STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE RED SEA

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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The reasons for conflict and dispute in the Middle East are numerous and varied, one of the most important reasons that causes unstability in the region is the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The United States and other countries have tried their best to put an end to the conflict. They have had limited success in achieving peace treaties between Egypt-Israel and Jordan-Israel. What remains is the more important issue, the Palestine-Israel conflict and the rest of Arab occupied land in Syria and Lebanon. The Arab states have used the Red Sea as a tool to put pressure on Israel. As a result of that pressure, Israel decided to gain more control in the Red Sea. That kind of strategy from both sides shows the mistrust of each other and makes it hard to predict when war will occur. By stating this example, I will show you how the Red Sea can be a cause for war to happen in the region.

In addition to that the bordering Arab and African states have disagreements among each other and each state has its own strategy in the Red Sea regardless of what the other states' concerns are. One of the main differences among these states is boundary disputes, which sometimes generates conflict up to the level of using forces against each other. But no matter what happens between the Arab states from minor disagreement to open conflict, it will go away when any Arab state has a confrontation with Israel. For this reason and in pursuit of their vital interests, regional and foreign powers have been attracted to that important waterway so they can either influence some of the region states or the region as a whole. In this research project I will explain in detail all aspects and strategies being adopted by coastal states, regional and foreign powers in the area.

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THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE RED SEA

A simple look at the map of the Middle East shows the great strategic importance of the Red Sea. It lies between two continents, Africa and Asia, separating the Middle East and the Far East, as well as between Europe and Asia. In a few words, it is the heart of the area and the link between two worlds. The Red Sea also provides a line of communication from the Far East to the Mediterranean and to the North Atlantic. Even before the Suez Canal came into being, the Sea had been of importance as an international waterway. It served as a bridge between the richest areas of Europe and the Far East. The geopolitical position of the Red Sea is of a special importance. Being a natural border between the eastern coast of Africa and the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula, it is a vital route for the transportation of oil through Bab el-Mandeb in the south to the Suez Canal in the North. As a result of this new role the importance of the Red Sea increased. Its ports could be used to transport Gulf oil to consumers. This newfound importance will continue as long oil remains a primary source of energy.

When the Suez Canal was built in the last century as a link between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, this new seaway quickly replaced the route around the Cape of Good Hope. It became a major trade and navigation route. In addition, the Red Sea lies in the strategic center of the world. It is a vital navigation route for military forces between their home countries and their bases in different parts of the world. It is moreover surrounded by regional powers that have their own mutual disagreements. Therefore, the Red Sea is an important theater for both regional and international conflict. The Red Sea area contributes to political and military developments in the area as a whole. Regional conflicts affect international interests and in this way could escalate to the level of conflict between the regional powers and the superpower. In past decades, the Red Sea area had become an arena for conflict and competition between world powers. One of the most important issues in the Red Sea area over the last 50 years has been the Arab-Israeli conflict.

There is also the close interrelationship between the Red Sea and the Arab Gulf, which have historic, economic and strategic links. What takes place in the Red Sea or around it leaves a long-term impact on the Gulf area, and vice versa.

The economic importance of the Red Sea increased by the worsening of the world energy crisis and the increasing need for economic development as a result of the large oil reserves in the region. Furthermore, the Red Sea has precious metal resources. The search for mineral deposits in the Red Sea has a recent history. With the exception of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which carried out an ambitious exploration program opposite its coast, none of the coastal states had until recently undertaken any worthwhile work with regards to exploration for mineral deposits. It was discovered that the isolated deeps of the Red Sea contain metals such as zinc, copper, silver, gold and some other elements including cadmium, cobalt and hydrocarbons, not to mention the enormous and huge variety of marine life. There are approximately 300 different kinds of fish that live in the Red Sea and the beautiful coral reef that makes the Red Sea one of the best places for tourists and for diving.

For all these reasons and more, the Red Sea gained its strategic importance. Several powers, particularly the United States and the former Soviet Union, were interested in the Red Sea and the developments along this waterway.[1] The great strategic and economic potential of the Red Sea can be summed up in the following:

1. The Red Sea became one of the main routes for oil and trade between Europe and the East especially after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia decided to export its oil via that sea for security and safety reasons.

