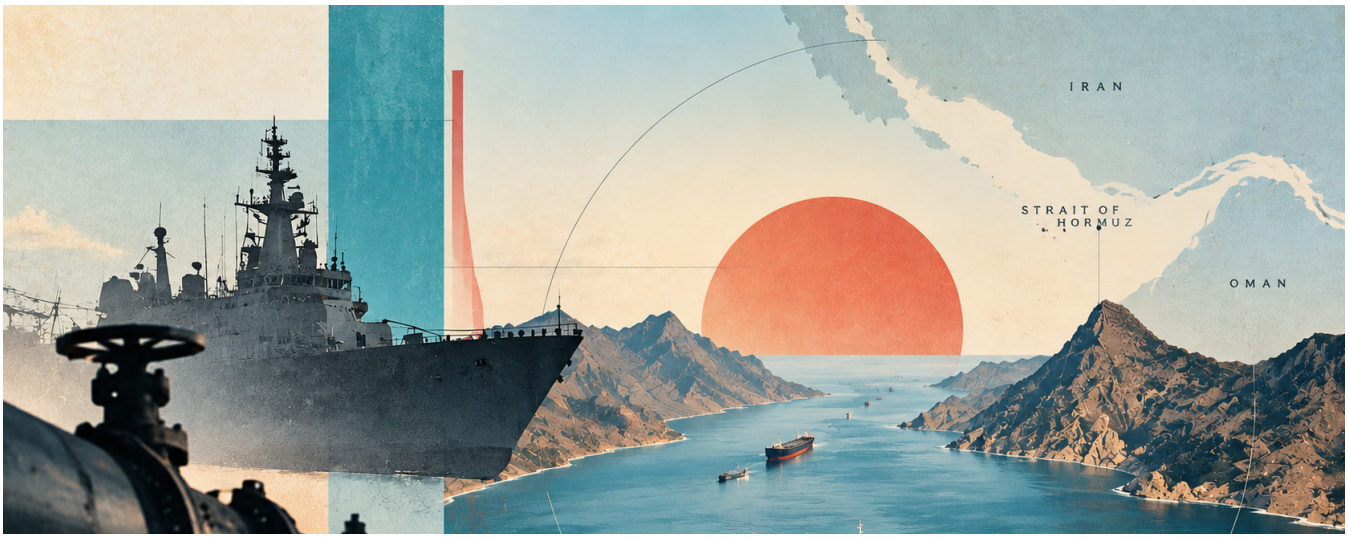
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About Global Up-to-Date

CGS Global Up-to-Date is an initiative of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), designed to serve as an analytical platform for understanding contemporary global issues. In response to a rapidly changing global landscape marked by armed conflicts, geopolitical shifts, socio-economic challenges, and evolving security dynamics, the initiative addresses critical and emerging questions relevant to policymakers, researchers, students, and wider policy audiences.

The initiative provides regular analytical briefs on pressing international developments, focusing on international politics, economy, security, human rights, development, and environment. In addition to regular online updates, CGS Global Up-to-Date publishes a monthly edition that brings together selected briefs on important contemporary global issues.

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India's BRICS Presidency and the Management of Disagreement



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Abstract: *On 7 August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan inked a mutual-defense agreement, committing to an attack on one being an attack on all. The "Makkah Defense Alliance," born of U.S. security worries, is a collection of capital from the Gulf, military strength from Turkey and manpower from Pakistan; but its hierarchy and activation protocol are not drawn up, and therefore it's more a precautionary measure than a true alliance.*

On 7 August 2026, at Al-Safa Palace in Mecca, Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed the Makkah Joint Defense Agreement.[1] The joint statement issued that day committed the three states to collective deterrence and declared that any armed attack against one of them shall be regarded as an attack against them all.[2] The declaration is consequential, yet its weight rests less on the language agreed in Mecca than on institutions and procedures that remain largely unbuilt.

