

The Ben Gurion Canal and its Relation with the Israeli Strategy of War on Gaza

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Abstract: The Israeli war on Gaza has several geostrategic objectives, including the implementation of the Ben Gurion Canal project, which aims to link the Red Sea with the Mediterranean Sea, as an alternative to the Egypt-controlled Suez Canal since 1956. However, the length and high cost of this project made many experts confirm that this project will only reach the expected revenues by seizing the entire Gaza Strip and digging a canal that links Eilat to the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, the underlying motive behind the Ben Gurion Canal project is to control navigation and international trade in the region, which will enable the Zionist entity to enhance its influence and achieve political and economic gains in the region. This underlines the importance of this project within the Zionist plan in its war on Gaza. This study seeks to clarify the relationship between the Israeli war on Gaza and its geostrategic importance in implementing the Ben Gurion Canal.

Keywords: Gaza, Israel, Ben Gurion, canals, Corridors

الملخص: إن الحرب الإسرائيلية على غزة تسعى إلى تحقيق أهداف جيوسياسية تتمثل في تنفيذ مشروع قناة "بن غوريون" الذي يهدف إلى الربط بين البحر الأحمر والبحر الأبيض المتوسط، ليكون بديلاً لقناة السويس التي تسيطر عليها دولة مصر منذ تأميمها عام 1956. ومع ذلك، فإن التكلفة العالية للمشروع وطول مسار القناة جعلتا العديد من الخبراء يؤكدون أن هذا المشروع لن يغطي الإيرادات المتوقعة منه إلا عبر الاستيلاء الكامل على غزة وحفر قناة تربط بين إيلات والبحر الأبيض المتوسط. وعليه، فالهدف من وراء مشروع قناة بن غوريون هو السيطرة على الملاحة والتجارة الدولية في المنطقة، مما يمكن الكيان الصهيوني من تعزيز نفوذه وتحقيق مكاسب سياسية واقتصادية في المنطقة، ومن هنا تكمن أهمية هذا المشروع ضمن المخطط الصهيوني في حربه على غزة. تنطلق هذه الدراسة من البحث في الإشكالية التي مفادها توضيح العلاقة بين الحرب الإسرائيلية على غزة وأهميتها الجيوسياسية في تنفيذ مشروع قناة بن غوريون.

الكلمات المفتاحية: غزة، إسرائيل، بن غوريون، القنوات، الممرات.

Introduction:

Canals and Straits are vital arteries of global trade and maritime transport as they facilitate international trade and military movement, connect distant continents and reduce transport costs. From a historical standpoint, the control of major canals reflects a nation's power and influence; they also play a key role in military logistics, national security and geopolitical influence. From the Panama Canal to the Suez Canal, nations with access to these routes have significantly influenced global trade and geopolitics. Similarly, in today's geopolitical landscape, these waterways are no less critical; powerful nations strategize to strengthen their influence, by engaging in military alliances, making strategic economic investments, and leading diplomatic initiatives to secure their interests and strengthen their global standing.

In the period prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, a strong emphasis has been placed on the importance of water resources to achieve strategic goals. In 1886, Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism recognized the strategic importance of water resources in a future Jewish state; He stated that: "water engineers are the real owners of the land". Now, there are claims that Israel seeks to control water resources from the Nile to the Euphrates and it seems that Israel developed a strategy not for only controlling water resources but also international trade and maritime routes through the implementation of the Ben Gurion Canal. Most importantly, the concept of the Ben Gurion Canal Project has long existed, it was only revived in the Abrahamic Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Sudan, and Bahrain.

The Ben Gurion Canal project was conceptualized in the 1960s to create an alternative maritime route connecting the Red Sea with the Mediterranean Sea and to reshape global maritime dynamics by challenging Egypt's monopoly on the shortest Europe-Asia route through the Suez Canal. Geopolitical theories suggest that controlling maritime routes has a significant impact over global trade and geopolitics. Accordingly, Israel seeks to control maritime trade routes in the region to become the link between Asia and Europe, strengthen

its trade relations with different countries as well as create economic activities and industrial zones along the canal path.

