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Russia's Planned Naval Logistics Base on the Red Sea: Regional Security Implications

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Abstract. In 2020, it was announced that Russia signed an agreement with Sudan on the establishment of a naval centre on the Red Sea. While the agreement still has not been ratified by Sudan's legislative body, which has not been formed, in February 2023 Sudan's military authorities declared their support for the construction of the Russian naval facility after having reviewed terms of the treaty, which has made the implementation of the project most probable to date.

Over the past decade, Moscow has repeatedly demonstrated its desire to obtain naval facilities in the region; this has arguably become a central theme of Russian negotiations with littoral countries. The paper will argue that Russia's naval presence in the Red Sea and adjacent areas serves the interest of littoral and neighbouring countries in light of Moscow's historic and contemporary interests, approaches and objectives in the region. The fact that regional powers have already engaged in what has been conceptualized as 'strategic hedging' – a geopolitical strategy by which states pursue policies that are in their national interests while not openly antagonizing 'the hegemon' – is likely to offer Russia a corresponding window of opportunity.

Keywords: Africa, Russia, Sudan, Red Sea, strategic hedging, naval logistics centre, naval base

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Проект создания военно-морского объекта России на Красном море: региональный аспект

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Резюме. В 2020 г. между Россией и Республикой Судан было подписано соглашение о создании в г. Порт-Судан, расположенном на побережье Красного моря, пункта материально-технического обслуживания (ПМТО) Военно-морского флота (ВМФ) РФ. Договоренность до сих пор не реализована, но в феврале 2023 г. военные власти Судана заявили о состоявшемся пересмотре обеими сторонами условий соглашения и о своей поддержке проекта, который, таким образом, приблизился к стадии его осуществления. В статье утверждается, что создание ПМТО послужит достижению интересов как Москвы, так и государств красноморского бассейна.

Ключевые слова: Африка, Россия, Судан, Красное море, стратегическое хеджирование, пункт материально-технического обслуживания, военно-морская база

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INTRODUCTION

In November 2020, it was announced that Russia would sign an agreement with Sudan on the establishment of a naval logistics centre in Port Sudan on the Red Sea. While the news came unexpected for many analysts, the idea of a Russian base in this African country was first aired three years earlier by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir during his visit to Moscow in November 2017. At the time al-Bashir appealed to President Vladimir Putin to protect Sudan from the aggressive actions of the U.S. and relayed his nation's willingness to host Russian naval facilities, which apparently would thwart Washington's ambitions.

The ouster of al-Bashir in a military coup in April 2019 seemed to have derailed the Russian-Sudanese agreement, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, opened up new opportunities for Russia: Sudan's international isolation, opportunistic foreign policy and socioeconomic difficulties had been hampering the development of bilateral ties, so the overthrow of al-Bashir conferred the possibility of partnering with a potentially more appealing regime (see: [1]). The agreement was eventually signed in December 2020, but was effectively put on hold due to disagreements within Sudan's regime and Western pressure. However, in February 2023 it was announced that Sudan's new authorities gave 'green light' for the construction of the Russian naval facility¹, which has made the implementation of the project most probable to date. In April 2023, a new internal armed conflict in Sudan once again raised the level of uncertainty about the future of the Russian-Sudanese agreement, yet Sudan's ambassador to Moscow has since reiterated his country's commitment to the deal².

For Moscow, a base on the Red Sea would serve as the point of entry to the Indian Ocean; it would also fit well with the priorities defined in key Russian policy papers, for instance, Russia's 2017 Naval Doctrine, which stipulates the need to maintain the presence of the Russian Navy in 'practically any area of the World Ocean'.³ Accordingly, the tasks of the Navy in the region would include not only the protection of maritime transports from pirates, but also forward power projection, as well as obstruction of attempts to inspect or detain Russian civilian vessels. The establishment of a naval centre in Port Sudan would mean the resumption (after 30 years of absence) of the Russian military presence in Africa and on the Red Sea and would significantly raise Moscow's profile in the Northwest Indian Ocean. It would also facilitate Russia's access to the heart of the continent – Central Africa, in particular the Central African Republic [2, p. 25], and naturally strengthen Russian influence in Sudan itself.

