



ULUSLARARASI SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER DERGİSİ
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND HUMANISTIC SCIENCES

e-ISSN: 2619-9300

The Strategic Channel Initiatives of the U.S., Israel, and Turkey: Global Power Competition and Geopolitical Implications

ABD, İsrail ve Türkiye'nin Stratejik Kanal Girişimleri: Küresel Güç Rekabeti ve Jeopolitik Etkileri

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Makale Bilgisi/Article Information

Geliş/ Received: 31.05.2025
Kabul/ Accepted: 11.06.2025
Yayın/ Published: 15.07.2025

Araştırma makalesi/Research article

DOI: 10.47155/mamusbbd.1710782

Kaynakça Bilgisi/ Citation Information

Uysal, K. (2025). The strategic channel initiatives of the U.S., Israel, and Turkey: Global power competition and geopolitical implications. *Maarif Mektepleri International Journal of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 8(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.47155/mamusbbd.1710782>

Uysal, K. (2025). ABD, İsrail ve Türkiye'nin stratejik kanal girişimleri: Küresel güç rekabeti ve jeopolitik etkileri. *Maarif Mektepleri Uluslararası Sosyal ve Beşerî Bilimler Dergisi*, 8(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.47155/mamusbbd.1710782>

Abstract

This article examines the strategic roles of sea routes and waterways in the global power struggle. Human-made canals such as the Suez, Panama, and Kiel, located in various parts of the world, have been crucial not only in shaping global trade but also in influencing military and geopolitical strategies. This article specifically explores the potential impact of the Canal Istanbul project on global power balances and how it may influence the strategic calculations of Turkey and international actors. The possibility of the Canal Istanbul Project bypassing the Montreux Convention raises discussions on how it could facilitate US and NATO access to the Black Sea, challenging Russia's security strategies in the region. The project's potential to provide easy access for US and NATO forces to the Black Sea is discussed as it may reshape the geopolitical balance in the area. Israel's plans to build an alternative canal to the Suez Canal, Israel's (Ben Gurion Project) along with the Panama Canal and Canal Istanbul projects, are analyzed in terms of their effects on the international system. In the context of increasing US influence in the Panama Canal, the potential for the Canal Istanbul and Israel's canal projects to limit China and Russia's strategic influence in the region is debated. Additionally, the study assesses how these projects may reshape trade and energy corridors between the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Black Sea, increasing cooperation opportunities between Turkey, the US, NATO, and Israel. The paper comprehensively examines the transformation of regional and global power balances brought about by these projects and based on that, explores the changing dynamics of political influence among the three countries: the US, Israel, and Turkey.

Keywords: Panama Canal, Canal Istanbul Project, Israel Canal Project (Ben Gurion) Waterways, Global Power Struggle

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0009-0003-8015-7365

Öz

Bu makale, deniz yolları ve su yollarının küresel güç mücadelesindeki stratejik rollerini incelemektedir. Dünyanın farklı bölgelerinde bulunan Süveyş, Panama ve Kiel gibi insan yapımı kanallar, yalnızca küresel ticaretin şekillendirilmesinde değil, aynı zamanda askeri ve jeopolitik stratejilerin etkileneşinde de kritik bir rol oynamıştır. Bu makale, özellikle Kanal İstanbul Projesi'nin küresel güç dengeleri üzerindeki olası etkilerini ve bunun Türkiye ile uluslararası aktörlerin stratejik hesaplamalarını nasıl etkileyeceğini araştırmaktadır. Kanal İstanbul Projesi'nin Montreux Sözleşmesi'ni devre dışı bırakma olasılığı, ABD ve NATO'nun Karadeniz'e erişimini nasıl kolaylaştırabileceği üzerine tartışmalara yol açmaktadır. Bu durum, Rusya'nın bölgedeki güvenlik stratejileri için bir meydan okuma teşkil etmektedir. Projenin, ABD ve NATO güçlerinin Karadeniz'e kolay erişimini sağlayarak bölgedeki jeopolitik dengeyi nasıl yeniden şekillendirebileceği tartışılmaktadır. Ayrıca, İsrail'in Süveyş Kanalı'na alternatif olarak inşa etmeyi planladığı kanal (Ben Gurion Projesi), Panama Kanalı ve Kanal İstanbul projeleri, uluslararası sistem üzerindeki etkileri açısından analiz edilmektedir. Panama Kanalı'ndaki ABD etkisinin artışı bağlamında, Kanal İstanbul ve İsrail'in Kanal projelerinin, Çin ve Rusya'nın bölgedeki stratejik etkisini nasıl sınırlandırabileceği tartışılmaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, bu projelerin Akdeniz, Kızıldeniz ve Karadeniz arasındaki ticaret ve enerji koridorlarını nasıl yeniden şekillendirebileceği, Türkiye, ABD, NATO ve İsrail arasındaki işbirliği, fırsatlarını artırma potansiyeli değerlendirilmiştir. Makale, bu projelerin bölgesel ve küresel güç dengelerinde yaratacağı dönüşümü kapsamlı bir şekilde incelemekte ve buna dayanarak ABD, İsrail ve Türkiye arasındaki siyasi etki dinamiklerindeki değişimleri keşfetmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Panama Kanalı, Kanal İstanbul Projesi, İsrail Kanal Projesi (Ben Gurion), Su Yolları, Küresel Güç Mücadelesi