2. It serves as a major trade outlet for its coastal states, especially Sudan, Ethiopia, Jordan and Israel.

3. There are strong indications that it is rich in mineral deposits, in addition to its great fishing potential.

4. Along its coasts lie some of the key countries in the Arab, Islamic and African worlds.

5. It serves as a line of communication for the military forces between their home countries and their bases in different parts of the world.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT IN THE RED SEA

As I stated before, one of the most important issues in the Red Sea area over the last 50 years has been the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab-Israeli conflict is an important factor in Red Sea politics, just as the Red Sea has in its turn been a major factor in this conflict.

Since the creation of Israel, the Arabs have regarded it as an illegal, hostile and expansionist existence over the Arab land (Palestine). Therefore, this newly founded state should be regarded and treated as an enemy and threat to the Arabs. The Arabs knew that they should allow no more future expansion for Israel and try to weaken its economy. As for Israel, free navigation through the Red Sea, which was essential to its trade and communication with Asia and Africa, has been prominent in Israel's strategic thinking. In fact Israel's founders insisted on including the southern Negev Desert and its outlet on the Gulf of Aqaba within the projected Jewish state.[2] The Israelis realized that if the Arabs, especially Egypt, choose to be hostile to Israeli, they could close navigation to them through the Suez Canal. Therefore, they needed an alternative to the Canal in the outlet on the Gulf of Aqaba. Since then, free access to the Red Sea has been crucial in Israel policy.

In March 1949, in a military operation, Israel occupied the Jordanian village of Um Rashrash on the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba, after the signing of an armistice agreement between Israel and the Arab states. The Israeli violation of the armistice was in order to secure a foothold on the Red Sea coast. Um Rashrash has now developed into a naval and air base on the Red Sea, Eilat. Having its own ports on the occupied territories, Israel became interested in developing trade relations with East African and Asian countries. In the early 1950s, Israel tried to claim the right of passing through the Suez Canal. But these attempts were rejected by Egypt and gradually this rejection included not only Israeli shipping but all Israeli-produced goods or merchandise destined for Israel, shipped on non-Israeli ships passing

through the Suez Canal. Then in 1967 the Israeli-Egyptian war caused the closure of the strait of the Tiran and the Suez Canal for the second time. In 1971, Palestinian guerrillas attacked the Israeli tanker Coral Sea from the island of Perim. This was a reaction to the expansion of Israeli activity in the southern part of the Red Sea. Yet another war erupted to the north of the Red Sea. On October 1973, the Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal to the east bank and destroyed the Bar-lev line in the process of liberating occupied Egyptian land. Instead of closing Sharm Al-Sheikh, Egyptian navy took control of the southern entrance of the Red Sea at Bab El-Mandeb.

As a result of these wars, Israel decided to gain more control in the Red Sea. It started to concentrate on the southern part of the Red Sea. Israel, therefore, has been actively supporting anti-Arab movements in Africa, especially in southern Sudan and Ethiopia, by offering military training, advice and arms. Israel was more successful in Ethiopia, a country with a long history of deeply rooted anti-Arab feelings. Both countries opposed the complete Arabization of the Red Sea.[3] Moreover, Israel convinced the United States of the importance of the presence of United Nations soldiers stationed at Sharm al-Sheikh, which symbolizes the "maritime powers" guarantee of free passage through the Strait of Tiran. Israel even called for making the Red Sea area an international region, particularly Bab El-Mandeb and some Arab islands in the south of the Red Sea. Israel also worked to strengthen its relationships with Eritrea after it got its independence. To win Entrea as a friend and alliance, Israel financed many projects there such as its own security points and an information center to exchange information with Eritrea about the Red Sea. This cooperation or the attempt to influence Eritrea included some of the following:

1. Israel attempt to prevent Eritrea from declaring its Arabic and Islamic trends, which succeeded when Eritrea refused to join the Arabic League.