Over the past decade, Moscow has repeatedly demonstrated its desire to resume naval military presence on the Red Sea or in the Gulf of Aden, having discussed options with the respective governments of Yemen, Djibouti, Eritrea, Somaliland and Sudan. The establishment of a Russian military facility in the region would undoubtedly have complex consequences at multiple – global, regional and country – levels. The present study will focus primarily on the analysis of regional security implications of the opening of a Russian naval logistics base in Port Sudan, lightly touching upon the geopolitical context of rising tensions between Moscow and the West, which have been accentuated on account of the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and the introduction of unprecedented Western sanctions against Russia; the authors will also evaluate the historical and contemporary positions of Moscow with regard to naval operations and basing in the wider maritime region.

In terms of the regional implications, it will be argued that Russia's growing naval presence in the Red Sea and adjacent areas is likely to facilitate deeper cooperation with Gulf countries, in particular, the United Arab Emirates, which, as has been aptly noted, has already become Moscow's 'ideational' partner [3], as well as with Egypt. These and other regional powers have already engaged in what has been conceptualized as 'strategic hedging' – a geopolitical strategy by which states pursue policies that are in their national interests while not openly antagonizing 'the hegemon' [4] – and are likely to benefit from the diversification of maritime security providers in the region; besides, non-state actors, such as pirates and terrorists, will face a more robust response from the international community.

¹ <https://sudantribune.com/article270741> (accessed 03.02.2023)

² <https://www.interfax.ru/world/901118> (accessed 12.04.2023)

³ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201707200015> (accessed 03.02.2023)

On the other hand, the marked escalation of military, political and economic competition in the Red Sea and in the Gulf of Aden has led to the emergence of a kind of geopolitical 'funnel' on this important sea trade route, drawing more and more outside powers into its 'whirlpool', which could have a destabilizing effect on the region in the long run, and a Russian naval centre could add fuel to the fire.

THE RED SEA: THE STRATEGIC AND SECURITY DIMENSION

The geopolitical and geoeconomic role of the oceans has been increasing throughout the history of mankind. The oceans offer the cheapest and most efficient corridors for the shipment of both goods and troops; they cover 70% of the Earth's surface, providing convenient access to global markets to at least 40% of the global population that resides within hundred kilometers from the coast. Around 90% of traded goods in the world are carried over the oceans, and 75% of them pass through vulnerable maritime choke points. Of the planet's 8 most important choke points, two – the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait – lead to and from the Red Sea [5]. Today, the Red Sea accounts for approximately 12% of global seaborne trade, with the annual transit through the region valued at over \$700 bln [6].

The Spanish-American War of 1898, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the First World War, the Second World War, as well as other smaller conflicts demonstrated not only the crucial value of the Red Sea route for the transportation of troops and relocation of naval units, but also the key role of powers that controlled ports on the Red Sea. Since the 1950s, the role of the route has been further augmented by the dramatic increase in transportation of oil from Arab countries to the West. More recently, in 2015, the launch of the New Suez Canal doubled the capacity of the route; the commencement of the construction coincided with the unveiling of China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road project, which further raised the importance of the maritime artery.

The growing attractiveness of the region to global and regional powers has been paralleled with political destabilization in littoral countries. Some of the relevant markers of destabilization have included the ongoing war in Yemen and the accompanying strengthening of separatism in its southern provinces; the insurgency in Ethiopia's Tigray region, which also directly involves Eritrea; border clashes between Sudan and Ethiopia; tensions over the division of the Nile waters between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, etc. Besides, Somalia still remains a de facto failed state, while both Sudan and Ethiopia underwent regime change in 2018–2019 against the background of mass protests.

Political instability in the Red Sea region also manifests itself in the emerging power vacuum that gets filled by a variety of armed groups, including terrorist and criminal organizations, which threaten the security of littoral states and foreign maritime transit. Immediate threats to maritime security in the area include Houthi missile attacks against ships of the Saudi-led Arab coalition in Yemen and against Saudi Arabia's infrastructure; covert attacks by Israel on Iranian vessels and vice versa; smuggling of migrants, weapons and other illicit goods; and terrorism. It is improbable that countries of the region will be able to manage these threats without the support of developed countries (see: [7]).

