



Egypt and the EU: Acting on the Shared Interest in Stabilising the Red Sea

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Introduction

Stability and security in the Red Sea are of key interest to both Egypt and Europe. The Red Sea's two chokepoints, the Suez Canal in the North and the Bab al-Mandab Strait in the South, form a critical nexus of global trade, energy and digital connectivity. The 193-kilometer narrow waters carry approximately 15% of global trade, 20% of container traffic, 12% of seaborne oil, 8% of liquefied natural gas (LNG), and nearly 17% of global internet data through submarine cables.¹

By now, the consequences of instability in the Red Sea are clear. In 2021, an incident with a faulty container ship blocked the Suez Canal, causing major disruptions. Two years later, in 2023, Yemen's Houthis started posing a more structural challenge as they targeted commercial shipping in the area as a retaliation for Israel's War in Gaza.² The necessary detour, rounding South Africa via the Cape of Good Hope, added at least 10 days to the transportation time, while maritime insurance costs soared. The disruptions in the Red Sea were instantly felt in energy supply chains and retail delivery schedules across Europe and beyond, while for Egypt itself, the slowdown in traffic painfully felt in the state finances, as Suez Canal revenues are a considerable source of income.³

The commercial disruptions are linked to a larger, geopolitical trend in which the Red Sea has become a so-called “hotspot”, with its chokepoints areas of increasing geopolitical tension. In the current situation, with multiple naval forces present in a confined maritime area, and multiple regional conflicts brewing, the risk of miscalculation or accidental confrontation is significant – further exacerbating the precariousness of Red Sea insecurity.

Minimising – or even better *preventing* – disruptions in the Red Sea is a shared concern between Europe and Egypt, as once more acknowledged during the high-level EU-Egypt Summit held in Brussels in October 2025.⁴ While Egypt is generally sceptical about international cooperation, the EU, and specific member states, could in several areas be considered a partner of interest, from offering technical expertise and joint investment options, to being a more “neutral” external actor to help mediate regional tensions. In light of the positive outcome of the EU-Egypt summit, and the Houthis stated willingness to stop their campaign of Red Sea attacks, this policy note explores potential areas of cooperation between the EU and Egypt.⁵ Doing so, it stresses the importance of proactive security and diplomatic cooperation to help prevent “the next Suez crisis”.

¹ See for example UNCTAD's Review of Maritime Transport 2025, <https://unctad.org/publication/review-maritime-transport-2025>; European Commission, Report on Security and Resilience of EU Submarine Cable Infrastructures, October 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/report-security-and-resilience-eu-submarine-cable-infrastructures>;

² “Calming the Red Sea's Turbulent Waters”, International Crisis Group, 21 March 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/248-calming-red-seas-turbulent-waters>

³ Shahira Amin, “Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea add to Egypt's economic troubles”, Atlantic Council, 8 February, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/houthi-attacks-egypt-red-sea-economy/>

⁴ EU-Egypt summit, 22 October 2025, Main results, see <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2025/10/22/>

⁵ Raya Jalabi and Jamie John, “Houthis signal halt to Red Sea shipping attacks”, *Financial Times*, 11 November 2025, https://www.ft.com/content/e1b1c16f-ae8d-4788-a3ef-aa644d372708?accessToken=zwAGQ1_FJdkQkdPhscFvro1HiNOj76pkTTcnCA.MEYCIQDHwMuGE31Ok8EfRpmea75l5TShrLgcO4-3R9zjzYpBAhAOG2aFqdNh7Jq90Ds9H4t97NsiRchp-29LsmQQQLGkJP&sharetype=gift&token=a95d8645-9c25-4fd0-b8a9-6039e0e30c18

The Risks: A Multi-Front Crisis

The Red Sea today faces an unprecedented multi-front crisis that could lead to partial or full closure of its critical chokepoints. Understanding these risks requires examining two distinct but interconnected dimensions including ad hoc Houthis attacks and acts of piracy, as well as more state-driven geopolitical rivalries and related increases in militarisation.