2. Israel still uses some Eritrean islands such as Dahkak, Fatima and Halpe.

3. Israel strengthens its relationship with Eritrea through economic and technological aids.

4. Israel flooded the Eritrean markets with Israeli products to complete the Arabic products.

5. Israel helped Eritrea to establish and modernize its armed forces. This complicated Arab-Israeli conflict and increased the tension in the region which in turn increased the presence of the superpowers.[4]

Israel is the only state in the area that has a nuclear weapon and the power to threaten and deter. Arab states have been watching Israel's expansionist ambitions in the area, including the Red Sea. Therefore the quest for stability in the Red Sea within a Middle Eastern context requires a search for security, which is the right of every party, not a right for just one party at the expense of another. The area will never know peace and stability until there is a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

POWER INTERESTS IN THE RED SEA

The identity of the Red Sea as a world navigation route has imposed itself in spite of negative characteristics such as high temperatures, severe drought and the scarcity of deep-water ports that serve this navigational route. In the past these negative characteristics handicapped navigation, but they do not at present constitute a major obstacle to progress in the technology of sea navigation.

Moreover, the Red Sea is a first class sea corridor among world navigational routes because of the percentage of oil out of the total of the world oil traffic being carried through it in unarmed tankers. So it is one of the primary duties of the international community to act as an alert guardian to ensure that the Red Sea area, including its straits, is available to all navigation at all times.

The Red Sea has always been a focus of interest for the different powers. Therefore, it is important to study the attitude and strategies of those powers toward the Red Sea, and to distinguish among them in the light of their needs and demands.

UNITED STATES STRATEGY IN THE RED SEA

The Red Sea has been a Western area of interest and influence for a long time. It had been a route for spices until it became an artery for crude oil. It offered the West the opportunity to embark at an early time on the field of colonialism and gain superiority as a naval power. When European colonial powers withdrew from this area, a vacuum existed and offered other powers the opportunity to fill it.

As a waterway providing access to and from several key Middle Eastern states, and as a shoreline providing outside powers with many opportunities to build positions of influence and military advantage, the Red Sea and its southern approaches directly affected the vital interests of the United States.

The Red Sea in the United States politics is the main artery that carries Arabian Gulf oil to Western industrialized nations. They mainly depend on Gulf petroleum to run their factories, warm their homes, and direct their economy by investments of petro dollars. The main regional goal of the American military forces is to ensure an uninterrupted flow of oil to Western nations and to safeguard Western petroleum companies operating in the Gulf area to guarantee the contributions of these companies to the balance of payments.[5] This underlines the importance of the Red Sea, which has been favored with a prestigious position in American strategy as being important base for control and command of petroleum as well as the route for transporting it.

The United States has stationed naval forces in the Indian Ocean, Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea, including aircraft carriers, destroyers and nuclear submarines. It also has several naval and air bases that serve these naval units. The purpose of these bases is to protect U.S. interests in the Middle East in general and in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea in particular.

Their strategic interests are basically centered on the use of the naval facilities on the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to support military operations either in peacetime or wartime. They also support free navigation through the Red Sea and to ensure the flow of Gulf oil to U.S. allies in Europe.

In addition, the United States appeared in the region to counter the former Soviets that threaten its interests and security of the waterway of U.S. navigation. The United States did its best and still does to keep the Middle East region, including the Red Sea, away from any hostile foreign influence. Since 1968, the United States tried to fill the space left after the British withdrew from the Gulf region and Aden. Its primary concern was to secure and protect Western interests that mainly involved preventing the expanding influence and presence of the Soviets in the Middle East region and its waterways. In order to do so the United States made political and military alliances with some regional states. For example, there was "The Baghdad Alliance" which the United States tried to convince many Arab countries to join it. But the Egyptian president Jamal Abdul Nasser fought this American project and declared that the real danger that threatens the Arab nations and their interests is Israel which was founded by the help of the West.

