

MARITIME INSECURITY: LESSONS FROM THREE GLOBAL FLASHPOINTS

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In national and larger regional domains the concept of ‘maritime security’ has attracted considerable attention in the last twenty years. The scholarly and practitioner literatures are overflowing with expositions of maritime security with many remarking that national strategic plans have yet to catch on, lamenting the absence of this concept in key defence and national security documents. In 2024 a monograph-length study *Understanding Maritime Security* by Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds, both of whom have been major contributors to this field of research for two decades.¹ The following year in Australia a group of maritime security scholars, retired officers, and academics launched an initiative to draft a maritime security strategy for Australia. A useful way to complement this burgeoning literature is to consider the inverse; a situation where the normal rules and

procedures of good order at sea have broken down. This has been conceptualised, mostly clearly by Christian Bueger, as ‘maritime insecurity’. Defining and specifying what ‘maritime insecurity’ looks like is particularly useful in identifying threats and uncovering the conditions where insecurity can thrive. We plan to write two separate articles exploring ‘maritime insecurity’. This first article will explore three case studies outlining varying states of ‘maritime insecurity’ drawing some general principles from these situations. In the second planned article, to be published later this year, we will apply that general framework to the Indo-Pacific region to see if we can characterise and identify particular flashpoints or areas of concern for maritime insecurity.

Maritime insecurity is a threat to the stability of shipping and fishing, which in

¹ Christian Bueger & Timothy Edmunds,

some regions has a long historical tradition dating back many centuries. Throughout the time, it shows “no sign of abating, and every sign of becoming less discriminate and more bloody.”² There are different ways to cause maritime insecurity. “Besides guerrillas and terrorists, attacks have been carried out by modern-day pirates, ordinary criminals, fanatic environmentalists, mutinous crews, hostile workers, and foreign agents. The spectrum of actions is equally broad: ships hijacked, destroyed by mines and bombs, attacks with bazookas, sunk under mysterious circumstances; cargos removed; crews taken hostage; extortion plots against ocean liners and offshore platforms; raids on port facilities; attempts to board oil rigs; sabotage at shipyards and terminal facilities; even a plot to steal a nuclear submarine.”³ These threats affect the global environment, disrupt supply chains and damage critical infrastructure and, as a result, national economies.

² Bonnie Cordes and Bruce Hoffman, “*Trends in International Terrorism, 1982 and 1983*,” RAND: Santa Monica, (1984), p Vii. Accessed on 1 Sep 2025 at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R3183.html#document-details>.

The areas we will explore are the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, disrupted by the Yemen-based Houthis, and the area south along the Somalian coast, affected by Somali pirates. This interconnected region from the Red Sea through the Man-el-Dab Strait to the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea, then south along the Somalian coast has historically seen incidences of maritime insecurity which have waxed and waned over time. Additionally, we will look at the Black Sea area affected by the Ukraine-Russia War. Given the constraints of space it is not possible to give a fulsome outline of these complex conflicts but we can focus on key characteristics and abstract some possible generalised experiences.

1. HOUTHIS AND THE RED SEA CRISIS

The seeds of the Red Sea maritime crisis were sown on land. A secessionist movement fuelled by religious extremism, the Houthis have grown from an insurgent

³ Elisabeth Braw, “The Houthis Have Declared War on the Environment: The green movement must speak out about pollution from Red Sea maritime terrorism, which will devastate livelihoods and the oceans.” In *Foreign Policy*, 18 March 2024. Accessed on <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/18/houthis-environment-rubymar-maritime-terrorism-pollution/>.

movement against the Yemeni Government in the early 2000s, to become a large more cohesive governing and military force in their own right occupying a large portion of south western Yemen. Despite the religious claims of some militants, their aim appears to be gaining power and controlling the region. The Houthis have links with Hezbollah in Lebanon and more recently with the Iranian regime thus providing regional support for their cause with access to ideological inspiration, funding, and advanced weaponry. As Houthi territory, resources, and ambition grew the possibility of interference with passing maritime trade became more likely especially given the proximity of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, located 1,400 miles south of the Suez Canal, which is the third most important shipping lane in the world.

