

## **Ben-Gurion Canal: A Study of its Economic Feasibility and Implications for the Egyptian Economy**

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### **Abstract**

This research explores the Ben-Gurion Canal project, through which Israel seeks to create an alternative sea route to the Suez Canal, linking the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea via the Negev Desert. The research examines the economic feasibility, geopolitical motivations, and potential impacts of the project on the Egyptian economy, particularly given the strategic and economic importance of the Suez Canal as a major international shipping route. The research adopts a multidimensional analytical approach encompassing geographical, economic, environmental, and legal criteria, and assesses the feasibility of the Israeli project considering the technical, political, and financial challenges. Furthermore, the research compares the two canals in terms of capacity, transit time, and cost, while analyzing the potential impacts on Suez Canal revenues and the Egyptian national economy should the project be implemented. Considering these challenges, the study presents various policy scenarios and recommendations aimed at protecting Egyptian interests, including developing the Suez Canal, expanding the economic zone, and enhancing regional and international cooperation. The research concludes with strategic recommendations for addressing potential threats and diversifying Egypt's sources of national income.

### **Keywords:**

Suez Canal, Ben Gurion Canal, strategic waterways, maritime sovereignty, global shipping, sovereign guidelines, international maritime law, security development, national economy.

## **Introduction:**

The global economy and geopolitical change have witnessed a powerful political force amidst exciting transformations. International broadcasting channels have emerged as strategic keys to controlling trade and capital flows between East and West. The Suez Canal is one of the most prominent of these waterways, representing a creative artery for the Egyptian economy and a significant source of sovereign income. However, the Ben-Gurion Canal project, proposed by an Israeli as an alternative to the Suez Canal, opens a wide door to debate about its economic feasibility and its potential impact on Egypt's role in international navigation. The research problem is that the Ben-Gurion Canal project, proposed by Israel, represents a direct challenge to the Suez Canal's status, not only as a global maritime route, but also as a source of Egyptian national income.

Although the project has not yet been implemented, the mere proposal of it raises profound economic questions about its feasibility compared to the Suez Canal, its impact on Egyptian revenues, and the volume of trade transiting through Egypt. Considering this potential threat, the fundamental problem of this research is the following: To what extent could the Ben-Gurion Canal project pose an economic threat to the Suez Canal, and the potential repercussions for the Egyptian economy if implemented. To analyze the main problem, the research will address several sub-questions, such as: the actual economic feasibility of the Ben-Gurion Canal project; a comparison of the proposed Israeli canal to the Suez Canal in terms of revenues, costs, and navigation routes; the expected impact on Suez Canal revenues if a portion of global trade is diverted to the Ben-Gurion Canal; and finally, the possible strategies for Egypt to protect its economic interests and enhance the Suez Canal's global standing.

Hence, the research aims to analyze the economic dimensions of the Ben Gurion Canal project and evaluate its potential impact on the Egyptian economy through: analyzing the economic feasibility of the Ben Gurion Canal project in terms of cost, return, operational capacity, and geographical potential; comparing it with the Suez Canal

in terms of economic efficiency, competitive advantages, and level of international accreditation; studying the impact of the project on the Egyptian economy in general by monitoring potential changes in trade, investments, and the labor market linked to international navigation; and then proposing economic strategies and policies that Egypt can follow to enhance the position of the Suez Canal and limit the potential impact of any alternative project.

The research adopted the descriptive and analytical approach to analyze the nature of the Ben Gurion Canal project in terms of economic feasibility and compare it to the Suez Canal, then evaluate the potential impacts on the Egyptian economy. It also adopted the comparative approach to compare the technical and economic characteristics of the two canals, and the prospective approach to estimate future scenarios for the project's impact on Egypt. This will be done through four Sections: the Suez Canal (economic and strategic importance), the Ben Gurion Canal project (geopolitical background and economic feasibility), the economic repercussions of the Ben Gurion Canal project on the Egyptian economy, and strategies for confrontation and opportunities for Egyptian economic fortification.

## Section One

### **The Suez Canal (Economic and Strategic Importance)**

The Suez Canal has been a pivotal turning point in the global trade system since its opening in 1869. It shortened the sea distance between East and West, connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea via a direct waterway that is one of the most widely used shipping lanes in the world. Over the decades, the canal has become a strategic pillar of the Egyptian economy, a primary source of hard currency, and an effective tool in supporting the Egyptian state's geopolitical position. Especially in recent decades, the Suez Canal has demonstrated its ability to adapt to global changes through expansion and development projects that have contributed to enhancing its operational efficiency and increasing its revenues. Today, the canal is one of the most vital waterways upon which the global economy depends, making it an indispensable component of international supply chains. This section examines the canal's origins and historical development, its central role in the Egyptian economy, and its contribution to strengthening Egypt's position on the global geopolitical and economic map, as follows:

#### **First: The Origins and Historical Development of the Suez Canal**

The idea of linking the Mediterranean and Red Seas dates to ancient times, but it was practically realized in the modern era thanks to the efforts of French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps, who obtained a concession from the Governor of Egypt, Said Pasha, in 1854, paving the way for the commencement of excavation in 1859. The Suez Canal is one of the greatest engineering projects in modern history. Since its official opening in November 1869, in the presence of international figures, it has represented a strategic turning point in global trade, shortening the sailing distance between the ports of Europe and Asia by approximately 7,000 kilometers, enhancing international trade to an unprecedented degree.

The Red Sea was connected to the Mediterranean Sea by a canal approximately 193 kilometers long, shortening the sea distance between East and West by thousands of kilometers and reducing the sea voyage time that had previously required sailing around the Cape of Good Hope. Throughout its history, the canal has been subject to numerous factors that have impacted its operation, including the British occupation, the wars Egypt fought, particularly the Tripartite Aggression (Britain, France, and Israel) in 1956, which followed the nationalization of the canal, and the wars with Israel. Nationalization thus consolidated Egyptian sovereignty over the canal and restored its role as a tool for serving the national economy and independent development. The Suez Canal remained a vital strategic and economic pillar for Egypt and the region.