At the global level, the escalating tensions between the US and its allies, on the one hand, and China and Russia, on the other, are poised to become a major factor that influences maritime security in the Red Sea. While Beijing and Moscow strive to ensure free and untroublesome exchange of goods with their partners, the Western alliance is set to maintain its monopoly as the controller of international trade and regular imposer of economic sanctions.

Under the circumstances, Russia, which has a history of involvement in the Red Sea region and which is once again laying a claim to be an influential actor on the world arena, cannot but try to gain a foothold in the area to boost its global and regional profile, which invites research on the accompanying security implications. These implications are likely to become a product of interaction between Russia's interests and approaches and those of other Red Sea actors, which requires us to look into historical and contemporary Russian agenda in this part of the world.

AN ASSESSMENT OF RUSSIA'S HISTORIC INTERESTS AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE RED SEA REGION

It would be important to draw some conclusions from the history of Russia's engagement with the Red Sea littorals, which could be instrumental to the analysis of regional security implications of the establishment of a

Russian naval installation in the area. First, from the very beginning Russia neither desired 'master-slave' relations with Red Sea peoples nor planned a colonization of Red Sea shores, but rather looked for allies against European competitors and especially Turkey.

Abyssinia, which shared Orthodox Christianity with the Tsardom of Russia and the subsequent Russian Empire, became the natural magnet for Russian political and military interest in the region. In the second half of the 17th century, the first attempt was made to establish diplomatic contacts between Russia and Ethiopia. Curiously, this diplomatic initiative was brandished by the famous Saxon scientist Job Ludolf, the author of the book *Historia Aethiopica*, who proposed that the Russian Tsar made Ethiopia his ally in the 1672–1681 war against the Ottoman Empire. The proposal was timely as the Russian government at that time was trying to forge an anti-Turkish coalition, while the Ethiopians resented the Ottoman occupation of the Kingdom of Medri Bahri in modern-day Eritrea [8]. However, the death of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1629–1676) who supported this diplomatic initiative, took away the momentum from Russian-Ethiopian relations [9].

The interest of the Russian government in the Red Sea area resumed after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. For St. Petersburg, the significance of the route was determined not so much by the need to trade with Asian countries or control overseas colonies, but by the absence of proper land communications with the Russian Far East: the Trans-Siberian Railway was to be completed only in 1904.

In the late 1880s, Russia stood a chance of establishing permanent presence on the Red Sea, owing to a private initiative by the self-proclaimed Cossack ataman Nikolai Ashinov. However, as demonstrated by the 1888 incident at Sagallo (modern-day Djibouti) when the Russian government disowned Ashinov and his Cossacks, establishing a colony on the Red Sea was not defined as an important policy goal in St. Petersburg. Rather, Russia aimed at assisting the Ethiopians with gaining sea access, which would allow setting up a facility in their territory. Addis Ababa, however, failed to mobilize its potential vis-à-vis coastal tribes supported by European powers and mostly stood on the defensive, while Russia had neither intention nor resources to intervene on behalf of Ethiopia militarily.

Nevertheless, St. Petersburg still sought to put pressure on unfriendly powers – the British and the Italians – by strengthening 'brotherly' Orthodox Ethiopia. During the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1895–1896), Russia sent a small team of advisers and volunteers and supplied rifles and cartridges to assist the Ethiopians. Russian support helped Addis Ababa win a war against Italy and remain the only African state not to be subjected to colonization.

During this period one could observe two different Russian approaches to the region: while the Foreign Ministry regarded activities in Abyssinia as part of a diplomatic game with Western powers, the Russian General Staff looked for a convenient port on the Red Sea for ship resupply and repairs. The development of ports in the Russian Far East set a new challenge for St. Petersburg, which now needed coaling stations on the route between Russia proper and Vladivostok. In the late 19th century, the rapprochement with the French, who granted Russia access to their naval facilities around the world, largely resolved the matter [10].

