

# Motives for the international conflict in the Horn of Africa region, who will rule?

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## Introduction:

The Horn of Africa is considered one of the hotspots of conflict and international competition between the major powers due to its geostrategic location, and its transformation into a vital artery that represents the shortest and fastest path linking the East and the West. By its characteristics has made it, over time, a major axis over which the major powers compete and struggle to achieve their strategic interests and prevail. It is influenced by the rich waterways, straits, and coastlines it contains, in addition to being a route for the passage of energy of various kinds, in addition to the nature of the complex relationships of the countries overlooking it historically.

This description made the Horn of Africa region, a region of strategic concern, preceded by the dynamism of international relations, and the different strategies of influence and control over it and from it. We find that the major powers resorted to multiple approaches in this field. Some of them took the political side and the political approach, and some of them realized the definition and made it the approach. Military and security are the reasons for his move.

Accordingly, we seek in this research to answer the following three questions that represent the research problem:

- What is the geostrategic importance of the Horn of Africa region?

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- What are the rivalries and competing forces in the Horn of Africa?

- Who will control the Horn of Africa region? According to what strategy?

We will start from the hypothesis that the Horn of Africa region is increasing in geostrategic and geopolitical importance as international competition for global leadership intensifies.

### **The geostrategic importance of the Horn of Africa region: -**

The Horn of Africa region has been a vital theater on the strategic, political, as well as economic levels, since ancient times, due to its advantage of linking the Asian coast and the African coast, as well as the link between the Indian Ocean to the south and the Mediterranean Sea to the north, and it is also the shortest route for navigation and trade and was the focus of attention of planners. It is considered a fundamental axis, a point of tension, and one of the drivers of regional and international conflicts<sup>(1)</sup>. The geographical and geostrategic location of the countries overlooking the straits enables them to control those straits, which has made maritime and global powers compete to impose their influence and control over these straits, which are of importance and have a geostrategic and geopolitical dimension as it is. This is the case for the United States of America and Britain, and energy security is linked to these straits, which are pivotal and sensitive points in the security of energy from production centers to consumption sites. If these sea lanes are exposed to any bottlenecks, the energy market will be hit by a supply crisis that will affect its prices due to their proximity to the eastern region. The Middle East is considered a strategic location for the major powers as a result of its energy wealth and strategic straits and gulfs<sup>(2)</sup>.

(1) Abu Bakr Fadl Muhammad Abdel Shafie, *Energy Security and the Strategic Conflict of the Great Powers in the Red Sea Basin Region*, Red Sea Basin Countries Studies Series for Publishing 2021, p. 11.

(2) Ahmed Omran Abd, *Sea lanes in the Middle East and energy security after 2001*, unpublished doctoral thesis submitted to the Council of the College of Political Science, University of Baghdad in 2021.

The Horn of Africa region, by the geopolitical advantages that characterize it, has made it an actual theater for regional and international conflicts, some of which are historical, some of which are still ongoing and existing, and some of which are the results of the interactions of our current era and the dynamism of international relations. International interests are intertwined and the pressures of influence and penetration are avoided in this vital region of the world. Perhaps the existence of problems with strategic, political, economic, military, security, and even ethnic, religious, and ideological motives and implications that are plaguing this region has given it a unique strategic importance, not only for the countries of the region located on it, but for the countries of the entire world, making it one of the most prominent seeds and fuel of the conflict. Perhaps its presence is the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran in the Gulf of Aqaba. The Bab al-Mandab Strait are factors that directly and indirectly contributed to the outbreak of wars and conflicts between various regional and international powers<sup>(3)</sup>.

Ensuring the security of this region is a guarantee of the security of the passage of trade, especially Chinese trade, towards Europe. For example, in the year 2018 alone, the volume of that trade was around (\$500 billion). Also, the Red Sea will be a major link to the Maritime Silk Road and the oceanic part of the Belt and Road Initiative<sup>(4)</sup>. On the other hand, The precious metals in this region play a major role in the Chinese and Western orientation towards the region.

The sea lanes, straits, and crossing points in the Horn of Africa region have witnessed many stakes and challenges, as the growing Asian demand for oil and gas has enhanced the importance of the region, in addition to the geopolitical and geostrategic balances, and the security of energy supplies has become an economic priority for all players in the region and the world.