### **Second: The Suez Canal's Contribution to the Egyptian Economy**

The Suez Canal is one of the most important sources of Egyptian national income, alongside remittances from Egyptians abroad and tourism. The canal represents a major pillar of the state budget, generating billions of dollars annually in ship transit fees. According to reports from the Suez Canal Authority, the canal recorded revenues of approximately \$9.4 billion during the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the highest figure in its history. The canal contributes significantly to Egypt's GDP through direct and indirect revenues, including logistics services, ports, and navigation-related industries. The canal also contributes directly and indirectly to job creation, supporting thousands of jobs in the maritime transport, engineering services, and ports sectors, thus enhancing sustainable development and economic activity in the surrounding areas (Suez, Ismailia, and Port Said). The Canal's expansion, completed in 2015, increased its operational efficiency and reduced transit time. This marked a major leap in the Canal's efficiency by creating a new branch that allows two-way traffic and reduces transit time, increasing its international competitiveness. Furthermore, the Canal is a key factor influencing the trade balance and a significant source of foreign exchange, making it a vital element in Egypt's macroeconomic stability.

### **Third: The Role of the Suez Canal in Global Trade**

The Suez Canal plays a pivotal role in international maritime trade, connecting more than 100 countries and constituting a key component of global supply chains. Oil and liquefied natural gas trade also relies heavily on the Suez Canal, making it a critical player in global energy security, especially given the increasing Asian demand for oil from the Gulf. This makes it an indispensable artery in the maritime transport system. Global shipping lines prefer to use the Suez Canal due to the shorter distance it offers between Asia and Europe compared to alternative routes. The sea journey between ports such as Shanghai and Rotterdam are cut by more than 7,000 kilometers, saving time, fuel, and operational costs. The canal's importance has increased following recent developments in global supply chains, particularly considering recurring crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which have reaffirmed the importance of safe and fast shipping lanes. Among the most significant contemporary challenges facing the Suez Canal are the emergence of new routes, such as the Arctic Sea Route, and alternative projects such as Israel's Ben-Gurion Canal. These challenges pose a challenge to the Suez Canal, and competition requires continuous development of the canal, improved logistics services, and reduced costs to attract more ships. Thus, the Suez Canal has proven throughout its long history that it is not just a maritime passageway, but a fundamental pillar of Egypt's economic and political power. It has played a major role in connecting global markets, supported the national economy, and enhanced Egypt's regional and international standing. However, the canal today faces real challenges that require continuous development of its infrastructure and services to maintain its competitiveness against proposed alternatives, foremost among them Israel's Ben-Gurion Canal project. Enhancing the Suez Canal's ability to adapt to global changes is a crucial challenge for the future of the Egyptian economy.

## **Section Tow**

### **The Ben-Gurion Canal Project (Geopolitical Background and Economic Feasibility)**

The Ben-Gurion Canal Project emerged as an Israeli initiative seeking an alternative to the Egyptian Suez Canal, by creating a shipping lane extending from the Red Sea port of Eilat to the Mediterranean coast. Despite the considerable controversy surrounding this project regarding its realism and feasibility, Israel continues to market it as an economic and development project capable of attracting global investments and reshaping trade flows in the region. This Section explores the historical and geopolitical background of the Ben-Gurion Canal Project; the proposed location and geographical route of the Ben-Gurion Canal Project; the political, economic, military, and legal dimensions of the Ben-Gurion Canal Project; the positions of international and regional parties on the Ben-Gurion Canal Project; and the most important possible scenarios should the project be implemented, as follows:

#### **First: The Historical and Geopolitical Background of the Ben-Gurion Canal**

The idea of the Ben-Gurion Canal is closely linked to the strategic orientations of the occupying state of Israel, which has sought since its establishment to impose its geopolitical and economic presence as an alternative and pivotal power in the region, especially considering Egypt's control over the Suez Canal corridor, a pillar of the Egyptian national economy. The Ben-Gurion Canal project is one of the most prominent strategic projects proposed by Israel for decades as an alternative canal. Its first signs began to emerge in the 1950s, with the aim of breaking Egypt's monopoly on the trade route between East and West. It is called the "Ben-Gurion Canal" after former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and is promoted in the Israeli media as a strategic waterway linking the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea without passing through Egyptian territory.

Former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion expressed a dream of linking the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, to break the monopoly of the Egyptian Suez Canal as a global trade corridor. However, it did not receive sufficient support at the time due to implementation difficulties and high costs. This ambition was reinforced after the 1956 war, when the Suez Canal was closed to Israeli ships. Recent developments in the transportation and global trade sectors prompted Israeli decision-makers to seriously consider establishing an internal alternative that would enable Israel to guarantee its navigational independence. Over the decades, several visions for the “Hebrew Canal” project were proposed, some involving the digging of a waterway, others relying on railways or oil pipelines. However, all these projects faced geographical, technical, and political obstacles. With technological advancements and the shifting balance of power in the region, Israel revived the project in its broader form, under what it called the “Ben-Gurion Canal,” attempting to present it as a global economic project with a developmental dimension, but at its core, it carried a geopolitical character.

According to the concepts published in some studies, the canal will be passable by large commercial vessels, and logistics areas, ports, railway lines, and oil and gas pipelines may be built alongside it, like what Egypt did with the Suez Canal Corridor Development Project. Therefore, the Ben-Gurion Canal project will require excavating vast areas through natural desert lands, destroying the ecosystems in the Negev Desert and potentially damaging or destroying the geological environment. The project also entails environmental and social costs associated with population displacement or resettlement. Furthermore, changing the water course could affect the groundwater level and threaten agriculture and biodiversity in the region. It also raises the possibility of oil spills or pollutants during ship passage, especially since the canal will pass through uninhabited areas or areas without protective ecosystems.