Introduction

This study posits that the planned Canal İstanbul Project and Israel's Ben Gurion Canal Project, mirroring the historical precedent of the Panama Canal, represent indispensable strategic instruments in the escalating global geopolitical power struggle. These projects are not merely aimed at the reorganization of trade but are strategic levers with the potential to profoundly impact world politics and geopolitical equations. Specifically, the Canal İstanbul and the Ben Gurion Canal are poised to play critical roles in bolstering the West's, particularly NATO's, geopolitical supremacy against China's Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's regional influence, thereby shaping the future of the global power contest. The construction of the İstanbul Canal, while strengthening Turkey's strategic position within NATO, could enhance NATO's military effectiveness in the Black Sea through the potential flexibility afforded by the Montreux Convention. This development would counterbalance Russia's strategic depth, reinforcing NATO's deterrence in Eastern Europe.

In conclusion, these canal projects extend beyond the mere reorganization of trade routes, serving as strategic tools with the potential to influence "global power balances". The Canal İstanbul and the Ben Gurion Canal can counterbalance China's global trade influence by offering alternative logistical corridors to the Belt and Road Initiative. These initiatives will play a vital role not only in reshaping economic and logistical networks but also in the reconfiguration of global power dynamics. In summary, these projects are key elements capable of solidifying the West's, especially NATO's, geopolitical superiority against the global strategies of China and Russia, transforming trade routes, and contributing to the global power balance. The collaboration of Turkey and Israel with United States of American integrate these projects to forge a new geopolitical equilibrium with global implications beyond the regional context. The realization of these projects could precipitate profound transformations in global trade, energy flows, and power balances.

Ancient Water Technology

The management of water resources has consistently presented a fundamental challenge for societies across historical periods. In ancient Greece, the regulations concerning water provision enacted by Solon exemplify an early endeavor to address this exigency while concurrently safeguarding communal values and social order. Plutarch (47-127 A.D.) later described a decree enacted by Solon (594 B.C.) concerning water access in a region reportedly abundant with natural sources such as perennial rivers, lakes, and rich springs, despite the prevalent use of artificial wells. Solon stipulated that if a public well was situated within a hippicon (approximately 710 meters), all inhabitants were obligated to utilize it. However, for those residing beyond this distance, self-procurement of water was mandated. In instances where individuals excavated to a depth of ten fathoms (18.3 meters) without discovering water, they were granted the right to obtain a hydria (approximately 20 liters) twice daily from their neighbors. Plutarch attributed the rationale behind this legislation to Solon's prudence in ensuring provision against genuine necessity while simultaneously discouraging indolence (Mays, 2020, p. 16).

Building upon these early understandings “of water management in ancient Greece”, other civilizations in the region also developed sophisticated techniques to harness and distribute water. “The late-classical-Hellenistic city of Priene in Anatolia”, for instance, featured a self-cleaning main drainage canal outlet (Ortloff & Crouch, 1998), demonstrating their awareness of hygiene. Furthermore, Priene's effective underground water network and elaborate drainage system highlight the level of sophisticated urban planning. Beyond urban infrastructure, figures like Archimedes (c. 287-212 B.C.) laid the foundations of hydrostatics and the principle of buoyancy, leading to diverse hydraulic applications. Ctesibius of Alexandria (c. 285–222 B.C.) invented key devices such as the force pump (attributed by Vitruvius), “the water clock, and the hydraulis”. Overall, the ancient Greeks possessed significant knowledge and practical skills in water management, hygiene, and hydraulic engineering (Mays, 2020, p. 17).

Moving eastward, the Kingdom of Urartu, flourishing in the Anatolian highlands, also left behind impressive legacies in water engineering. The Urartian water management system in Tuspa, the kingdom's capital (present-day Van), represents a striking achievement of ancient engineering. Flourishing from around 850 B.C., the Urartians exhibited sophisticated water technology rivaling that of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Faced with the unusable saline waters of Lake Van, their initial efforts focused on exploiting the springs of the Engil Stream valley. The Menua Canal, a testament to their engineering prowess and spanning approximately 56 km under the reign of King Menua (c. 805-785 B.C.), has functioned uninterruptedly for 2500 years, sustaining irrigation in the Tuspa (and modern Van) plain. Even after the capital's shift to Toprak-Kale around 700 B.C., the Menua Canal's importance persisted. The water requirements of the new urban center were addressed through the transformation of the Kesis lake flat basin into Lake Rusa via dam construction. Water channeled from the northern and southern dams, integrated with complex canal networks and potentially later hydraulic structures, established a comprehensive irrigation infrastructure. Remarkably, reservoirs formed by dams 4 and 5 continue to serve the irrigation needs of the Van plain in contemporary times. The Urartians' large-scale and meticulously conceived water management strategies, underscored by their enduring functionality, highlight the remarkable ingenuity of ancient engineering (Mays, 2020, p. 18).