(3) \*See details:

- Johnathan Filton, China's changing role in the Middle East, Atlantic council, June 2019.

(4) See Al Jazeera's website on the international information network .available at 012024/30/.

## Paths of competition and conflict in the Horn of Africa region:

After the end of the Cold War, the changes that took place in the international political arena and its consequences on the nature of international interactions and American exclusivity in the world, and the international system adopting a unipolar pattern, we find that there are changes in competition and struggle for influence and hegemony in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region and its territories and the important straits and waterways they contain. We find that there are powers whose interests have emerged in the region, even though they are from outside the region, such as Russia, the European Union, and even Japan and India, in addition to the change in the form of competition in the region and the entry of China instead of the Soviet Union as an important party opposed to the United States of America<sup>(5)</sup>, through its attempt to gain a foothold in the region. The region is seeking to secure its strategic interests at the global level<sup>(6)</sup>, especially as it has begun to search for a global role that is no longer limited or restricted to its presence in Asia or its regional surroundings.

On the other hand, we see that there are what can be called oceanic powers who have strategic interests in the region and are trying to access it by all available means, such as Turkey, Iran, and Qatar, as well as the United Arab Emirates, and the growing competition between and among the coastal powers on more than one level, and that competition has extended to take the form of a network. Of the interactions that penetrate the four arcs, the competition was not at one pace or one form, but rather no longer had a purely ideological identity. Rather, the geo-strategic and geo-economic dimensions and future visions became a priority. China approached the regions with the Belt and Road Initiative and then followed it by strengthening its presence with a military presence in Djibouti, India, the Unit-

(5) Kazem Hashim Neama, *Competition of Powers in the Red Sea Region*, p. 2. Also see Ian William, *Uncomfortable lesson: reassessing Iran's missile attack*, center for strategic and international study, 2020.

(6) Al-Moez Al-Farouq Muhammad Ahmed, *optic*, 23

ed States of America, and Japan responded with initiatives that challenged the soft Chinese encroachment and with a military presence in the Red Sea<sup>(7)</sup>. It is as if conflict and competition took a space towards transforming into a multipolar system or breaking American hegemony by affecting the volume of international trade, which prompted the United States of America to follow several strategies to deal with this situation and to emphasize that these turns are not a sustainable solution, the regions in general are an arena. The struggle between these two types of structure of the new world order, and the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa represent the features of this formulation more than any other strategic region, as it contains the United States of America, which is the most influential and has the most influence and military presence, and its competitors, each according to its strategy, such as China, Russia, India, and Japan<sup>(8)</sup>.

(7) Kazem Hashem Nehme, optic , p. 9

(8) Ibid p10

The dynamics of interactions do not remain stable, as controversial and conflictual issues spread on both sides of the Red Sea, and they have repercussions on the rest of the conflict arenas, such as the war in Yemen, the issue of the Nile Dam, and the state of instability prevailing in some of its countries, such as Somalia, Ethiopia, and Yemen. The external force maneuvers between the coastal powers, while the powers... Coastal countries by seeking a balance between them, and finally, the efforts to establish these countries as a whole did not succeed in formulating a comprehensive and effective regional security system with the same institutions and mechanisms for its implementation and commitments, and mediation efforts did not succeed in eradicating the causes of conflicts and dispute<sup>(9)</sup>. We find that the United States of America and China are the two powers with the greatest international influence in the region. However, some believe that China, despite its clear penetration in the region, will remain a limited competitor below the level of actual clash with the United States of America.

(9) Kazem Hashem Nehme, optic,10.

Historically, China, despite its attempts to enter the region, has remained free from Western intervention in general and internal turmoil in it, which made China not favor uncalculated intervention in the region and interact with it more extraordinarily. China's participation in the region is an example of combating piracy with all effectiveness, as it has made dozens of attempts and more than 30 operations. It accompanied ships and deployed military submarines, which raised doubts about its military intentions, as well as joint multilateral exercises, as well as an increase in the volume of sales of Chinese weapons to the countries of the Red Sea Basin, as purchases for most of these countries increased. In the last ten years, it established forums for dealing and dialogue with the Red Sea countries on its banks. Eastern and Western (Forum on Chinese-African Cooperation FOCAC) and (Forum on Chinese-Arab Cooperation ASCF)<sup>(10)</sup>. On the other hand, this represents a global development in terms of international political interactions in the region.