The operation known as “Al-Aqsa Flood”, launched on October 7, 2023, by the military wing of Hamas against the Zionist settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories sparked significant controversy. The Palestinian attacks were described as pre-emptive and abortive, revealing an Israeli project aimed at constructing a canal called Ben Gurion. Given the challenging terrain and the cost of the project, the canal is planned to pass through Gaza. This trajectory requires eliminating opposing forces and displacing the local population to ensure the canal security. Such a canal could alter global trade route by linking the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Therefore, the Israeli military actions in Gaza appear to contain geopolitical and military geostrategic goals.

Research Question:

This study seeks to explore **the relationship between the actions of the Israeli army in Gaza and the strategic significance of the Ben Gurion Canal project**, by answering the following research question: **How does the strategic importance of Gaza influence Israel's strategy to build the Ben Gurion canal?**

Hypothesis: The geopolitical importance of Gaza greatly influences Israel's motivation to implement the Ben Gurion Canal project as a strategic approach" to enhance its geopolitical, economic, and security interests.

Aims: this study aims to analyse the geopolitical significance of the Ben Gurion Canal project, as well as examining the link between this project and the Israeli war on gaza, furthermore, this article explains the the relationship between the Ben Gurion canal project, and the India-Middle East-Europe economic Corridor.

Structure of the Study:

This study is organized as follows:

In the first part, we will discuss the geopolitical significance of the Ben Gurion Canal project.

In the second part, we will examine the strategic importance of Gaza in relation to the Ben Gurion canal. This involves delving into the geographic and strategic significance of the Gaza Strip as well as examining the link between this project and the Israeli war on Gaza.

In the third part: we will analyse the relationship between the Ben Gurion canal project and the India-Middle East-Europe economic Corridor and the complementarity of these two projects.

The Geopolitical Significance of the Ben Gurion Canal in the Israeli Strategy.

This project aims to create a canal linking the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Some experts speculate that one of the reasons behind Israel's desire to eliminate Hamas from the Gaza Strip is the interest in building the Ben Gurion Canal Project. This project is named after the founding father of Israel, David Ben Gurion. the project includes constructing a canal that passes through the Israeli-controlled **Negev Desert** from the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba (the eastern arm of the Red Sea) to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, which offers an alternative to the Suez Canal, controlled by Egypt (Indian Express, 2023).

Figure 1: Map of the Proposed Ben Gurion Canal

This map shows the proposed route of the Ben Gurion canal, which is an alternative to Egypt's Suez Canal and aims to link the Gulf of Aqaba near Eilat with the Mediterranean Sea, by traversing the Negev Desert and stopping right next to Gaza. This map also underscores the Canal's proximity to geopolitically sensitive regions, especially the Gaza Strip, where the Palestinian resistance operates.



Source: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-ben-gurion-canal-vision-amidst-upheaval/>

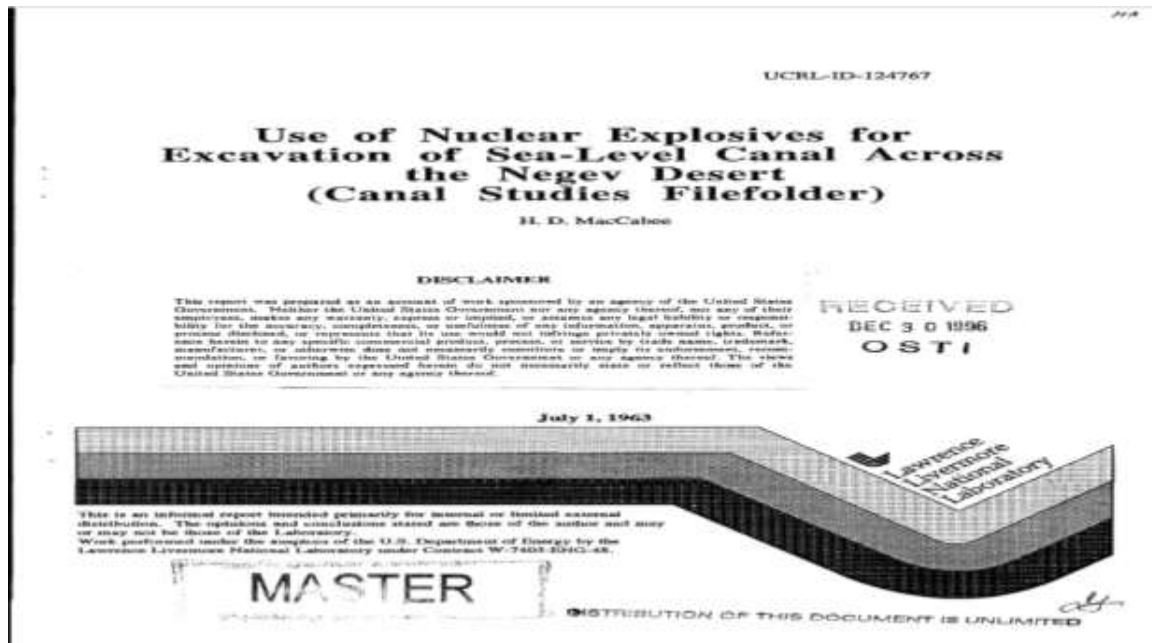
If completed, the Ben Gurion Canal Project that was first envisioned in the 1960s could revolutionize global maritime trade by undermining Egypt's monopoly on the shortest route between Europe and Asia. However, it is important to note that this project is extremely complex and costly, with an estimated cost of 100 billion U.S. dollars. This amount far exceeds the amount needed to widen the Suez Canal and solve its traffic issues. On the other hand, the planned route for the canal is 100 km longer than the Suez Canal (Ali, 2024).

