

Shifting Dynamics in West Asia: Navigating the Strategic Implications for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

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Abstract

The shifting dynamics of the volatile West Asian region create ripple effects across the international political landscape. The contemporary scenario of the region is characterized by a significant socio-political and economic transformation, driven by a rise in youth-led movements, changing governance models, and economic diversification efforts. Amidst the complex environment, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) has emerged as a positive multilateral engagement, aimed at reshaping trade routes, reducing logistical costs, and most importantly, strengthening economic integration between Europe, the West Asia, and South Asia. The IMEC has the potential to reshape the regional trade and power dynamics in West Asia, but the future remains uncertain due to geopolitical instability, conflicts like the Israel-Hamas War, Israel-Iran War, civil wars, rising extremism and terrorism etc. This paper aims to examine the impact of West Asia's changing geopolitical scenario on the development trajectory of IMEC. The paper starts by giving an overview of the IMEC, and its strategic components, keeping in light the broader geostrategic interests of its participants, and then explores the changing landscape of the region, like the normalisation of diplomatic ties between regional actors, the rise of multipolarity, shifting energy politics, and increasing security challenges, among others. It further analyses the impact of the IMEC on the trade and economic growth of the region. The paper ends by describing the hurdles in the IMEC's path and provide some recommendations. The paper has followed a qualitative approach using document and content analysis method and has drawn theoretical insights from the liberal perspective of international relations.

Keywords: Shifting power dynamics, IMEC, West Asia, economic integration, geostrategic interests.

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Introduction

The shifting dynamics of the volatile West Asian region create ripple effects across the international political landscape. The contemporary scenario of the region is characterized by a significant socio-political and economic transformation, driven by a rise in youth-led movements, changing governance models, and economic diversification efforts. Amidst the complex environment, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) has emerged as a strategically significant multilateral engagement, aimed at reshaping trade routes, reducing logistical costs, and most importantly, strengthening economic integration between Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia (Samaan, 2023). Announced at the sidelines of the G20 Leaders' Summit in 2023 in New Delhi, IMEC is a multi-modal, transcontinental transport corridor consisting of ship-to-rail networks and road transport routes. However, its evolution can be traced back to the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 and the emergence of the I2U2 (India, Israel, the US, and the UAE) grouping, the former paved the way for the normalisation of diplomatic ties between Israel and some of the Arab countries while the latter forged a new path of economic integration among the member states. At the G20 Summit, an MoU was signed between the key stakeholders of the corridor - India, the European Union, France, Italy, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States – which is rooted in their shared geostrategic and geoeconomic interests (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023).

The IMEC is divided into two parts, the East Corridor and the Northern Corridor. The East Corridor will connect India to the Arabian Gulf, in which major Indian ports like Mundra (Gujarat), Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (Navi Mumbai), will be linked with the crucial ports in the Arabian Gulf like Jebel Ali Port in the UAE and Dammam and Ras Al Khair Ports in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the East Corridor is a maritime link between India and the Gulf region to facilitate the quicker movement of goods and enhance supply chain resilience. The Northern Corridor of IMEC will connect the Arabian Gulf to Europe through rail and road networks. It moves northwards from Gulf ports, reaching the Port of Haifa on the Mediterranean coast through overland rail and road networks passing through countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel. Further, the Israeli Port of Haifa will be connected to the Piraeus port in Greece, Messina in Southern Italy, and Marseille in France via the maritime route. Hence, the strategic importance of IMEC lies in the fact that it bypasses congested and volatile trade routes like the Suez Canal and creates a new trade artery that is faster and cheaper (Suri, Ghosh, Taneja, Patil, & Mookherjee, 2024). As India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has highlighted,

the Corridor will “bring down logistics costs by up to 30 percent, and reduce transportation time by 40 percent between India and Europe” (Press Information Bureau, 2025).

The idea of IMEC can be situated within the liberal theory of international relations, which emphasises rules-based frameworks to reduce the risk of conflict and enhance the prospects of peace and stability. It is best explained by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's notion of complex interdependence, where economic and institutional tools are given more importance than military force to create a stable and peaceful environment within the anarchical international system (Keohane & Nye, 1973). IMEC enhances the complex interdependence between India, the Middle East, and Europe, creating disincentives for conflict. It has the potential to establish a new regional order in the conflict-prone West Asian region, as the liberal notion highlights that increased cooperation in one area leads to increased cooperation in other areas.