Houthi Attacks Mixed with Piracy

The war in Gaza has served as the political pretext for the Houthis escalation of violence in the Red Sea.⁶ Since 2023, when the Houthis began their operations in the Red Sea, the Red Sea witnessed more than 300 attacks against commercial and military ships passing through the Bab al-Mandab, targeting more than 100 merchant ships, sinking four vessels, seizing another and killing at least eight sailors.⁷ The disruptions have contributed to global shipping congestion and increased freight rates, as major shipping firms were forced to reroute their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope. In late 2023, war-risk insurance premiums rose from 0.05-0.1% of a vessel's value to 1-2% per transit, while cargo insurance climbed from around 0.6% to roughly 2% of cargo value. For a large container ship, this increase amounted to several million dollars in additional costs for a single Suez Canal passage.⁸ These costs do not include the opportunity costs of delayed deliveries, and disrupted supply chains that ripple through global trade.

Beyond military attacks, the Houthis in the past years also invested in trying to set up an extortion operation, demanding payment from shipping companies for safe passage through the Red Sea. According to UN experts, the Houthis were suspected of having been able to set up an estimated \$2 billion/year piracy business, while experts did note these numbers were possibly too high to be realistic.⁹ Regardless of the actual revenue generated, this commercialisation of maritime threats has added a new dimension to the crisis, transforming it from purely political action into a revenue-generating enterprise. At the same time, more traditional forms of piracy have continued, and the security vacuum created by the Houthi crisis has also led to a resurgence of Somali piracy.¹⁰

Geopolitical Rivalries and Increased Militarisation

In 2024, more than one in four conflict fatalities globally were in countries surrounding the Red Sea, including Ethiopia, Israel, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.¹¹ Growing militarisation, and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. "Houthi attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea", *Reuters*, 10 July 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/houthi-attacks-merchant-ships-red-sea-2025-01-16/>

⁸ Jonathan Saul, "Red Sea insurance soars after deadly Houthi ship attacks", *Reuters*, 11 July, <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/red-sea-insurance-soars-after-deadly-houthi-ship-attacks-2025-07-10/>

⁹ "Letter dated 11 October 2024 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council", 11 October 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/259/53/pdf/n2425953.pdf> and Cathrin Schaefer, Are Houthis blackmailing shipping companies for millions?, *Deutsche Welle*, 11 December 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/are-houthis-blackmailing-shipping-companies-for-millions/a-70766332#:~:text=%22The%20Houthis%20allegedly%20collected%20illegal,not%20independently%20verify%20the%20information.>

¹⁰ See for example "The Red Sea Crisis: Impacts on global shipping and the case for international co-operation", Background Paper, International Transport Forum, 2024, <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/repositories/red-sea-crisis-impacts-global-shipping.pdf>

¹¹ Anatomy of a chokepoint: Mapping power and conflict in the Red Sea, *ECFR Mapping*, May 2025, <https://ecfr.eu/special/anatomy-of-a-chokepoint-mapping-power-and-conflict-in-the-red-sea/>

geopolitical rivalries, along with having multiple conflicts along the shores of the Red Sea could potentially lead to escalations that can disrupt maritime stability.

Rivalries and the growing militarisation of the region are perceived as direct threats to Egypt's geostrategic influence. The presence of multiple foreign powers has created a competitive and unstable security environment in the Red Sea, affecting Egypt's regional standing and its political manoeuvrability. At the same time, regional rivalries are exacerbating the risk of escalation.

By now, major regional and global powers have sent their navies, established military bases, and expanded their strategic presence in the area. Djibouti hosts military bases from the US, China, France, and Japan, while Eritrea, Sudan, and Somaliland have welcomed countries interested in building naval bases.¹² China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017. The UAE has invested in ports in Assab (Eritrea), Berbera (Somaliland), and Bosaso (Puntland), while Saudi Arabia launched the Red Sea Project and the NEOM mega-port to enhance its geo-economic clout.¹³ Russia signed an agreement to establish a naval base in Port Sudan.¹⁴

All of this comes with the risk of turning the Red Sea into a potential proxy battlefield. There are concerns around a resumed war between Israel and Hamas, concerns around Iran's sponsorship of the Houthis. Another key conflict, in the Red Sea, is Ethiopia's aggressive push for Red Sea port access and its demand that the Eritrean government hand over Assab Port.¹⁵ Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's statements, along with Ethiopia's attempts to negotiate alternative corridors, have alarmed neighbouring states as Eritrea rejects any implication of territorial concessions, while Somalia condemned Ethiopia's outreach to Somaliland as a violation of its sovereignty. These developments have heightened fears that Ethiopia's maritime ambitions could inflame long-standing regional tensions and destabilise the already fragile Horn of Africa.