Further south, in the arid landscapes of the Near East, the Nabataean civilization demonstrated exceptional skill in adapting to and managing scarce water resources. “The Nabataean Kingdom”, flourishing between 168 B.C. and A.D. 106, encompassed a significant territory, with its capital Petra situated in a mountainous region of southwestern Jordan. This geographical context, coupled with fluctuating seasonal rainfall, presented considerable challenges for ensuring a consistent urban water supply. However, the Nabataeans, drawing upon pre-existing water technologies and demonstrating remarkable adaptability to their arid environment, developed ingenious solutions. They constructed dams, diversion walls, terraces, cisterns, and reservoirs for water storage, alongside channels and aqueducts to convey water from springs. The Arabic root *nabat*, meaning “to percolate from underground to the surface,” from which *anbata* (to dig for water) is derived, reflects the Nabataean’s proactive and industrious approach to water acquisition. Consequently, these innovative water management strategies were vital for the sustenance and growth of Petra (Mays, 2020, p. 21).

The ingenuity of Nabataean engineering is particularly evident in their sophisticated water management techniques within urban centers like Petra. Their innovations directly influenced the security and sustainability of their cities. The engineering endeavors at the Siq, Petra’s primary access route, serve as a salient illustration of this. The diversion of the Wadi Musa’s flow and the construction of a dam at the Siq’s entrance (1st century B.C.) were critical not only for water provision but also for flood control. Numerous water management structures documented by Ruben (2003) in the catchment areas, along with the analyses of Oleson (1995), underscore the Nabataeans’ comprehensive strategies for controlling water resources and mitigating potential natural threats. These detailed engineering practices provide tangible evidence of the Nabataeans’ efforts not only to survive but to construct a prosperous and resilient urban center (Mays, 2020, p. 24).

In summary, the ancient civilizations of Greece, Urartu, and the Nabataean Kingdom exhibited notable ingenuity in water management. Through legal statutes, engineering marvels such as canals and drainage systems, and adaptive responses to environmental challenges, they significantly contributed to the development and sustainability of their societies. These primordial innovations established crucial precedents for later advancements in water technologies. However, the strategic significance of water would not remain confined to terrestrial systems. The evolution of naval dominance and maritime infrastructure, particularly artificial canals, would soon emerge as vital determinants of economic prosperity and military power. Understanding this transition necessitates engagement with the theoretical contributions of Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose formulation of sea power would come to define international strategic thought.

Mahan’s Theory of Sea Power

“Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) was a United States Navy officer and a pioneering naval theorist whose strategic ideas fundamentally shaped modern maritime doctrine.² His theory of sea power, developed during the late 19th century, significantly influenced naval policy not only in United States of America but also in other major maritime powers such as Britain, Germany, and Japan. His seminal work, “*The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*”, published in 1890, argued that national greatness and geopolitical influence are inextricably linked to maritime dominance (Mahan, 1890). This treatise has become a

² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alfred-Thayer-Mahan>

foundational reference in the field of international relations and naval strategy, often cited as a blueprint for understanding the strategic logic of naval supremacy.

According to Mahan, seven critical elements are required for a state to achieve effective “sea power: geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, population size and character, national character, commercial activity, and the size of the merchant and naval fleets.” These components collectively determine a nation’s capacity to engage in maritime commerce, protect sea lines of communication, and project power across oceans (Mahan, 1890 p,35 Sumida, 1997). Geographic location pertains to a state’s proximity to navigable waters and strategic chokepoints. Physical characteristics include natural harbors and the length of coastlines, while national institutions must support a maritime orientation in both policy and public spirit. A robust population engaged in trade and maritime professions underpins a sustainable naval presence, and commercial vigor supports the economic rationale for maritime expansion.

Mahan’s central thesis is succinctly expressed in his oft-quoted assertion; “*Whoever rules the waves rules the world.*” Sea power, in Mahan’s view, is not limited to naval warfare, it encompasses a comprehensive infrastructure involving commercial shipping, overseas colonies, coaling stations, and the strategic control of maritime chokepoints, including man made canals. Canals such as the Suez, Panama, and the proposed Canal Istanbul are not merely engineering feats they are geopolitical instruments capable of shifting the global balance of power by facilitating or restricting access to vital maritime theaters (Mahan, 1890).

Crucially, Mahan also emphasized the role of naval forces during peacetime. He argued that sea power should deter adversaries, protect trade routes, and maintain a state of readiness that ensures strategic advantage in times of crisis. In this sense, artificial canals and maritime infrastructure function not merely as passive conduits of commerce, but as dynamic assets of national strategy. As Mahan eloquently summarized, “*Sea power is not merely a means to an end, it is the end itself. It is the lifeline of commerce, the shield of expansion, and the guarantor of national well-being*” (Mahan, 1890, p. 25).