A declassified document in the 1990s showed that a few years after the Suez Crisis, the Americans developed a secret plan in 1963 to detonate 520 nuclear bombs in the Negev Desert in order to assist "Israel" in digging the Ben Gurion Canal and to reduce the cost of drilling in diverse terrain between lowland, desert, and mountains. However, the risk of nuclear fallout makes this option extremely risky (Rao, 2024).

Figure 2: The 1963 US Classified Proposal to Use Nuclear Explosions to Construct the Ben Gurion Canal.

The declassified document of 1996 shows the secret American-led plan of 1963 to detonate 520 nuclear bombs in "Al-Naqab" desert to help Israel construct the Ben Gurion canal. This document proves

that Israel and the United States have been planning for decades to build the Ben Gurion Canal to rival the Egyptian canal.



Source: Al Mayadeen English, 1 Dec 2023, <https://2u.pw/1aXVywzU>

Through this project, Israel seeks to achieve various goals, the most important being:

1- Economic Goals:

Although the estimated cost to dig the canal is approximately 55 billion U.S. dollars, its revenues would cover the costs in just ten years. The primary goal of this canal is to control the most important shipping routes in the world, in addition to the fact that 90 percent of the Israeli trade with the world circulates through the sea and that the Mediterranean Sea has become an important source of gas for Israel.

If built, the Ben Gurion Canal could significantly boost Israel's economy through transit fees and other related economic activities. The canal's ability to handle the world's largest ships combined with its strategic location makes it a highly attractive route for global maritime trade. Estimates suggest that Israel could earn around \$6 billion annually from transit fees alone.

The canal project would also stimulate substantial investment in infrastructure and development, creating numerous jobs and supporting regional economic growth. The construction phase alone requires around 300,000 workers (containerlift, 2024).

Upon completion, the canal is predicted to drive an industrial transformation and facilitate the establishment of an economic and industrial zone along its length. A key economic objective of the project is to leverage control over the gas fields situated along its shores, including the Leviathan, Samson, and Aphrodite fields in the Mediterranean Sea, which Israel claims ownership of. This initiative aligns with Europe's increasing demand for alternative gas sources, especially following the disruption of Russian supplies. Additionally, Israel plans to develop tourist cities along the canal, which would further enhance the tourism sector and contributes in strengthening the national economy (Ali, 2024).

2: Reduce Dependence on the Suez Canal:

The first goal of this canal is to control the most important shipping lines in the world whereas the second is to reduce dependence on the Suez Canal because Israel relies heavily on maritime trade, which is crucial for its economic and military activities.

The Suez Canal was opened in 1869. It was jointly controlled by Britain and France in its initial years, but was nationalized in 1956 by Egypt which now collects toll revenues from the passing vessels. In other words, Egypt has sole authority and control over it.

the Suez Canal currently handles around 12% of global trade, acting as a vital shortcut for maritime transportation between Europe and Asia. It also separates the African continent from Asia, allowing passage from the north Atlantic to the Indian Ocean without the need to circumnavigate the African continent. This Canal is essential for international trade and has been a reason for conflict since its launch. The Suez Canal accounts for **30% of all global container traffic** and facilitate the transport of 1 trillion U.S. dollars' worth of goods

annually. It is also crucial to the transport of oil and gas from the Middle East to European and Far Eastern markets.