With this context, this paper aims to explain the evolving dynamics in West Asia and their implications on the development trajectory of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. In the next section, the paper highlights the major components of IMEC, along with their strategic importance for the participating countries. Further, the paper delves into the shifting geopolitical environment of the region and its positive and negative impacts on the IMEC, followed by the benefits that IMEC brings to the table for the volatile West Asian region. Lastly, the paper ends by describing major hurdles in IMEC's path and provides some recommendations.

Major Components of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

As an economic corridor, IMEC is not limited to infrastructural connectivity; rather, it integrates various strategic elements across transport, energy, and digital sectors (The White House, 2023) to promote regional integration, economic growth, and strategic balance. Its multimodal nature makes it a more resilient trade corridor and presents significant opportunities like technological innovation, economic dividends, and enhanced digital connectivity, among others, for the participant countries (Darmaki, 2024). This section aims to explain the different components of the IMEC and their strategic importance for the participating countries.

Maritime Infrastructure Component

The maritime component of IMEC aims to strengthen shipping connections between India and the Arabian Peninsula and, further, between the East Mediterranean coast and Europe. Major

ports identified for this purpose are Mundra, Kandla, and Mumbai ports in India, Jebel Ali and Fujairah ports in the UAE, Dammam and Ras Al Khair ports in Saudi Arabia, Haifa Port in Israel, and Piraeus Port in Greece (Porecha & Haidar, 2023). Substantial investments are being made by Saudi Arabia, India, and the UAE to expand and modernize ports and logistics hubs, which will provide an added advantage to IMEC's maritime infrastructure component. To mention a few, in January 2023, Saudi Arabia announced an investment of US\$1.9 billion to expand and develop two container terminals at the Dammam port ("The Push to Increase Trade," 2024). Besides, the UAE's DP World has developed the Nhava Sheva Business Park, a free-trade warehousing zone in India, which offers state-of-the-art infrastructure to streamline supply chain connectivity (Government of Dubai Media Office, 2025).

The maritime infrastructure component of the corridor serves a unique purpose, particularly for India, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Concerning India, the increased Chinese footprint in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) via strong naval presence and by developing ports and airports with potential dual-use purposes in the States bordering the IOR has created a strategic imperative for New Delhi to secure its sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) (Trivedi, 2025). As seamless supply of goods from India to the Arabian Peninsula would require safety of shipping lanes and deployment of naval forces at the crucial chokepoints of the Persian Gulf, the strengthened maritime connectivity between India, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE will not only help New Delhi boost its deterrence against China but also help it become a leader in ensuring internal security of the IOR (Subburayan, 2024), substantiating its initiatives like the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). For Saudi Arabia and the UAE, this component will provide a much-needed fillip to their port expansion projects as well as to their regional and global aspirations in the maritime domain. It will enhance their roles as regional shipping nodes and re-export hubs, ultimately strengthening their presence in global value chains. On similar lines, Greece's strategic location is very crucial for IMEC, which could be leveraged by the country to attract foreign direct investment and strengthen its port infrastructure to provide smooth handling of containerised cargoes and become a bridge between the East and the West (Gavalas & Dikaio, 2025).

Railways and Overland Transport Networks

The railway network forms the backbone of the IMEC as it will connect the ports of the UAE to Israel via Saudi Arabia and Jordan and provide a seamless overland trade connection. It has been estimated that the export of goods through the railways "could save between 10-12 days

in travel times to Europe compared to shipping alone” (Rizzi, 2024), which, in turn, will reduce freight costs, end the hurdle of rising insurance premiums for marine vessels and deepen regional integration across the corridor.

Along with existing railway lines and ongoing rail-link projects in the GCC states, Israel, and Jordan, there are some gaps where the construction of new lines is required for the IMEC. A railway line already extends from the Emirates to the city of Al Ghuweifat, located on the UAE-Saudi border. To establish further connectivity, new rail tracks would need to be constructed from Al Ghuweifat to Haradh in Saudi Arabia. From Haradh, the existing 2,750 km North-South Railway links to Riyadh and continues up to Al Qurayat, a town on the Jordanian border. To complete the route, additional tracks need to be laid from Al Qurayat to Beit Shean in Israel (Bhatt & Roychoudhury, 2023). Besides, the UAE's Etihad Rail project, which aims to ‘connect the principal centres of industry, logistics and manufacturing’ (Quamar, Hameed, & Kumaraswamy, 2023), can be regarded as a central piece for this network. Furthermore, Jordan's railway modernisation efforts and Israel's efficient rail connections to Haifa port will enable faster and more secure cargo transit to Europe, positioning IMEC as a transformative initiative in a volatile geopolitical environment (Eissenstat, Kasulke, Ellison, & Urban, 2023).