From a strategic perspective within Mahan’s theory of sea power, contemporary canal initiatives such as the planned Canal Istanbul, the Israel Canal (Ben-Gurion), and the Panama Canal possess the potential to create lasting strategic impacts on international relations, trade dynamics, and the projection of naval power. Consistent with Mahan’s strategic emphasis on the geopolitical significance of sea dominance, these projects reflect the strategy of controlling strategic waterways to reshape global trade routes, influence naval deployments, and enhance the geopolitical influence of controlling actors. Therefore, analysis should extend beyond economic dimensions to focus on the long-term strategic consequences for regional and global power balances. This theoretical groundwork laid by Mahan can be clearly observed in the historical and contemporary significance of key chokepoints such as the Suez Canal.

Suez Channel

Mahan’s strategic insights emphasize that sea power is shaped not only by naval capacity but also by the control of maritime infrastructure. In this context, artificial waterways such as the Suez Canal lie at the heart of global trade and power projection.

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2022), throughout history, geographical formations that impeded natural waterways have presented significant challenges for human populations, prompting the search for solutions to facilitate passage using the technological

capabilities of the respective eras. Canals emerged as one such pivotal solution. Presently, there are 48 notable canals recognized globally. (Britannica, 2022).

Ancient Egypt witnessed pharaonic endeavors to link the Nile and Red Sea with east, west canals. The “Canal of the Pharaohs,” located along the Wadi Tumilat (circa 13th century BCE) (Owens, 2021), served as a key coastal trade route. Initial, smaller canals are credited to Senusret II/Ramses II and later Necho II, but the first fully operational one was built by Darius I (late 6th century BCE) (Rappoport, 2005). These long-constructed waterways, aided by the landscape, primarily aimed to support agriculture and transportation (Akalin, 2011), while also facilitating the development of a fleet in Suez.

The Suez Canal, the first modern man, made sea-level waterway that eluded the technological capabilities of various preceding civilizations, was established in the 19th century through the initiative of French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps and Austrian engineer Alois Negrelli, culminating centuries of aspiration to conjoin the Mediterranean and Red Seas (Britannica, 2025; History.com Editors, 2025). The completion of this ambitious undertaking in 1869 engendered a transformative impact on global trade and maritime strategy by obviating the necessity for ships to circumnavigate the Cape of Good Hope, thereby significantly diminishing transit times and costs between Europe and Asia (Britannica, 2025). The strategic significance of the Suez Canal rapidly became apparent, aligning with Mahan’s subsequent emphasis on the control of pivotal maritime infrastructure as a critical determinant of sea power (Till, 2009). The establishment of the Suez Canal in 1869 irrevocably altered global maritime routes and trade dynamics. Building upon this foundational transformation, the inherent geographical characteristics of the Suez Canal have consistently rendered it a waterway of paramount strategic importance.

When examining the strategic significance of the Suez Canal, it is evident that this artificial waterway provides the shortest maritime route between Asia, Europe, and Africa by connecting the Mediterranean and Red Seas (Lutmar and Rubinovitz, 2023). Its location within Egyptian territory renders it critically important from both commercial and geopolitical perspectives (Özçelik, 2011). The canal accommodates approximately 12% of global trade volume and plays a central role, particularly in the transportation of energy resources such as oil and liquefied natural gas (Özçelik, 2011).

The Suez Canal’s strategic importance transcended mere economic considerations, as evidenced by its critical role during periods of conflict. During the First World War, the Ottoman Empire’s attempts to seize the Canal directly clashed with the British Empire’s determined efforts to safeguard its significant strategic interests in the region (Polat, 2021). For the British, the waterway served as a vital supply line and their essential conduit to the East. Despite the successful repulsion of Ottoman offensives, the Canal’s strategic significance remained undiminished throughout the war. Decades later, under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Suez Canal once again became a central catalyst for international crisis, culminating in the 1956 Suez Crisis. Nasser’s pivotal decision to nationalize the Canal triggered a military intervention by the United Kingdom, France, and Israel (Louis and Owen, 2011). However, the concerted diplomatic pressure exerted by both United States of America and the Soviet Union ultimately led to the failure of this intervention, thereby firmly consolidating Egypt’s sovereignty over the crucial waterway. This pivotal crisis had a profound impact on the delicate balance of power in the Middle East during the height of the Cold War (Louis and Owen, 2011).

In contemporary times, Israel and its ally, United States of America, are troubled by terrorist activities in and around the Red Sea region. This situation presents security challenges

for both nations. Specifically, the Houthi movement in Yemen, with likely support from Iran, has been conducting attacks targeting Israel and Israeli-linked vessels (Crisis Group, 2025). These attacks threaten not only the security of Israel and United States of America but also the stability of international maritime trade (Pole Star Global, 2025).