Due to a sudden sandstorm on March 23, 2021, the super tanker “**Ever Given**” was diagonally caught across the Suez Canal. The incident blocked the waterway for six days, disrupting billions worth of global trade and causing a direct impact on military movement in the region. The incident demonstrated the need for an alternative passageway to the Suez Canal (New Zealand foreign Affairs&Trade, 2021).

Dr. Ismail Abdel Ghaffar Farag, President of the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport noted that prices for containers surged by over 10 percent due to this disruption. The incident caused over \$9 billion worth of goods to be delayed each day, resulting in losses equivalent to \$400 million in trade per hour and an estimated total trade loss of \$54 billion. The insurance companies **faced** \$31 billion in losses from the six-day closure of the canal, which contributed to a 0.4 percent decline in global trade growth during that brief period (Farag, 2012).

In 2023, Western countries expressed concerns over a 15 percent increase in transit fees for all types of ships, as well as the logistical disruptions in the Suez Canal due to potential groundings, weather factors, and other issues. Such disruptions can inflate shipping costs and negatively impact global trade and businesses. Therefore, Western powers, such as the United States and the European Union are eager to create an alternative route to the Suez Canal.

The Ben-Gurion Canal is expected to be more efficient than the Suez Canal because it is designed to operate differently. For instance, while the Suez Canal relies on a single route for ships traveling in either direction, Israel plans to construct two independent canals, one from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea and the other from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. The Israeli Canal is aimed to accommodate a larger number of ships and reduce transit time which typically takes two weeks for vessels in the Suez Canal.

Unlike the Suez Canal, located along sandy shores, the Israeli Canal would have rocky walls that require almost no maintenance. Each proposed branch of the Canal would have a depth of 50 meters and a width of about 200 meters. It would be 10 meters deeper than Suez Canal, which makes it suitable to accommodate the world's largest ships (Ali, 2024).

The Geopolitical Importance of Gaza for the Ben Gurion Canal Project:

The idea of the Ben Gurion Canal project has been around for a long time, but it emerged once more after the Abraham accords. In April 2021, Israel announced its plan to initiate this project in June 2021 but it was not successfully implemented due to the Gaza strip. according to several sources, the final point of the Ben Gurion canal will end in Gaza. Gaza is deemed to be a vital point in facilitating the implementation of Israel's project which connects the Red Sea with the Mediterranean Sea via Eilat and the Gulf of Aqaba.

As previously mentioned, the proposed canal is designed to be around one third longer than the Suez Canal, making it too ambitious. The route involves navigating through challenging mountainous terrain, which significantly increases the cost of excavation and infrastructure. Furthermore, the canal proximity to the Gaza Strip entails a range of security challenges. Therefore, while the location of the canal near Gaza enhances its geostrategic importance, it also complicates the project's feasibility, which raises doubts about its successful implementation (Aatif, 2025).

The Israeli occupation believes that coercing the population of Gaza to seek refuge in Egypt or Jordan or relocating them and eliminating the resistance in Gaza would help address both financial and security challenges. Integrating the Gaza strip into the occupied territories would create a shorter direct route for the canal and reduce the estimated costs, which are projected to exceed \$55 billion U.S. dollars. According to initial studies, it also reduces the time of construction and mitigates security concerns by enforcing the relocation

of Gaza inhabitants to neighboring countries and eliminating all forms of resistance (Rao, 2024).

There is growing perception that Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza is not going in accordance with the declared goal of destroying Hamas and revenging the attacks of 07th October. The extensive bombing of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, courts and homes is evidence that Israel is making Gaza uninhabitable for Palestinians. This approach aims to depopulate the Gaza strip and persuade the neighboring countries, particularly Egypt and Jordan, to accept Gazan refugees in exchange for economic benefits from Israel and other Western countries (Helmy, 2025).

