

## The West's Tightrope: Balancing diplomacy and power in the Red Sea

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**Global attention continues to focus on the Red Sea region where the conflict is getting worse. Having started with a series of calculated moves by regional powers, it is threatening to develop into a terrible conflict with**



**potentially far-reaching consequences. Military clashes continue to increase, geopolitical tensions are rising and a humanitarian crisis is likely. The problem is exacerbated by the involvement of multiple actors, each with their own agendas, leading to a tangled and multifaceted battle scenario.**

### **Geopolitical catalysts: diverting attention from Ukraine**

The involvement and differing priorities of Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Israel are making the conflict especially complicated. Iran, which has all its strategic positions in the area, is accused of working closely with Russia. There are claims that Iran and Russia have acted in concert, using the conflict to alter power dynamics in the region and prevent Saudi Arabia and Israel forming a peace agreement. Saudi Arabia faces the predicament of trying to juggle the demands of regional leadership while maintaining its own stability. Israel has its own concerns about security and has been involved in regular covert and overt operations in the region, adding further to the tension. Russia's involvement, while not as obvious, remains significant. On the surface, it seems that Russia is exploiting the conflict to divert attention away from Ukraine so that it can wield further power and influence elsewhere on the global stage.

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## **Hezbollah's role and regional consequences**

Hezbollah's role in the rising conflict in the region has sparked scrutiny and concern. Its aggressive tactics, such as launching rockets and running incursions into neighbouring territories, have angered regional powers. There is a belief that Hezbollah, with support from Iran, is aiming to assert dominance and reshape the political landscape in favour of its allies. However, these acts carry significant consequences. They heighten the risk for a broader regional conflict that could undermine Lebanon's sovereignty and stability. Many analysts criticise Hezbollah's strategy of conducting military operations in civilian-populated areas, seeing it as endangering lives unnecessarily and disregarding the rules of international warfare.

## **The Maronite church and Christian parties: voices of opposition**

Religious leaders, including those from the Maronite Church and Christian parties in Lebanon, have expressed strong disapproval of Hezbollah. They have criticised the group for putting civilian lives in danger – especially in areas populated by Christians – and have accused Hezbollah of using innocent religious and ethnic peoples as human shields. These firm stances reveal growing civil unrest within Lebanese society and its increasing dissatisfaction with Hezbollah's tactics. The implications for Lebanon's internal stability could extend further – the situation is fuelling sectarian division and also weakening the government's ability to protect and control its own citizens.

## **Economic implications: the shift in maritime routes**

Repercussions can also be felt in maritime trade. The instability in the region has led to container companies rerouting their ships around Africa instead of using the Suez Canal. While this alternative route is safer, it comes with huge additional costs and longer transit times, affecting supply chains and trade logistics. The decrease in traffic through the Suez Canal has taken its toll on Egypt which relies heavily on canal revenues.

## **International response and the role of the West**

Careful diplomatic measures are crucial, especially for the West, which faces a balancing act. On the one hand, it aims to prevent escalation and safeguard civilian lives; and on the other, it must strive to find compromises within the complex web of alliances and conflicts in the region. Diplomatic approaches might involve negotiating ceasefires, imposing sanctions or facilitating dialogue between conflicting countries. The success of these efforts will depend entirely on the cooperation of regional powers and the international community.

Alternatively, the West might consider military intervention, deploying naval forces to secure maritime traffic routes while providing military support where required. These direct actions carry inherent risks but, if handled carefully, could contribute to stabilising the region.

## **Conclusion: navigating a way forward**

The escalating conflict in the Red Sea holds significant implications for global geopolitics, and the way the West responds will be pivotal. International alliances and rivalries are being reshaped – not only in the Middle East, but on the international stage as well. This is already evident in the way that Russia, China and Iran are acting in concert and battling with the US head on.

Attention is now firmly on the West and its reaction – or lack of – to these conflicts and escalating tensions. Effective engagement could restore the West's reputation as peacemaker. Conversely, mishandling the situation would weaken its voice and empower rivals like Russia and China. Whichever way this conflict is resolved, it is likely to establish precedents for future geopolitical scenarios, making the outcome a bounty for all those involved.

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