The escalating attacks by Houthi forces against commercial ships in the Red Sea have prompted numerous major maritime companies to reroute their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope, leading to a significant increase in shipping times and costs (Supply Chain Digital, 2025). This development carries the potential to cause disruptions in global supply chains and contribute to inflationary pressures (Atradius Collections, 2025).

The international community is undertaking various measures to counter this threat. A multinational maritime security coalition, Operation Prosperity Guardian, has been formed under the leadership of The United States, and “The United Nations Security Council” has adopted a resolution condemning the Houthi attacks (European Parliament, 2025). However, the complexity of the civil war in Yemen and the regional power struggle complicate the resolution of the security issues in the Red Sea (Congress.gov, 2025).

In brief, the Suez Canal represents humanity’s enduring quest for efficient sea routes, originating from ancient aspirations to a vital artery in modern global trade and power projection. Its strategic importance, consistent with Mahan’s focus on maritime infrastructure control, has been historically crucial in global conflicts and economic trends. Current Red Sea issues highlight the lasting strategic value of such maritime chokepoints for international security and global commerce stability. Their control and security are key geopolitical determinants, directly affecting trade, naval deployments, and power projection. “While the Suez Canal exemplifies the global significance of maritime chokepoints in the South, Europe’s own strategic waterway, the Kiel Canal, offers a compelling case study of canal induced shifts in the regional power balance.

Kiel Canal (Nord-Ostsee Canal)

Strategically assessed within the context of international relations, the Suez Canal is understood to have played a significant role in the transformation of power balances throughout history. Following this analysis, the importance of another crucial European-centric waterway, the Kiel Canal, will be addressed. Indeed, a central focus of this study is the emergence of the Kiel Canal, the disruption it caused to Germany’s naval power balance, and the proposition that this significantly contributed to both the genesis “of the First World War and the formation of the Second World War” (Armaoğlu, 2003).

Upon scrutinizing the genesis of the Kiel Canal, its pivotal role in the evolution of German naval power becomes apparent. In the latter part of the 19th century, Germany’s maritime strategic objectives and the prevailing European power dynamics established the preconditions for the canal’s construction. Inaugurated in 1895, the canal expedited maritime transit by linking the Baltic and North Seas, consequently enhancing Germany’s naval capabilities. The construction of the Kiel Canal constituted a salient initiative intended to fortify Germany’s naval prowess, and the waterway assumed considerable significance within Germany’s military strategic planning (Armaoğlu, 2003).

Great Britain reacted to the construction of the Kiel Canal primarily due to anxieties regarding the potential loss of its naval dominance. Germany’s strategic maneuver in building this waterway in the late 19th century posed a threat to existing British naval supremacy, prompting Britain to reinforce its own naval forces. Germany’s military transit capability

through the canal, connecting the North and Baltic Seas, reshaped Britain's understanding of maritime security. These developments spurred Britain to enhance its preparations for naval warfare with Germany and to reassess its maritime strategies, ultimately intensifying the strategic rivalry concerning naval power in Europe (Kennedy, 1987).

The inauguration of the Kiel Canal fundamentally altered the European power structure in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By enhancing Germany's naval maneuverability between the Baltic and North Seas, it provoked British anxieties and instigated a naval rivalry. This competition destabilized the balance of power, contributing to the outbreak of World War I and influencing the conditions leading to World War II. As such, the Kiel Canal stands as a vivid example of how technological infrastructure can reshape global strategic dynamics (Tirpitz, 1919).

Panama Channel

The advent of Trump's emergence on the global stage has reignited other geopolitical debate, with the Panama Canal as its central object. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025) The emerging tensions between China and United States of America concerning the Panama Canal underscore the contemporary significance of such waterways. Similar to the Kiel Canal, the Panama Canal possesses substantial strategic value (Wishnick, 2017).

The Panama Canal is defined as an artificial waterway constructed across the Isthmus of Panama, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Owned and administered under the sovereignty of Panama, this canal spans approximately 40 miles between its shoreline extremities. Facilitating bidirectional maritime transit, the average passage time through the canal is 10 hours. In accordance with international maritime law, the conditions of passage and applicable tariff policies are based on the principle of equality for vessels of all national registries (Britannica 2025).

Historically, prior to the construction of the Panama Canal, transcontinental maritime transport between the east and west coasts of the American continents was conducted via the Cape Horn route in South America. This arduous and protracted passage constituted a substantial additional distance of approximately 8,000 nautical miles compared to a direct canal transit, requiring a voyage of approximately two months to complete. Consequently, maritime trade and transportation between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans were significantly constrained by geographical impediments. The operationalization of the Panama Canal in the early 20th century fundamentally altered this situation, resulting in a remarkable reduction of thousands of nautical miles in the sea routes connecting these oceans. This development exerted a profound and transformative impact on the speed, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of international maritime commerce (Britannica, 2025). This historical transformation not only reshaped global trade but also recalibrated geopolitical balances. One of the most striking contemporary reflections of this shift can be observed in China's strategic maneuvers concerning Panama.