The agreement was concluded at the Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defense, and on 31 August Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan announced that the grouping would be known as the Makkah Defense Alliance.[3] The treaty text has not been released, leaving duration, ratification, withdrawal, geographic scope and accession procedures outside public knowledge.[4] Descriptions such as "Islamic NATO" are journalistic shorthand rather than official terminology. Fidan has called the clause technically equivalent to NATO's Article 5 while noting that the degree, form and format of any response would be settled through consultation.[5] Saudi Deputy Minister for Public Diplomacy Rayed Krimly has said the pact establishes neither a military axis nor a sectarian bloc.[6]

The agreement emerged from several overlapping pressures rather than one single event. Since 2023, wars in Gaza and Lebanon, Israeli operations in Syria and Iran, Iranian attacks on Gulf states and disruption to energy routes have sharpened fears of escalation, while the conflict that began on 28 February 2026 raised serious questions about the dependability of the United States security umbrella.[7] Riyadh has consequently sought broader strategic options without abandoning Washington. Turkey has expanded its regional military role and defense industry, while Pakistan has decades of training and security ties with Saudi Arabia and close defense cooperation with Ankara.[8] The pact also builds on the Saudi-Pakistani Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement of September 2025, which declared aggression against either country to be aggression against both.[9]

The members bring complementary assets. Together

they field roughly 1.4 million active personnel, 3,400 aircraft, 6,000 tanks and more than 340 naval assets, according to the 2026 Global Firepower Index.[10] Saudi Arabia contributes financial capacity, diplomatic influence, a central Gulf and Red Sea position, and substantial defense resources. Turkey contributes large conventional forces, NATO experience, an expanding defense industry, drones and naval capability. Pakistan adds a large professional military, long-standing Gulf defense relationships, strategic access between South Asia and the Middle East, and nuclear-weapon status.[11] That capability should not be treated as a nuclear guarantee to the other members. Krimly has said the pact is not linked to nuclear ambitions or an arms race,[12] and specialists note that Pakistani doctrine remains oriented toward India rather than extended to allies.[13]

Operationally, the August statement was broad. It established collective deterrence and defense but did not publicly specify activation thresholds, force commitments, command authority or rules for intervention.[14] Institutionalization has nevertheless moved quickly. On 31 August, foreign and defense ministers and military chiefs met in Istanbul through a new Strategic Political and Defense Committee, agreeing to establish a secretariat in Saudi Arabia, led initially for three years by a Pakistani secretary-general, and to deepen defense-industry cooperation, joint technology development and production.[15] Pakistan's Foreign Office acknowledged that the alliance remains in its formative stage, with considerable work still required to finalize its structure and procedures.[16] Intelligence sharing, missile defense and combined commands may follow, but none is confirmed in public documents.

Existing arrangements show both the pact's importance and its limits. The 2025 Saudi-Pakistani agreement was bilateral, whereas the Makkah framework adds Turkey and creates a wider strategic triangle. The Gulf Cooperation Council also has an attack-on-one principle, supported by a Peninsula Shield Force, a Unified Military Command and joint planning, yet these have not displaced reliance on outside guarantors.[17] NATO offers only a limited analogy, since Article 5 leaves each ally to take the action it deems necessary while resting on mature political and military institutions.[18] The Makkah pact shares that declaratory logic but has far less developed machinery.

It is also fundamentally different from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), a 57-member body with a broad diplomatic, political, economic, humanitarian and cultural agenda whose charter emphasizes sovereignty, peaceful settlement and cooperation rather

"A mutual-defense pact now binds Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan, declaring that an attack on one is an attack on all."

than an automatic military guarantee among all members.[19] The Makkah pact, by contrast, is a three-state defense arrangement with an explicit mutual-defense clause. It could complement OIC diplomacy as a narrower mechanism among willing states, but it is neither institutionally nor politically a replacement for it.

Geopolitically, the pact is best understood as strategic hedging and regional security autonomy rather than a break with the United States. Saudi Arabia retains its defense relationship with Washington, Turkey remains in NATO, and Pakistan continues its security dialogue with the United States.[20] All three gain options when American priorities appear uncertain, which may increase bargaining leverage and shift responsibility toward regional powers. President Donald Trump publicly welcomed the agreement on 16 August, suggesting that regional autonomy and partnership with Washington can coexist.[21]

The agreement should not automatically be read as directed against Iran or Israel. Members describe it as defensive, and Tehran has so far responded without alarm.[22] Israel's formal position remains unclear, since the prime minister's office declined to comment.[23] Israeli planners may view closer coordination among three significant states with concern, yet the members differ in their relations with Iran, Israel, Syria and the Gulf, which constrains assumptions of a unified front.