The overland transport network of the IMEC could be a game-changer for the West Asian countries in many ways. For instance, Saudi Arabia’s vision “to grow the Saudi mining industry from USD 17 billion in 2012 to USD 75 billion by 2030... and establish the Kingdom as a global center for rare earth processing by 2027” (Shokri, n.d.) could benefit from the vast railway network. The bulk amount of critical raw materials could be transported easily through trains, helping the mining sector grow on the one hand, and strengthening the country’s economic diversification efforts on the other. Additionally, it will also help tackle the existing Chinese monopoly in the rare earth minerals sector (Rizzi, 2024), giving the European Union and India access to a resilient and reliable supply chain. Besides, IMEC has enhanced the prospect of the revival of the long-stalled GCC Railways Project, which aims to connect Oman, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait (Hadchity, 2025). Concerning Jordan, the country which is grappling with an array of economic hardships such as low economic growth, high unemployment rate, and high debt-to-GDP ratio (World Bank, 2024), etc., the IMEC offers a glimmer of optimism. To overcome these hurdles and ensure sustainable socio-economic growth, Jordan requires better infrastructural connectivity, huge capital investments, and robust regional cooperation. The IMEC would help Jordan access the market of billions of people in India, Europe, and the Persian Gulf, with reduced logistics costs and streamlined regulatory

frameworks, which will enhance its trade efficiency, ultimately resulting in increased trade volume and deeper integration into transnational supply chains (Ahmed & Zayna, 2025).

Green Energy Corridor

The evolving global energy architecture from hydrocarbons to clean energy resources due to global warming and climate change has led nation-states to foster closer cooperation in this sector. The transition to renewable energy while ensuring energy security has become a crucial aspect for climate change adaptation and for achieving net-zero emission goals set by countries. In this context, the green energy corridor of IMEC aims to foster trade in clean energy and enable the seamless exchange of electricity across the two continents of Asia and Europe. It includes green hydrogen pipelines and the interconnection of power grids. Both these sub-components hold significant importance for India, Europe, and the Gulf as well. The interconnection of power grids will provide a reliable electricity supply source in the highly fragile global (dis)order, and the proposed green hydrogen corridor will bolster countries' efforts to achieve their decarbonisation goals (Suri et al., 2024). To materialise this ambitious goal, India, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are conducting feasibility studies to 'connect their grids with undersea cables passing through the Arabian Sea' (The Economic Times, 2025). In this regard, the Government of India is considering investing ₹40,000 crore to establish a high-voltage direct current (HVDC) undersea transmission cable from Bhuj in Gujarat to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with a projected capacity of up to 2,500 MW (Global Transmission Report, 2025).

Concerning the strategic importance of this component, it aligns closely with Saudi Arabia's NEOM Green Hydrogen Project and the UAE's clean energy initiatives. This component will help Middle Eastern countries in transitioning away from one resource economy (oil-based economy), while addressing Europe's urgent need to diversify its energy supplies and address the demand-supply imbalance created by the Russia-Ukraine war (Vaid, 2025). Additionally, it holds the potential to transform India's energy trade profile from a net-importer of hydrocarbons to an exporter of surplus green energy and enable a conducive environment for cooperation under the One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG) initiative (Bhatt & Roychoudhury, 2023). Both the IMEC and the OSOWOG are based on the core idea that the sun is always shining somewhere in the world, facilitating a round-the-clock flow of renewable energy across regions (Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2025). This 21st-century trade route would also provide countries like Jordan and Israel access to new

sources of clean gas and increase their energy efficiency while also providing incentives for strengthening the domestic renewable energy sector (Schuetze & Hussein, 2023).

Digital Infrastructure or Data Corridor

Another critical component of the IMEC is digital connectivity, which includes “a telecommunication network, an undersea data cable, and digital payment ecosystems aimed at promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth” (Suri et al., 2024). This initiative will not only enhance commercial activities but also strengthen cybersecurity cooperation among the corridor’s participants, as an enhanced digital connection would require cutting-edge technologies to tackle cyber fraud and undersea cable sabotage. Besides, once the internet bandwidth is expanded across the corridor, it will enable greater regional integration, connect more people with the digital world, and provide a seamless flow of data (Suri et. al., 2024) – a crucial asset in the 21st-century global scenario.