## **Second: The Proposed Location and Geographical Route of the Ben-Gurion Canal Project**

The Ben-Gurion Canal Project emerged as part of long-standing Israeli plans aimed at creating strategic alternatives to the Suez Canal. This was for reasons related to national security and the desire to control an international waterway that would serve its economic interests and enhance its regional standing. Since the 1967 defeat, the occupation of Sinai, and the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, Israel began seeking ways to sever its geographical connection with the Suez Canal, over which Egypt has sovereignty. In this context, the idea of constructing a canal linking the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, passing through Israeli-controlled territory, emerged. With the escalation of crises in the Gaza Strip and the emergence of gas conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel has strongly re-proposed the project, especially with the escalation of international competition over shipping lanes. Furthermore, the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the pressure to separate it from Egypt may be part of a broader strategic plan to create an alternative waterway passing through the Negev Desert and reaching the port of Haifa.

The proposed route of the Ben-Gurion Canal is in the Negev Desert in southern occupied Palestine, starting from the port of Eilat on the Red Sea and heading north through the Araba Valley, reaching the coastal plain and then on to the ports of Ashkelon or Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean Sea. The canal's approximate length is between 250 and 300 kilometers, requiring massive excavation work through complex mountainous and desert terrain. The project faces several challenges in this context, including: the rocky nature of the Negev Desert, which requires enormous engineering effort and high costs; the canal must pass through partially populated areas or close to Israeli military zones; and the need to provide vast water resources in a region already suffering from water scarcity, threatening its ecosystems. The project also requires the construction of water pumping stations or a stepped structure to overcome the difference in elevation between the two seas, which constitutes an engineering burden like the Panama Canal.

However, Israel sees this location as a strategic opportunity that would enable it to fully control an alternative passage to the Suez Canal, without relying on other countries, and provide it with a direct point of connection between continents. According to the concepts published in some studies, the canal would be accessible to large commercial vessels, and logistics areas, ports, railway lines, and oil and gas pipelines could be established alongside it, like what Egypt has implemented in the Suez Canal Corridor Development Project.

### **Third: Dimensions of the Ben-Gurion Canal Project**

#### **1- The political and strategic dimensions of the Ben-Gurion Canal Project:**

Israel seeks to reduce Egyptian influence in the Red Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean by imposing a commercial and strategic alternative. This is achieved by leveraging international alliances to attract funding from international partners (the United States, the European Union, and Asian countries), who benefit from the fact that their trade flows beyond Cairo's influence. Israel may integrate the proposed canal with the oil and gas pipelines connecting it to the UAE and Bahrain, strengthening its position in the "regional energy network." Since the Suez Canal is a shipping artery between Europe and Asia and generates billions of pounds for the Egyptian economy annually, establishing an alternative in Israel would diminish the importance of the Suez Canal, especially if Israel offers faster or less expensive services. This is considered a direct threat to Egypt's strategic position. Moreover, Israel's possession of an international maritime canal places it on the global shipping map.

The project could be used as a means of political pressure on countries that rely on navigation, strengthening Israel's relations with some global powers that may view the project as a strategic alternative in the event of tensions over the Suez Canal. This would shift the balance of power in the region, as Arab countries, especially Egypt, would find themselves forced to deal with a new equation in which Israel has greater maritime

and economic influence. The canal could thus become a bargaining chip for Israel to use on other issues such as: water, borders, or normalization. The construction of a canal of this size in an environmentally sensitive desert area such as the Negev Desert requires a complex environmental impact assessment, as it could result in: deterioration of the desert ecosystem as a result of excavation, filling, and blasting operations; potential groundwater contamination due to the mixing of saltwater with freshwater resources in the region; disruption of local biodiversity, including rare fauna and flora in the Negev Desert; and concerns about oil or industrial spills should the canal be connected to major logistics centers and ports. Given the weak environmental oversight within the occupied Palestinian territories, these damages may not be addressed within international environmental standards.

## **2- The economic dimensions of the Ben-Gurion Canal:**

Establishing a canal of this size in an environmentally sensitive desert area such as the Negev Desert requires a complex environmental impact assessment, as it could result in: deterioration of the desert ecosystem as a result of excavation, filling, and blasting operations; potential groundwater contamination as a result of saltwater mixing with freshwater sources in the region; disruption of local biodiversity, including rare animals and plants in the Negev Desert; and fears of oil or industrial spills if the canal is connected to major logistics centers and ports. Given the weak environmental oversight within the occupied Palestinian territories, these damages may not be addressed within global environmental standards. The Ben-Gurion Canal could generate profits from global shipping transit fees and the establishment of major logistics centers serving Asian-European trade, thereby reducing reliance on the Suez Canal. It could also create new jobs and investments in infrastructure and ports, thus strengthening Israel's role as a global transit and trade hub.

Israel may use the proceeds to strengthen its technological and infrastructure projects. The project will thus serve as an incentive to rebuild southern Israel (the Negev) through the construction of new

cities, power plants, and infrastructure. Some major countries may invest in the project to benefit from its revenues or reduce their dependence on the Suez Canal, or major American or European companies may intervene in the construction or management of the canal. However, there are significant obstacles to the project's economic feasibility. Its cost could exceed hundreds of billions, with initial estimates ranging from \$15 to \$55 billion. This figure is likely to increase due to the region's mountainous terrain (the Negev Desert is mountainous, making excavation much more difficult than the Suez Canal). The project also requires advanced security systems due to the instability surrounding the project (Gaza, the West Bank, and southern Lebanon). There is also potential international opposition, particularly from Egypt and some Arab countries, which may view the canal as a provocative project. There is also potential opposition from major countries that benefit from the stability of the Suez Canal, leading to a limited impact in the near term, given the difficulty of competing with the Suez Canal in terms of geography and readiness.

### **3- The security and military dimensions of the Ben-Gurion Canal:**

Israel seeks to attract private sector funding, in addition to sovereign partnerships with Gulf states or international entities. The project may be presented to institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and sovereign wealth funds. However, the political and security risks make many of these parties hesitant to engage in such a high-risk project. The Ben-Gurion Canal would be a potential target in any armed conflict, particularly from resistance factions, or in the event of a full-scale war. Securing a canal of this length would require a massive military effort from Israel and could impose a permanent financial and security drain. The passage of warships through it would make it a potential point of contact between conflicting states or forces. Furthermore, the project's connection to Israel's security vision, given that the canal is entirely within Israeli-controlled territory, gives

it the advantage of complete security control and protects it from the geopolitical risks that the Suez Canal could face during regional crises.