(10) Agency France 24, Will China succeed in convincing Iran to stop Houthi attacks in the Red Sea? International Information Network, access date 12023/31/.

(11) Al Jazeera website on the international information network, access date 12023/31/.

And also see;  
- Ian Anthony, Maritime disputes in the eastern Mediterranean, Why and Why now, Stockholm International peace research institute, 2020.

The Red Sea region represents a geopolitical and even geo-strategic demand for the United States of America, the countries of Europe, and even the industrialized West in general, due to the dependence of these countries and powers on the oil of the Arabian Gulf to meet their energy needs<sup>(11)</sup>. Therefore, this region and its influence on it means an advanced step in achieving energy security and controlling it later.

Any threat and danger in the Red Sea will have repercussions on the areas of influence and conflict in the Indian Ocean as well as the Arabian Gulf, which is the relationship of influence and influence between the geopolitical regions, as the interactions will not stop in these regions.

It is a fact that we must acknowledge that the interests of the countries bordering the Red Sea do not necessarily coincide with the interests of the international powers in force in this

region, and this is what is complicated by the nature of the relations witnessed in the sphere of influence in this region, and even by the imbalances in the centers of influence and the differences in strategies between the parties from inside and outside the region, and therefore The superpower and major power resorted to two main strategies:

1- Containment strategy, which means direct control and control by military force.

2- A strategy of indirect approach or participation through controlling the seaports, straits, and strategic islands that control the coasts of the Red Sea through concluding economic agreements or creating political systems loyal to them<sup>(12)</sup>.

As for Iran, it aspires to play a greater regional role in the region and to lead the entire region. There is an Iranian awareness that its presence in the region gives a distinctive international momentum, and it wants to send messages to the world that it does not fear any international power present in the region and wants, to mobilize its agents or allies such as the Houthis, to play a role. Distinctive in the region through a strategy of establishing networks of interactive relationships with these powers.

The transformations at the regional and international levels cannot be isolated from the competition in the issue of Bab al-Mandab. The matter is not related to the Houthis alone, but rather the issue includes Iran. Rather, the main element is Iran, as the Gulf Cooperation countries see. Therefore, this matter cannot be isolated from the developments and events that occur in the vital area of the Bab region. Al-Mandab, especially in the Horn of Africa region and countries like Ethiopia beyond it. This region is not only a region of competition but has become a region of intense struggle for influence, sometimes taking the side of the military conflict. Some of them believe that Egypt is considered the most affected and a threat to its strategic interests since this region and its neighborhood are

(12) Farouk Abdel Ate Negm / p. 29. Also see Karim Matar Hamza Al-Zubaid, *The International Conflict in the Red Sea between Past and Present*, published on the International Information Network 2015.

(13) Zakaria Muhammad Abdullah, Red Sea Security and Arab National Security, Arab Affairs Magazine, issue 88, December 1996, p. 157. Also, see Hudoud Center for Supporting Digital Expression, Bab al-Mandab, The Danger of Regional War, and the Danger of Egypt Defending Its Strategic Interests, Cairo, p. 12.

(14) Al Jazeera website. International Information Network, access date 12014/31/.  
- Also see Ahmed Abdel Halim, Red Sea Security, Past, Present, Future (Cairo: Arab Center for Strategic Studies, Strategic Issues Series, No. 4, 1996.