Collective defense can raise the cost of aggression, but it also carries escalation and entrapment risks while activation rules remain ambiguous. Recently, after Houthi attacks injured more than seventy people in southern Saudi Arabia, Defense Minister Khawaja Asif said aggression against one member was aggression against all, and that the agreement would become operational if the Yemen conflict spilled over.[24] Two days later, Pakistan's Foreign Office described the pact as defensive and said no military response was under discussion.[25] The distance between the two suggests consultation and political judgement may weigh as much as treaty language.

Expansion presents a similar trade-off. Additional Muslim-majority members could add capability and legitimacy, but also divergent threat perceptions and rivalries. Islamic solidarity, military alliance, collective

security and defense cooperation are not interchangeable, and the Muslim-majority world is not a single strategic bloc. Islamabad has said expansion is not currently under discussion and that the three states must first consolidate.[26]

While the Makkah Joint Defense Agreement may be important, it is not yet a fully developed regional alliance. Its mutual-defense clause, political and defense committee and planned secretariat give it institutional substance. Credibility will depend on defining armed attack, allocating responsibilities, planning operations and managing disagreements. Its lasting significance will rest less on the symbolism of Mecca than on whether the three states convert a shared promise into interoperable capabilities and predictable decision-making without turning deterrence into escalation.

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Planetary Change and the New Geopolitics of the Anthropocene



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Abstract: *This article, based on a comparative study of the glacier floods in Nepal 2017 and the earthquake in Venezuela 2026, contends that now, rather than nature, the outcome of a disaster is dependent on the governance and institutions at play. Climate change is transforming the relationship between migration, energy security and diplomacy, making environment-related crises issues of justice and global responsibility, not just emergency response.*

For much of human history, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and droughts were understood as powerful forces of nature that existed beyond human control. We could prepare for these calamities and attempt to recover from their consequences, but their occurrence was largely considered independent of human actions. However, when an earthquake, flood or hurricane strikes, the immediate images are often of collapsed buildings, rescue operations, and humanitarian suffering. Yet the consequences are rarely determined by geological forces alone. The same natural hazard can produce very different outcomes depending on governance capacity, institutional preparedness, public trust, and economic resilience. In the Anthropocene[1], an era in which human activities have become a major force shaping the planet, the impact of disasters increasingly reflects political choices as much as natural conditions. Whether or not it represents a formally recognized geological age, one reality is increasingly clear: humans are part of an interconnected global system, and the consequences of our actions on the Earth have become impossible to ignore.

This can be observed in the primary cause of earthquakes that is scientifically said that it is driven by tectonic movements of plate, while emerging research suggests that climate-related processes, including glacier retreat, changing water pressure, and alterations in the Earth's surface conditions, can influence seismic activity in certain regions[2]. This should not be interpreted as an assertion that earthquakes are directly linked to environmental change. Though the evolving relationship between climate and geology demonstrates that environmental crises can no longer be examined within isolated scientific boundaries; they increasingly intersect with questions of governance, security, and geopolitics.

Climate change now exerts considerable influence over migration, resource security, economic stability, and international cooperation. With this the unequal geography of vulnerability has transformed climate change into a major issue of global diplomacy, where adaptation, climate finance, and technological access have become central concerns. This is where the significance of the Anthropocene becomes more visible, however the scale of contemporary human activity has altered the relationship between societies and nature.

The challenge today is not only understanding how the planet influences human affairs, but also how human decisions are reshaping the conditions of life on Earth.

