INTRODUCTION

In the Red Sea region, significant geo-strategic processes have been unfolding over the past decade, manifesting in political, security, economic, and technological changes. This region, stretching between the Middle East to the north, the Arabian Peninsula to the east, the Horn of Africa to the south, and East Africa to the west, has transformed from primarily a maritime trade corridor into a focal point for inter-power and regional struggles, while simultaneously creating opportunities for complex civil and security collaborations. These processes present Israel with a significant opportunity to leverage its geostrategic assets to strengthen its position and exert broader and deeper influence on its surroundings.

This memorandum focuses on maritime security as a derivative of security awareness in the maritime domain. In recent years, there has been a global increase in the focus on maritime domains in general, which are returning to the forefront of the global stage due to their centrality in the prominent conflicts occurring worldwide. This resurgence once again highlights the maritime domain's importance to the global economy and underscores its role as a medium where the ability to operate in it is key to superpowers, nations, and organizations.

Recent conflicts that illustrate this point include the Russia-Ukraine war, the maritime conflicts in the South China Sea, the competition over shipping routes in the Panama Canal and the Arctic region, attempts to damage undersea transmission infrastructures, and of course the centrality of the maritime domain in our region—the shipping routes in the Arabian Peninsula area, particularly the Red Sea, which has become a global focal point of interest in the past two years due to the activities of the Houthi terrorist army in Yemen.

For many years, Israel's discussion of the sea has focused on the Mediterranean Sea region and the energy resources discovered within it. However, the Red Sea is no less important, in contexts that remind us that

Israel is an "island nation" in the full sense of the term, due to its almost complete dependence on maritime supply chains. The term "awareness of the maritime domain" refers to issues pertaining to the maritime domain that affect a country's security, safety, economy, or environment.

After 9/11, the United States, a pioneer in the maritime domain, defined the six overarching objectives of security in this realm:

1. Preventing terrorist attacks and criminal activities exploiting the maritime domain, and reducing the state's vulnerability to attacks in this domain.
2. Enhancing national security and homeland security by strengthening the protection of population centers, critical infrastructures, borders, ports, and access routes in the maritime domain.
3. Improving and strengthening the ability to recover after an attack in the maritime domain.
4. Increasing awareness of maritime security in light of threats emerging from the maritime domain aimed at the state's sites and assets on the coast and at sea.
5. Strengthening and expanding international collaborations and integrating the private sector to establish a maritime security framework, as well as formulating and promoting shared interests in the maritime domain.
6. Strengthening cooperation between various entities to implement a coordinated policy in the maritime domain and to fulfill the authority and responsibility of the involved entities.[1]

These principles were adopted by additional countries and organizations that developed such capabilities in various maritime domains, including in the

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1   S. Horev, *The Maritime Domain, Maritime Strategy, and What's In Between*. The Center for Maritime Policy and Strategy Research and Systems (2021), 15–18.

Red Sea.[2] As a result, international bodies were also established to address threats in the maritime domain.[3]

When discussing strategy in the maritime domain, it is advisable to consider the words of British historian Basil Henry Liddell Hart, who asserted that the role of grand strategy is:

> To coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war—the goal defined by fundamental policy [...] Moreover, grand strategy must look beyond the war to the subsequent peace. It should frame its course in the light of the most probable conditions of the peace, and aim to establish a more prosperous and enduring peace.[4]

In other words, the state's ability to integrate all components, both military and non-military, to maintain and foster the state's resilience for as long as possible.[5] Applying this thinking, therefore, presents an important opportunity to examine the significance of the maritime domain, with an emphasis on the Red Sea, where the importance of shipping routes and maritime supply to the global economy in general, and to the State of Israel in particular, can be observed.

The State of Israel is currently grappling with the need to formulate a security concept that takes into account the transformations and changes characterizing the entire region following the attack on October 7, 2023, and the continuation of the multiple front campaign. Within this framework, Israel should also address the maritime domain regarding insights and ideas that will

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2   Combined Maritime Forces, Joint Maritime Information Center (n.d.), https://tinyurl.com/2s4mex2z
3   Combined Maritime Forces, https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/
4   B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: Second Revised Edition* (Faber & Faber, 1991), 322.
5   Paul Kennedy, ed.*Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (Yale University Press, 1991), 169.

enhance understanding, opportunities, and challenges in the Red Sea region and assist in incorporating the domain into Israel's updated security concept.