The United States of America was concerned about the role of the Soviets in the Red Sea region for many reasons. First, the Soviets were considered supporters of some Red Sea coastal states, especially those who are not satisfied with their existing regimes and tried to change them, such as Ethiopia and former South Yemen. Those radical movements strongly depended on the political, economical, and military support of the Soviets. Secondly, Soviet interest and presence in the Red Sea allowed the countries in the region different and more optional trends in their foreign policies. Those countries will be free to choose which party to be allied with, the United States, the Soviets, or stay impartial. The United States even resorted to economic and financial aid as a way of making alliances and friendship with the Red Sea

coastal states. At the end of the 1970s, the United States provided military facilities to both Kenya and Somalia to counter the Soviet strategy in the region.[6]

There are many reasons that lie behind the American policy toward the Soviets. The United States regarded it as a threat to the security and stability of the region. So, the United States tries to expel the Soviets from the region or at least counter their influence in this crucial area. On the other hand, the United States strategy avoid direct confrontation with the Soviets in the Middle East and Red Sea area due to their past experience in Vietnam, from which they learned not to get involved in regional conflicts. But this does not mean that direct military intervention was eliminated, especially in situations where its interests and national security were being threatened, as it did during the second Gulf War (Iraqi invasion of Kuwait). As a matter of fact, the recent changes and developments in the international policy and the collapse of the USSR made the United States more willing and ready to interfere if there is a need to do so. There is no better evidence than the American intervention in the last Gulf War. Still, the United States cannot ignore the sensitivities of Middle Eastern and African countries to having the military forces of outside powers—and particularly those of the superpowers—stationed on their territory. Many of these states recognize that U.S. support for their security is their only ultimate guarantee against hostile regional powers. But they are also conscious of the internal political pressures that could be generated by too close a military association with the United States. They want the United States to be able to meet any military threat in the region, but to the extent that this requires U.S. forces to be stationed in the area, they want them to be available but not on their territory.

This is a difficult obstacle to contend with, however. A failure by the United States to respond to the challenge of finding the most effective ways of projecting military force into the region would leave a serious gap in its overall capability and expose its friends in the area to serious dangers.

Finally, there is a prime interest of the United States in the Middle East and Red Sea region. It is America's historic commitment as ultimate guarantor of Israel's security. It is important for the United States to assure the security and independence of the state of Israel as a vital ally to the United States in this region. As the Arab-Israeli conflict continues, Israel will still be concerned with having free navigation in the Red Sea, in particular through the Bab El-Mandab strait, which is the only outlet through which Israel can go to its markets in Africa and Asia. It was a major concern of the United States to see that passage in the Red Sea remain unrestricted. In fact, the attempt to block shipping to Israel's Red Sea port Eilat was the proximate cause of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. In general, we can say that the United States has always supported Israel expansionist interest. Since the days of President Truman, all American presidents assured in different occasions their moral and financial support to Israel and it has been one of the priorities of the U.S. foreign policy. In spite of Israeli dependence upon the American support and approval, Israel may make decisions that do not agree with the interests of the United States in the region.

FORMER SOVIET UNION STRATEGY IN THE RED SEA

The Soviets initial interest in the Middle East and the Red Sea was apparently to challenge British imperial influence as colonialism waned. Gradually in the midst of consolidating its own imperial ambitions, Moscow assigned this effort added importance. Soviet planners understood the potential utility of air and naval facilities, and of a military presence in general, as well as the Soviet involvement growing in East Africa and the Middle East to include the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The Soviets have paramount interests in the region. These interests are multiple, and some are essential to the Soviet national security. The region is the Soviet's southern sea route which is the shortest waterline of communication opened in the navigation route between its European ports in the Black Sea and the Indian Ocean, where it has its naval fleet, instead of going through the Mediterranean Sea into the Atlantic Ocean and around Africa. The Suez

route makes it easier for the Soviets to support its navy and air force in peacetime and during wartime. The closing of the Suez Canal between 1967 and 1976 demonstrated the canal's vulnerability to blockade in the future. As early as the late 1950s, U.S. development and deployment of submarines was of major concern to the Soviets. The Soviet planners realized that the northern sectors of the Indian Ocean provided a good location for the deployment of such weapon systems aimed potentially at the USSR and soon countering the United States influence in this region became a prime interest to the Soviets.

