

“The Red Sea Crisis: How conflict continues to impact shipping risk and associated preventative and mitigative measures”

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Extended abstract

The Red Sea plays a critical role in the global trade network, facilitating the movement of approximately 12 to 15% of the world's trade, including around 20% of the world's containership traffic (World Economic Forum, 2021). As a crucial maritime passage connecting Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Red Sea's strategic importance cannot be overstated. However, this vital shipping route has become increasingly vulnerable to a variety of risks, including piracy, armed conflicts, and blockades, which are closely tied to the volatile global political landscape. The rise in security incidents in the region highlights how global maritime shipping is becoming more sensitive to geopolitical tensions.

This paper seeks to explore the intricate relationship between shipping risks and world politics by analysing recent maritime security incidents in the Red Sea. Through the examination of recent cases, this paper identifies recurring and emergent themes in the evolving risk landscape of international maritime shipping. Specifically, it underscores the commodification of military technology and its significant impact on the capabilities of armed groups, which have increasingly targeted commercial vessels. The recent attack on the MV Sounion serves as a case in point, illustrating the unprecedented level of threat posed by non-state actors with access to sophisticated weaponry and militarised technology.

The commodification of military technology has reshaped the threat landscape for maritime shipping. Armed organisations, including terrorist groups and regional militias, are now able to leverage advanced weaponry such as missile systems, drones, and naval mines to launch attacks on vessels transiting the Red Sea. This shift marks a departure from the traditional dynamics of piracy and small-scale attacks and represents a new stage of escalation in maritime conflict. The theory of escalation, as outlined by Calson (1995), argues that international conflict escalates in predictable patterns. However, the recent developments in militarised technology, such as precision-guided munitions and autonomous systems, have disrupted this theory, creating new uncertainties regarding the potential for conflict escalation in the Red Sea.

The analysis presented in this paper reveals a clear correlation between global political instability and the increased exposure of marine vessels to risk. Heightened tensions in the Middle East have spilled over into the maritime domain, with incidents of armed attacks and blockades becoming more frequent. As a result, this study anticipates future volatility in shipping security, as geopolitical shifts continue to influence the risk landscape.

One of the key findings of this research is the difficulty in guaranteeing timely security support and safety for response personnel in the Red Sea. Response organisations, including emergency response

services and environmental solution providers, face limitations in their ability to respond quickly and effectively to incidents. This is due in part to the lack of international coordination and the difficulty of maintaining a constant naval presence in a region as vast and politically complex as the Red Sea. The paper argues that without more robust security frameworks, response organisations will continue to face elevated risks, which in turn will affect the marine environment. The lack of adequate protection and rapid response capabilities could lead to increased incidents of environmental damage, such as oil spills or hazardous material leaks, which not only harm marine ecosystems but also pose significant economic and health risks to coastal communities.

This paper concludes by emphasising the need for additional security measures and enhanced support for response organisations to enable faster and more effective mitigation strategies. By tackling these challenges, the maritime sector can better safeguard both the marine environment and human health. The findings aim to help shape a future research agenda aimed at enhancing the prevention and response to security incidents in high-risk maritime areas.

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