It was only after establishing some level of control over land that the Houthis extended their ambition into the maritime domain. The start of the Israel-Hamas

conflict on 7th October 2023 brought a new kind of conflict to prominence, with the Houthi rebels attacking commercial ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden more effectively.⁴ From bases in Southern Yemen, the Houthis possess missile, drone, and small boat capabilities. They have also more recently used SSVs. In March 2024, the *Rubymar* was the first vessel sunk since the Houthis renewed their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea in November, 2023. The cargo ship with 21,000 metric tons of ammonium phosphate sulphate fertiliser threatens the area with ecological disaster.⁵ Apart from its cargo, fuel leaking from the ship can have a potentially deleterious impact on local marine life as well as threaten livelihoods in the fishing and other marine industries.⁶ Furthermore, according to US officials and the HGC Global Communications, the anchor of the sunk *Rubymar* cut three to four undersea communication cables, which in turn affected up to 25% of data traffic between Asia and Europe.⁷ The case of the sinking

⁴ BBC, "Who are the Houthis and why is the US targeting them?" 26 March 2025. Accessed on <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67614911>.

⁵ Braw, "The Houthis Have Declared War on the Environment."

⁶ Braw, "The Houthis Have Declared War on the Environment."

⁷ Kersten Knipp and Stuart Braun, "Houthi attacks in the Red Sea threaten lives and environment." In Deutsche Welle News on March 7, 2024. Accessed on

of the *Rubymar* exemplifies the way in which a particular maritime insecurity (attacks by terrorists groups) can lead to other issues in the maritime domain including environmental damage, loss of fisheries stock, economic decline for coastal communities, and damage to undersea infrastructure.

The overall strategic goal of the Houthis is to create a climate of uncertainty in the Red Sea; to use the actions as a way to publicise their politics and destabilise global trade. This outcome has potential flow-on effects in global shipping, maritime insurance, and supply chain costs. A scholar with the Center for Anticipatory Intelligence in the US argued that Yemeni rebels categorising themselves as Ansar Allah are not just another Iranian proxy group responding to the ongoing conflict in Gaza. They are Yemeni nationalists with deep domestic and regional interests that are distinct from current events in Gaza.⁸

<https://www.dw.com/en/houthi-attacks-in-the-red-sea-threaten-lives-and-environment/a-68463083>.

⁸ Jonah Carlson, "Houthi Motivations Driving the Red Sea Crisis: Understanding how Ansar Allah's strategic culture goes beyond Gaza and Iran," in *Journal of Advanced Military Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, (2024), Marine Corps University Press: Quantico, Virginia. Accessed on <https://www.usmcu.edu/Outreach/Marine-Corps-University-Press/MCU-Journal/JAMS-vol-15-no-2/Houthi-Motivations-Driving-the-Red-Sea-Crisis/>.

⁹ Carson, "Houthi Motivations."

For them, Ansar Allah is just a pretext for the attacks. This presumes that "the group is likely to continue its attacks against ships traversing shipping routes near the Middle East regardless of an outcome to the Gaza conflict."⁹

In July 2025 Houthis attacks on ships escalated. On 6 July 2025, the Houthis attacked a Liberian-flagged Greek-owned bulk carrier *Magic Seas*. It was first "engaged by multiple small vessels" that "opened fire with small arms and self-propelled grenades."¹⁰ The attack set the ship ablaze and caused it to take on water. All of the crew abandoned the ship and were rescued by a passing merchant vessel.¹¹ In response to the attack on *Magic Seas*, Israel struck the Yemeni ports of Hodeidah, Al Salif, and Ras Isa, as well as the Ras Katib power station.¹²

Later, on 9 July, Houthis attacked the Liberian-flagged bulk carrier *Eternity C*. The Yemeni rebels conducted an attack

¹⁰ "Crew abandons cargo ship in Red Sea after drone, grenade attack," *Al Jazeera News*, 9 July 2025.

Accessed on <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/6/gunmen-target-shipping-vessel-in-red-sea>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bridget Toomley, "Houthis resume deadly Red Sea shipping attacks," in *Long War Journal*, 7 July 2025.

Accessed on <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2025/07/houthi-resume-deadly-red-sea-shipping-attacks.php>.

using an unmanned boat and missiles. After their attack on a cargo ship in the Red Sea, six were rescued, 15 were missing, and four lost their lives.¹³ This action caused numerous casualties among seafarers when Houthi gunboats directed their fire at the ship's bridge.¹⁴ In response, Israel carried out an air strike on the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, on 28 Aug. As a result, the Iranian-backed Houthis' prime minister, Ahmed al-Rahawi, was killed along with several ministers.¹⁵

Almost 15% of global seaborne trade usually passes through the Red Sea.¹⁶ "More than thirty commercial vessels came under attack between November 2023 and January 2024, including container ships, bulk carriers, oil/chemical tankers, and crude oil tankers that were owned, managed, and operated by various international companies."¹⁷ After US and UK air strikes on Houthis' positions, and increased targeted attacks

by Houthis on the US and UK ships, the major shipping companies had to stop using the Red Sea.