The Suez Canal is subject to an international agreement guaranteeing free passage for all ships. The Ben Gurion Canal, however, will be a fully Israeli canal, meaning Israel can block the passage of any vessel it does not wish to pass through. This contradicts the principle of “maritime neutrality” and could cause international crises, especially if Israel uses it as a bargaining chip. The US may support the project if its economic or security interests are threatened via the Suez Canal. China may oppose the canal if it conflicts with the Belt and Road Initiative. The European Union may proceed with caution because it prefers stability and does not want competition between canals that would impact the global economy.

#### **4- The international legal dimension of the Ben Gurion Canal Project:**

Although the project is being built within the borders of Israel, the principles of freedom of navigation and non-discrimination (the International Canal Convention) as stipulated in the Constantinople Convention of 1888 remain significant in its international assessment. The canal may be exploited as a corridor for transporting oil and gas from the Gulf to Europe via connected pipelines, threatening the Egyptian SUMED project. Using the corridor as an alternative to the oil pipelines that pass-through Syria and Lebanon strengthens Israel’s control over energy flows in the Eastern Mediterranean. The project complements the infrastructure that Israel is working on to establish itself as an alternative energy hub considering its competition with Türkiye, Egypt, and Cyprus.

The project thus threatens the ecosystems of the Negev Desert, potentially placing it under international environmental agreements that require Israel to conduct environmental impact assessments and consult with affected countries. Given that some lands may be considered within the occupied Palestinian territories, implementing a project of this magnitude could raise international legal objections and regional disputes from multiple parties. In terms of international liability for transboundary

damage, Israel could face legal claims for compensation or accountability if the canal results in environmental or economic damage to neighboring countries such as Egypt or Jordan.

The Ben-Gurion Canal project thus forms part of an integrated Israeli strategy aimed at altering the regional balance of power and undermining Egypt's pivotal position via the Suez Canal. While the project represents an economic and political ambition, it faces legal, geographical, and environmental challenges that may prevent its full implementation in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the mere introduction of the project compels Egypt and Arab states to treat it seriously as part of defensive and proactive strategies to preserve their vital interests.

#### **Fourth: The positions of international and regional parties regarding the project and possible scenarios if it is implemented**

##### **1- The position of the major powers:**

The United States may support the project as part of its policy of strengthening Israel's role as a strategic ally. China and India may prefer continued use of the Suez Canal due to its history and reliability. The European Union will proceed cautiously, considering its interests with Egypt and regional stability.

##### **2- The position of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:**

In terms of its geographical, religious, and political location, Saudi Arabia overlooks the Red Sea and is close to the Gulf of Aqaba. It also has significant political and economic influence in the region. Its relationship with Israel is conservative, but there is undeclared or partial normalization on some issues. In terms of possible positions: Saudi Arabia may support the project as part of a strategic deal if it believes the project serves its logistical or economic interests, such as obtaining concessions or a role in operating the canal or connecting it by land. Its opposition may be muted, such as rejecting the project but without direct confrontation, or preferring to support the Suez Canal to support Egypt and regional

stability. Its opposition may be overt if it sees it as a threat to Saudi trade in the Red Sea, or if Egypt exerts strong pressure to mobilize a unified Arab stance against it. However, if comprehensive formal normalization occurs between Saudi Arabia and Israel, the position may shift to a more pragmatic and economically cooperative approach.

### **3- The position of Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan:**

Given its sensitive geographical location, Jordan borders Israel to the east, and the canal will be built near its western border. It has a small outlet on the Red Sea (the port of Aqaba), and it is in its interest not to be isolated economically or geographically. In terms of its potential positions, the project may be rejected for geopolitical reasons, as it could increase Jordan's dependence on Israel for ports or trade flows, or because it would diminish Jordan's position as a land corridor for trade between the Gulf and Europe. Acceptance may be conditional on Jordan receiving access to the canal, a portion of the profits, or support for water desalination and energy projects linked to the canal. A commitment to neutrality may occur if Jordan chooses to distance itself from the Egyptian - Israeli conflict and focuses on compensating for any losses through alternative economic means. Thus, Saudi Arabia could exert financial and political influence, while Jordan may be directly affected geographically and may be forced to take a calculated stance. Therefore, both countries could be an effective factor in determining the fate of the project, whether through pressure, support, or even by offering Arab alternatives.

### **4- Possible Future Scenarios If the Ben-Gurion Canal Project Is Implemented**

#### **Scenario 1: Complete Success of the Project**

Israel may succeed in constructing the canal within 10-15 years. The canal will begin attracting commercial vessels, particularly those coming from Asia to Europe. Global companies may also support the canal, especially if it provides cheaper or faster passage than the Suez Canal. In this case, the Suez Canal's revenue will decrease by 20-30 percent, and

Israel will become a major player in the global shipping sector. This will lead to permanent political tension between Egypt and Israel, and the possibility of an Egyptian response (economic or geopolitical) to attempt to regain influence.

### **Scenario 2: Partial Success with Limited Impact**

The canal may be built, but it faces several challenges, including high operating costs, technical or environmental problems, and international political pressure. Some ships use it, but most companies prefer the Suez Canal due to its stability. In this scenario, the impact on the Suez Canal will be limited, and Israel will incur significant financial losses in exchange for minimal profits. The project will thus become more of a propaganda tool than a strategic project.

### **Scenario 3: Project Failure and Halt**

Israel may face economic, political, or environmental problems that prevent it from continuing. The international community may oppose the project due to its geopolitical risks, along with intense Egyptian-Arab pressure that hinders international funding or support. In this case, the project will be halted or frozen, the Suez Canal's status as an indispensable waterway will be strengthened, and political gains will accrue to Egypt and the Arab region. This means that the project's success or failure depends not only on technology or funding, but also on the balance of power, international alliances, and regional reactions.

