



FRENCH MEDIATION IN THE YEMENI HANISH ISLANDS CASE (1995–1998)

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 8 th June 2024 Accepted: 6 th July 2024	The Yemen-Eritrean conflict highlighted the significance of international border disputes and the necessity of finding a peaceful resolution through international arbitration, which has emerged as the most effective method for resolving disputes of this nature. The dispute generated vital local and international implications before resorting to international arbitration as a final resort, Therefore, France assisted in directing the conflict to the path of a peaceful resolution because of its careful handling of the conflict since its intervention in With the help of international and regional support, French diplomacy was able to persuade the two nations to settle their differences through international arbitration. The court then used this foundation to reject all of the arguments made by the parties and issued its ruling based on principles agreed upon by public international law. As a result, France was successful in resolving the dispute from the agreement of principles to the execution of the judgment decision.

Keywords: geopolitics, Hanish, Red Sea, Yemen, France

INTRODUCTION:

The Hanish Islands are of great strategic importance, as they are located near the Bab al-Mandab Strait, which is the southern key to the Red Sea, and these islands consist of 40 islands, most of which are small islands, perhaps the most important of which is the Great Hanish Island, and considering it the center of gravity in the archipelago, and this is what made it close to the Yemeni coasts more than it is close to the Eritrean coasts, and its importance lies in the fact that it is the link between the continents of the world, which made it one of the shortest international shipping lanes, as well as its distinction in nature As a result of the great importance of these islands and their special advantages, they have avenged the dispute between Yemen and Eritrea around them, which caused a great local and international echo until it reached international arbitration for final resolution.

Accordingly, the aim of choosing this topic as the title of the study was to shed light on the reservoirs of this conflict and its repercussions on the international arena, starting with friction and then conflict, the war between the Yemeni-Eritrean states and then international arbitration around it.

The nature of the study required the division of the research into an introduction, three sections and its conclusion, the first section was entitled the strategic importance of the Hanish Islands, while the second was entitled the Yemeni-Eritrean conflict over the islands 1985-1995, while the third section highlighted the relationship of France and its role in resolving the conflict between the two parties 1995-1998.

The researcher relied on a variety of sources in the completion of this research, foremost of which are university theses that dealt with the Hanish Islands, perhaps the most important of which are: Thesis tagged (Regional and international positions on the Yemeni-Eritrean conflict on the Hanish Islands 1995_1998) by the researcher Woroud Majid Kazem Al-Tamimi, submitted to the Faculty of Arts, Al-Mustansiriya University 2021, as well as a master's thesis tagged (Yemeni-Eritrean conflict over the islands of the southern Red Sea) Researcher Russell Abboud Mohi Al-Ghazali, presented to the Faculty of Education, University of Babylon, 2011

As well as the books that had a share in this research, the most prominent of which is the book: Hanish Islands and the Security of the Red Sea by Aida Ali Sarie El-Din, issued by the National Library House, Abu Dhabi, 1996. As well as the book tagged (Conflict Resolution by Proper Methods), by the author Abdul Karim Ali Al-Iryani, issued from Oman 2001

Also, the research published in various Iraqi and Arab journals also had a share in providing the research with valuable information that greatly benefited the researcher, especially the research on the geopolitical importance of the

Hanish Islands and its impact on the security of international navigation by researcher Wissam Ali Kitan, published in the Journal of Arts, Issue 139 December 2021, University of Baghdad, and another research entitled The Yemeni-Eritrean conflict over the Hanish archipelago by researcher Alaa Salem, Published in the Journal of International Politics, No. 135, (April 1999), and other sources that benefited the researcher by writing the details of the research.

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE HANISH ISLANDS

The islands of the Hanish archipelago enjoy a strategic location and geopolitical importance because they are located at the southern entrance to the Red Sea in front of Bab al-Mandab (Zubaidi, 2002, 41), and the Hanish archipelago consists of three main islands (Al-Habashi, 1992, 27), and thus the islands of the Greater and Lesser Hanish archipelago and Zagr are one of the most important islands in the Red Sea in terms of geopolitics and the focus of attention of regional and international powers due to its vital and continuous location in addition to the archipelago's area of 194 km (Kitan, 2021, 291).

