

CIVILIAN COOPERATION IN THE RED SEA REGION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ISRAEL

The maritime domain effectively facilitates activities and the integration of interests in various spheres, both civilian and security-related. Israel should build partnerships and capabilities, or strengthen existing capabilities, in order to integrate or collaborate with other entities in the region to establish as much control as it can in order to minimize threats against it and successfully address them. In recent years, the Red Sea has become one of the most important and complex arenas in the international sphere. In addition to security threats, the region offers extensive potential for regional civil cooperation, and Israel can and should position itself as a central player both in its military capabilities in the region and in leading civilian initiatives in the domain. The civilian arena, particularly in light of the geostrategic tensions in the MENA region, can serve as an anchor for stability, regional cooperation, and deepening ties with Arab states, African nations, and global entities. Civil collaborations in the Red Sea present a strategic opportunity for Israel to establish regional economic and diplomatic influence, build bridges with Arab and African countries, and emphasize Israel's role as a positive player in a tense geo-strategic domain. The link between investments in infrastructure, technological innovation, and interpersonal connections is key to a more stable future in the region.

Strengthening the Maritime Infrastructure in Eilat and Transforming it into a Regional Hub

The Port of Eilat is Israel's sole maritime access point to the Red Sea and East Africa. In light of this, there is strategic and economic importance in expanding the port, upgrading its infrastructure, and developing it as a multi-dimensional logistics center. The port is currently not utilized to its full potential; however, in an era of threats to shipping routes in the Bab al-Mandab Strait, there is renewed feasibility for Israel to offer an operational-logistic alternative to the shipping lines.

Development proposals include transforming the port area into a free trade zone, developing railroads and dry ports to connect Eilat with Mediterranean Sea ports (Ashdod, Haifa, and possibly Gaza in the future), and expanding the use of EAPC facilities to move fuel and energy. Potential partnerships for this initiative include Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, all of which aim to diversify their supply chains and reduce dependence on transit solely through Egypt or Bab al-Mandab.

Undersea Communication: Israel as a Digital Hub

Ninety-six percent of global digital information is transmitted through undersea cables, many of which traverse the Red Sea on their path between Europe and Asia. Israel is situated in a unique position within the digital corridor between East and West, and projects like Google's Blue-Raman cable highlight Israel's potential. Israel can offer terrestrial infrastructure, advanced regulation, data centers, and technological capital, enabling it to become a central undersea connection hub in the region.

Regional cooperation in this field—for example, with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—could establish an integrated, stable, and decentralized communication network resilient to technological or geopolitical threats. Upgrading the infrastructure in Eilat may enable an alternative routing of cables in emergency situations.

Marine Agriculture and Tourism: Economic and Environmentally Friendly Resources

The Red Sea region is rich in unique resources—coral reefs, diverse fish populations, and natural conditions that promote the development of advanced aquaculture. Israel, a leader in the development of water technologies and desert agriculture, can share its knowledge with neighboring countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, which is developing coastal areas as part of its economic vision (Saudi Vision 2030), and Egypt, which is promoting tourism sites along the Sinai coast.

Possible topics for collaboration include eco-tourism, coral reef conservation, promotion of aquaculture (algae, fish), and addressing coastal pollution. Jordan can also join, creating trilateral projects in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

Search and Rescue: A Civilian Field with Security Value

The field of search and rescue in the Red Sea remains underdeveloped, particularly along the sea's African coast. Countries like Djibouti, Somalia, and Eritrea are open to assistance and development of capabilities in this field, recognizing the shared need. Israel, which operates an advanced coast guard and drone technologies, warning systems, and rapid response capabilities, can contribute to the establishment of a shared regional center, as well as in training and exercises.

Projects of this type can be conducted within a multinational framework, in collaboration with countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and even international partners like the European Union. They will also serve as a basis for softened military-civilian cooperation, with the potential to strengthen ties and recognition in the region.

Maritime Medical Aid: Building Humanitarian Bridges of Trust

Many countries, including China and the United States, operate civilian or military hospital ships that provide medical services in remote coastal areas. Israel, with proven medical experience in international emergency arenas, can operate medical maritime platforms—independently or in partnership—that will serve for training, disaster response, and strengthening ties with African and Asian countries. It is also possible to integrate universities, hospitals, humanitarian organizations, and government bodies into such projects, as well as combine medical assistance with training, mobile surgeries, and the dissemination of medical knowledge.