Nepal's flash flood offers a further reminder that the issue of climate change is no longer a talking point for climate change or environmental policy, but it is now also a geopolitical one. The flash floods in Nepal have once again highlighted the effect of the fragile ecosystem and the changing glaciers in the mountain areas due to global warming. These geological processes have always had a strong influence on the formation of the Himalayas, but the new challenges of the Anthropocene, as climate stressors begin to take their toll, are changing the relationship between the landscape and human societies. The impact of glacier retreat, and increasingly erratic weather conditions, is not limited to the national level and is likely to have an impact on water resources, hydropower development, infrastructure and regional connectivity in South Asia[3].

The call for climate compensation[4] when climate-related disasters strike in Nepal is a watershed moment in global climate politics. In vulnerable countries, environmental catastrophes are no longer moments to be dealt with in a state of emergency, but are emerging as a subject of the diplomatic discourse on climate justice, adaptation and responsibility. It is not only a matter of black and white, but one of understanding the ramifications of a connected world when the impact of change on Earth is not shared equally. The Himalayas are, when considered in this way, yet another characteristic of the Anthropocene: the environmental changes that take place in one region can impact political agendas, economic policies and international relationships in another.

When two powerful earthquakes struck Venezuela in 2026, the event was initially understood through the language of geology: tectonic movement, seismic intensity, and physical disruption. Yet its significance extended beyond the movement of the Earth's crust. Venezuela's position as a major energy-producing country places environmental challenges within a broader context of resource politics, regional relations, and global economic interests. Environmental events in strategically important regions increasingly intersect with questions of energy security, resilience, and international cooperation.[5]Thus, an earthquake or indeed any significant disruption in the environment should not be viewed as merely a geological event, but take place within an intricate web of energy and environmental interests, regional dynamics and global interdependence

It is also unfolding across that the planet has not occurred only through changes in climate and natural systems; it has also been shaped by the expansion of human technological capabilities, creating both unprecedented opportunities and new environmental pressures. For instance, industrial technologies enabled large scale resource extraction and fossil fuel consumption, while modern technological systems have increased demand for energy and critical minerals. The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure has also raised new questions about energy consumption and environmental costs.

> *"Whether a disaster becomes a catastrophe now depends less on nature and more on governance, institutions, and political choices."*

Technology is therefore not merely a manifestation of human capability that has made life more efficient; it has also become part of the broader processes driving planetary transformation. While it offers solutions to environmental challenges, it simultaneously shapes the scale and nature of those challenges.

The relationship between earthquakes, climate change, and geopolitics reflects a reality more complex than any single explanation. Environmental challenges cannot be understood only as the result of human activity, nor can they be viewed simply as unavoidable forces of nature. The Anthropocene provides an important lens for understanding how human actions have become connected with planetary systems, but it should not become an argument of blame. The challenge is to recognize how development choices, technological advancement, resource competition, and political decisions shape humanity's relationship with the planet. The future of global politics will depend not only on understanding environmental change but also on the ability of societies to cooperate, adapt, and build resilience. The planet's changing conditions are not simply a story of human success or failure; they reflect the choices societies make in balancing development, innovation, and environmental responsibility.

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Zambia's Mineral Dilemma: Global Demand, Domestic Expectations



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Abstract: *Zambia is counting on the demand for critical minerals and plans for a copper production increase to three times by 2031, appealing to foreign investors to process and value-add locally. However, most Zambia citizens still believe the economy is deteriorating, and increasing prices at home will determine the success of the Government, rather than the volume of exports.*

Imagine a country rich in minerals that are essential to the global economy, yet still struggling to turn those resources into broad national prosperity. This is the challenge facing Zambia. Copper, cobalt, lithium, nickel, graphite, and rare earth elements are increasingly described as critical minerals because they are essential for electric vehicles, renewable-energy systems, electricity networks, and modern technologies. As geopolitical competition intensifies, access to these minerals has become a strategic concern for China, the United States, the European Union, and other major economies.

For African countries, this competition creates both opportunity and risk. The continent possesses many of the minerals required for the global energy transition, but much of its mineral wealth has historically been exported in raw or lightly processed form. Limited infrastructure, technology, financing, and industrial capacity have often prevented African states from capturing more value from extraction. Zambia illustrates this problem clearly. It is one of Africa's major copper producers, but its long mining history has not always produced the level of economic transformation expected from such resource wealth.