In this context, the island of Great Hanish is the largest in this part, especially as it is located at a width of 13-44 north and a longitude of 44-45 and is 90 km² and is long in shape extending from northeast to southwest and away from the right coast about 28 nautical miles (Maqtari, DT, 5).

At the same time, Hanish Island is a rocky volcanic island and there are many mountain ranges along the island, as well as in the center of the island there is a mountain of very terrain and ruggedness with a height of 415 meters above sea level, and there are many hills that are cut by deep valleys descending towards the sea and its coasts are covered by beach sediments, silt, mud, river and valley sediments is a large part of the island covered by deposits of porous rocks basaltic Boissaltuff formed from volcanic ash and successive With Basalt lava flows (Maqtari, DT, 5).

On this basis, the island of Hanish Grand comes at the top of those islands in terms of strategic and geopolitical importance, as it is located near the entrance to the Red and Southern Sea on the Yemeni coasts and is 140 km from the island of Perim, so its geopolitical importance lies in that it affects its regional surroundings economically and politically, and its impact on international navigation exceeds being one of the control and control centers in the southern Red Sea, especially as it is habitable (Aida, 1996, 35).

At the same time, the island is surrounded by coral reefs on all sides, which are known to obstruct maritime traffic around them, and this island is characterized by the abundance of fish, especially colorful aquarium fish, as well as sharks, turtles and other types of fish (Tamimi, 2021, 24).

On this basis, the island was distinguished by being able to monitor the navigation movement of ships passing through the region at the time in the event of the availability of capabilities and equipment for monitoring, in addition to that, the island was used for military purposes, especially by Egypt during the October 1973 war, as a military airport to control and monitor the navigational movement of passing ships, as well as that the island contains a large oil and mineral reserve (Tamimi, 2021, 24-25).

While the Lesser Hanish Islands are located in the northeast of the Great Hanish Island and the south and island of Zagr, which is 10 nautical miles away, while its area is about 9 km² consisting of volcanic rocks and many long mountain ranges very rugged, which reach a height of about 415 m above sea level, and that this island is about 26 nautical miles away from the city of Al-Khufa and from the coast of the right about 20.5 nautical miles.

In this regard, the islands of the Hanish archipelago enjoy a strategic location that qualifies them to be an important center for those who want to impose control and domination over the Red Sea and the entrances to the seas adjacent to the islands (Eritrea, d.t., 25), especially the Arabian Sea, the Strait of Tiran, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba, as well as the Suez Canal, through which it facilitates access to any location they want from the beaches, islands and countries located in those areas (Kitan, 2021, 294).

Therefore, the islands of the archipelago occupy great economic importance, which made them the focus of attention of the forces aspiring to control them and invest their economic resources, since the islands have volcanic formations, so studies conducted on the islands have proven that they are rich in oil and mineral wealth, as they contain many minerals and ores in large commercial quantities, especially minerals represented by iron, copper, lead, magnesium, zinc and gold, as well as the presence of uranium and metal (aquamarine), which is comparable to and equal to diamonds in economic value (Ketan, 2021, 296).

In light of the geopolitical, economic and military importance enjoyed by the Hanish Islands, especially the geographical location at the entrance to the southern Red Sea, it has become the focus of attention of competing powers at the regional and international levels in order to control them and control international navigation, especially since this importance overlaps and varies for the calculations of regional and international powers between their security, military, political, economic and social importance, it is possible at a moment that any of these importance emerges on the surface according to the repercussions, interaction and regional and international interference in Red Sea Region (Kitan, 2021, 297).

It is clear from the above that the strategic location of Yemen on the coasts extending from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean and its direct control over the Bab al-Mandab Strait and then on those strategic islands scattered from the side of the Red Sea to the depths of the ocean has given Yemen many advantages, which found a state of ambitions Arabic direction of each other's regions, including the islands located on the Red Sea, so the Yemeni-Eritrean competition appeared over those islands.