### **Fifth: Egypt's Ways to Confront the Ben-Gurion Canal Project**

**Egypt has many levers to confront the Israeli project, both directly and indirectly, the most important of which are:**

1- Economic efforts to develop the Suez Canal by increasing the depth and width of the waterway, establishing massive logistics zones on both sides (the Suez Canal Economic Zone), offering incentives and discounts to attract ships, and establishing alternative projects within Egypt, such

as linking the Red Sea ports to the Mediterranean via modern railways, and investing in ports such as Sokhna, Damietta, and Alexandria to increase capacity and service.

2- Diplomatic and regional efforts to build an Arab alliance in support of the Suez Canal, such as coordination with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Algeria, Iraq, and others, and establishing an “Arab Navigation Vision” with the Suez Canal as the centerpiece. Influencing major powers by convincing the European Union, China, and India that the Suez Canal is more stable and secure, and signing long-term agreements with these countries that guarantee their reliance on the Suez Canal.

3- Geopolitical and military moves to increase military presence in the Red Sea by securing sea lanes and preventing or monitoring any attempt to threaten navigation or dominance by Israel. Cooperation with Sudan and Djibouti, developing ports in the Red Sea, and confronting Israeli influence should it attempt to expand southward.

4- Establishing counter-regional projects, such as the Gulf-Egyptian linkage project, linking Saudi and Emirati ports to Egypt via railways and transporting goods via the Gulf > Saudi Arabia > Egypt > Europe without the need for an Israeli canal. An alliance with China through the “Belt and Road Initiative” will attract significant Chinese investments in the Suez Canal and ensure that China will continue to adhere to the Egyptian corridor instead of the Israeli one.

This means that Egypt, despite the threat, possesses powerful tools to respond, such as a unique geographical location, a historical and proven canal, popular and international support against the alternative project, and political and economic flexibility that it can employ intelligently.

### **Section Three**

## **The Economic Implications of the Ben-Gurion Canal Project for the Egyptian Economy**

Strategic waterways have become a key tool in struggles for economic influence amid the rapid transformations in international trade patterns. In this context, the Ben-Gurion Canal project, through which Israel aspires to create an alternative to the Egyptian Suez Canal, stands out as a project with profound economic and geopolitical dimensions. This paper sheds light on the potential economic impact of the Ben-Gurion Canal project on the Egyptian economy by analyzing the extent of the threat the project may pose to Suez Canal revenues, its repercussions on employment opportunities, Egypt's status as a global shipping lane, and investments linked to the Suez Canal Economic Zone. It also provides a rough comparison between the Suez Canal and the Ben-Gurion Canal project, as follows:

### **First: Potential Impact on Suez Canal Revenues**

The Suez Canal is a vital source of revenue for the Egyptian economy, generating annual revenues exceeding \$9 billion in recent years, representing over 10 percent of the gross domestic product. These revenues depend on the passage of more than 20,000 ships annually, its imperative location on the shipping route between Asia and Europe, and the associated navigation, pilotage, and maintenance services. If Israel can implement the Ben Gurion Canal project to specifications that allow the passage of large vessels, with high efficiency and at competitive prices, some shipping companies may divert their routes to the alternative canal, resulting in a decrease in the number of ships passing through and, consequently, a decline in direct revenues for Egypt. Israel may resort to offering attractive incentives, such as reduced transit fees, customs facilities, and concessions to global logistics companies, forcing Egypt to lower its prices. This would put pressure on the canal's net profitability, and thus potentially result in a loss of revenue. Should the Ben Gurion Canal attract a portion of trade, particularly Asian-European trade, this could lead to a gradual decline in the Suez Canal's revenue.

## **Second: Impact on Suez Canal-Related Projects**

The Special Economic Zone around the Suez Canal is a massive national project aimed at transforming the corridor into a global industrial and logistics hub, attracting investments in transportation, storage, and trade. The emergence of an alternative canal could reduce the attractiveness of foreign investment in this region, and companies may prefer to locate near the new Israeli corridor, if it proves feasible. Egypt has prioritized infrastructure and government investments, spending billions of pounds on developing and expanding the canal, including the New Suez Canal in 2015. This could lead to weak future returns due to the emergence of a direct competitor, which could undermine the ability to recover these investments or achieve the desired return.

## **Third: Impact on Employment and the Local Economy**

The Suez Canal sector provides direct and indirect job opportunities. In terms of direct job opportunities, there are thousands of opportunities for Egyptian workers in maritime transport, pilotage, engineering, and management, in addition to indirect opportunities in the three surrounding cities (Suez, Ismailia, and Port Said). Therefore, any decline in shipping traffic will impact these jobs, thereby impacting Egypt economically and socially. The impact may also extend to complementary industries such as logistics and marine maintenance companies, as well as fuel and supply companies. In other words, a reduction in shipping traffic will reduce demand for these services, resulting in widespread local economic losses.

## **Fourth: Impact on Egypt's Geoeconomic and Regional Position**

The implementation of the Ben-Gurion Canal project will impact Egypt's role as a pivotal shipping lane. For a century and a half, Egypt's global image has been associated with its control of one of the world's most important sea lanes. The existence of an alternative passageway could strip it of this advantage, impacting its economic relations with major countries that rely on the Suez Canal. Egypt could lose its geopolitical negotiating advantage in times of crisis and diminish its influence over

international navigation and trade decisions. Therefore, the Ben-Gurion Canal project, if implemented, represents a direct strategic threat to the Egyptian economy, with repercussions that extend beyond competition over transit fees to affect the local economic structure and Egypt's global position as a trade hub. Furthermore, the loss of some of the Suez Canal's global role could diminish Egypt's ability to use its position as a diplomatic and economic lever in regional crises. The project could also end Egypt's monopoly over the shipping lane linking the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Although technical and political challenges may hinder the project, its mere existence as a proposed idea requires the Egyptian state to take proactive measures, including improving the efficiency of the Suez Canal, offering new trade incentives, and diversifying sources of income in the canal zone. This is demonstrated through several future scenarios, as follows:

- 1- The actual implementation and success of the canal would lead to direct competition with the Suez Canal, especially with international or Gulf support. Egypt would lose a portion of its revenues and be forced to reduce fees to maintain its attractiveness. This would impact the balance of payments, increasing pressure on the Egyptian currency.
- 2- If the canal's implementation stalls, the project would remain a dead letter due to its high cost, security instability, and regional opposition. Egypt would benefit from the current situation and enhance the Suez Canal's capabilities.
- 3- Partial implementation would create a partial alternative structure (a parallel railway line for navigation or oil pipelines), The Suez Canal would remain at the forefront but face intermittent challenges.