Copper has shaped Zambia's economy since the colonial period. Large-scale mining in the Copperbelt encouraged the construction of railways, towns, and industrial infrastructure, and copper remained the country's most important export after independence in 1964. President Kenneth Kaunda's government believed that political independence should be accompanied by greater economic control over natural resources. The 1969 Matero Reforms increased state ownership in mining, and the major state-controlled operations were later consolidated into Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) in 1982. The goal was to ensure that mining revenue supported employment, infrastructure, and social services.[1]

However, dependence on copper also exposed Zambia to global price shocks. Falling copper prices after the mid-1970s, together with declining production, debt, outdated technology, and insufficient investment, weakened the state-led model. By the 1990s, economic crisis and pressure from international financial institutions pushed Zambia toward liberalisation.

"Zambia is racing to triple its copper output by 2031, but most citizens still say the economy is moving in the wrong direction."

Privatisation of ZCCM began in 1996 and was largely completed by 2000. Foreign investors brought capital and technology that helped revive production, but privatisation also created debate over foreign ownership, employment, and whether Zambia was receiving a fair share of the value produced by its minerals.[2]

That unresolved question remains at the centre of Zambia's mineral politics today. Under President Hakainde Hichilema, first elected in 2021, the government has tried to combine investor-friendly policies with greater domestic participation and value addition. His United Party for National Development (UPND) pledged to improve mining governance, expand the copper value chain, and increase the economic benefits Zambia receives from its mineral resources. During his first term, the government focused on restoring investor confidence, expanding production, and attracting new investment into mining.[3]

Hichilema was re-elected in August 2026 and began a second five-year term in September. His re-election gives the government political continuity at a moment when Zambia's mineral resources are becoming more strategically important.[4] Yet the second term also begins with pressure to demonstrate that investment and mining growth can improve everyday life. In 2024, a survey found that 66 percent of Zambians believed the country was moving in the wrong direction, while 73 percent described national economic conditions as fairly bad or very bad. The rising cost of living was the issue citizens most wanted the government to address.[5]

This dissatisfaction matters for Zambia's critical-minerals strategy. The government may succeed in attracting foreign capital and increasing copper exports, but citizens are likely to judge that success through jobs, prices, income, electricity access, and public services. The political challenge for Hichilema is therefore not simply to expand the mining sector, but to show that Zambia's growing importance in global mineral supply chains can generate visible domestic benefits. If mineral-sector growth does not improve living standards, the gap between national economic ambitions and public expectations could widen.

Zambia's National Critical Minerals Strategy 2024–2028 is designed to address part of this problem. It identifies 11 strategically important minerals: copper, cobalt, lithium, nickel, graphite, manganese, columbite-tantalite, tin, uranium, sugilite, and rare earth elements. Its priorities include better geological mapping, stronger government-private-sector partnerships, beneficiation and value addition, and research and development.[6] The strategy shows that Zambia does not want to remain simply a supplier of raw minerals. It wants to participate more fully in the value chain.

Value addition is especially important. Processing and refining minerals domestically could create jobs, develop technical skills, strengthen manufacturing, increase government revenue, and allow Zambia to retain a larger share of the economic value generated from its resources. This is also why the government has set a target of increasing annual copper production from roughly 800,000 tonnes to three million tonnes by 2031. The production strategy is intended to stimulate exploration, mining, processing, and the supply of mining-related goods and services.[7]

However, increasing production alone will not guarantee transformation. Zambia could produce far more copper while continuing to export much of its economic value abroad. The country still faces electricity shortages, infrastructure constraints, limited processing capacity, shortages of specialised skills, and the high cost of financing major mining projects. Large-scale mining also requires foreign capital and technology, creating a difficult balance between attracting multinational investors and retaining greater national control over the benefits of extraction.

Geopolitics gives Zambia additional bargaining power. China has long been an important investor in Zambian mining and infrastructure, while Western countries are increasingly interested in alternative sources of critical minerals. Zambia has generally avoided presenting this as a simple choice between China and the West. Instead, it can use competition among external partners to seek investment, technology, infrastructure, and market access. Critical minerals therefore function not only as commodities but also as instruments of economic diplomacy.