The key to addressing challenges in the maritime domain lies in maritime control, which entails achieving the right to exploit a specific maritime region for a defined period. Sometimes, maintaining a constant naval presence in specific areas and sea routes can deter the enemy from deploying its forces from its ports and prevent military actions or armed conflict. It is possible to achieve control over limited areas of sea, such as the Red Sea and its inlets, also through armaments launched from shore to sea, such as long-range missiles. Control of the sea is never absolute, as it is not possible to conquer an area at sea in the same manner as conquering land territory. When discussing freedom of movement in the Red Sea, it is essential to refer to the concept of "shipping route security," which describes the safeguarding of sea routes used for trade, logistics, and the movement of naval military forces.

This memorandum was written due to the mounting threat posed by the Houthis to the Red Sea arena and to Israel during the Swords of Iron war. The Houthi attacks on Israel, merchant ships, and international shipping routes emphasized the necessity of establishing a new international maritime framework. This should include not only the Western powers but also the relevant countries in the region who recognize that the stability of the Red Sea is a shared interest for all the nations bordering its shores and for the global economy as a whole. Near the completion of this paper, a direct military conflict occurred between Israel and Iran lasting 12 days, during which the United States also attacked nuclear facilities in Iran. The war will have far-reaching implications for the entire region and for the national security policies of the countries in the region. However, their interests in the Red Sea arena, as discussed in this paper, are not expected to change. This also holds true for the opportunities and benefits it holds for Israel. Therefore, even if the implications of the Israel-Iran war are not fully clear

yet, the assessments in this paper remain valid and may have become even more pronounced as a result.

To provide insights into these challenges, it is necessary to present the Israeli interests in the domain. In the immediate term, there is a clear and distinct interest in minimizing the Houthi threat to movement to, in, and from the Red Sea. In other words, it is imperative to stop the attacks on vessels navigating the Red Sea—regardless of ceasefires in Gaza—and restore the movement of goods in this sea to the same or approximate levels before the onset of Houthi aggression. This is irrespective of the clear necessity to stop the firing of rockets and UAVs into Israeli territory and to eliminate the threat to the movement of ships in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

On the surface, this appears to be a military issue requiring an appropriate military solution; however, a military solution does not stand alone, and there are additional broader implications here. It is evident time and again that dealing with a terrorist army—which has become a semi-state organization deeply embedded within the population and the area in which it operates—is particularly complex. This complexity is particularly significant in the case of the Houthi forces, which operate on one hand as an Iranian proxy serving the radical Islamic axis, while simultaneously pursuing interests in the local Yemeni arena.

Therefore, Israel should adopt a strategy of joining a coalition of entities working to eradicate Iranian influence in the region, and specifically to prevent the strengthening of forces of the radical Shiite axis in the Arabian Peninsula. Partnership with these forces is, of course, essential for addressing Iranian influence in the maritime domain as well. Israel may become an important and contributing partner in such a coalition. Therefore, the Israeli interest is to present the struggle against the Houthis—and thus, the struggle for freedom of navigation—as a broad and significant struggle for all partners. The response should be comprehensive, militarily, diplomatic, economic, and technological, otherwise, the solutions will be temporary and partial,

and there will be additional threats from the Houthi terror army or from other areas in the Red Sea region.

Israel's potential partners include the United States, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and in certain areas, even Russia. Within this framework, Israel can offer its contribution to international forces by providing them with an additional base for the relevant forces in Eilat. Thus, these countries will be able to benefit from priority access to the maritime and land trade routes concentrated in the Eilat region, as well as develop the free trade zone in the domain for the benefit of partners from these countries and, of course, participate in efforts to develop and establish military and economic bases in the Red Sea region, with an emphasis on the African coasts. Israel must ensure, through its short-term activities, a position as an important and relevant entity that can be relied upon, and more importantly, an entity to be considered in the Red Sea region.

In parallel with short-term activities (and assuming they indeed yield the desired results), Israel must form a long-term strategy aimed at consolidating the achievements of the short-term strategy to establish maritime and terrestrial security. This is achieved by positioning itself as an important player in the game involving all the Red Sea actors. It must become a legitimate and central partner of the Red Sea countries and the powers operating in this area, while deriving economic and transportation benefits from its geographic location.

Integrating in the Red Sea region entails numerous advantages—security, economic, commercial, and political. The Abraham Accords and the potential inherent in their expansion are just one example of them. The Red Sea is also a key to strengthening Israel's ability to address the ongoing Iranian threat. In the global context, this domain is one of the key points in the intense competition over global trade and communication routes, and consequently—over the physical infrastructures and foreign relations frameworks between countries, which will connect the East to the West, as long as Israel anticipates events and invests in these infrastructures.