The most vulnerable actor of the Red Sea crisis is the Shadow Fleet traffic. These ships had changed their AIS tracker and ship's name multiple times to avoid sanctions. At some point, they became a target for the rebels, since Houthis have attacked vessels based on outdated shipping registry information. In fact, their attacks have sparked closer scrutiny of the ships under attack.¹⁸

Overall speaking, the Red Sea crisis has created a maritime insecurity that continues to reshape global shipping patterns and supply chains. Thus, rerouting of vessels has triggered a cascade of economic consequences, among which are:

1) *Increased freight rates:* Spot rates for container shipping between Asia and

¹³ Al Jazeera, News, 9 July 2025. Accessed on <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/9/five-rescued-after-suspected-attack-by-yemens-houthis-on-red-sea-vessel>.

¹⁴ Noam Raydan and Farzin Nadimi, "Lethal Attacks Show Strengthened Houthi Control over Red Sea Transit," in *The Washington Institute* July 16, 2025. Accessed on <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/lethal-attacks-show-strengthened-houthi-control-over-red-sea-transit>.

¹⁵ ABC news, "Israeli air strike kills Houthi rebel prime minister Ahmed al-Rahawi in Yemen," 31 Aug 2025.

¹⁶ BBC

¹⁷ Noam Raydan and Farzin Nadimi "Tracking Maritime Attacks in the Middle East Since 2019," in *The Washington Institute* January 23, 2024. Accessed on <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/756ca769315d4b879ca7fdd6bd4a82be>.

¹⁸ Noam Raydan and Farzin Nadimi "Despite the Houthi Pledge to Limit Attacks, the Red Sea Remains Highly Volatile," in *The Washington Institute* January 27, 2025. Accessed on <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/despite-houthi-pledge-limit-attacks-red-sea-remains-highly-volatile>.

Europe have risen by over 40% since the crisis began.

2) *Insurance premiums*: War risk insurance for Red Sea transit has surged by 300-500%.

3) *Delayed deliveries*: Manufacturing and retail sectors face inventory challenges due to extended shipping times.

4) *Port congestion*: Alternative ports experience backlogs as traffic patterns shift;

5) *Fuel consumption*: Additional distance travelled has increased maritime fuel demand by approximately 8%.¹⁹

2. THE SOMALIAN COAST

There has always been uncertainty along the Somali coastline. Since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, most of Somalia has been in political unrest, and the country's economy collapsed.²⁰ As in the case of Yemen,

instability on land eventually led to maritime insecurity at sea. Unregulated illegal fishing in Somali waters by large factory ships affected the lives of fishermen. This generated anger in coastal fishing communities.²¹ Pirate gangs were able to recruit fishermen from these villages. The issues in Somalia have had a spillover effect into the Red Sea region.

It appeared that pirates can develop from small-scale opportunistic actors to professional organisations.²² Edward E. Lucas in his article "Somalia's "Pirate Cycle" explains those phases, saying,

"The increase in pirate activity off Somalia has not occurred in a steady linear progression, but instead has taken place in three separate phases. The first phase, which lasted from the 1990s until the mid-2000s, witnessed relatively low levels of pirate activity mainly concentrated in the Gulf of Aden. The second phase, which began in 2005, involved a much

¹⁹ John Zadeh, "Houthi Attacks and Eilat Port Shutdown: Global Shipping Disrupted," in *Discovery Alert*, July 19, 2025. Accessed on <https://discoveryalert.com.au/news/houthi-attacks-impact-2025-global-shipping/>.

²⁰ Edward E. Lucas, "Somalia's "Pirate Cycle": The Three Phases of Somali Piracy," in *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol 6, N 1, Article 8, Spring 2013. Accessed on

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1218&context=jss>.

²¹ Mohamed Gabobe, "'We're not pirates', say hijackers who seized Chinese ship off Somali coast," Published On 15 Jan 2025. Accessed on <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2025/1/15/were-not-pirates-say-hijackers-aboard-chinese-ship-off-somalia-coast>.