The civil war in Sudan presents particular risks. The fragmentation of Sudan into zones controlled by competing armed groups could create ungoverned spaces that serve as bases for piracy and smuggling. The humanitarian crisis in Sudan has already generated massive refugee flows, with Egypt hosting approximately nine million international irregular migrants, particularly from Sudan.¹⁶ Further instability could accelerate migration pressure on both Egypt and Europe.

Without a de-escalatory framework and coordinated maritime rules management, escalation could jeopardise both global commerce and regional stability.

¹² Obi Anyadike, "A Rough Guide to Foreign Military Bases in Africa", The New Humanitarian Project, 15 February 2017, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2017/02/15/updated-rough-guide-foreign-military-bases-africa>

¹³ Eleonora Ardemagni, "The UAE's Rising Military Role in Africa: Defending Interests, Advancing Influence", ISPI – Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 6 May 2024, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/the-uaes-rising-military-role-in-africa-defending-interests-advancing-influence-172825>

¹⁴ Andrew McGregor, "Credibility of Russia's Red Sea Naval Facility Agreement with Sudan", Jamestown Foundation, 6 March 2025, <https://jamestown.org/program/credibility-of-russias-red-sea-naval-facility-agreement-with-sudan/>

¹⁵ Anatomy of a chokepoint: Mapping power and conflict in the Red Sea, ECFR Mapping, May 2025, <https://ecfr.eu/special/anatomy-of-a-chokepoint-mapping-power-and-conflict-in-the-red-sea/>

¹⁶ "Government Starts Scrutinizing Refugees Numbers and State's Services Cost", The Cabinet, Arab Republic of Egypt, 8 January 2024, <https://www.cabinet.gov.eg/News/Details/74779>

The Closure Scenario

In cases of chokepoints' closure, shipping companies would face stark choices. Rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope adds ten to fourteen days to the Europe-Asia voyage, increasing fuel costs by an estimated one million dollars per voyage for large container ships. The longer transit time reduces effective fleet capacity, as ships spend more time in transit and less time loading and unloading cargo. This capacity reduction would drive up freight rates and create shortages of shipping capacity on global routes.

For time-sensitive cargo, including perishable goods, just-in-time manufacturing components, and seasonal merchandise, the additional transit time could render shipments worthless. European retailers dependent on Asian manufacturing would face empty shelves during peak seasons. Automotive manufacturers relying on just-in-time delivery of components would face production shutdowns. Energy markets would experience volatility as LNG and oil shipments were delayed or rerouted.

The digital infrastructure dimension adds another layer of vulnerability. While submarine cables are physically difficult to damage, the concentration of ninety percent of Europe-Asia cable traffic through the Red Sea corridor creates a single point of failure. Damage to multiple cables simultaneously, whether through deliberate sabotage, accidental anchor strikes during naval operations, or collateral damage from conflict, could severely degrade connectivity between Europe and Asia, affecting financial transactions, data transmission, and cloud computing services.

Egypt's Interests in a Stable Red Sea

For Egypt, the economic impact of Red Sea disruption has already proven devastating. The Suez Canal contributes approximately 10% to Egypt's GDP.¹⁷ Through the fees leveraged and the economic activity generated; the canal serves as the third-largest source of national income. In the first two months of 2024, trade through the Suez Canal dropped by 50% from a year earlier.¹⁸ During the onset of the latest crisis, revenues collapsed from a record \$9.4 billion in fiscal year 2022-2023 to just \$7.2 billion in 2023-2024.¹⁹ The disruptions came at a moment that Egypt was already experiencing economic fragility, as it has been trying to manage a severe balance of payments crisis triggered by the Ukraine war and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The crisis in the Red Sea has also put a spotlight on alternative routes, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC), which could permanently bypass the Suez Canal and erode Egypt's transit monopoly. However, this threat is not imminent and depends on several uncertain factors. First, IMEC's viability is politically uncertain, as it would first of all need a Saudi-Israeli peace agreement. Second, IMEC would pass through the Strait of Hormuz, making it highly susceptible to Iranian attacks or disruption, potentially making it even less reliable than the Suez Canal route.²⁰

In addition to a drop in direct revenues, crisis in the Red Sea has trickle down effects. The slowdown in Red Sea navigation disrupts imports of fuel, food, and intermediate goods essential for industry. The tourism sector, which was already pressured by the Ukraine war, faces additional severe challenges as Red Sea and South Sinai resorts suffer from the perception of regional instability.

