning of what the Adwa Defense, Intelligence & Strategic Studies Institute (ADISS) termed the “Ring of Fire”: a maritime system in which instability on one shore leads to a change in the strategic value of the opposite shore. Under the title “Ethiopia Inside Ring of Fire and the Red Sea Disorder,” the institute’s study, published in September 2026, placed the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Horn of Africa within a single security theater extending from the Suez Canal to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and then to the Gulf of Aden.

What is happening today confirms this vision in a manner that is almost a live application of it. In Yemen, the Houthis have managed to expand their presence along the western coast and reach the Bab al-Mandab area. Consequently, the strait, which was originally an international passage, has become a military and political card in the hands of a regional proxy aligned with Iran. The matter is no longer confined to the Yemeni war alone, as the turmoil in the Strait of Hormuz has made Bab al-Mandab more critical for Saudi Arabia and international trade. Therefore, Riyadh is preparing for a military operation that may extend beyond Bab al-Mandab and Taiz, while simultaneously attempting to leverage the Mecca Agreement, in addition to soliciting assistance from America.

And herein lies the most critical strategic issue: America’s objective is not necessarily to eliminate the Houthis—who have been exposed along the coast and pledged not to target its ships or those of the Jewish entity—but rather to fortify the region against intervention by rival powers and prevent any party from acquiring a reliable capability to turn a maritime chokepoint into a tool for regional and international leverage; that is, to prevent a repeat of the Strait of Hormuz scenario. Therefore, the recurring U.S. naval presence in the Red Sea and even the Arabian Sea—with aircraft carriers, destroyers, and other combat vessels—should not be interpreted solely as preparation for war, but also as a deterrence message conveying that chokepoints must not become the exclusive strategic property of any regional power. However, control of the sea does not always begin at sea. This is the point that renders the African coast critically important.

In Ethiopia, the resumption of fighting in Tigray coincides with conflicts in Amhara and Afar, and the formation of new armed alliances against Abiy Ahmed’s government, all while relations

between Addis Ababa and Asmara deteriorate. Several analyses have pointed out that the Ethiopian conflict is no longer a purely internal affair, as it intersects with the calculations of Eritrea, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Türkiye, and the Gulf states—all preparing for a post-Abiy Ahmed phase under a U.S. green light. A core part of the tension is linked to Ethiopia's desire to secure sea access and reduce its reliance on Djibouti. Meanwhile, a recent study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, published in September 2026, indicated that China has carried out upgrades to its military base in Djibouti, enhancing its communications and intelligence-gathering capabilities—reflecting a clear expansion of China's presence in this theater.

And here the "Ring of Fire" appears in its clearest form: the Houthis, operating on the Asian coast of the Red Sea, affect the value of the opposite African coast; Ethiopia, seeking a sea outlet, cannot separate its national security from the Bab al-Mandab; Eritrea, possessing a long coastline facing Yemen, gains a strategic importance that exceeds its economic weight; Egypt, dependent on the Suez Canal, sees the turmoil in the Red Sea as a direct threat to one of its vital resources; while Saudi Arabia views the opposite coast as an extension of its western security. Therefore, the land conflicts in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia are not distant from the naval battle; rather, they are parts of the very same structure linked to ports and supply chains.

While America's role in fueling these conflicts to mobilize its own tools cannot be ruled out, a recent study by the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations warned of the interlocking nature of conflicts in the Horn of Africa. It argued that the tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the war in Sudan, the Egyptian-Ethiopian rivalry, the conflict in Somalia, and the maneuvers by Türkiye and the Gulf states could cause the conflict to spread from one theater to another through a web of borders, ports, and alliances.

From this perspective, regional movements on both sides of the Red Sea can be understood differently. Saudi Arabia no longer views Yemen merely as a southern front; Egypt does not regard Sudan and Ethiopia as two separate African files; Türkiye does not see Somalia as a partner disconnected from the Red Sea; Eritrea cannot deal with Ethiopia in isolation from its maritime position; and Ethiopia itself can no longer treat the issue of ports as a purely economic matter, especially given the existence of plans for their partition and dismemberment that have been on the table since the Biden administration.

It is, therefore, a single network that culminates at the Red Sea. However, we must not imagine that Washington needs to manage all these fronts directly. It is sufficient for it to prevent the emergence of a regional power capable of monopolizing a passage, port, or strait, and to maintain a network of agents and proxies capable of balancing one another. Saudi Arabia is a power on the Arabian shore, Egypt is a power on the northern shore, Türkiye is a rising actor in Somalia, Eritrea is a coastal state with an extremely sensitive location that can be courted by lifting some sanctions, and Ethiopia is a major land power seeking a maritime outlet, while the direct U.S. military presence remains the ultimate controlling factor for this entire system.

This policy undoubtedly carries grave danger for the states that rely on it. For he who borrows his security from a major power cannot guarantee it when interests shift, and he may one day awaken to fight a war for which he has not built strength, fortified his land, or possessed decision-making power. How much more so when this power from which he seeks refuge is America—the enemy of Islam and Muslims?

Some entities around the Red Sea possess such strategic location, wealth, human resources, and industrial capabilities that—if they properly build their strength—they could be capable of imposing equations for international change that would liberate humanity from the hell of capitalism. However, if they remain captive to dependency, they may become arenas of conflict. In major wars, maps do not protect borders that strength cannot defend; what colonialism drew with a pen, force can redraw with fire, as Sudan's lesson has taught us.

True strength is not built with money or weapons, but with a civilizational idea that gives man the meaning of his existence. An idea that forms the Ummah's entity, builds its state, shapes the military doctrine of its army, and drives it to safeguard the security of every individual within it, making the protection of its children and sanctities its cause. But whoever lacks the strength to protect their existence may be consumed by the "Ring of Fire" instead of having their passages safeguarded.