(15) Fels Sabeel Lopez, Petroleum Geopolitics, translated by Salah Nayouf, p. 28, published on the International Information Network, Googol. Com.

geo-strategic, that is. The region of the Horn of Africa and the Abyssinian sources of the Nile is Egypt<sup>(13)</sup>, and this represents a serious threat to Egyptian national security and its strategic interests. The United States of America sees this region as a point of strategic interest under the pretext of combating terrorism, especially after the events of September 2001. It worked to sign a series of military agreements, including, for example, with Djibouti in the year 2003 to bring in a military facility and establish a base called Limuna within the security and military arrangements after the events of September 2001. The agreement was founded in 2014<sup>(14)</sup>, and similar to the Greater Middle East project, the United States of America has a project known as the Greater Horn of Africa. The issue of waterways is a vital issue for the global oil reserve in particular. And from energy in general, approximately 2/3 of the crude oil produced and exported daily goes through crude oil tankers, and among the 48 million barrels of crude oil that are exported daily, there are more than 35 million barrels that pass through the sea straits, which are characterized by ease of closure and control. Hence, they constitute potential targets for terrorist movements and organizations or other types of piracy<sup>(15)</sup>.

### **The Controlling International Powers... Who Will Rule?**

This region, due to its geo-strategic location, important waterways and straits, coasts, energy sources, and energy security corridors, are production points, as well as export, corridor, or transportation lines, making it a strategic advantage for any powers that want regional or global influence. Whoever controls these corridors now controls the world and its energy security, which pushed some important international powers, such as the United States of America, to create military bases and direct intervention, while other powers, such as China, resorted to establishing partnerships, and another regional pow-



er emerged, such as Iran. We find that it attempted to play an important role in the region by supporting armed groups such as the Houthis. This importance made international powers compete for control strategies. Before her in this area.

The importance of the region was not now ,but Since ancient times, its importance was and increased during the Cold War era. We find that the Soviet strategy was to remove Egypt from the equation, cooperate with Libya in the Mediterranean, and benefit from a military presence on the African coast in the port of Asmara in Ethiopia, and the presence in Somalia and Aden. It had an eye on the southern part of the Red Sea<sup>(16)</sup>.

The failure to adopt at least one specific concept of energy security has made each country or power have a different strategy from the other, and thus the absence of real cooperation from both sides of the equation, the consuming countries and the producing countries, which has resulted in what can be called the energy dilemma, which can be defined simply as The state's endeavor to achieve its energy security in a way that affects the policies of other energy-consuming countries. It can be said that the Red Sea geologically is characterized by two basic features in strategic control<sup>(17)</sup>:

1- The Red Sea is distinguished by its long coastline. The long coastline has the overwhelming ability to control seawater and navigation. As a result, the countries overlooking this sea and controlling its coastline play a fundamental role in the conflict surrounding it and then control this political, military, and economic artery.

2- The Red Sea is filled with islands scattered north and south, some of which amount to great strategic importance equivalent to the importance of points of strangulation, control, siege, and strategic control. According to international references, the waters of the Red Sea contain about 380 known and observed

(16) Viktor katana, Sudan oil industry could recover after being removed from Us terror list oil price march 23, 2020.

(17) Abu Bakr Fadl Muhammad Abd al-Shafi'i, previously mentioned source, p. 12, p. 13. Also see Salah al-Din Hafez, The Great Power Struggle over the Horn of Africa, World of Knowledge Series (Kuwait: Kuwait National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature, 1982), p. 62.

islands, some of which are inhabited and others empty and deserted.

These features were the basis of importance, as well as the points of conflict and its motives, being the vital artery that connects the main continents of the world and its energy security.

Its strategic position and control over vital waterways, as well as its being an important entrance from the east and the presence of important countries in this region, make the major powers compete to control this region and control it and its enormous resources, including oil.

Therefore, there will be powers controlling this region, a region divided into several powers, the most prominent of which are the United States of America and China.

### **United States of America:**

The United States of America does not have direct economic interests, such as investments, natural resources, or energy business, in East Africa, but rather in the eastern flank of the Red Sea, where oil and facilities are located. Therefore, energy security represents the most important economic interest, as well as the United States' concern about external threats represented by the efforts of other powers to deprive the United States. The United States can escape from that role through unconventional threats such as terrorism and instability, and American influence in international politics does not depend only on its military and economic capabilities, but also on the petro-dollar, which was established as a global financial system in the oil market in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia<sup>(18)</sup>.

The Suez Canal and Bab al-Mandab are the most important choke points in global maritime trade. Controlling them represents a threat to the United States as a great power and to its economic interests. As a result of piracy operations, we find that the United States of America has played a leadership role in implementing anti-piracy operations and that the Gulf of Aden is

(18) Kazem Hashim Nimah, optic, p. 99

one of the areas most strategically exposed to threats, which He made the United States of America carry out military operations after Al-Qaeda carried out attacks on the US destroyer Cole in 2002<sup>(19)</sup>.