II- Yemeni-Eritrean dispute over islands

The beginning of the crisis between the two countries dates back to the visit of Eritrean Interior Minister Ali Sayed Abdel Allah to the Yemeni capital Sana'a on October 15, 1995 carrying a message from Eritrean President Asias Afwerki (Asias

Afwerki: Assisi was born in 1946 in the Eritrean capital, he joined the Eritrean revolution in 1966 after returning from Addis Ababa, where he was studying at the School of Engineers, and after joining the Eritrean revolution, the Eritrean Liberation Front sent him to China within a military course with a group From the Eritrean youth, and after his return he was chosen as a political commissioner for the fifth region, but he has been raised several doubts as a result of his relationship with the United States in the mid-sixties, and he was also accused of assassinating his opponents inside and outside Eritrea, but everyone does not disagree on his superior ability in the war, and his proximity to members of his group, and achieved what he aspired to in 1991, and became the head of the Eritrean interim government, and then became the head of the independent Eritrean government in 1993) (Ali, 2019, 80), to Yemeni President Ali Abdul Allah Saleh (Ali Abdul Allah Saleh: Ali Abdul Allah Saleh bin Afash Al-Hamdani was born on the fifth of July in 1942 in the Xinjiang area of Sana'a, he lived in a rural environment practicing agriculture, he was educated by churches and jurists He joined the military in 1958 He graduated from the Military School in 1960, he joined the Armor School in 1964 and graduated from it successfully, he suffered many injuries in his confrontation with the royalists, Ali bin Abdul Allah Saleh took over many Of the military leaders, the last of which was the commander of the Taiz Brigade, and he obtained the rank of lieutenant colonel in the twenty-fifth in 1978, and because of the political and military possibility, he was elected president of the country on the seventeenth of July in 1978) (Adel, 2008, 51) includes Eritrean issues and demands regarding fishing in the territorial waters of the islands of the Hanish archipelago and the Yemeni forces stationed on the islands to prevent Eritrean fishermen from fishing, so the official Yemeni response came that Yemen does not prevent the joint fishing rights of both countries in the nearby Yemeni and Eritrean islands It respects these recognized rights, which are by virtue of custom and tradition, but opposes commercial fishing by Eritreans, which is outside the scope of traditional fishing recognized between the two countries (Safa, 1995, 9).

At the same time, on November 3, 1995, some Eritrean military arrived on the Great Island of Hanish and inquired from the guards of the tourism project about the nature of the work they do on the land of the island, and the response came from the official of the Yemeni garrison who replied that they are guarding a tourism project. Sports diving is under implementation for the benefit of a Yemeni investor and his German partner, after which the Eritrean military left the land of the island (Al-Iryani, 2001, 158).

Accordingly, a number of Eritrean soldiers arrived on the island of Hanish al-Kubra on November 11, 1995 and delivered a written warning to the members of the Yemeni garrison requesting that the work of the German company for the establishment of the tourist hotel and exit on the island be stopped, but the members of the Yemeni garrison responded to the Eritrean military and could not comply with these orders and they are a market informing their government of this (Al-Yousifi, 1970, 79).

In light of this, the Yemeni response came after the delivery of the memorandum, as the Yemeni authorities submitted an official protest to the Eritrean government and through the recognized diplomatic methods in response to the method adopted by the Eritrean authorities in the method of communication with a friendly and neighboring country such as Yemen, although the diplomatic attempt did not work to contain the situation, as Eritrea sent a naval patrol on November 15, 1995, demanding that the patrol commander evacuate the island from the Yemeni forces. But the Yemeni officer replied that ((he could not evacuate the island and take down the flag, and that the memorandum has been submitted to the Presidency of the Republic and that the instructions are to continue to work and not to evacuate the island because the crisis will be boring by diplomatic means, so the Eritrean patrol left content with this response (Al-Iryani, 1970, 159).

Despite the continuous talks between the two sides to contain the crisis (Al-Iryani, 1970, 190-161), especially the Yemeni side, which made efforts to resolve the dispute properly and continue to hold meetings and negotiations, the meeting agreed upon in Sana'a revealed the intentions of the Eritrean government, where Eritrea, before the meeting agreed upon in the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, attacked the island and the Yemeni garrison stationed there (Al-Asbahi, 1995, 166) It is clear from the above that the Eritrean side preferred to resort to the use of military force to resolve the situation in its favor.

