

Palestinian-Israeli Crisis to Impact North Africa, with Global Consequences

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Global Research, November 13, 2023

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence, Law and Justice](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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*Iranian-backed Houthi rebels claim to have targeted Israel with ballistic missiles over the Red Sea, causing Tel Aviv to respond last week by deploying missile boats. These recent developments may once again place the region under the spotlight. The issue of the Palestinian conflict in fact has long been a divisive matter in the wider African continent, and within the African Union (AU), as the [South African condemnation](#) of what it described as the Israeli "Apartheid" last year clearly showed. **The dramatic situation that is unfolding in Palestine today is having massive repercussions globally, and the North of Africa, the so-called Horn of Africa, especially, can be particularly affected by it.** To better understand this, one needs to go back in time about three years, though.*

Since the 2020 US-brokered [Abraham Accords](#), and the subsequent normalization agreements with Israel signed by states such as the [United Arab Emirates](#) (UAE), tensions over the issue have arisen in the continent, and particularly in North Africa. The timing of the Abraham Accords is interesting: the Horn of Africa has been increasingly dominated by rising Gulf states, as Alex de Waal, a World Peace Foundation's executive director, wrote in a 2019 [paper](#). The 2020 Israel-UAE deal in particular, and notably their [joint naval drill](#) in November 2021, raised some eyebrows. Among other reasons for that, the UAE can be described as a rising military regional power, with a presence in Eritrea and Somalia, for instance, and also having, together with Tel Aviv, been [occupying Yemen's Socotra Island](#).

Far from being merely a matter of normalizing relations with the Jewish state, these agreements with Tel Aviv in fact have opened the door to security and military cooperation, thus increasing [Israel's presence in Africa](#) – a presence which includes [private companies with close ties with the state](#) such as the NSO Group, but also the Shin Bet (Israel's Security Agency), the Mossad and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) themselves. Such has been a key part of Netanyahu's diplomacy – often described by critics as "buying friends by selling

weapons” or sometimes as [“spyware diplomacy”](#) – for the last six years at least.

For one thing, **one quarter of the Jewish states’s maritime trade goes through the port of Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba**. Alex de Waal describes the Red Sea as “Israel’s back door”, the coastal countries there (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen Eritrea, and Djibouti) all being, in Tel Aviv’s perspective, “pieces in the jigsaw of its extended security frontier.” As Waal reminds us, about 10 percent of the global maritime trade is carried through the straits between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Besides its concerns regarding the Red Sea’s security, Tel Aviv’s foreign policy has also focused on gaining African support pertaining to votes at international bodies, Palesting obviously being a hot topic.

Thus far, such a strategy had been gaining Israel new allies, for sure, but, at the same time, fueling domestic tensions within these very states – and, more critically, inter-state frictions, as well. Morocco, for instance, is another point of contention: in a kind of “quid pro quo” over Morocco’s own normalization deal with its Israeli ally, former US President [Donald Trump recognized Moroccan claims](#) over the disputed territory of Western Sahara, controlled by Algerian-backed rebels, thus increasing the heat in what already was a boiling pan. Already in December 2020, Algeria’s **then Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad** denounced the Israel-Morocco deal in strong language, describing the agreement as a “dirty alliance” through which the “Zionist entity” (in his word) tried to get closer to Algerian borders.

When it comes to state officials in the region, anti-Israel speech is fueled by security concerns, from the perspective of some of these states such as Algeria, but such feelings have frequently found an echo in popular opinion whenever Tel Aviv bombs civilians in Palestine, something which happens, with varying intensity, quite often. The next year, in May 2021, Israeli bombing of residential buildings in Gaza, for example, [sparked a humanitarian crisis and pro-Palestine protests](#), further polarizing the Middle East – again with an impact in the Horn of Africa.

The ongoing Israeli military campaign which started in October, after the Hamas attacks, is, one could say, unprecedented in its scale – and its diplomatic and geopolitical consequences will probably be so as well. Washington has long treated its Israeli ally as a kind of exception to international law and this seems to be backfiring. As I wrote, [Turkish-Israeli ties](#) in all likelihood are going back to the freezer – not to mention the rapprochement with Saudi Arabia.

All of this is very bad news for the Jewish state, considering all its strategic interests in the Red Sea and in the Horn of Africa, a region troubled by the complex situations unfolding [in Sudan](#) – not to mention a number of [hydropolitical conflicts](#). As the aforementioned Alex de Waal reminds us, anti-Israeli feelings fueled by indignation over the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza plus Hama’s boldness will encourage Islamists groups such as Somalia’s al-Shabaab – not to mention the Houthi movement.

In addition, Israel and Turkey already compete for influence in North Africa, as the former [seeks to connect the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea](#) as part of its geostrategic oil and gas interests, and with both countries’ relations [severely damaged](#) as of now (over Gaza), the area may increasingly become yet another point of contention.

Moreover, as I [wrote](#) in January, [post-Nord Stream](#) Europe has been in quest for energy

alternatives to Russian gas, and both Algeria and Morocco have been competing for European markets, however it would be unrealistic to expect a robust energy supply from North Africa pipelines, considering the region's ongoing tensions. This is particularly true now, as Middle Eastern stormy waves reach the Horn of Africa and beyond – thus the European continent's [industrial](#), economic and [energy](#) crises remain deadlocked – and so do emerging North African power aspirations towards becoming key energy providers, as the current Middle-Eastern conflict risks spilling across the Red Sea.

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This article was originally published on [InfoBrics](#).

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