However, the Soviets policy toward the United States does not only include military strategy, it also concerns political, diplomatic, and economic strategies. Within the framework of its growing interest and involvement in the Middle East and Eastern Africa, the Soviets concluded many alliances and treaties of friendship with the states of the region in order to counter U.S. influence in the area. Such an action made the area an arena for international conflict between the two great powers. This competition between the two powers or what is called the "Cold War" began at the end of World War II. The Soviets also found a good opportunity to have a greater influence in Africa in general and in the Red Sea in particular by supporting the radical and revolutionary movements. This gave the Soviets a position of power in the region which the United States and its western allies could not ignore or deny, especially that those radical regimes supported by the Soviets became influential in the African and Arab foreign policies.

After 1977, the Soviets gained a strong ally in the southern part of the Red Sea along with its alliance with the former Southern Yemen, the Marxist regime in Ethiopia.[7] The Haile Mariam regime which came to power in 1974 in Ethiopia depended on Soviet and Cuban military and financial aid in its struggle with Somalia and Eritrea. This aid guaranteed Ethiopia a very powerful military force with which it achieved a military success over Somalia in 1978 and controlled many Eritrean territories. This conflict in the Horn of Africa led to different regional and international results such as:

1. It increased the possibilities of competition and confrontation between the two superpowers.

2. It created ideological conflicts among the African countries that resulted in finding subgroups inside the African and Arabic groups.

3. It encouraged the conservative regimes on the Red Sea to adopt friendly attitudes towards the U.S. as an ally against the radical regimes.

4. It gave the Soviets a good position and reputation among many African countries.

The significant shift in the Soviet policy towards some countries, as it did when it gave up on Somalia and turned to supporting Ethiopia, reflects the general interests and goals of the Soviets that include:

1. To control the navigation on the Red Sea and its straits and around Africa and the Middle East. Also, to deploy its own forces in the region in case there was a need to use them. As it happened when the Soviet fleet operated in the Arabian Gulf to support its presence against the Americans fleet there.

2. To challenge the American and western interests in the Red Sea, Africa and the Arab world.

3. To gain more power in the region, through the radical regimes reliance on the Soviet support.

4. To strengthen and support the Soviet military presence in the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Red Sea and Arabian Gulf.

Although the Soviet strategy in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa was expensive, it proved to be a success. Many of the Red Sea coastal states, besides other African and Arab countries, regarded the Soviets as a big supporter and a reliable side in their battle against colonialism and racism (Israel and South Africa).

Nevertheless, the change of attitude in the Soviet strategy after Gorbachev came to power in 1985, helped to reduce the tension and competition between the two superpowers in

the area. In addition, the Soviet attempts to improve their economic state, open their markets to the West, and use Western technology made the Soviets avoid any policy or situation that could lead to a confrontation with the United States or Western Europe.

As for the Soviet economic interests in the Red Sea, its most important function in the economic sphere is as a part of Russia's own internal communications network. The Suez Canal serves to provide a maritime link between European and Far Eastern Russia that is open all the year around—something that does not apply to the arctic route. On the other hand, there is no oil dependency but instead a shipping link. The Soviets had their trade relationships with local states in the Red Sea area and they wanted to preserve the Red Sea for their trading ships heading to Asia and Africa. Moreover, the Soviets had their own ships fishing directly from the Red Sea and they helped to operate a jointly owned fishing fleet there with the Yemenis. It is true that the USSR collapse had a severe impact on that policy and it almost diminished to the minimum, but we cannot deny that the Russians still have some noticeable influence in that part of the world.

OTHER PLAYERS

There are other countries that have economic and political interests in the Red Sea, such as the Western Europe countries. In order to enhance their relations with the regional states, the Western countries and Japan offer economical, financial and military aids. In fact, France is considered to be one of the biggest Western European countries that offer such aid to the African countries, especially Djibouti. France's special interest in the African countries is because of the historical and cultural ties between them since the days of the French colonialism. China also plays an important political role in Africa but its financial aid is limited to certain countries.