To move forward in this direction, the already established India-UAE Digital Corridor can be leveraged and used as a template to further integrate all other IMEC participants (Afterman, Janardhan, Baharoon, & Mayer, 2025). Additionally, India’s Unified Payments Interface (UPI) can be explored for cross-border payment settlements within IMEC countries, as has already been done by France, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia (Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2025). Thus, IMEC is truly a green and digital bridge across continents and civilisations as described by the European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen (Deepak, 2023).

Shifting Dynamics in West Asia and Implications for the IMEC

Peace and stability in West Asia are essential for the effective implementation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). The ever-changing geopolitical scenario of the region presents a complex mix of opportunities and challenges for the corridor. While certain trends, such as the normalisation drive, shifting energy politics, and economic diversification, provide positive momentum, a great number of developments, like persistent conflicts, rising extremism and terrorism, and increasing security threats, pose significant obstacles to the IMEC's progress. However, the strong intent of participating countries to materialise the corridor goes well with David Mitrany's argument that “technical and economic cooperation would expand when the participants discovered the mutual benefits that could be obtained from it” (Jackson & Sørensen, 2013, p. 106). This section aims to explain the shifting

economic, political, and security landscape in the West Asian region and its impacts on the development trajectory of IMEC.

The Normalisation Drive

The signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE, followed by Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan (U.S. Department of State, n.d.), marked a tectonic shift in the geopolitical environment of West Asia, as the Accords signified moving away from the Arab Peace Initiative, which had made Arab-Israeli normalisation contingent on the resolution of the Palestinian question. The Accords became a geopolitical enabler in an otherwise volatile region and resulted in the elevation of diplomatic ties between the signatory countries, paving the way for cooperation in diverse areas. For instance, post-2020, the UAE and Israel, the two countries that are part of both the IMEC and the Accords, have recorded exponential growth in their defense, security, energy, technology, and economic partnership. Within two years of the signing of the Accords, both nations signed a free trade agreement (FTA) that reduced tariffs on around 96% of mutually traded products (Ministry of Economy and Tourism, UAE, n.d.) and merchandise trade between them has reached US\$6.4 billion in the period 2021-2024 (UN Comtrade Database, n.d.). The FTA between Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi has set a precedent for broader regional interconnection by advancing economic integration and reducing regulatory barriers, thereby laying the groundwork for the IMEC's success. Although Saudi Arabia has not given a nod to the Accords, scholars are of the view that IMEC could advance an economic normalisation, if not political, between Riyadh and Tel Aviv (Cafiero, 2023), thus highlighting the liberal notion of mutually beneficial cooperation. Moreover, the Saudi-Israeli rapprochement has become a major diplomatic mission of the United States to bring Israel into the political circle of the Arabian Peninsula, and the U.S.'s support for the IMEC is being regarded as one of the major steps in this direction (Afterman & Urhova, 2024). So, it is beyond doubt that the diplomatic architecture created by the Abraham Accords acted as a catalyst for the ideation of the IMEC as a transformative economic and infrastructure corridor by the participating countries.

Economic Diversification Plans

Described as 'rentier economies' due to their excessive reliance on oil and gas export revenues, the Gulf countries' diversification efforts hinge primarily on moving away from the oil-based economy and petrodollars. In this regard, initiatives such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's Centennial 2071 aim to transform their economies by augmenting investment in non-

oil sectors like logistics, renewable energy, manufacturing, and digital infrastructure, among others. Rooted in their aspirations to reinforce their centrality in the global economy and become regional trade and technology hubs (Das, 2024), the targets under these initiatives resonate with all the key components of IMEC. For instance, the Saudi Vision 2030 envisions enhancing the economic resilience of the country by increasing the ‘share of non-oil exports in non-oil GDP from 18.7% to 50% and raising its Logistics Performance Index ranking from 49th to 25th place’ by 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, n.d.). Concerning this, Saudi Arabia requires substantial investments in the infrastructure and logistics sector for projects like port upgrades, construction of new railway lines, and development of smart logistics parks. The IMEC will help Riyadh attract these crucial investments, thereby improving the country’s infrastructure along with bolstering supply chain connectivity for the corridor itself. With regard to the UAE, although the country has already established itself as a key transportation and logistics hub at the global level, the IMEC will further give a boost to the goals to rely less on oil, invest in technology-driven industries, and ensure economic sustainability by creating a cooperative economic space. This complementarity of objectives will position Gulf countries as critical nodes in the transcontinental supply chain (Anshu, 2025) and ultimately reshape the inter-regional economic landscape.