The defeat in the Russo-Japanese War stripped Russia of the status of a major naval power for half a century. The logic of the Cold War, however, required the USSR to establish global naval presence and corresponding naval facilities to circumvent the 'Rimland' largely controlled by the US and its allies. Relying on ideological ties and security assistance, since the 1960s Moscow established a string of bases that enabled it to carry out long-term naval missions in the World Ocean.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 led to the unilateral withdrawal of Soviet personnel from the overwhelming majority of overseas military installations. The pro-Western stance of Russia and the catastrophic economic situation in the 1990s precluded any Russian initiatives to establish naval presence abroad, even though two overseas naval bases (in Syria's Tartus and in Vietnam's Cam Ranh, the latter until 2001) remained in use. The intensification of geopolitical competition over the past decade has prompted Russia to reconsider its strategic policies, including the Naval Doctrine, and once again look for footholds in the World Ocean to increase its defensive potential vis-à-vis Western powers.

PROSPECTS OF THE RUSSIAN MILITARY DEPLOYMENT ON THE RED SEA IN THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD

The competition between the USSR and the US in the Red Sea region continued with varying success until the early 1990s, when Russia forfeited its naval presence in the Indian Ocean after the evacuation of the base

in Ethiopia in 1991 [11]. Since the late 2000s, and especially after the cooling of relations with the West, Moscow has sought to restore its global naval presence. These geopolitical developments also coincided with the rise in piracy threat off the Somali coast. While Russia did not join any international anti-piracy coalitions, it independently deployed warships to the region to protect international maritime shipping. Since February 2008, there have been over 15 incidents of piracy in the Gulf of Aden that affected crew members of Russian nationality and at least two Russian vessels underwent attacks by pirates, so the challenge to Russia's interests was real. In 2010, the destroyer *Marshal Shaposhnikov* freed a Russian tanker that had been captured by Somali pirates. In 2011–2017, the Russian Navy escorted 695 ships through the maritime zone and also prevented the capture of several foreign transports.⁴ Countering piracy has become another Russian foreign policy goal in the Indian Ocean, which in light of escalating geopolitical tensions required independent access to naval facilities in the region.

In 2013, Russia reinstated the permanent ship formation of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea, which had been defunct since 1992, so the quest for bases has become even more justified. In 2012–2014, Russia probed opportunities for leasing a parcel of land to build a base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, but reportedly the Americans managed to head off the arrangement.⁵

Despite mounting US pressure on littoral countries, since 2016 Russia has received several offers for hosting a military base in the Northwest Indian Ocean. In August 2016, Yemen's ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh declared that Yemen was ready to grant Russia access to air and naval bases.⁶ While this barely qualified as an official invitation, it nevertheless reflected the positive view toward Russian military presence on part of some regional elites. In the summer of 2017, a delegation from Somaliland visited Russia and offered to lease land to Moscow that could be used for building a naval facility. The delegates offered land not far from Berbera, where the Soviet Union had had a naval installation in 1974–1977. However, the country sought recognition of its independence in exchange for military cooperation, which would not contribute to the advancement of Russia's influence in the Horn of Africa, where many countries face problems with separatism and irredentism.

Another proposal, as already mentioned, came from Sudan's President al-Bashir in 2017. This proposal in many respects surpassed others: Sudan was a recognized member of the UN and al-Bashir at the time was still its legitimate leader despite the warrant for his arrest issued by the International Criminal Court. Sudan was also a major regional economy, a large consumer of Russian weapons and occupied a strategic position at the crossroads of North, East and Central Africa.

Finally, there was a basing offer from Eritrea in 2022, which Russia has apparently chosen to dismiss in view of the Sudan variant⁷, but which may still be on the table. The Eritrean port of Assab, which had recently been abandoned by the Emirati military, presents a viable option and at one time was considered by the Soviet Navy.

REGIONAL SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF RUSSIAN MILITARY PRESENCE ON THE RED SEA: AN ASSESSMENT

Russia's return to the Middle East, the most visible symbol of which has been the establishment of two military bases in Syria, has been substantiated by establishing bilateral strategic partnerships with some of the key countries in the area – Egypt and the UAE, which are also some of the most important security actors on the Red Sea. In early 2019, just before the coup against al-Bashir, Sudan's ambassador to Russia confirmed his country's commitment to developing a strategic partnership with Russia.⁸ Moscow has also been developing security dialogue with Israel and Jordan, as well as energy dialogue with Saudi Arabia, which is its close but difficult partner at OPEC Plus.