The globalization of China's developmental strategy, evolving from infrastructure diplomacy focused on its inner west to the transnational "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" encompassing the global periphery, exemplifies the rapid transformation of China's ambitious grand strategy with expansive economic and political objectives. Within this context, Panama, despite its small geographical size, represents an unexpectedly critical strategic nexus within the global trade system, offering significant leverage for China's national security and international influence, particularly within Latin America. Consequently, China's economic

statecraft in Panama strategically aims not only to penetrate the Latin American and Caribbean markets, extending its commercial influence, but also to project political influence in this geographically significant region. China's multifaceted grand strategy presents Latin American nations with a dualistic choice between a vision of shared prosperity through liberal internationalist engagement and a zero-sum framework of realist competition. This assertive approach leverages relational power with smaller, strategically located states like Panama to position China at the forefront of a burgeoning coalition within the Global South, presenting a collective challenge to American hegemony in its traditional sphere of influence (Mendez and Alden, 2019). China's multifaceted strategic approach amplifies Panama's relevance in the present global power dynamics. It is within this context that our analysis moves from historical significance to the unfolding geopolitical contest between major powers

Up to this point, while briefly acknowledging its significance, the focus of this analysis will now shift from the historical developmental trajectory of the Panama Canal to contemporary debates surrounding it. To put it more directly, rather than dwelling on past events, the central focus of our thesis lies in the ongoing power struggle between United States of America and the "People's Republic of China" concerning the Panama Canal, a dynamic unfolding before our eyes in the present day. United States of America response to China's growing involvement in Panama, particularly during Donald Trump's administration, vividly illustrates the emerging security concerns and the urgency attached to preserving its influence in the region

Perceiving China's actions as a threat to national security, Donald Trump initiated measures aimed at curtailing China's influence over the Panama Canal. This stance is evidenced by his public statements, which underscore the priority he assigned to this issue, as well as by his strategic policy implementations (Economist, 2025).

In conclusion the Panama Canal, a transformative engineering achievement, has long served as a cornerstone of global maritime commerce. However, within today's evolving geopolitical landscape, its significance has transitioned from a mere symbol of trade efficiency to a critical nexus of strategic contestation. China's Belt and Road Initiative, extending its influence deeply into Latin America, has reconfigured Panama from a simple transit route into a strategic outpost. The United States, perceiving this as an encroachment upon its traditional sphere of influence, has responded with heightened security posturing and policy interventions, particularly during the Trump administration (ISSF.org.in, 2024). This analysis reveals that the Panama Canal is no longer solely about connectivity, rather, it is fundamentally about control. The canal embodies a microcosm of the 21st-century global order wherein trade, politics, and power converge, illustrating the intricate entanglement of infrastructure and sovereignty within the context of great power competition (Swank, 2022). Just as the Panama Canal represents a strategic battleground between superpowers, similar dynamics are increasingly visible in Eurasia, particularly through Turkey's ambitious Canal Istanbul project.

Canal Istanbul Project and Israel Canal Project (Ben Gurion)

This section will examine the Panama Canal, Turkey's Canal Istanbul³ project, and Israel's proposed "Ben Gurion Canal" as pivotal elements in an emerging global geopolitical power struggle. In light of the Panama Canal's evolution into a strategic arena for great power

³T.C. Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2021 (<https://www.uab.gov.tr/uploads/pages/bakanlik-yayinlari/01-uab-kanal-istanbul-brosur-20cmx20cm-250521.pdf>.)

competition, Turkey's proposed Canal Istanbul and Israel's envisioned canal initiative will be analyzed as contemporary reflections of this broader geopolitical contest. It will be argued that the realization of these three projects holds the potential to recalibrate global power dynamics, particularly by positioning NATO member Turkey, alongside its "strategic allies" United States of America and Israel as an emergent axis of counterbalance to revisionist powers such as China and Russia, thereby reshaping the strategic architecture of the 21st century geopolitical order.

Beyond its mere consideration as an infrastructural investment, the Canal Istanbul warrants examination as a strategic instrument capable of contributing to the reshaping of power dynamics within the international system. In terms of the flow of global trade and the assurance of energy supply security, the alignment of this project with the geopolitical strategies of United States of America, a key member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), could serve as a significant element in reinforcing the organization's regional and global influence (Kaplan, 2012).

The construction of Canal Istanbul presents an opportunity to transcend existing strategic limitations. While maintaining Turkish control over the Straits, the project has the potential to reshape the access of The United States, Russia, and other actors to the Black Sea. In this context, it is argued that the Canal Istanbul holds the potential to enhance United States of America regional military and diplomatic efficacy. Within Turkey's NATO alliance, it could provide an alternative corridor facilitating the passage of US military assets, potentially offering a degree of flexibility regarding the Montreux Convention. This development could not only bolster United States of America strategic influence in the Black Sea but also elevate Russia's security concerns and redefine Turkey's regional strategic significance and its role within NATO. (Tulun 2025) Parallel to Turkey's strategic initiative, Israel's revived Ben Gurion Canal plan reflects another axis of maritime contestation in the Middle East

In assessing the potential geopolitical ramifications of the Canal Istanbul Project, Israel's envisioned Ben Gurion Project, (this is beriut 2025) conceived as a strategic alternative to the Suez Canal, must also be incorporated into the analytical framework as a significant dimension of this escalating global power competition. Indeed, this project carries the potential to reshape regional trade flows and strategic access dynamics, thereby exerting additional influence on existing power balances.