To address this challenge, a comprehensive strategic vision is required that balances the protection of sovereign revenues with enhancing integration with international partners to ensure Egypt maintains its pivotal position within the global trade system. Egypt's response to this challenge includes: continuous development of the Suez Canal infrastructure, such as increasing its depth and width, modernizing traffic and monitoring systems, developing the canal's ports, providing competitive incentives to shipping lines, such as reduced transit fees and integrated service

packages, smart international marketing of the canal, highlighting the safety of the Egyptian waterway, and building economic and regional alliances, such as strengthening partnerships with China, India, Turkey, and the Gulf states, to encourage them to continue using the Suez Canal.

### **Fifth: A rough comparison between the Suez Canal and Ben Gurion's Canal Project**

Item	Suez Canal (Egypt)	Ben Gurion Canal (Israel)
length	Approximately 193km	Around 250-300 km (depending on the final route)
Date of Establishment	1869 (official opening)	Not implemented yet (just a concept)
Geographical location	Between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean via Sues	Between the Gulf of Aqaba (Eilat) and the Mediterranean via the Negev Desert
Annual Ship Traffic	More the 22.000 ships annually (2023)	Unknown (estimated to be less than the Suez Canal at its beginning)
Transit Time	12-16 hours	Could be longer due to terrain or complex infrastructure
Transit Fees	Relatively high (depending on load and type)	Might be less attractive as a commercial option
Annual Revenue	Between \$8 to \$9 Billion	Not specified – expected to reach billions if successful
Challenges	Regular maintenance-security and safety	Harsh geography – massive – safety and stability
International Law	Bound by the Constantinople Convention (freedom of navigation)	Not bound by international agreements – Israeli decision only
Regional Influence	Source of power for Egypt	Threat to Egypt's status – shift in regional power balance

Comparison between the Suez Canal and the Ben Gurion Canal Project in terms of length, time, revenues, advantages, disadvantages.

The previous table presents an analytical comparison between the Suez Canal (Egypt) and the proposed Ben-Gurion Canal (Israel). The

analysis aims to evaluate the fundamental differences between them in terms of geographical, economic, and geostrategic characteristics. This comparison will be based on several main axes:

### **1 -Geographical and structural dimension**

(1) Length: The Suez Canal is shorter than the Ben-Gurion Canal indicating greater navigational efficiency and less time and fuel consumption.

(2) Date of construction: The Suez Canal has been an existing facility since 1869, while the Ben Gurion Canal remains an unimplemented project, highlighting a significant operational and time gap.

(3) Geographical location: The Suez Canal passes through a natural passage between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, while the proposed canal passes through the Negev Desert, requiring massive engineering intervention and a high cost.

### **2- Operational Performance**

(1) Number of ships passing annually: The Suez Canal receives more than 22,000 ships annually, while the Ben Gurion Canal has not yet entered service and is expected to initially receive even fewer, weakening its chances as an effective competitor.

(2) Transit Time: Transiting the Suez Canal requires 12–16 hours, while transiting the Ben Gurion Canal may take longer due to terrain or construction complications.

### **3- Economic Feasibility**

(1) Transit Fees: The Suez Canal generates relatively high revenues based on tonnage and type, while the Ben Gurion Canal may be less commercially attractive given the competition and transit costs.

(2) Annual Revenue: The Suez Canal generates annual revenues estimated at between \$7 and \$9 billion. The alternative canal's revenues are still undetermined, but they could generate billions if the project succeeds, which is hypothetical and not guaranteed.

(3) Challenges: The Suez Canal faces periodic challenges, such as maintenance and securing the passage. In contrast, the Ben Gurion Canal faces significant challenges related to its difficult geography, high costs, and political instability.

#### **4- Legal and Political Dimensions**

(1) International Law: The Suez Canal is governed by international agreements that stipulate “freedom of navigation”, which gives it international legal legitimacy. The Ben-Gurion Canal, on the other hand, is subject solely to Israeli sovereignty, which may limit its international recognition.

(2) Impact on the Region: The Suez Canal is considered a source of strength for Egypt at the economic and political levels, while the Israeli canal could be used as a tool to undermine Egypt’s regional position and reshape the balance of power in the region.

#### **5- Environmental Dimensions of the Project**

(1) Deterioration of the desert ecosystem as a result of excavation, backfilling, and blasting operations.

(2) Potential contamination of groundwater due to the mixing of saltwater with freshwater sources in the region.

(3) Disruption of local biodiversity, including rare fauna and flora in the Negev Desert.

(4) Concerns about oil or industrial spills if the canal is connected to major logistics centers and ports.

Given the weak environmental oversight within the occupied Palestinian territories, these damages may not be addressed within international environmental standards.

#### **6- Financing Opportunities and Potential Sources of Support**

(1) Israel seeks to attract private sector funding and sovereign partnerships with Gulf states or international entities.

(2) The project may be presented to institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, or sovereign wealth funds, but political and security risks make many of these entities reluctant to take the risk.

### **7- The project's use in Israel's energy strategy**

(1) The canal could be used to transport oil and gas from the Gulf to Europe via connected pipelines, threatening Egypt's SUMED project.

(2) Using the corridor as an alternative to oil pipelines passing through Syria and Lebanon strengthens Israel's control over energy flows in the Eastern Mediterranean.