Shifting Energy Politics

West Asia's energy landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, as countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have diversified their energy portfolios by investing in renewable energy, green hydrogen, and carbon-neutral technologies (Gross & Ghafar, 2019). For instance, to achieve its goal of reducing carbon emissions by 278 million tonne per annum (mtpa) and increase the share of renewable energy sources in power generation to 50% by 2030, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has established various solar, wind, and green hydrogen facilities across the country (Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives, n.d.). Besides, climate goals, Europe's accelerated decarbonisation targets, along with its urgent need to find alternatives to Russian energy supplies (Sim, 2023), have provided a strong impetus to the Gulf countries' energy transition. July 2025 marked a breakthrough in this regard when the Saudi energy firm ACWA Power signed agreements with the leading European companies, such as TotalEnergies Renewables SAS (France) and Zhero Europe B.V. (Italy), among others, to create a Green Hydrogen and Renewable Energy Export Value Chain between the KSA and Europe (ACWA Power, 2025). It is being considered a huge success for the IMEC's green energy corridor, which has the potential to create a new energy order less dependent on fossil

fuel flows and vulnerable chokepoints like the Suez Canal or the Strait of Hormuz (Singh, Raja, Kumar, Uppal, & Rani, 2025). Additionally, the UAE's competitiveness in producing green hydrogen at a levelized cost of hydrogen (LCoH) of \$2.7/kg, which is further projected to decrease to \$1.7/ kg in 2030(Gupta, 2024), is the lowest among all IMEC's participants and presents an added advantage for the corridor's green energy component. Although there exist some apprehensions about the cost-competitiveness of transshipment of green hydrogen over long distances at present, the increasing technological prowess through research and innovation is likely to make it economically viable in the near future.

Rise of Multipolarity in the Region

Multipolarity has become an indispensable feature of the contemporary international system, and West Asia is no exception. The traditional dominance of any single power is giving way to a more complex and decentralised balance of influence (Hoffman, 2021). Major regional players like the UAE, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are exercising greater strategic autonomy, forging diverse partnerships with extra-regional powers such as China, Russia, the EU, India, and the United States. This evolving geopolitical landscape presents both opportunities and complexities for IMEC. On the one hand, multipolarity allows for inclusive and flexible collaboration, potentially reducing unilateral dominance and making the corridor more acceptable (Monroe, 2023). On the other hand, competing interests and overlapping initiatives like China's BRI could lead to strategic hedging among the partner countries because Riyadh and Abu Dhabi perceive multipolarity very differently from Washington and Europe (Rajagopalan, 2023). They view it as an opportunity to secure their national interests by actively engaging with multiple partners rather than seeing it through the lens of a competitive global landscape.

Their balancing act became more prominent in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, towards which Riyadh adopted the notion of "positive neutrality" (Heibach, 2024) and refused to become a part of the West-led sanctions regime and support Washington's idea of reducing oil prices via the OPEC+. Similarly, the UAE has also refused to take any side and has rather called for a diplomacy-led resolution to end the war. Interestingly, Abu Dhabi has become a key trading partner for Moscow, as bilateral trade between the two has reached US\$11.5 billion in 2024. Besides, the signing of the Trade in Services and Investment Agreement (TISIA) with Russia in August 2025 (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, 2025) indicated clearly that the UAE is not in favour of harming its

geo-economic interests by isolating Russia. This multipolar environment of the region necessitates diplomatic maneuvering to enhance IMEC's long-term viability and geopolitical relevance while avoiding a dangerous retrenchment (Rizzi, 2024).

