

Kennedy Fields
Professor Thomas Ambrosio
POLS 220
12 April 2021

When a big boat got stuck in a little canal, people made memes, wrote articles, and laughed at the absurdity of this strange, seemingly small matter. However, Asher Orkaby thought more deeply about the effect that this boat made in economic and political affairs. In his essay *Beyond Suez: How Yemen's War Can Imperil Red Sea Shipping*, he brings to light the reality of the blockage in the Suez Canal. World trade was dramatically altered when the Ever Given got stuck in the canal for several days; Orkaby asks the question, what would happen to the world economy if civil war and conflict in Yemen had the potential to close the canal as well? A country on the southern mouth of the Suez Canal, Yemen - a country that has been the source of conflict for decades - carries the power to determine much of our world's economic trade potential.

Yemen became a country of importance because of its location on the Suez Canal. According to Orkaby, the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, and Perim Island - a piece of land in the southern mouth of the canal near Yemen - was named as the "figurative lighthouse watching over the Red Sea [and] the Suez Canal..." This hotly contested piece of land that had belonged to Yemen naturally led to more conflict when different states attempted to take over control of the canal. Yemen was of great importance to the canal until around 1967, when the canal was closed until 1975. By the time the canal opened, most boats were too big to fit through it. However, in 2014, the canal was widened, and Yemen once again became an important part of the control of the canal. Orkaby mentions that the civil war and unrest that Yemen has seen for years always threatens to change world access to the Suez Canal. When the Ever Given blocked

the canal for several days, world trade changed drastically; Orkaby asks what would happen to world trade if the canal were closed because of civil war and unrest in Yemen.

Orkaby's analysis of Yemen's impact on the trading world involves many factors, some valid, and some of which I believe he failed to consider. While he points out that the recent blockage of the Suez Canal changed trading drastically, and that we must be more aware of what political changes could affect world trading, I don't believe that he talked enough about the specific risks that currently exist that would cause the Suez Canal to be closed due to civil war or unrest. He specifies several conflicts that have happened since 2014, but he ends his article rather abruptly when he says: "A narrow focus on the Suez Canal misses the larger picture of the Red Sea region." What I believe that he meant by this was that by focusing only on the Suez Canal's trading capacity, we forget about other factors that may influence the availability of the canal, such as the stability of countries like Yemen.

When seemingly small, silly events like this happen, most people's reaction is to laugh at a problem that most likely won't affect them directly and go about their daily lives, waiting for the little digger to dig the big boat out of a tiny canal. Orkaby, however, thought of the political ramifications of the closure of the Suez Canal and thought outside the box; what if it wasn't a boat that closed the canal but instead civil war or unrest? While I believe this is an important question to be asked, I don't think Orkaby took enough time in his article to explain the details of how unrest in Yemen could cause the closure of the Suez Canal. I have seen many memes, stories, and articles about this event; I hadn't seen a perspective like Orkaby's before I read this article. But after reading it several times looking for a clue of what I should specifically be concerned about in regards to unrest in Yemen without end, I realized that while Orkaby brought

up a new perspective about the Suez Canal, I would be interested in reading a second article explaining more details on how he thought this might occur.

Source

Orkaby, Asher. "Beyond Suez: How Yemen's War Can Imperil Red Sea Shipping." *The National Interest*, The Center for the National Interest, 2 Apr. 2021, nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/beyond-suez-how-yemen%E2%80%99s-war-can-imperil-red-sea-shipping-181647.