Despite the initial announcement, construction of the canal did not commence, but there is an opportunity for progress. Many analysts view the ongoing situation in the Gaza Strip as a potential catalyst for reviving important projects that could benefit the region. The renewed focus on the Ben Gurion Canal is aligned with the growing interest in the Gaza marine gas reserves, which hold a considerable potential.

In March 2021, the Palestinian Investment Fund and the Egyptian government signed a memorandum of understanding, aimed at developing the gas field of the coast of Gaza. This agreement underscores the potential for international collaboration in the region, no objections were raised by Hamas representatives regarding the agreement at that time (Elmas, 2023).

On June 18, 2023, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu outlined a plan to advance development in partnership with both the Palestinian Authority and Egypt. Reports showed constructive discussions between these parties and a willingness to cooperate together for the common interest of the involved parties (Asmar, 2023).

The canal project faces several challenges and difficulties. Experts estimate that the construction of the Ben Gurion Canal will take several years and require the mobilization of around 300,000 workers. Additionally, the canal will traverse a variety of terrains, including desert areas, rugged mountainous areas and the unique Dead Sea basin,

which is situated below sea level. There are also concerns about the potential use of underground nuclear explosions in construction, which could cause catastrophic consequences for the surrounding communities and neighboring countries. Furthermore, Egypt may decide to expand the Suez Canal at a third of the cost of the Israeli Canal (Container Lift, 2024).

In sum, the geopolitical implications of the Gaza Strip concerning the implementation of the Ben Gurion Canal implementation are highly complex and multifaceted. They involve geographical considerations, political dynamics, security and environmental challenges, and critical economic factors. Therefore, the future of both the Gaza Strip and the Ben Gurion Canal are deeply interconnected.

The Relationship Between the Ben Gurion Canal Project and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

India seeks to increase its current GDP to reach 5 trillion U.S. dollars in the next few years to become the third largest economy in the world after the United States and China. In order to achieve this goal, India set a plan to raise exports, boost the industrial sector and turn the nation into a manufacturing hub. In that respect, any economic development requires partners diversification and connectivity, amongst other requirements. Therefore, the current Indian government is building economic corridors to facilitate international trade and reduce trade costs and time.

In September 2023, at the G20 summit in New Delhi, several participants announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the corridor linking India to Europe via Middle East (IMEC), which covers a distance of almost 4.800 kilometers. For the United States and its allies, this plan offers economic and commercial advantages and most importantly, the advantage of countering Chinese ambitions vehicled through the Belt and Road (BRI) initiative. However, it is important to note that the membership of Israel was not mentioned at

the signing, which is probably due to the fact that Israel is not a member of the G20.

The IMEC consists of an Eastern corridor that connects India to the Gulf and a Northern corridor that links the Gulf region with Europe. This initiative is based on developing the already-existing routes to improve efficiency and creating new connections. Accordingly, goods are shipped from Mumbai to Jebel Ali in Dubai to be transported by train through Saudi Arabia to Haifa, Israel. From there, they will be shipped to European ports like Piraeus, Messina, and Marseille, with further rail connections to Germany and other European countries. This corridor will also facilitate the movement of products from Europe to India, in other words the IMEC is not a one-way route, it's a two-way corridor (Lage, 2024).

Figure 3: The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

Figure 3 illustrates the strategic trade route of the IMEC, which connects India, the Middle East and Europe through a combination of shipping lanes and rail networks. Goods travel by maritime routes from India to Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates, and then by train through Saudi Arabia to Haifa. From there, goods are shipped to various European ports, including Piraeus in Greece and other destinations across Europe.



Source:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=imec+india+middle+east+europe+economic+corridor&udm>

In addition to these routes combining maritime and rail transport, the IMEC provides a high-speed data transport network that would replace the existing undersea cables. It also has a “green” character, including an electricity grid connected to the Indian renewable energies and a gas pipeline network to transport “clean hydrogen”.

The IMEC has significant opportunities but also entails substantial challenges. It has the potential to enhance trade between India and Europe as well as transform the trade dynamics between Asia and Europe, primarily through the Suez Canal, which is central to the Belt and Road Initiative. However, the IMEC is challenged by the need for collaboration among multiple states with conflicting ambitions. Unlike the Belt and Road Initiative, which is singularly financed and overseen by China, the divergent aspirations of the IMEC economies, rooted in their socioeconomic peculiarities, must be reconciled to achieve a common goal. Additionally, the trade route needs to be designed to align with market conditions to ensure its long-term viability, nonetheless, events such as the attacks in Israel on October 7 could hinder the IMEC the ambitious plans (Navdeep Suri, 2024).