²² Lucas, "Somalia's "Pirate Cycle," 2013.

higher frequency of attacks carried out off Somalia's Indian Ocean coast by larger and more organized pirate groups. Since 2007, Somali pirates have again — and even more dramatically — increased both the number and range of their attacks. This most recent manifestation represents a third phase of Somali piracy. Although the number of successful attacks carried has declined since 2011, Somali pirates are still capable of hijacking large merchant vessels hundreds of miles offshore."²³

Another author notices that the piracy problem off the Coast of Somalia, which was a threat to shipping in 2010, has reappeared now, partly because of the crisis in the Red Sea and the actions of the Houthis. "Multiple factors have fuelled this rise. The frequency of anti-piracy patrols off Somalia has diminished, especially

after 2022, when the UN authorisation for foreign naval patrols lapsed. Resources have also shifted to countering the Houthis' threat off the Yemeni coast."²⁴ LaRocco supports this view by noticing that stability decline and uncertainty in a region lead to the old problems re-emerging. "Piracy off the coast of Somalia had been on the decline in recent years after peaking in 2011 when Somali pirates launched 212 attacks."²⁵ However, according to data from 2023, piracy is on the rise in key global shipping lanes.²⁶ In 2024, the world has seen "large, well-organised, and well-armed pirate groups hijacking skiffs and dhows to travel deeper into the Indian Ocean and target larger vessels."²⁷

The cost of piracy to the global economy is a steep one. It costs the global economy around \$18 billion annually.²⁸ It was calculated that in 2009, more than half the global piracy attacks were carried out by Somali pirates, and in 2010 alone,

²³ Lucas, "Somalia's "Pirate Cycle," 2013.

²⁴ Mark Overington, "Somali Piracy to Threaten Global Supply Chains in 2025." In *Solace Global*, January 2025. Accessed on <https://www.solaceglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Somali-Piracy-to-Threaten-Global-Supply-Chains-in-2025-Solace-Global-Risk.pdf>.

²⁵ LaRocco, "Somali pirates are back," 2024.

²⁶ Lori Ann LaRocco, "Somali pirates are back on the attack at a level not seen in years, adding to global shipping threats." In *State of Freight* on Feb 6 2024. Accessed on [https://www.cnb.com/2024/02/06/somali-](https://www.cnb.com/2024/02/06/somali-pirates-are-back-on-the-attack-at-a-level-not-seen-in-years.html#:~:text=Maritime%20security%20efforts&text=Citadels%20are%20a%20pre%2Ddetermined,boarding%20incidents%2C%22%20he%20said.)

[pirates-are-back-on-the-attack-at-a-level-not-seen-in-years.html#:~:text=Maritime%20security%20efforts&text=Citadels%20are%20a%20pre%2Ddetermined,boarding%20incidents%2C%22%20he%20said.](https://www.cnb.com/2024/02/06/somali-pirates-are-back-on-the-attack-at-a-level-not-seen-in-years.html#:~:text=Maritime%20security%20efforts&text=Citadels%20are%20a%20pre%2Ddetermined,boarding%20incidents%2C%22%20he%20said.)

²⁷ Overington, "Somali Piracy," 2025.

²⁸ 2013 World Bank Study, "Pirate Trails' Tracks Dirty Money Resulting From Piracy Off the Horn of Africa." In World Bank Group Press Release. Accessed on [https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/11/01/pirate-trails-tracks-dirty-money-resulting-from-piracy-off-the-horn-of-africa.](https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/11/01/pirate-trails-tracks-dirty-money-resulting-from-piracy-off-the-horn-of-africa)

approximately 790 sailors were taken hostage.²⁹ Almost all of the Somali piracy is carried out for ransom, and ransom payments to Somali pirates have risen to millions of dollars. According to UNODC reports, in 2011, pirates made some \$170 million in ransom money for hijacked vessels and their crews.”³⁰ Piracy causes a community impact. Attacks on merchant ships create uncertainty at sea. This affects fishing, since fishing is often a small business, with a base on coastal communities. Those communities are adversely impacted by uncertainty at sea and environmental impacts through oil spills and other pollution incidents.

To protect the shipping routes, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed seven resolutions targeting Somalia piracy between December 2010 and March 2022. These resolutions permitted foreign naval and air forces to enter and patrol Somali waters. Additionally, they authorised the European Union Naval Force Operation Atalanta to

use “all necessary means to repress piracy and armed robbery at sea.”³¹ These counter-piracy measures significantly suppressed pirates’ activity in a region. However, the resolutions expired in March 2022. This led to the surge of more organised and weaponised pirates’ activities in the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and the southern coastline along the east African coast towards Kenya and Tanzania.