Therefore, military operations began on the evening of December 15, 1995 when Eritrean forces attacked the island of Hanish al-Kubra and the attack continued until noon on December 17 of the same year, and the Yemeni forces stationed on the island of Hanish were limited in number and armament, as the number of those who tried to address the Eritrean attack does not exceed 500 elements and with the help of Yemeni aviation, which carried out several sorties to prevent Eritrean forces from penetrating into the territorial waters of Yemen, the Yemeni government has condemned the attack and described it as a blatant (piracy operation). Against the Yemeni territory and territorial waters, as well as threatening the security of international navigation in the Red Sea, in the face of these developments, the two parties reached a ceasefire on December 18 after a telephone call between the two countries (Al-Iryani, 1970, 162), and the Yemeni government has expressed its readiness to resolve the differences by peaceful means, so consultations took place between the Yemeni and Eritrean sides and ended with the postponement of the issue to the end of February 1996 (Alaa, 1998, 158)

It is worth noting that there are many reasons that prompted the Eritrean side to carry out a military attack against Yemen on those islands, and perhaps the most prominent of these reasons is the weakness of the Yemeni side in terms of military, especially in the field of naval power, which was suffering from it severely, in addition to that the Eritrean side has received external support, especially Israeli support, which can be considered the influential factor in the course of events in the Red Sea region (Tamimi, 2021, 51)

It is clear from the above that diplomacy has not succeeded in resolving the conflict between the two parties, so we find that the conflict has been punctuated by regional and international interventions since its inception, and thus the intervention of external parties in resolving the conflict, which led to the internationalization of the conflict, especially after the failure of Arabic and African diplomacy to find a solution to end the conflict between the two countries, which gave way to either internationalizing the conflict internationally, and this is what was welcomed by the parties to the conflict.

III- France and its role in resolving the dispute between the parties until 1998

Eritrean-French relations extend back to the period before the official declaration of Eritrea's independence in 1993, when an agreement was reached between the two countries in the economic field and the contribution of France in the health, industrial, agricultural, cultural and media aspects after 1995, including regional and political cooperation, infrastructure repair, transportation and energy, and the contribution of France amounted to about 20 million French francs (Hana, 2010, 219).

From this standpoint, the United Nations (Kayali et al., 1994, 200-202) France was nominated to play the role of mediation and good offices between the two countries (Tamimi, 2021, 156) after that role was played by both Egypt and Ethiopia, especially since France had wide interests in the Red Sea region and the Horn of Africa and had good relations with the parties to the Yemeni and Eritrean conflict, so it went to exert all diplomatic endeavors under the title "Require and explore intentions after this task was entrusted to Ambassador Francis Gutman (Born on October 4, 1930 in the French capital, Paris, he held many government positions, including responsible for policies in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the period (1951-1957), then a member of the French delegation within the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations (1952-1955), then became Secretary General of Foreign Relations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the period (1981-1985), then the French ambassador in the director (1985-1988), then President of the French Petroleum Institute (1993-1995), then the policy officer in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1996-1998, then the President of the Defense Council. Alami (1998-2011) died on June 25, 2020 in Paris).

In light of this, the French envoy Francis Gutman, the envoy of French President Jacques Chirac arrived (Jacques Chirac: French politician Jacques Chirac was born on the twenty-ninth of November in 1932, in the fifth Parisian arrondissement, he is the only son of his family, he studied at the Institute of Political Science in Paris in 1951 and then studied at the National School in 1954, graduating in 1959, after which he entered the world of politics and became a member of the French National Assembly in 1968, and took gradation in its positions, including: Ministers of Agriculture and Development (1972-1973), then Minister of the Interior in 1974, Prime Minister (1974-1976), as well as his appointment as Mayor of Paris (1977-1995) and on May 7 he was elected President of the Republic) (Zeidan, 1996, 95-96) to the region on February 1, 1996 The latter expressed upon his arrival that his visit comes within the framework of urgent French efforts to defuse the existing tension between the two countries: He added that this visit does not carry any French initiative ready to resolve the conflict, but explained that the France government believes it can now help with the Yemeni-Eritrean conflict (Saidi et al., 1999, 104).

The French mediation began its first effective moves to resolve the crisis with visits by the French envoy Gutman to the two conflicting parties, calling on the parties to the conflict to provide written pledges to ensure that there is no military activity or action by either country during the existing French efforts to resolve the conflict, and accordingly the two conflicting parties agreed to do so and the Yemeni government announced its full readiness to cooperate with the French mediation (Tamimi, 2021, 199).