Further south, Russia has sought to establish contacts with all parties to the conflict in Yemen, including southern separatists. Russia also maintains warm diplomatic relations with Eritrea, which became one of the few African countries to consistently vote in favor of Russia's position on Ukraine at the UN General Assembly. Relations with Djibouti and Somalia remain rather limited but also lack any serious disagreements. Be-

⁴ http://morflot.gov.ru/deyatelnost/transportnaya_bezopasnost/uchastie_mmrf_v_adenskom_zalive.html (accessed 03.02.2023)

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/world/africa/us-djibouti-chinese-naval-base.html> (accessed 03.02.2023)

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-idUSKCN10W0S2> (accessed 07.02.2023)

⁷ <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/eritrea-supporting-russia-stay-power> (accessed 22.02.2023)

⁸ <https://ria.ru/20180418/1518901915.html> (accessed 03.02.2023)

yond the littoral states, one should mention intensifying Ethiopia-Russia relations, with Addis Ababa poised to become an important buyer of Russian arms. Ethiopia also sent one thousand naval officers to Russia for training, reflecting its desire to launch a navy⁹.

Generally positive relations between Russia and the countries of the region allow us to claim that the establishment of Russian permanent military presence on the Red Sea is likely to benefit most regional actors, who have seen Moscow perform a delicate balancing act between a number of competing parties in the Middle East and neighboring regions and mediate several armed conflicts; Russia is also viewed as a supplier of reliable weaponry and a provider of security, which could help hedge the risks of American unpredictability and China's economic domination in the area and simultaneously diminish local threats of terrorism, transnational crime and piracy. Accordingly, we may refer to the theory of strategic hedging [4] to help explain why Red Sea littoral states could see their overall security increase as a result of Russia's naval deployment in the region. As per theory, the transition from unipolarity to multipolarity greatly increases risks of war and destabilization, which weaker states attempt to mitigate through establishing closer relations with other potential global poles of power while avoiding entering formal alliances with them and consequently antagonizing the hegemon.

Indeed, regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE, as well as smaller states, have been improving their capabilities and minimizing their vulnerabilities through a variety of means, including positive military balancing, the latter entailing such activities as increasing arms imports, conducting joint exercises and concluding defense agreements, sending military personnel abroad for training, etc. Perhaps, a key difference of this recent trend has been the diversification of partners, with the same countries becoming consumers of security products and services from the West, China, Russia, etc. This to an extent reflects the notion that unipolarity has come to an end if not globally then in certain regions, and above all in the Middle East. Arab and African allies of Western countries can no longer afford exclusive security relations with the West because the limits of the latter's influence are now conspicuous in Syria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, Ukraine and elsewhere.

Russia's strong counterterrorism and counter-piracy agenda, the prioritization of national sovereignty and anti-Western rhetoric under the circumstances fall on fertile ground, and even Moscow's relative economic weakness may be considered an advantage as it may complement other international partners rather than enter into the fierce competition for local markets. Russian military presence in the region could help reduce the vacuum of maritime security along its shores and also decrease the likelihood of inter-state wars and interventions. Whilst the deployments of Egyptian troops in Sudan or Eritrea were seen as provocation by Ethiopia, the UAE used its bases in Eritrea and Somalia to attack the Houthis, and Emirati activities on Socotra Island are seen by some as an infringement of the sovereignty of Yemen, Russian presence would have no such destabilizing repercussions on the regional level as it would not upset the balance of power among the Red Sea littorals.

On the global level, where the strategic hedging theory is also applicable, Russia's foray in the Red Sea could be viewed with both suspicion and interest by China, which is the largest foreign investor in the area. China has become Russia's direct competitor in Africa not only in arms sales, but also in the provision of security by private military companies, which in recent years have emerged as Moscow's foreign policy instrument. However, as long as the tensions between Beijing and Washington keep growing, China would be interested in deflecting Western attention from its own military build-up toward Russian naval activities or even consider threatening the West with closer military cooperation with Moscow [12, p. 104].

Undoubtedly, the US, France and most of the other key NATO countries view Russia as a spoiler on the Red Sea. While any prospect Russian naval presence would be small in comparison to the combined NATO assets in the region, it would enter their strategic calculations and limit their freedom of action. The example of Syria has shown that a Russian military deployment may effectively block a Western intervention. The appearance of anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) weapon systems on the shores of the Red Sea, as it has already happened on the Syrian coast, would directly challenge the US hegemony in this strategically important part of the world. As the balance of power in the world continues to change in favor of China and the conflict between Russia and the West pushes Moscow closer toward Beijing, Washington is increasingly concerned with the potential strengthening of China-Russia partnership in Africa and the Middle East.