The central question is whether Zambia can turn this geopolitical advantage into domestic economic value. Its history shows the limitations of both heavy state control and extensive dependence on foreign investors. Hichilema's second term therefore faces a more demanding test than simply raising production. The government must connect mining growth with local processing, employment, industrial development, and improved living standards.

Zambia's fight for value is ultimately taking place on two fronts. Internationally, it must negotiate with powerful governments and multinational companies that want secure access to strategic minerals. Domestically,

it must convince citizens that the mineral boom can improve their lives. If Zambia can retain more value through processing, skills, local industries, and stronger institutions, critical minerals could become a foundation for long-term economic transformation. If it cannot, the country risks repeating an old pattern in a new global economy: exporting valuable resources while much of the wealth created from them is captured elsewhere.

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Houthi Escalation in Yemen: The Growing Threat to Shipping Through Bab el-Mandeb



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Abstract: *In the past two years, since July 2026, Houthis attacks including a fatal one on the cargo ship Tihamah have reduced traffic through Bab el-Mandeb by about half. The rerouting around Africa will be expensive and not magically solve the issue, and in addition, Iran is able to exert an indirect influence on the Houthis, as a crisis around the Huways also has the potential to become a broader issue of stability in the Gulf, which requires a political and not military solution.*

The world had already witnessed the Houthi forces demonstrating their ability to threaten international shipping after the Gaza catastrophe began in October 2023. Their series of attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea forced major shipping companies to divert vessels around the Cape of Good Hope, while the United States and the United Kingdom launched military strikes against Houthi positions within an "international maritime security operation". Although Houthi maritime activity was seen as relatively limited earlier in 2026, the threat still remains visible. The situation transformed sharply in July, when the Houthis announced a maritime embargo against Saudi-linked shipping on July 20. Then claimed attacks on Saudi oil tankers two days later and subsequently expanded their threats to other Saudi-associated vessels. More significantly, Reuters reported on July 29 that the group was considering imposing fees on commercial vessels passing through the southern Red Sea. This suggests a shift from selective attacks towards an attempt to exercise coercive control over maritime traffic. Additionally, the reported involvement of Iran further connects the maritime crisis with the wider Iran–US confrontation.[1]

The latest escalation is particularly intimidating because both the objectives and the geographical landscapes of the threat have been broadened substantially. Earlier attacks were largely highlighted as responses to the Gaza destruction and directed at Israeli-linked vessels. In July 2026, however, Saudi-associated and energy-related shipping also came under threat, directly implicating the southern Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb region.[2] While the consequences are already visible: shipping companies are redirecting vessels, and war-risk insurance costs have remarkably been risen. On August 12, an Egyptian-owned cargo vessel *Tihamah* was attacked near Bab el-Mandeb, killing four crew members and two rescuers and injuring ten others. Subsequently, traffic through the Bab el-Mandeb and Red Sea had already fallen by more than 50 percent from earlier levels and declined further after the July blockade. Where it's firmly observed that A chokepoint does not have to be physically closed to become strategically dysfunctional. The perception of insecu-

rity alone can push commercial operators to avoid the route, disrupting a huge chunk of global commerce.[3]

Bab el-Mandeb is a narrow maritime passage between Yemen and the Horn of Africa, connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean. At its northern end, the Red Sea joins the Suez Canal, creating a continuous maritime corridor linking the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean and Europe. This makes Bab el-Mandeb a classic maritime chokepoint: a relatively narrow passage through which

"Houthi attacks have cut ship traffic through Bab el-Mandeb by nearly half, turning a narrow strait into a global economic flashpoint."

substantial international shipping must pass, where insecurity can have consequences far beyond its immediate geography. Its importance is particularly visible in the flow of energy. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, 8.1 million barrels per day of crude oil and petroleum liquids passed through Bab el-Mandeb in the second quarter of 2026, compared with 4.1 million barrels per day in 2024. The crisis has therefore emphasized not the disappearance of its strategic importance, but how quickly vital flows can be displaced when the route becomes risky.[4]