¹⁷ Dr. Ezzat Kenawy, "The Economic Impacts of the New Suez Canal", IEMED Mediterranean Yearbook 2016, <https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Economic-Impacts-of-the-New-Suez-Canal.pdf>

¹⁸ "Red Sea Attacks Disrupt Global Trade", *IMF Blog*, 7 March 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/blogs/articles/2024/03/07/red-sea-attacks-disrupt-global-trade>

¹⁹ Suez Canal annual revenue hits record \$9.4 billion, chairman says", *Reuters*, 21 June 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/suez-canal-annual-revenue-hits-record-94-bln-chairman-2023-06-21/> "Egypt's Suez Canal Annual Revenue Drops to \$7.2 Bln", *Asharq Al Awsat*, 18 July, <https://english.aawsat.com/business/5041283-egypts-suez-canal-annual-revenue-drops-72-bln>

²⁰ See for example "What's needed to unlock the power and promise of IMEC", *Atlantic Council*, 22 August 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/whats-needed-to-unlock-the-power-and-promise-of-imec/>

Europe's Interests in a Stable Red Sea

Europe's exposure to Red Sea instability is profound and multifaceted, extending across trade, energy, digital connectivity, and migration. Europe has a clear commercial interest in having the Red Sea stable and secured. More than 60% of goods from China are shipped to Europe via the Suez Canal and several individual member states are extremely exposed to the canal. For example, Italy handles 54% of its exports by sea and 42.7% of that maritime trade is usually passing through the Suez Canal.²¹ According to a study conducted for the German Ministry of Economy and Energy, in 2023, approximately 9.8 percent of all German imports passed through the Suez Canal, making it the most critical maritime chokepoint.²² When the canal is disrupted, German factories feel the impact within days as inventory buffers are exhausted.

The canal is also major route for jet fuel and diesel, while associated pipelines (like Sumed) are key conduits for Middle Eastern oil and LNG exports to Europe.²³ Europe's efforts to diversify energy supplies following Russia's invasion of Ukraine have increased dependence on Middle Eastern LNG, much of which transits through the Red Sea.

In addition, Red Sea instability also poses a critical threat for data transmission via submarine cables, as 90% of the cable traffic between Europe and Asia transits through this corridor.²⁴ Damage to multiple cables simultaneously, whether through deliberate sabotage, or accidental incidents during naval operations, or collateral damage from conflict, could severely degrade connectivity.

Lastly, Egypt, like other Northern African states, has been an important transit country for migrants making their way to Europe. Already, Egypt is host to some 9 million international irregular migrants, in particular from Sudan. Further instability in the region, potentially accelerates migration pressure on the EU.

²¹ "Red Sea crisis weighs on Italian economy" https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2024/02/07/red-sea-crisis-weighs-on-italian-economy_6500084_19.html

²² "The Role of Maritime Chokepoints for German International Trade", https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/EconPol-PolicyReport_56_Maritime-Chokepoints.pdf

²³ "Europe-bound diesel, jet fuel cargoes divert from Red Sea" <https://www.reuters.com/default/europe-bound-diesel-jet-fuel-cargoes-divert-red-sea-2024-01-02/>

²⁴ "Report on Security and Resilience of EU Submarine Cable Infrastructures", <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/report-security-and-resilience-eu-submarine-cable-infrastructures>

The Gatekeeper

As the gatekeeper of the Suez Canal, Egypt views Red Sea stability as integral to its national economy and geopolitical posture. However, keeping the area stable and secure has proven increasingly challenging. Unlike other maritime chokepoints, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab al-Mandab, the Suez Canal is entirely under the sovereign control of a single state, offering a single point of engagement. If Europe can develop an effective partnership with Egypt, it can significantly enhance the security and resilience of this critical chokepoint.

Cairo maintains that “the governance of the Red Sea is the exclusive responsibility of its coastal countries,” a principle rooted in decades of ineffective, externally shaped regional frameworks.²⁵ Egypt has a consistent and persistent caution toward broad international security initiatives and prioritises selective defence cooperation with regional partners.

For Europe, this means that effective cooperation must respect Egyptian sovereignty and regional leadership while providing technical and financial support that enhances Egyptian capacity. The challenge is to structure cooperation in ways that Egypt perceives as supporting rather than undermining its gatekeeper role.