(3) The project complements the infrastructure Israel is working to establish itself as an alternative energy hub amid its competition with Turkey, Egypt, and Cyprus.

This analysis demonstrates that the Suez Canal possesses integrated strategic advantages, including geography, history, operational performance, and legal legitimacy. Meanwhile, the Ben-Gurion Canal remains a hypothetical project facing significant operational, economic, and geopolitical challenges, making its viability as an effective competitor questionable in the near or medium term.

## **Section Four**

### **Confrontation Strategies and Opportunities for Economic Fortification in Egypt**

This section presents the practical and strategic aspects of how Egypt can deal with the potential threat of the Ben-Gurion Canal project, and the means of economic and diplomatic fortification. Considering the challenges posed by the Ben-Gurion Canal project, the Egyptian state must develop a proactive vision to confront the potential economic repercussions. Egypt's economic fortification lies not only in defending the Suez Canal, but also in reformulating a comprehensive national strategy that includes developing the waterway, diversifying the tools of economic power, and activating diplomatic and legal arms. Therefore, this section focuses on analyzing the alternatives available to Egypt, identifying opportunities for smart confrontation through four axes: internal development, regional presence, legal action, and long-term economic fortification. It then presents a strategic political, economic, and media roadmap to confront the Ben-Gurion Canal project, as follows:

#### **First: Developing the Suez Canal and its associated infrastructure**

1 - Deepening and widening the canal: Work is underway to deepen the waterway and widen its branches to allow the passage of giant vessels, reduce transit time, and facilitate navigation, giving the canal a natural competitive advantage.

2 - Developing logistics services: Improving the efficiency of Egyptian ports (such as Port Said and Sokhna) and linking them to industrial zones, while expanding stevedoring, storage, and regional distribution services.

3 - Improving the business environment to attract ships and companies: Occasionally reducing fees, introducing digital transformation technologies in transactions, and providing incentives for investors in the economic zones surrounding the canal.

## **Second: Strengthening Regional and International Partnerships**

1- Building economic alliances with countries dependent on the Suez Canal, such as China, India, the Gulf states, and the European Union, while emphasizing the stability and safety of the Egyptian Canal as a guarantee for supply chains.

2- Negotiating with major international maritime transport companies: Offering long-term contracts at competitive prices and facilitating the opening of permanent headquarters on the Canal.

3- Cooperation with African and Arab countries: Proposing joint projects in infrastructure, land and maritime transport, and protecting the Canal from regional marginalization through integration with alternative corridors in Africa.

## **Third: Legal and diplomatic action on the international stage**

1- Relying on international agreements to protect interests: Monitoring the Ben Gurion Canal project's compliance with environmental protection laws and transboundary antiquities, and the possibility of raising the issue with the United Nations or the International Court of Justice if it harms Egypt's interests.

2- Pressure through international financial institutions: Raising the project's environmental and geoeconomic risks to organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, preventing Israel from obtaining international funding for the project or attaching strict conditions to it.

3- Employing soft power tools: Launching international awareness campaigns highlighting the value and stability of the Suez Canal and strengthening economic diplomacy to enhance Egypt's position as an indispensable shipping lane.

#### **Fourth: Diversifying sources of income and long-term economic fortification**

1- Reducing reliance on Suez Canal revenues alone: Developing other sectors such as renewable energy, industry, smart agriculture, and tourism, and investing the proceeds in development projects with long-term returns.

2- Investing in human capital: Improving the efficiency of maritime transport and logistics workers and developing vocational education programs related to ports and navigation.

3- Expanding regional connectivity projects: Completing the Cairo-Cape Town corridor and connectivity projects with Sudan and Libya and building dry ports and regional distribution platforms along the Suez Canal corridor.

Therefore, in the face of a project that poses serious threats such as the Ben-Gurion Canal, Egypt needs a comprehensive approach that is not limited to reaction, but rather based on long-term strategic planning. Egypt can fortify its economy and enhance the position of the Suez Canal through continuous development, international alliances, legal action, and expanding its national income base. Maintaining maritime leadership requires political will, smart investments, and balanced diplomatic positions that guarantee Egypt's rightful position at the heart of global trade.

#### **Fifth: A Strategic Roadmap to Confront the Ben-Gurion Canal Project**

1- The Political and Diplomatic Front: Undertake international diplomatic mobilization, such as addressing the United Nations and international maritime organizations to reject the project as a threat to regional stability. Submit the Canal issue to the UN Security Council as a "threat to global maritime security." Mobilize Arab and Islamic support by inviting the Arab League to hold a special session on the project to issue

a unified Arab statement rejecting the project and supporting the Suez Canal. Leverage relations with countries such as Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Morocco to form a strong support front. Establish agreements with major economic powers, such as signing long-term agreements with the European Union to ensure their reliance on the Suez Canal; China to link its Belt and Road Initiative to the Egyptian Canal; and India and Russia to encourage their trade to transit through the Suez Canal rather than through any alternative project.

2- The Economic and Technical Front: Work to develop the Suez Canal, such as completing expansion projects, establishing advanced ports and logistics services, and providing economic incentives to major companies (reduced fees, immediate services, and storage). The goal is to establish an “economic maritime alliance” between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, and Iraq, with the aim of providing Arab alternatives to any Israeli corridor via shared railways and ports. This will also include investing in integrated projects, such as developing the Suez Canal Economic Zone into a global industrial center and linking it to Red Sea and Gulf ports.

3- The Media and Public Awareness Front: Conduct an international media campaign highlighting the environmental, political, and legal risks of the Israeli Canal. Support the national narrative by broadcasting reports documenting the importance of the Suez Canal and its history, exposing Israeli intentions through Arab and international media outlets, and raising awareness by educating Arab and international public opinion about the dangers of the Israeli project. Support media outlets that promote the Suez Canal as a safe and neutral option.

This means that with political will, diplomatic capabilities, and smart economic action, Egypt can: contain the Israeli project internationally, maintain its position as a global shipping lane, and transform the threat into an opportunity to strengthen its regional and international alliances.