The notion of Israel constructing an alternative canal to the Suez Canal first emerged in 1956, following "Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's" nationalization of the Suez Canal and the subsequent exclusion of Israeli vessels from this waterway. Within this context, the "Ben-Gurion Canal" project, named after David Ben-Gurion, a founding leader of Israel, began to be discussed in the 1960s. This project aimed to construct a canal linking the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea; however, it did not materialize due to the prevailing economic, technological, and political circumstances of the time. In 1963, United States of America proposed that Israel utilize nuclear detonations in the Negev Desert to excavate a canal, but the high cost of the project and the anticipated reaction from Arab states led to the failure of this initiative. When these discussions are examined from the perspective of Israel's regional strategic objectives, they clearly highlight the potential ramifications of seeking an alternative waterway to the Suez Canal on regional trade and security dynamics (Pezzulli, B. (2024, Şubat 26).

Evaluating contemporary developments, the Canal's position as a strategic transit point in the Middle East emerges as a significant factor influencing the security of Israel's southern borders. Considering the potential for global terrorist organizations, such as ISIS, active in the

with U.S. strategic backing and Israel, mark a transition from a Eurocentric geopolitical paradigm to an increasingly U.S. centric order. These new initiatives reflect the reconfiguration of global influence, wherein United States of America is poised to play a more assertive role in maritime geopolitics, particularly in counterbalancing China's Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's regional hegemonic ambitions.

Within this analytical framework, our fundamental proposition posits that the Canal Istanbul Project, envisioned for realization, and the Ben Gurion Canal initiative, anticipated to be constructed by Israel, within the historical context established by the Panama Canal, constitute indispensable and pivotal strategic instruments in the escalating global geopolitical power struggle. These canal projects transcend their designation as mere steps towards the reorganization of global trade, possessing the inherent capacity to function as strategic levers in the profound and enduring reshaping of world politics and geopolitical equations.

Notably, the Canal Istanbul, likely to be realized, and the Ben Gurion Canal, projected by Israel, are poised to assume vital roles in fortifying the West's geopolitical supremacy against China's Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's regional hegemonic aspirations. In this context, the construction of the Canal Istanbul, beyond reaffirming Turkey's strategic positioning within NATO, presents a potential avenue to transcend the limitations of the Montreux Convention, thereby augmenting the United States' and NATO's military presence in the Black Sea. This development could shift the balance of power in this historically significant strategic depth of Russia in favor of the West and bolster NATO's deterrence capabilities in Eastern Europe. Functioning as a counterbalancing factor against Russia's military and strategic superiority in the region, the Canal Istanbul will concurrently amplify Turkey's central role within NATO and its influence on the alliance's strategic planning.

In conclusion, the Panama Cannal, the Canal Istanbul, and Israel's alternative canal projects to the Suez Canal cannot be merely construed as steps towards the reorganization of global commerce. These projects are concurrently strategic tools with the potential to leave profound imprints on world politics and geopolitical equations. Such endeavors can play a significant role in reinforcing Western geopolitical supremacy vis-à-vis China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Russia's regional hegemony efforts, potentially shaping the broader context of global power struggles. The potential impact of the Canal Istanbul on the Montreux Convention is particularly salient, as it could redefine Turkey's strategic posture and modify NATO's military presence in Eastern Europe. Similarly, Israel's project for an alternative canal to the Suez Canal could influence regional energy and security dynamics and bolster strategic cooperation between Turkey and Israel.

Ultimately, projects such as the Istanbul Canal and Israel's canal proposal can serve as critical strategic instruments to counterbalance China's dominance over global trade and energy routes by providing alternative logistics corridors against the BRI. These initiatives will play a vital role not only in reshaping economic and logistical networks but also in the reconfiguration of global power dynamics. As these projects materialize, interactions among global political actors will become more complex, and geopolitical and strategic calculations will assume increasing centrality. Thus, the Panama Canal, the Istanbul Canal, and Israel's canal projects are emerging as key elements capable of solidifying Western geopolitical superiority against China's and Russia's global hegemony strategies, transforming global trade routes, and contributing to the reshaping of the global power balance. Turkey, in collaboration with United States of America and Israel, could integrate these projects to forge a new geopolitical equilibrium with profound regional and global ramifications.