However, we can say that the political, military and economic influence of the United States is still much more important than the influence of these powers.

ISRAELI STRATEGY

Israel's political, economic and strategic aims in the Red Sea are closely interconnected. In a geopolitical perspective the southern Negev region of Israel, the port of Eilat and the Gulf of Aqaba are seen as an integral unit.

Israel's first policy is to counter any attempt to block distant chokepoints along the Red Sea. From the beginning, the Israeli policymakers realized that, bordering Arab states, Israel would be isolated and surrounded with neighbors who refuse to deal or live with it. Israel strongly resists any projection of the idea of the Red Sea as an "Arab lake." Free navigation to and from Eilat is considered absolutely essential to Israel's security and economic interests and to reduce Israel's political isolation, due to the enmity with its Arab neighbors. The Red Sea's importance for Israel grew since it is the best waterway for shipping and trade with East Africa and the Far East. The prime concern to the Israelis is to secure free passages through the straits of the Red Sea so it would not be under any political or economical pressure.

The Israeli strategy in the Red Sea stands on certain bases. First, the necessity of Israel's security that demands controlling the straits and waterways of the Red Sea or preventing any of its adversaries from controlling them. Secondly, the Red Sea is vital to Israel's economic well-being since it is a maritime route to the Mediterranean and the Indian Oceans and links it to Asian and African trading markets. The Israelis even set their own goals dealing with the Red Sea region, which are: (1) to secure free navigation on the Red Sea; (2) to accomplish a strategic depth in the Red Sea, which enable Israel to monitor the Arab military activities in this region; (3) to break any Arab blockade on any of the Red Sea straits, waterways or on the Israeli ships; (4) to guarantee and secure the civilian and military lines in the Red Sea which are directed to the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal or to the Indian Ocean through the strait of Bab Al-Mandab.

In order to achieve these goals, Israel resorted to different means. For example, they deployed their forces along the Red Sea and secured an outlet to the Red Sea through the Gulf

of Aqaba and the occupying of the village of Um-Rashrash (now the port of Eilat).[8] It also reinforced its naval and air fleet at the southern part of the Red Sea, which heightened the tension of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel strategic development in the Red Sea included not only the demands of free navigation, but they also claimed that Israeli national security is associated with the Red Sea and the need to create a strategic depth in this area by deploying Israeli forces in near and remote parts of the Red Sea. Moreover, they presented Israel as one of the Red Sea states with the right to use it, benefit from it and to be treated equally with the rest of the coastal states.

Israel also took another approach to accomplish its goals. It has emphasized its bilateral relations with the African countries, especially those in the Horn of Africa like Ethiopia. To Israel, Ethiopia was important for two reasons: (1) the longstanding alliance with it was aimed both at preventing the Arab attempts to preclude the Israelis from using the Red Sea, and (2) at securing the way inland to the various countries they kept in touch with for political as well as for commercial reasons. Israel offered military and financial aid to its African allies. Israel also took advantage of the regional conflicts there such as the Somali-Ethiopian, the Somali-Kenyan and Ethiopian-Sudani conflicts to achieve more strategic depth in the Red Sea.

Furthermore, Israel intended to associate its strategy with the American strategy in the Middle East and to convince the United States that Israel is their only reliable ally in the region, unlike the Arab allies. They used this alliance to secure their existence in the region and to accomplish their strategic goals in the Red Sea. In addition, they offered the United States, especially after the mining incidents in the Red Sea in 1985, that Israel take the responsibility for security of the Red Sea and to guarantee the flow of oil to the West. They also offered more coordination between the American and Israeli naval forces. It is on this basis the American and Israeli strategies were associated together. Israel with all its capabilities and bases became a part of the American strategic plan.[9] This Israeli strategic importance to the United States came from the potential Israeli role in the American strategic regional plan to counter the

