



A Turkish Military Base in the Red Sea

OE Watch Commentary: Suakin Island of Sudan could be Turkey's third military base abroad after it established bases in Qatar and Somalia. During his visit to Sudan in December 2017, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reportedly asked Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to lease Suakin Island in the Red Sea to Turkey. At the time, President Erdoğan rejected the claims that Turkey might establish a military base on the island; however, now Turkey is not hiding the fact that it is establishing a military base there. The accompanying excerpted articles, one from the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Akit* and the other from state-owned *Anadolu Ajansı* highlight what Turkey might achieve by establishing a military base in the Red Sea.

“While Turkey has become a force for ensuring peace and prosperity of the people in the region, [it] will assume geopolitical supremacy with a military base on Suakin Island.”

According to the *Yeni Akit* article, even though it is intended to be a naval base, it will also be supported by the Turkish Land and Air Forces. The article states that with this military base, Turkey will contribute to the balance of power against other countries such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Iran, who have each established a presence in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean. Turkey's establishment of a military base on Suakin Island has especially affected relations between Egypt and Sudan. Egypt already reinforced its military base in Eritrea, which neighbors Sudan, with more troops. The article argues that Turkey will assume geopolitical supremacy by establishing this military base and will become an influential power in the Red Sea.

During the recent visit to the island, Turkish Minister of National Defense, Hulusi Akar, brought with him the Chief of General Staff and the President of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). TIKA was founded in 1992 to implement Turkish foreign policy priorities in Turkic countries that have cultural and language ties to Turkey in Central Asia. However, in recent years it has expanded its work to restore Ottoman heritage in the Balkans and elsewhere. The presence of TIKA indicates Turkey may not only establishing a military base, but also engaged in restoring the island's Ottoman heritage, as the island was an Ottoman forward outpost in the Red Sea.

According to the article from *Anadolu Ajansı*, Saudi Arabia announced a new alliance with Jordan, Egypt, Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan to curb the influence of Iran, Turkey, and Qatar in the Red Sea. Turkey has worked to expand its influence in the Horn of Africa since 2002. Turkish President Erdogan has made several trips to the region and has signed bilateral agreements with countries in the Horn of Africa, including Somalia and Sudan. As a result, Turkey has established a military base in Somalia and most recently Sudan has allocated Suakin island to Turkey to establish a military base. The article notes how Suakin Island is located right across from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and that ultimately, “Turkey's rapprochement with these regional countries and Qatar” as well as the establishment of the base on Suakin Island, “worry Saudi Arabia.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**



Suakin, Sudan, ruins of egypt national bank (2008).

Source: Bertramz [CC BY 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Suakin_national_bank.jpg.

(continued)



Continued: A Turkish Military Base in the Red Sea

Source: “Türkiye askeri üs kuruyor (Turkey to establish military base),” *Yeni Akit*, 13 November 2018. <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/turkiye-askeri-us-kuruyor-543984.html>

The place where the TAF [Turkish Armed Forces] is establishing a base on Suakin Island [and] which was allocated to Turkey during President Erdoğan’s visit to Sudan was determined. During President Erdoğan’s visit to Sudan, it was determined that the TAF would establish a base on Suakin Island...

...While the TAF is expected to establish a naval base on the island, it will include land and air forces as well. Land forces will assume duties on the island with the support of Naval and Air Forces elements.

With the Suakin Base, Turkey will become a counterbalance in the axis of Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Iran from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.

This move... will create a secure and peaceful sea route in the Gulf of Aden. While Turkey has become a force for ensuring peace and prosperity of the people in the region, [it] will assume geopolitical supremacy with a military base on Suakin Island.

Last week, the Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar inspected the work in Suakin Island as part of his visits to Libya, Sudan and Somalia. Akar’s delegation included the Chief of General Staff Yaşar Güler, representatives from the Turkish Armed Forces and Foreign Ministry, and the TİKA [Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency] President Serdar Çam.

Source: Dr. Necmettin Acar, “Kızıldenizde jeopolitik kamplasma (Geopolitical alliances in Red Sea),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 18 December 2018. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/kizildenizde-jeopolitik-kamplasma/1342043>

On 11 December [2018] international news agencies announced that Saudi Arabia formed a new alliance in the Red Sea region with five other countries (Jordan, Egypt, Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan). Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said this new alliance was formed to protect Saudi Arabia and its neighboring countries interests, to create synergy among regional countries to prevent outside influence to protect the stability of the region...

...the main objective of this alliance is to create a geopolitical supremacy favoring Saudi Arabia and to curtail Iran, Turkey and Qatar’s influence on the region...

...since the beginning of 2000s, the Red Sea region has become a region where Turkey, Iran, and Qatar have influence... [Therefore,] Saudi has decided to take measures against Turkey, Iran, and Qatar...

Turkey’s interest in the region has been in four areas including political, economic, social, and cultural... President Erdogan’s visits to 30 African countries since 2002 has played a role in establishing relations especially with countries in the Horn of Africa... The important gains from [building] these relations are Turkey opening a military base in Somalia and Sudan’s allocation of Suakin Island to Turkey. Suakin Island in terms of its location in the Red Sea is located across from the city Jeddah... Turkey’s rapprochement with these regional countries and Qatar and establishing a military base on Suakin Island worry Saudi Arabia...

THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

<http://madsciblog.tradoc.army.mil>

The Mad Scientist Laboratory blog is a marketplace of ideas about the future of our society, work, and conflict.

Mad Scientist is a TRADOC initiative and community of action that continually explores the future through collaborative partnerships and continuous dialogue with academia and industry.