In summation, the evolution from European-led initiatives, exemplified by the Suez Canal and the Montreux Convention, to U.S. backed projects such as the Istanbul Canal and the Ben Gurion Canal, marks a pivotal transition in the global geopolitical architecture. These strategic undertakings transcend infrastructural development, serving as critical instruments in the West's effort to counterbalance the expanding influence of China and Russia. As United States of America assumes a more central role in maritime geopolitics, these canal projects are poised to redefine global trade routes, recalibrate power distributions, and reshape the international order. Thus, the strategic realization of these projects represents not only a shift in regional dynamics but also a profound reconfiguration of the foundations upon which future global interactions will be built.

Extended Abstract

ABD, İsrail ve Türkiye'nin Stratejik Kanal Girişimleri: Küresel Güç Rekabeti ve Jeopolitik Etkileri

Kemal UYSAL

Introduction

Bu çalışma, deniz yolları ve yapay su yollarının küresel güç dengelerindeki stratejik rollerini çok boyutlu bir yaklaşımla analiz etmektedir. Tarihsel ve jeopolitik açıdan kritik öneme sahip Süveyş, Panama ve Kiel kanalları gibi insan yapımı su yollarının uluslararası ticaret, enerji dağılımı ve askeri stratejiler üzerindeki etkileri incelenmektedir. Kanal İstanbul Projesi, Türkiye'nin jeopolitik konumu, deniz hukuku, Montrö Boğazlar Sözleşmesi, NATO'nun Karadeniz stratejileri ve Rusya'nın bölgesel güvenlik algısı çerçevesinde değerlendirilmektedir. İsrail'in Ben Gurion Kanalı ve ABD'nin Panama Kanalı üzerindeki artan etkisi gibi gelişmeler de karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Analiz, bu kanal projelerinin bölgesel ve küresel güç dinamikleri üzerindeki potansiyel etkilerini ayrıntılı biçimde ortaya koymaktadır.

Method

Çalışma, nitel araştırma yöntemine dayanmaktadır ve doküman analizi ile tarihsel karşılaştırmalı analiz teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Tarihsel olaylar, stratejik teoriler (özellikle Mahan'ın deniz gücü teorisi) ve güncel gelişmeler karşılaştırmalı biçimde incelenip analiz edilmiştir. Literatürdeki güvenilir kaynaklardan elde edilen veriler sentezlenmiş ve yorumlanmıştır.

Findings

Bulgular, söz konusu projelerin Çin ve Rusya gibi aktörlerin deniz yolları üzerinden kurdukları stratejik etkiyi sınırlayabileceğini göstermektedir. Özellikle Akdeniz, Karadeniz ve Kızıldeniz ekseninde oluşabilecek yeni ticaret ve enerji koridorları, Türkiye, ABD, NATO ve İsrail arasında yeni iş birlikleri doğurabilir, ancak aynı zamanda bölgesel rekabeti de artırabilir. Bu durum, güç dengelerini ve ittifakları yeniden şekillendirebilir.

Sonuç

Kanal projeleri, ekonomik, askeri ve siyasi etkileriyle uluslararası ilişkileri önemli ölçüde dönüştürebilir. Bu projelerin hayata geçirilmesi, stratejik denklemde köklü değişikliklere yol açabilir. Bu nedenle, olası sonuçlarının dikkatle değerlendirilmesi gerekmektedir. Bu çalışma, henüz hayata geçirilmemiş olan Kanal İstanbul ve Ben Gurion Kanalı gibi projeleri, Panama Kanalı'nın tarihsel deneyimiyle birlikte ele alan nadir analizlerden biridir ve geleceğe yönelik stratejik çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Literatürde bu üç projeyi birlikte ve bütüncül bir bakış açısıyla karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alan çalışmaların sınırlı olması göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bu çalışma önemli bir boşluğu doldurmakta ve özgün bir katkı sağlamaktadır.

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Yazar beyanları/Statements of the authors

Etik	Ethic
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ “ABD, İsrail ve Türkiye'nin Stratejik Kanal Girişimleri: Küresel Güç Rekabeti ve Jeopolitik Etkileri” başlıklı bu çalışmanın yazım sürecinde, tüm bilimsel, etik ve alıntı kurallarına titizlikle uyulmuş. Toplanan verilerde hiçbir uydurma veya değişiklik yapılmamış ve bu çalışma başka hiçbir akademik yayın platformuna değerlendirme için sunulmamıştır.✓ Makalede ifade edilen görüşler tamamen yazara aittir.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ During the writing process of this study, titled ‘The Strategic Channel Initiatives of the U.S., Israel, and Turkey: Global Power Competition and Geopolitical Implications’, I meticulously adhered to all scientific, ethical, and citation rules. I made no fabrication or alteration on the collected data, and I have not submitted this study for evaluation to any other academic publication platform.✓ The views expressed in the article are solely those of the author.
Çatışma Beyanı	Conflict Statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Bu makale ile ilgili olarak herhangi bir kurum, kuruluş veya şahısla mali çıkar çatışması yoktur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ I declare no financial conflicts of interest with any institution, organization, or individual concerning this article