Soviets, because the Israeli membership in the American defense strategy (Star Wars) and because of the possibility of participating in a direct or indirect way in the American regional plan to protect their vital interests in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the Israeli strategy has its problems and gaps. In spite of the temporary success of the Israeli strategy in the region, it still faces many problems and has many gaps that could lead, if the Arabs take advantage of them, to the failure of Israeli strategy and could threaten Israeli security. One of the most important problems that face the Israeli strategy is the lack of the strategic depth in the region and the continuous changes and instability of the region. There are also other gaps in the Israeli strategy, such as:

1. The way that Israel handles the conflict in the Arab region that reflects the nineteenth century philosophy and that the winner in any conflict should destroy the defeated side. Israel insists on the importance of achieving total security and at the same time ignores the nature of the present domestic conflict which could lead to a broader conflict between them and the rest of the Arab states and all this makes Israeli security temporary.

2. The geographical element has a negative impact on the Israeli security. The lack of the strategic depth and the small size of Israel can threaten its security. Not to mention the possibility of developing the Arab countries armed forces and having modern weapons that could reach the strategic depth of Israel.

3. Israel also has different economical problems like inflation, unemployment and others. The high cost of military expenses in Israel and the fact that the Israeli budget is unable to cover those expenses made Israel depend increasingly on the Western countries and the United States to support it and provide it with its military and economic needs. So, the present Israeli power is not by itself, but it depends on the others help and if anything should stop this, it will threaten the Israeli security.

ARAB STRATEGY IN THE RED SEA

The Red Sea is almost placed in the middle of the Arab community area whether geographically or nationally. It is the main and only sea outlet for many Arab countries especially for Jordan, Djibouti and Sudan. The Red Sea is a main corridor through which Arab petroleum flows to export markets. Most Arab countries' economies depend mainly on petroleum exports, which represent 93 to 100 percent of the total exports of some Arab countries. Furthermore, the presence of mineral resources on the bottom of the Red Sea increases its importance both in the geographic and national concepts.

In spite of the strategic importance of the Red Sea to the Arabs and their geographical control of its coasts, there is no clear-cut and effective Arab strategy toward this area. The foreign and hostile powers were left to control the world balance through controlling this important region of the world. It seems that the negativity of the Arab community is not limited to the absence of a clear-cut formula toward the Red Sea.

A most telling example of Arab community's negative attitude toward the Red Sea is the end of some Arab islands of the Red Sea, such as Samafir, Tiran and Hanish-Saghir which came under the military control of Israel by agreement with Ethiopia.[10]

The increasing interests and demands of the Arab community in the Red Sea requires that community to adopt a unified and clear Arab policy toward this important strategic corridor without being simply content with declarations of intentions and good wishes. There is the need to build a naval fleet to realize a balance between the demands and the possibility of achieving them. They need to adopt an effective attitude toward the struggle over the strategic coasts of the Horn of Africa, which was regarded as an extension of the Middle East struggle between Arabs and Israel. The Arabs should also put some recommendations under consideration to ensure the security of this crucial area of the world. First, the redistribution of military forces--the uninhabited islands on the Red Sea present a threat to Arab security, since they might tempt others to invade and occupy them. The redistribution of Arab military forces in the area, on the

basis of a strategic plan, represent a basic guarantee for Arab security. The presence of such forces would also encourage the settlement of national communities and help to reveal the economic resources and strategic value of these islands and confirm or deny whether there is any non-Arab presence there. Secondly, the construction of ports and lighthouses--this would help the movement of international trade if more ports and lighthouses were built on the Red Sea shores. Finally, Arabs should prohibit the use of force among Arab states and between Arab states and their neighbors. It should be stressed that peaceful means--negotiations, good offices are the only course of action. This would contribute to an improvement in relations between Arab and non-Arab states.

There is an urgent need for an Arab plan designed to coordinate their policies and improve the relations between the Arab states, especially after the tragic events of the second Gulf War. They should study these disputes in order to define the real nature of the problems and how to solve them because these conflicts or disputes can be a serious obstacle to any Arab cooperation. These disputes include the Egyptian-Sudanese dispute and the Sudanese dispute with Eritrea and Ethiopia. They should solve their disputes within the framework of regional organizations such as the League of Arab States and the OAU.