## Conclusion

The Ben Gurion Canal project poses a potential economic and strategic challenge to Egypt, given its proposed geographic location and Israel's stated goal of establishing an alternative corridor to the Suez Canal. Despite the obstacles facing the project's implementation, both in terms of its high cost and its environmental and security impact, its mere proposal reflects shifts in the balance of power and economic interests in the region. A comparison between the two projects reveals that the Suez Canal enjoys a clear advantage in terms of its ready infrastructure, economic returns, and pivotal geostrategic location. However, maintaining this advantage requires Egypt to pursue effective economic and investment policies to enhance the Suez Canal's competitiveness and ensure its share of international trade. Egypt's efforts must be diverse, including developing the canal, expanding regional and international cooperation, and intensifying diplomatic efforts to counter any alternative projects that might affect its economic security. Therefore, Egypt's success in maintaining the Suez Canal's status will not be merely an option, but rather a strategic necessity to ensure the stability of the national economy and enhance maritime sovereignty in a region of global importance. Accordingly, the most important findings and recommendations are as follows:

### First: The Results

- 1- The Ben-Gurion Canal is not just a maritime transport project, but rather a strategic tool for Israel, through which it seeks to reshape the commercial and political landscape of the Middle East to break Egypt's monopoly over global maritime trade routes.
- 2- The economic feasibility of the project, despite its ambition, remains fraught with major challenges, including its complex geographic structure, high costs, and environmental and political risks. This makes its full implementation difficult in the short term but does not negate its long-term risks.

3- The Suez Canal still maintains clear competitive advantages related to its geographical location, operational efficiency, relative political stability, and advanced infrastructure. However, if the Israeli project, or any part of it, succeeds, there will be direct repercussions for the Egyptian economy, beginning with a decline in Suez Canal revenues and culminating in a threat to Egypt's geopolitical position on the global trade map.

4- A multi-dimensional threat. Economically, it threatens the revenues of the Suez Canal and Egypt's position as a maritime corridor. Politically, it undermines Egypt's international political influence through the Suez Canal. Geographically, it transforms Israel into an alternative transit point between Asia and Europe.

5- The competition is unequal. Israel seeks to build the canal with the support of international blocs, while Egypt relies on a single canal. Despite potential American and Western support for the Ben-Gurion Project, especially considering geopolitical tensions, the impact is limited due to a lack of preparedness in the short term. The risk escalates if investments are attracted, and the project is gradually implemented in the medium to long term.

6- The Ben-Gurion Canal Project poses a real strategic challenge to Egypt, not only economically, but also in the battle for influence, position, and regional role. This proves that future conflicts are no longer limited to weapons and military influence, but also revolve around corridors, trade, and control of global supply chains.

## **Second: Recommendations**

1- Continuously strengthen and develop the Suez Canal by launching new expansion phases to increase capacity and reduce transit times for ships compared to any possible alternative route, and develop the Suez Canal Economic Zone, transforming it into a global industrial and logistics hub.

2- Launch an international diplomatic and media campaign by mobilizing

global public opinion and environmental and human rights organizations against the Israeli project due to its potential harms. Egypt should also emphasize its responsibilities to secure international navigation compared to the risks of the alternative route.

3- Act at the international legal level by examining the possibility of challenging the legitimacy of the Israeli project internationally, considering it potentially detrimental to the environment and the stability of global navigation. It should also utilize international legal tools to address international maritime bodies.

4- Strengthen regional alliances by consolidating relations with Arab and Gulf countries affected by the project as potential competitors and seek to create an Arab “safe corridors” alliance based on the Suez Canal as a unified corridor that serves common interests. It should also build strategic partnerships with major powers such as China, India, and the European Union.

5- Economic diversification by not relying solely on the Suez Canal, but rather expanding into the energy, agriculture, export industries, digital economy, and cross-border logistics sectors.

6- Enhancing national economic security by linking the economy to national security and forming a permanent national committee to monitor and follow up on regional waterway transformations and reduce reliance on the Suez Canal as a primary source of foreign currency.

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# قناة بن جوريون: دراسة في جدواها الاقتصادية وتداعياتها على الاقتصاد المصري

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## ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث مشروع «قناة بن جوريون»، الذي تسعى إسرائيل من خلاله إلى إنشاء ممر مائي بديل لقناة السويس يربط بين البحر الأحمر والبحر الأبيض المتوسط عبر صحراء النقب. ويناقش البحث أبعاد هذا المشروع من حيث الجدوى الاقتصادية والدوافع الجيوسياسية والآثار المحتملة على الاقتصاد المصري، لا سيما في ظل الأهمية الاستراتيجية والاقتصادية لقناة السويس كممر ملاحى دولى رئيسى. ويرتكز البحث على تحليل متعدد الأبعاد يشمل المعايير الجغرافية والبيئية والاقتصادية والقانونية، مع تقييم مدى واقعية المشروع في ضوء التحديات الفنية والسياسية والتمويلية. كما يقارن البحث بين خصائص القنوات من حيث القدرة الاستيعابية والزمن الملاحى والتكلفة، ويدرس الأثر المتوقع على عائدات قناة السويس والاقتصاد القومى المصرى في حال تنفيذ المشروع الإسرائيلى. وفي ضوء هذه التحديات، يستعرض البحث مجموعة من السيناريوهات والسياسات المقترحة لحماية المصالح المصرية، من خلال تطوير قناة السويس وتوسيع مشروعات المنطقة الاقتصادية وتعزيز التعاون الإقليمى والدولى. ويختتم البحث بتوصيات استراتيجية لمواجهة التهديدات المحتملة وتنويع مصادر الدخل القومى المصرى.

## الكلمات المفتاحية:

قناة السويس- قناة بن جوريون- الممرات المائية الاستراتيجية- السيادة الملاحية- النقل البحرى العالمى- العائدات السيادية- القانون الدولى البحرى- التنمية اللوجستية- الأمن القومى الاقتصادى.