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the Ben Gurion Canal are two major projects designed to enhance connectivity between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Both initiatives aim to provide alternative trade routes to the Suez Canal and the Belt and Road Initiative led by China. These projects have the potential to facilitate the transport of goods and commodities, facilitating deliveries within a day or two, in contrast to the lengthy transit time, usually extending over ten days through the Suez Canal.

The interplay between these two projects is complex. The Ben Gurion Canal is a vital component of the IMEC; it creates a direct maritime link between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. This connection is expected to enhance the overall efficiency of the IMEC by reducing transit time and costs as well as circumventing maritime chokepoints. Both initiatives traverse the Gulf and the Middle East, a region currently in opposition to Israel. It is important to note that the Ben Gurion project is spearheaded by Israel, which also plays a key role

in the IMEC. This position aligns with broader geostrategic considerations in the context of competition with China and Russia, by counterbalancing the Chinese Silk Road.

Furthermore, the IMEC aims to mitigate Russia's monopoly on European energy supplies via the Nord Stream gas pipelines to strengthen energy security for Western nations. Addressing food security is also a key objective of the IMEC, which highlights the complementary nature of these two projects.

The successful completion of this corridor, which holds immense strategic importance for both Israel and Western countries, requires addressing all forms of resistance in Gaza. The corridor is designed to extend south of the Dead Sea and traverse territories that have been occupied since 1948, to ultimately reach the Mediterranean Sea at a distance of approximately 25 kilometers from the current Gaza envelope. Therefore, ensuring the security of this route is imperative (Rizzi, April 2024).

The underlying reasons of the conflict in Gaza, including the efforts to manage demographic challenges, are deeply motivated by strategic and economic factors. Therefore, it is the imperative to secure critical projects for Israel and Western nations, such as the Indian economic corridor and the Ben Gurion Canal initiative. Ultimately, both projects reflect the regional geopolitical competition and seek to counter the Chinese influence in the region with its Belt and Road initiative and undermine the Russian influence in global trade through alternative energy routes.

Conclusion:

The recent Israeli war on Gaza revealed that Israel has a broader geostrategic framework that extends beyond military objectives. The declared goal of eliminating Hamas entails larger geopolitical and geoeconomic ambitions, such as the implementation of the Ben Gurion canal, which serves as a strategic alternative to the Suez Canal.

This American-Israeli initiative seeks to reshape global trade routes and enhance Israel's geopolitical influence. By controlling maritime trade routes, Israel aims to strengthen its position as an indispensable economic partner, potentially leading to normalization with other Arab countries and in result, Israel will no longer need the recognition of other states.

Furthermore, this geostrategic manoeuvre aligns with broader Western interests aimed at creating alternative trade routes to the Suez Canal and competing with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Efforts are being made to reduce transit time and cost as well as circumvent maritime chokepoints, through the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

The Israeli war on Gaza demonstrates that military force is often used as a means to achieve long-term geo-economic and geopolitical objectives. The integration of infrastructure projects, economic corridors, and control over maritime routes highlights how conflicts in the Middle East are increasingly driven by economic factors rather than purely ideological reasons or security concerns. In this respect, future conflicts are expected to revolve around water, ports, and strategic trade routes.

All these vital projects made Israel instrumentalize its war on Gaza to obtain the support of Western countries that will benefit from these projects. They believe that this can only be achieved by completely eliminating Hamas, weakening the Palestinians, and displacing them from their lands, especially since these projects will expand to include new tourist cities, hotels, Malls, parks, and green spaces. This will not be feasible in a climate of insecurity and hostility.

Lastly, The Ben Gurion Canal highlights the intense competition for control over global trade routes and underscores the geopolitical significance of the Middle East. If completed, the canal will profoundly shift the balance of power in the region, providing Israel with significant advantages in global trade while diminishing Egypt's long-standing dominance over the Suez Canal. This ambitious project will

enable Israel to gain greater political and military influence in the region. The canal potential impacts, that range from reshaping global trade dynamics to escalating regional tensions, illustrate the complex connections between economic ambitions and geopolitical reality.

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