These days, the affected countries are trying to organise their own resources to fight the pirates. Kenya, for example, is looking to strengthen its maritime security by partnering with neighbours, building its coast guard capacity, and setting up an information sharing centre to increase MDA. In other words, adjacent maritime states watch nearby developments with concern and will respond and make plans to head off the problem or indeed alleviate it should it already be affecting their waterways.³²

²⁹ 2013 World Bank Study.

³⁰ “India: 332 days at the mercy of Somali pirates - a survivor’s account,” UNODC, April 2012. Accessed on <https://www.unodc.org/southasia/frontpage/2012/April/At-the-mercy-of-somali-pirates.html>.

³¹ LaRocco, “Somali pirates are back,” 2024.

³² Ida Gathoni, “Implications of Piracy on the Kenya-Somalia Maritime Dispute.” In the *Influential*, Jan-Mar 2021. Accessed on <https://gloceps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Influential-Bulletin-paper-no-4.pdf>.

3. UKRAINE-RUSSIAN WAR

The Ukraine-Russian war is the biggest conflict in Europe since World War II. Along with the cost of lives and the refugee crisis, there is also an economic cost. Ports such as Odessa and Mauripol were centres of the Ukrainian grain and energy export trade. The closure or unavailability of these ports due to the war caused a crisis in the trade of grain, bringing exports, especially via the Black Sea, almost to a standstill. The impact of war had essentially closed these ports to ongoing regular trade. “The investigation finds that 60,000 tonnes of grain were destroyed in the attack on Chornomorsk. Russian forces continued to attack the Odesa Oblast with estimates of 113 attacks between January and October 2024 alone, targeting more ports and other critical infrastructure and showing a clear pattern against grain and related infrastructure.”³³ In July 2022, the UN and Turkey brokered a safe corridor keeping Ukrainian grain exports flowing. However, when the

agreement ceased in August 2023, the Russian military immediately targeted port infrastructure.³⁴ The Starvation Mobile Justice Team analysed that “over 101,000 square metres of grain storage were hit across the region between July and October 2023. These actions have severely disrupted Ukraine's exports and exacerbated global food insecurity, particularly in regions heavily dependent on Ukrainian grain. Those regions accounted for around 12% of the world's wheat before Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.”³⁵

The trade that is still moving through the Black Sea experiences severe shipping and crew shortages. The carriers opt for the extra coverage for war, when their ships become damaged or destroyed by sea mines, bombings, or rocket attacks within the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. Non-war losses could happen due to: 1) Ships trapped in the Black Sea as well as Ukrainian ports, 2) Unsafe navigation, 3) Crewed vessels that can't leave the area,

³³ “New Report” in *Global Rights*.

³⁴ See also Caitlin Welsh, Joseph Glauber, “**Russia's Renewed Attacks on Ukraine's Grain Infrastructure: Why Now? What Next?**” in CSIS, November 25, 2024. Accessed on <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-renewed-attacks-ukraines-grain-infrastructure-why-now-what-next>.

³⁵ “New Report Reveals Russian Campaign to Cripple Ukraine's Grain Trade and Economy.” In *Global Rights Compliance*, 21 May 2025. Accessed on <https://globalrightscpliance.org/new-report-reveals-russian-campaign-to-cripple-ukraines-grain-trade-and-economy/>.

4) Maintenance issues for the carriers, and
5) Cargo being damaged or abandoned in storage or transit. The longer your goods are on the water, the greater the risk.³⁶

“Neighbouring ports in the Black Sea are grappling with backlogs as a Russian warship fired warning shots at a cargo vessel, congesting shipping lanes.”

³⁷ The expense associated with a war risk premium for the Black Sea, typically renewed every seven days and added to the annual insurance costs, was approximated to be tens of thousands of dollars per ship for the duration of the voyage.

4. THE FACTORS PREDISPOSING TO MARITIME INSECURITY

From the case studies we can discern key patterns and clear themes even if they manifest very differently in each case. Thus, at a very high level, we can identify general factors that select for maritime insecurity.

Firstly, any region where there is a tradition of piracy or robbery at sea has the

potential for such historic practices to be reactivated. Furthermore, any commitment to historical codes of illegality does not stop at piracy. As we have seen, those who engage in piracy are most often involved in other forms of illegal trade of goods (smuggling), human trafficking, or illegal fishing. At times, these areas are poor and perhaps even subject to some justifiable grievance, but such factors are often well exploited by criminal or terrorist elements to encourage recruitment and commitment to illegal behaviours.