²⁵ “Governance of Red Sea an exclusive responsibility of coastal states: Egypt FM”, Ahram Online, 20 October 2025, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/1/555228/Egypt/Governance-of-Red-Sea-an-exclusive-responsibility-.aspx>

Potential Areas for EU-Egypt Cooperation, with a Focus on Preventive Measures

The EU is actively looking for increased cooperation, as illustrated by the 2024 Joint declaration in which the EU and Egypt mutually agreed to elevate the relationship to the level of a strategic and comprehensive partnership. This year's high-level EU-Egypt Summit marked another milestone in the deepening of EU-Egypt relations. Keeping the Red Sea and its chokepoints stable and secure is of crucial importance for Egypt, both from a financial as well as a political perspective, as well as for Europe.

Chip in on Suez Canal Diversification and Resilience

Given Egypt's gatekeeper positioning and relative scepticism of European involvement in Red Sea matters, European member states could use Egypt's evolving comprehensive national security strategy to carve out various entry points for potential cooperation on preventive matters. The challenge is to identify areas where EU support can provide maximum impact while respecting Egyptian sovereignty and building on Egypt's own initiatives.

For the past decade, Egypt's national strategy to be more prepared for major disruptions has been centred on military means and modernisation. The cornerstones of this effort are the establishment of the Southern Fleet Command (2017) and the inauguration of the Berenice military base (2020), the country's largest naval facility, designed to secure the southern approaches to the Red Sea.²⁶ Recently, Egypt has positioned long-range Chinese HQ-9B air-defence batteries at key locations in the Sinai Peninsula, marking a significant move at a time of rising military tensions.²⁷ So far, Egypt has complemented these investments with selective defence cooperation with regional partners. The naval cooperation protocol with Saudi Arabia aims to enhance operational coordination, joint training, and readiness against evolving maritime threats, reinforced by recurring naval drills such as Bright Star 2025, Red Wave-7 (2024), and Morgan-16 (2020).²⁸ Egypt is also reinforcing its security perimeter in the Horn of Africa through a mutual defence pact with Somalia and exploratory security cooperation with Eritrea, measures that counter Ethiopian influence and bolster Cairo's regional posture.²⁹

However, the Houthi crisis demonstrated that conventional military strength is insufficient to counter a sustained asymmetric campaign. In response, Egypt has broadened its definition of national preparedness to include economic resilience. Key measures now include the diversification strategy by the Suez Canal Authority (SCA), which is actively working to reduce its dependency on transit fees by expanding into maintenance, shipyard building, and manufacturing, with the goal of transforming

²⁶ See "Berenice Military Base", *The Arab Republic of Egypt Presidency*, <https://www.presidency.eg/en/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/>

²⁷ "Sinai Escalation: Egypt's HQ-9B Missiles Create "No-Fly Zone" Over Southern Israel", 22 September 2025, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/egypt-hq9b-deployment-sinai-israel-air-defence-china/>

²⁸ "Egypt, Saudi Arabia sign naval cooperation protocol to bolster regional maritime security", Ahram Online, 1 September 2025, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/552268.aspx> "Without the United States, Egypt and Saudi agree to form joint naval force amid rising threats in Red Sea," The New Arab, 9 September 2025, <https://www.newarab.com/news/egypt-saudi-agree-form-naval-force-tackle-red-sea-threats>

²⁹ Federico Donelli, "Egypt's Growing Role in Somalia: Implications for Red Sea Security and Regional Balance", Rabdan Security & Defence Institute (RSDI), 14 May 2025, <https://rsdi.ae/en/publications/egypts-growing-role-in-somalia-implications-for-red-sea-security-and-regional-balance>

the canal into a regional logistics hub.³⁰ Egypt has been particularly focused on attracting Chinese investments in the Suez Canal zone to ensure that China has a vested interest in diverting some of its trade through the Red Sea route, creating a strategic alignment of interests, as illustrated by a recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with China's Ministry of Commerce to enhance cooperation in developing the Suez Canal zone.³¹

Tagging on to the plans that Egypt has in terms of diversification of the Suez Canal area, the EU and its (larger) member states could help strengthen the resilience of the Red Sea chokepoints. For example, it could pursue and push, in the framework of Europe's Global Gateway program and in collaboration with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development/European Investment Bank, for investments in the further expansion of the Suez canal's capacity and in upgrading its facilities in order to better handle the shipping through the canal, including in peacetime.