Whereas the issue is that avoiding Bab el-Mandeb does not provide an equivalent alternative. Although ships can avail the scope to bypass Africa through the Cape of Good Hope, longer voyages will encounter higher fuel consumption, increased crew and operational costs, greater insurance expenses, and potentially higher freight rates. Moreover, Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal form parts of the same maritime system, where insecurity at the southern entrance can undermine the expediency of the entire Red Sea and Suez route even if the canal itself remains operational. This threat is furthermore considered to be multidimensional. U.S. maritime authorities identify risks ranging from UAVs, unmanned surface and underwater vehicles, and ballistic and cruise missiles to small-arms fire, explosive boats, and illegal boardings or seizures. Thus, the challenge doesn't turn out to be simply physical closure; it is the consequence of sustained insecurity that makes a strategically important commercial passage increasingly difficult and costly to navigate.[5]

The first economic consequence of this maritime insecurity is the route diversion of ships. When ships even avoid Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea channel, they have the option to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, but this alternative is considerably longer and more expensive. During the previous Red Sea crisis, a tanker voyage from the Persian Gulf to the Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp hub took about 19 days through Suez, compared with nearly 35 days via the Cape. Longer voyages increase fuel consumption, crew and operating costs alongside insurance expenses and delivery times, which substantially reduces the vessel utilisation. The 2026 experience already demonstrates how rapidly commercial behaviour changes: after the Houthis' July maritime blockade against Saudi Arabia, Bab el-Mandeb traffic dropped by around 24%, while mainstream tanker traffic particularly declined with far-reaching effects. By mid-August, overall traffic remained around 15% below the pre-blockade average, with tanker traffic approximately 38–40% lower. The market accordingly does not wait for a complete blockade, where it is widely perceived that this range of risks alone can alter regular shipping patterns.[6]

These consequences spread beyond shipping into energy security and consumer prices. Bab el-Mandeb is considered to be a key corridor for crude oil, petroleum products, and LNG. Record shows, in the second quarter of 2026, around 8.1 million barrels per day of crude oil and petroleum liquids passed through the strait, partly because Saudi Arabia rerouted more oil towards its Red Sea port of Yanbu during disruption elsewhere.[7] This creates a strategic paradox: the more precarious the Strait of Hormuz becomes, the more important Bab el-Mandeb turns out to be as an alternative. Redirection cannot entirely replace these corridors because alternatives are longer, costlier along with having the capacity-constraints. Higher maritime risk can therefore translate into higher amounts of losses, insurance, and import costs, eventually affecting businesses and consumers. As a result, Import-dependent developing economies are particularly vulnerable because they have fewer substitutes to absorb such shocks.[8]

Bab el-Mandeb has evolved from a maritime security concern into an instrument of regional power politics. Although the Houthis are well-aligned with Iran, they hold their own political and military objectives in Yemen. Their maritime campaign therefore has both a local dimension involving Yemen and Saudi Arabia and a wider strategic aspect engaging Iran, the United States and Israel. The July 2026 blockade of Saudi-linked shipping made this especially clear, as the Houthis exercised their position near the Red Sea to apply pressure while the United States and Iran were already in proxy confrontation.[9] While Iran does not directly control Bab el-Mandeb, its relationship with the Houthis provides Tehran a form of indirect strategic leverage over this significant maritime corridor. The likelihood of simultaneous disturbance at Bab el-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz makes the threat even more severe,

potentially transforming a regional conflict into a global strategic challenge.[10] At its fundamental point, this also raises a question of freedom of navigation: whether a non-state armed group can really determine which ships, companies, or national affiliations will safely be able to use an important international waterway.[11]

Protecting navigation hence requires something more than military retaliation. Multinational maritime surveillance, intelligence-sharing, early warning, naval coordination and appropriate protection for commercial vessels can reinforce existing security efforts. But military deterrence alone can produce a cycle of attack, retaliation and further escalation. A strong response must also address the political incentives behind the crisis through a broader regional framework involving Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and other Red Sea states. The central principle should be clear: commercial shipping should not become a bargaining chip or objective of warfare in any regional conflicts.

Endnotes

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