(19) Ibid,p101.

Because the Houthi military operations were against the interests of the United States of America and to secure supplies, the United States strategy was a strategy of partnership and leadership in some of the coalitions, such as the African Operation Forces.

Accordingly, it adopted a military approach by dealing with the activities of competing powers, extremist violent organizations, instability, failed regimes, challenges, and complex international and regional security, as well as local, intertwined in the positions, behavior, and choices of actors at the three levels<sup>(20)</sup>. Therefore, the United States' strategy was to control through the military approach and realize the threats due to... Deprivation, poverty, inequality, and the nature of the political, personal, and behavioral systems make them terrorists. Therefore, the strategy of a preemptive strike emerged, and the deployment of American forces in areas of concentration, mobilization, recruitment, and dissemination of terrorist ideas, in bilateral cooperation and regional and international coalitions to combat global terrorism<sup>(21)</sup>. Accordingly, it can be said that the United States adopted and used hard power and military use. To force military operations, raids, liquidations, and enhance the role of local forces loyal to them, as well as targeting the leaders of these groups, and even resorting to renting military bases for use, as well as using international institutions such as the Security Council to issue international resolutions allowing the use of force against piracy<sup>(22)</sup>, and did not neglect the diplomatic and economic aspects.

(20) Strategic framework for countering terrorisms and targeted violence homeland security department of home land security of the us, 2019.

(21) Ibid,p23

(22) S D, Mulla, American Navy, press, office, April 2022.

## **China :**

China is a major power active in international interactions, and its role has begun to increase clearly in the course of international politics. Many believe that China is active in the Red Sea region and the Horn of Africa, not from a global, supreme strategic perspective, but under its intellectual vision in the development peace thesis, which it has adopted as an approach in its foreign policies. We find that stability, security, and peace are the basis and conditions for economic development. Therefore, it has adopted soft mechanisms in political discourse, economic cooperation, and initiatives to enhance its influence in the region. Then it went to the military and security presence and established a base for it in Djibouti, in addition to its reliance on the Belt and Road Initiative as a strategic arm to encircle American influence from On the one hand, and to break the American encirclement of China, on the other hand, and to build bilateral and multiple strategic partnerships.

China adopts a primarily political approach. It does not tend to interfere in the internal affairs of countries but rather enhances economic cooperation, adopts economic development, works with advanced economic companies in countries in the region, and stimulates trade. It always raises the issue of national sovereignty and pushes towards pluralism to bear collective responsibility for security, stability, peace, and development. In the world, it does not tend toward the language of dictations, but rather dialogues are the basis of its policy, and China's political approach interacts and integrates with its economic approach.

## **Conclusions:**

It can be said that competition and conflict in the Horn of Africa region will continue and may become more complex due to the importance of the geo-strategic location and its significant impact on the possibility of playing a prominent role in international interactions and by the presence of enormous wealth in this region and its instability, in addition to the fact that it links the economies of the countries of the world to each other, and the major powers will continue to be represented. China and the United States of America are the major countries competing most in the region for influence and thus over the hierarchy of the international power structure. Each of them will resort to its approach to the region, and many conclusions can be reached, most notably the following:

- The process of limiting, closing, or obstructing the normal flow of navigation in waterways is a strategic problem and has a profound impact on the survival of states or not, thus generating strategies of strategic strangulation.
- These regions will not witness sustainable stability as they are points or hotbeds of permanent tension and as a result of the international scramble for hegemony and influence in this region.
- The meeting of geography, economics, and politics, which will increase global tension.
- This region of the Horn of Africa is considered one of the most important points of global geopolitical strategic control, and thus it will have an impact on energy security and even human security in general.
- The United States of America will continue, currently and in the foreseeable future, to follow a military and security approach in the region with little diplomacy and reliance on international institutions.
- China will continue its fundamentally developmental political and economic approach in dealing with the region and its countries, while gradually shifting towards a military and security approach and creating security partnerships in the region.