⁹ <https://worldview.stratfor.com/situation-report/ethiopia-army-sends-1000-officers-russia-naval-training-report-says> (accessed 09.02.2023)

On the continental level, while the African Union (AU) generally opposes the construction of foreign military bases on the continent, it has been the Soviet and Russian tradition to establish logistics support points rather than bases; the apparent message has been that bases are typically used for controlling territory, but support points simply serve the navy that is tasked with global containment and not local conquest. In addition, the AU has largely ignored the considerable military build-up on the Red Sea by other international actors. Besides, Russia's history of involvement in Africa on behalf of liberation movements and its strong support of decolonization agenda appeals to Africa's intellectuals and some of political elites.

Thus it may be argued that Russian naval presence on the Red Sea may become a stabilizing factor in the region, not only contributing to military operations against local violent non-state actors, such as pirates and terrorists, but also benefiting regional powers, most of which are seeking to strengthen their sovereignty and international agency through the diversification of security partners as part of their strategic hedging approaches, as well as facilitating the preservation of the balance of power at the global level.

CONCLUSION

Despite the armed conflict in Ukraine, the establishment of Russia's naval presence in the Red Sea region has remained high on Moscow's agenda, reflecting favorable regional circumstances, with a number of regional heavyweights engaged in strategic hedging to maximize their national interests. In addition, Moscow's geo-strategic and geoeconomic interests viewed against the backdrop of intensifying global tensions and sanction risks dictate the need to set up 'pit-stops' for the Russian navy on key maritime arteries and intensify naval diplomacy, while Russia's vocal international counterterrorism and counter-piracy efforts would best be buttressed by power projection capability in the Indian Ocean.

Historical ties with Red Sea littoral countries (including the former littoral – Ethiopia) contribute to the choice of the region as the site of a Russian naval centre; we have already witnessed closer naval cooperation with Addis Ababa, reminiscent of the situation in the late 19th century. Eritrea, which over the past few years has become a close ally of Ethiopia, may be seen as Russia's next best choice for naval basing – if the Sudan variant fails.

As of spring 2023, the agreement on the establishment of a Russian naval logistics centre in Port Sudan is awaiting ratification¹⁰; Sudan's military authorities apparently renegotiated the 2020 deal and approved the project. However, the conflict between rival factions within the military government – the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, which erupted on 15 April 2023, may still threaten the implementation of the agreement. First, any internal politico-military destabilization is detrimental to such sensitive issue as the establishment of a foreign military base. Second, whichever party to this conflict prevails, it will lack international and domestic legitimacy and face a severe humanitarian and economic crisis, which will probably make it more dependent on the West and thus more susceptible to Western pressure to cut ties with Russia.

In any case, Moscow clearly aims at becoming a key security provider in the wider region through the conclusion of strategic partnerships, conduct of joint exercises, arms and technology transfers, military training, counterterrorism and counter-piracy operations, and also through the establishment of military facilities. In addition, Russia has been performing a delicate balancing act between a number of conflicting actors in the MENA and neighboring regions, making it a suitable partner in strategic hedging activities for many littoral countries.

At the same time, Russia evidently lacks an articulate long-term foreign policy toward the region, in stark contrast with China's latent power strategy for the Red Sea, which represents an effective combination of development assistance, investment, security cooperation [13], as well as the underlying ideology of 'common destiny' of mankind. Moscow's foreign policy narrative – the prioritization of national sovereignty, anti-Western rhetoric, in particular the opposition to externally imposed regime change, and combating terrorism and violent extremism – serve the purpose of preserving the status quo and incumbent regimes, but do not necessarily outline long-lasting strategic prospects for partnering countries.

However, the logic of strategic hedging, which calls for the diversification of political, economic and security ties by second- and third-tier countries, offers Russia an opportunity to occupy a considerable niche in the

¹⁰ <https://tass.com/world/1575271> (accessed 22.02.2023)

regional security arrangement, which is likely to manifest itself in the eventual establishment of a naval facility in the Northwest Indian Ocean.

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