Secondly, areas where there are illegal behaviours in the maritime environment are often associated with a state with weak enforcement capabilities, both in terms of deterrence and legal regimes which are not widely respected, possibly corrupt, and sometimes with centres of political and legal power located some distance from the area of concern. In summary, the areas of concern are often liminal locations, geographically isolated with populations who have a weak affinity

³⁶ “The Russia-Ukraine War’s Impact on Global Shipping,” in *Management Insurance Brokers*, 28 Sep 2025. Accessed on <https://www.wmib.com.au/news/the-russia-ukraine-wars-impact-on-global-shipping/>.

³⁷ Syed Rakin Rahman, “Russian warning strikes trigger Black Sea congestion.” In *Port Technology International*, August 16, 2023. Accessed on <https://www.porttechnology.org/news/russian-warning-strikes-trigger-black-sea-congestion/>.

with the nation-state and its enforcement regimes.

Thirdly, areas of concern are often strategically important transit points or maritime chokepoints. These sites offer a smaller force the opportunity to intercept vessels where they have little room to manoeuvre or few options for alternative routes. Chokepoints gather together a large number of potential targets, often in confined waters. The reliance on regular SLOCs and the sheer volume of trade mean that any threat to good order at sea has potential impact and thereby leverage. This is the case not just for the nearby coastal states but for large import and export states located at the key ports along these crucial and often globally significant SLOCs.

Fourthly, areas of concern are sometimes bordered by other areas of concern such that maritime insecurity spills over into adjacent zones. Insecurity has a way of expanding, and particular attention needs to be paid to regions where multiple issues and multiple areas overlap, creating ever larger areas of instability. The practical effect of this – as we have seen –

is to stretch scarce enforcement resources to a point where a serious outbreak of maritime insecurity in one area can lead to under-resourcing for nearby areas and hence a return of older problems.

Fifthly, and perhaps most importantly, all of these points listed above can be framed in a wider global or ocean-wide maritime security context. Where major global superpowers with their blue water navies have a benign or even a mildly positive presence, maritime security challenges can more easily be dealt with by coastal states. In crises, a single global navy or coalition could even render assistance as they did in red Sea and along the Somalian coast. But as the Ukraine-Russian conflict shows war on land and at sea overturns everything, creating dangerous conditions for ships and mariners, high levels of uncertainty and The Black Sea has been an otherwise relatively stable area until 2014 and especially after 2022 but the war has meant Ukraine, Russia and even neighbouring states can no longer devote resources to managing everyday issues in the maritime domain

5. SIGNIFICANCE

All of these elements can degrade maritime security, whether it is a lack of port security, piracy, illegal trafficking, loss of coastal community livelihoods or sustained conflict at sea; every single element, especially the latter, disrupts the flow of trade and prosperity. In periods of stability and good order at sea we can observe what Geoffrey Till called the ‘virtuous cycle of sea power.’³⁸ In his understanding, a port with more and more trade will acquire a range of other services and facilities, new business, more employment, maybe a new wharf or unloading facility to cater for different types of trade. Thus, trade momentum builds prosperity and leads to the mutually reinforcing relationship between a nation's commercial strength and its naval power. It is where wealth from trade funds a navy, and the navy, in turn, protects and expands that trade.

However, the cycle can work in reverse. We have seen this with the Houthi and Somalian pirate issue. The momentum of growing trade, prosperity, and further

investment in Till's virtuous cycle can be threatened and may even be reversed entirely. The virtuous cycle becomes instead a vicious cycle, characterised by declining trade, reducing prosperity, and increasing insecurity. Deteriorating maritime security can have material effects as we have seen, but can also lead to less tangible impacts, including a loss of investor confidence and loss of confidence from coastal communities that the sea is a bounty that can help them secure their future.

Across these three case studies – The Red Sea, the Somalian Coast and the Ukraine-Russian war in the Black Sea – we have identified five major factors that have compromised maritime security. We are more likely to see maritime insecurity in areas where there is a past history of problems, where there is weak or divided state enforcement capabilities and where malign actors can secure maximum leverage at maritime chokepoints. Areas of concern tend to multiply with negative affects spilling over into adjacent regions. Finally, and we suggested that this is

³⁸ Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 17.

perhaps the most important factor, all specific local and regional issues are exacerbated and often overtaken altogether by war at sea. The next step in this research is to apply these five general characteristics of maritime insecurity built from the analysis of the case studies to our own region, the Indo-Pacific. Can we identify areas of concern and particular sites where there is an intense concentration of maritime insecurity? That will be subject of our next article.

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