Improve Maritime Situational Awareness and Risk Assessments

As it is already in the cards, the EU could accelerate Egypt's accession and strengthen its participation in the EU's CRIMARIO (Critical Maritime Routes Indian Ocean), which supports countries in the region to enhance their Maritime Situational Awareness, with a focus on combating piracy and armed robbery at sea. The accession is currently planned for the end of 2025.

For Egypt, of specific interest would be tapping the EU and its member states for technical expertise in drafting robust risk assessments and contingency planning processes and mechanisms to strengthen the ability to divert traffic in emergency contexts, for example through targeted training around translating information into risk assessments and the operationalisation of mitigation strategies, including through joint exercises. EU member states that manage large ports could be well positioned for such forms of cooperation, including the Netherlands.

Enhance Coordination between the Various Naval Missions in the Region

The fact that the Suez Canal is getting crowded, also from a geopolitical viewpoint, is not asking for an additional force, but rather for a coordinator. The EU, as a relatively neutral force, could play a role in enhancing cooperation. It could promote coordinated maritime security diplomacy to ensure that naval operations, European, regional, or international, remain complementary and do not escalate tensions, potentially with a starting point of an institutionalised alignment framework for patrols zones and the identification of capabilities gaps. This could include the development of Shared Operational Protocols on the requests for escorts or protection, the methods of verifying and disseminating information on attack and search-and-rescue operations, in order to provide commercial shipping companies with more clarity and less conflicting guidance.

Step up Protection of Critical Undersea Infrastructure

Threats to critical undersea infrastructure are on the rise and in some ways are still an overlooked issue. Given the importance of Red Sea cabling for EU data traffic, this could be an interesting area for "preventive" cooperation. The EU and Egypt could push for more emphasis on securing connectivity and undersea cables, potentially taking inspiration from recently expanded models of cooperation in the Baltic Sea area and starting with the establishment of a network of designated

³⁰ See for example "Suez Canal signs \$2bn first-phase deal to build petrochemical complex in Ain Sokhna", *Daily News Egypt*, 22 October 2025, <https://www.dailynsegypt.com/2025/10/22/suez-canal-signs-2bn-first-phase-deal-to-build-petrochemical-complex-in-ain-sokhna/>

³¹ "Egypt's SCZONE, China discuss boosting investment in auto, clean energy sectors", *Daily News Egypt*, 11 November 2025, <https://www.dailynsegypt.com/2025/11/11/egypts-szone-china-discuss-boosting-investment-in-auto-clean-energy-sectors/>

points of contact. This could include increased cooperation between the EU and the Middle East & Central Asia Submarine Cable Maintenance Agreement (MECMA), a regional consortium responsible for the maintenance and emergency repair of submarine fibre-optic cables, including in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Given the recent experience in this regard, Nordic states such as Sweden and Finland would be well positioned to push for this area of cooperation, while the Netherlands, as an important internet hub, would also be an understandable partner from an interest perspective.

The Silver Bullet: Cooperate on Regional De-escalating Frameworks for Ongoing and Potential Conflicts

Ultimately, true preventive measures would tackle the current and potential future instability in the region. This could include:

- Support for de-escalation frameworks for the conflict in Yemen by coordinating diplomatic channels, backing UN efforts, and engaging regional actors to curb Houthi militarisation and safeguard navigation routes.
- Strengthening joint mediation efforts in Sudan by developing an EU–Egypt track that pushes for sustained ceasefires, secures humanitarian access, and prevents the fragmentation of Sudan into zones controlled by armed groups with potential spillover into the Red Sea.
- The EU can potentially collaborate with Egypt and other regional actors to shape a broader regional security architecture, drawing on European experience in multilateral security governance. It could potentially draw on the recently launched Suez and Red Sea Initiative for Economic and Maritime Development (StREAM) that seeks to strengthen cooperation among coastal states.³²

³² "Egypt announces Suez and Red Sea initiative for regional economic integration at Aswan Forum", Egypt State Information Services, 19 October 2025, <https://sis.gov.eg/en/media-center/news/egypt-announces-suez-and-red-sea-initiative-for-regional-economic-integration-at-aswan-forum/>

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