The Somali problem heightens tension in the region. It is considered a great challenge to any project in the region due to the bad condition the country suffered which tempted foreign powers to take advantage of the situation there. It should be clear that the security of any of the Red Sea states is connected to the security of the area as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The Red Sea will still be a very important strategic waterway because of all the different reasons that I have stated previously. So the security and stability of this area of the world is essential and this requires the Red Sea Arab coastal states to adopt a new strategy. This strategy will not achieve its goals until these states overcome their problems. Certain steps should be taken, such as:

1. The Arab-Israeli conflict still has a major impact on the region. The Israelis attempt to counter the Arab influence in the Red Sea and their demand to put it under international supervision should be countered by the Arabs. They should work together to achieve a fair and lasting peace with Israel for the stability and security of the region. A peace treaty with some Arab states is not enough to end the conflict. The peace that the Arabs are looking for is the one that secures for the Palestinian people all their rights on the basis of U.N. resolutions and on international law which affirms the right of Palestinians to self-determination and Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories.

2. The reduction of foreign influence in the Red Sea area. Disputes among Arab and African states which can reach the state of armed conflict are the loopholes through which the foreign powers penetrate the area, establish bases and obtain facilities to further their own interests, regardless of the regional interests of local states. Therefore, the Red Sea states should counter foreign influence in the area.[11]

3. Establish good relationships with African countries in general and especially those countries located in the Horn of Africa.

4. The collapse of the USSR which reduced East-West competition in the area gives the United States the upper hand to influence the whole region as the only superpower in the world. At the same time the United States should stop the double standard policy and deal with these states on the basis of mutual interests, and realize that the whole region is going through a lot of change and that the people have the final world to say. I do not think it is wise to sacrifice your vital interest or gain the hatred of the people by making one state (Israel) happy. It is obvious that the whole region is willing to go as far as possible in the peace process between the Palestinians and the Israelis as long as it is fair and acceptable, any other solution will cause more tension in the region and cause the Arab states, as a whole, to stand firmly against it in spite of their own differences, and also will cause them to seek the help of any other nation to support them. It is the right time for the United States to take this great advantage of the

collapse of the USSR and not to give the chance to another player to step in. To my knowledge U.S. is the favorable power to most of the regional states if they manage to show and prove their impartiality when dealing with Palestinian-Israeli issues. Finally, to have only one dominant power is hard to deal with no matter how fair they are. They cannot be fair to all. Having more than one power might keep the balance of the whole world not only the Middle East.

WORD COUNT = 6,621

ENDNOTES

[1] Muhama Z. Al-Mugarbi, The Conflict of Strategies in the Red Sea. (Cairo: Arab Affairs, 1991), 54.

[2] Abdulah A. Al-Sultan, The Red Sea and the Arab Israeli Conflict. (Cairo: Arab Affairs, 1991), 93.

[3] Al-Mugarbi, 66.

[4] Al-Sultan, 198.

[5] Zakarya M. Abdulah, The Security of the Red Sea and the Regional Arab Security. (Cairo: Arab Affairs, 1996), 163.

[6] Al-Mugarbi, 56.

[7] Abdulhameed Al-Qaisi, The Strategic Importance of the Red Sea. (Al-Bagrah, 1986), 200.

[8] Aydah A. Seri Al-deen, Hunaish Islands and the Security of the Red Sea. (Beirut, 1996), 43.

[9] Nasser A. Al-Arfaj, The Importance of the Waterways in the Red Sea. (Riyadh: Institute of Diplomatic Studies, 1999), 41.

[10] Madi Abdul Lateef, The Strategies Conflict in the Red Sea and How it Effects the Arab National Security (Cairo: Arab Affairs, 1991), 69.

[11] Seri Al-deen, 54.

[12] Ahmad Halee, A Regional Arabic Project for the Red Sea. (Cairo: Arab Affairs, 1997), 51.

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