Based on the acceptance of the two conflicting parties to the French mediation, the French envoy went towards visits to both Asmara and Sana'a during the period 9 December to 18 February of 1996 to negotiate and find appropriate solutions that satisfy both parties, proposing the formation of a court consisting of three judges, two judges appointed by the Yemen Eritrea and a judge appointed by France, and the three judges study the disputed issue and put judgments accordingly (Aida, 1996, 123)

It is also worth mentioning that the French envoy made a concerted visit, as he visited Saudi Arabia, Cairo and Ethiopia and met with Prince Saud Al-Faisal (Ismaili, 2018, 8-18), Saudi Foreign Minister and Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa (Obaidi, 2020, 87).

Despite the initial tendency of the parties to accept the French ideas, Eritrea received them half-heartedly following the return of its president from his visit to Israel in early February 1996, which made the France amend its proposals so that the arbitration body is formed from two judges appointed by the parties as well as a president of the tribunal appointed with the consent of both parties, and Sana'a met these proposals again with acceptance in the middle of February 1996, and officially announced in mid-March 1996 its readiness to sign the Agreement of Principles (Salem), 1996, 160) with the Eritrean side, which was confirmed by the Yemeni president in early April 1996 during his visit to Cairo, Eritrea responded with reservations on some points in an attempt to buy time and disrupt the French role (Al-Ghazali, 2011, 120).

Despite this, the French mediator, after visits to both Asmara and Sana'a, was able to convince the parties to return to the negotiating table, which was already done, as negotiations resumed in London on the fourth of September 1996 to discuss the issue of naming rulers, and as a result of the memoranda sent by the Yemen government to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, France, the Arabic League and other parties, and with the mediation of France between the two countries, this mediation resulted in reaching an arbitration agreement (Al-Ghazali, 2011, 124)

Arbitration Agreement

This agreement between Yemen and Eritrea was based on the Agreement of Principles signed between the two countries in Paris in 1996 and included several items, the most important of which are:

1. No later than December 31, 1996, the parties shall inform each other and France of the names and addresses of the arbitrators they have appointed, and the four arbitrators shall meet within two weeks to consider the selection of the President of the Court.
2. The four referees are making efforts to reach an agreement to choose the president of the court
3. The court shall meet no later than (11 October 1997)
4. In the first phase, the Court shall issue a judgment on territorial sovereignty and determine the scope of the conflict between Eritrea and Yemen and the President of the Court shall determine Yemeni sovereignty in accordance with the principles and rules of international law (Bassem, 2001, 104).

The Court held its first meeting on the fourteenth of January 1997 in London, and the Court asked representatives of the Yemen of Eritrea to answer its questions, and the Court continued to hear the arguments of the parties about the territorial sovereignty of the islands, and the Court was convinced after studying the arguments of the parties with the Yemeni point of view, so it issued on the ninth of October 1998 its final decision and ruled the ownership of Yemen in the islands of the Hanish archipelago, and Eritrea implemented the judgment and handed over the island (Greater Hanish) to the Yemeni forces on the first of November 1998 (Al-Ghazali, 2011, 128)

Based on the above, it is clear to us the positive and impartial efforts of the French government to mediate between the two countries, which made the role of France go beyond the usual mediation in international politics, and thus the success of its role in settling the conflict, starting from the agreement of principles to the implementation of the ruling decision.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the above that the strategic, political and economic location of the Red Sea for Yemen and Eritrea is a major reason for provoking the conflict between the two countries, and this conflict almost led to the ignition of the southern Red Sea region in a war whose results are difficult to predict and dragged the region into a new phase of instability, which it suffers from originally because of the large number of conflicts, whether internal in the countries bordering the Red Sea or external between these countries themselves, but the interest of the major countries played a role in directing The dispute towards its peaceful resolution, including the France that succeeded in containing the conflict, through the keenness shown by the France since its intervention in the conflict, as French diplomacy succeeded with great success and with international and regional support and support in convincing the two countries to resolve their dispute through international arbitration.

Source: Yemeni Islands Dr. Shehab Mohsen Abbas, at the link <https://ebook.univeyes.com/154912>

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