Ongoing Conflicts and Regional Instability

The major obstacle in the path of IMEC is the ever-changing intra-regional dynamics of West Asia. The protracted conflicts and fragile ceasefires pose significant challenges to the implementation and viability of this trans-regional initiative. For instance, Israel's conflict with Hamas, war with Iran and the most recent attack on Doha have cast a shadow on the Israel-Saudi normalisation drive and potentially disrupted the development of IMEC's Northern Corridor (Levitan, Reich, & Rynhold, 2025). The increased intensity of Israeli strikes in Gaza has led even the UAE to assert that if Israel plans to annex the territory, it would amount to betraying the very spirit of the Abraham Accords (Newsonair, 2025). This volatile environment complicates the level of coordination required for the seamless operationalisation of the corridor. Additionally, the conflict with Hamas has diverted the available resources in Israel towards the defense sector. Estimates from Israel's central bank suggest that 'by the end of 2025, the cost of war would amount to 12% of the country's GDP' (Pagliarulo, 2025), which has further diminished the potential of Tel Aviv to invest in the construction of required infrastructures under the corridor. However, the most prominent threat to the viability of IMEC comes from the unresolved crises in Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. These crises have long undermined the principle of coexistence and have made stability a distant dream in the region, which in turn threatens the confidence of private investors to get involved in any project in West Asia (Joshi & Sharma, 2025). Besides, violent non-state actors like Hezbollah and the Houthis, who are disrupting the maritime shipping routes in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb strait, may harm the Saudi, Israeli and Jordanian leg of the IMEC's physical infrastructure, potentially reviving the fear of increased freight costs and insurance premiums, therefore, ultimately eroding the very objective of the IMEC.

External Influences and Strategic Rivalries

West Asia has always been a chessboard of diplomatic games between the global powers, mainly due to its geostrategic location and energy wealth. The United States continues to exert influence through its longstanding security partnerships, while China has expanded its footprint through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and energy partnerships with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Meanwhile, Russia's growing engagement with Iran and other non-Western-aligned actors adds

to this complex great power rivalry (Cook, 2021). Additionally, Türkiye and Egypt are not part of the corridor, and they view it as a setback to their economic and strategic interests in the region and beyond. Egypt has voiced concerns that the corridor may render the Suez Canal inefficient, adversely affecting the Egyptian economy (Chorev, 2023), while the Turkish President has said that “there is no corridor without Türkiye” (Soylu, 2023). Ankara’s exclusion from the IMEC and its aspiration to remain a key transit country between Asia and Europe have spurred it to support another multimodal connectivity corridor, namely, the Development Road Project or DRP (Daily Sabah, 2025). The project aims to connect Asia and Europe via Iraq and Türkiye, with financial backing from Qatar and the UAE. Although Türkiye views DRP as a counterbalance to IMEC, the inclusion of Qatar and the UAE may make the project complementary to IMEC in the future. Furthermore, periodic threats by Iran to blockade the Strait of Hormuz pose a significant challenge to the uninterrupted flow of Indian goods to the Gulf (Rizzi, 2024). To bypass this strategic rivalry, expanding the IMEC to Oman would be of huge strategic advantage, as Omani ports would provide direct access to the Arabian Sea.

The Geoeconomic and Geopolitical Promise of IMEC for West Asia

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) holds much more than just establishing robust trade connections and resilient supply chains. It has the potential to reshape the intra-regional dynamics in the conflict-ridden West Asian region as it facilitates deeper economic collaboration between some countries of the region that do not have formal diplomatic ties, that is, Israel and Saudi Arabia (Singh, 2025). Building on the gains of the Abraham Accords, IMEC could act as a catalyst for industrial and infrastructure development in war-torn West Asia, linking the fragile region for better cooperation and enhancing the prospect of intra-regional political, social, economic, security, and cultural cooperation, as a peace train (Darmaki, 2024). Estimates indicate that the Corridor could “generate up to 2 million jobs in the Gulf region and attract over US\$100 billion in foreign direct investment by 2030. Additionally, the enhanced infrastructure and connectivity are expected to bolster the region’s position as a global trade hub, potentially increasing its share in global trade flows by 5%” (Anshu, 2025). The IMEC will also enable West Asia to establish a reliable and shorter connection with Europe and avoid taking risky trade routes such as the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. The surge in Houthi-backed attacks in these strategic maritime chokepoints has compelled shipping companies to reroute. Consequently, the alternative long-haul via the Cape of Good Hope increases the travel distance by 29% and voyage time by 17% (Notteboom, Haralanibides, & Cullinane, 2024). Besides, West Asia has vast potential for solar and wind

power, but the region lags in the renewable energy sector mainly due to a lack of required infrastructure and robust partnerships. By opening vast markets for clean energy consumption in Europe and India, IMEC will give a much-needed fillip to this sector in the region (Suri et al., 2024).

Geostrategically, IMEC will once again revive the ancient glory of the Middle East as an important trade route connecting the two continents of Asia and Europe. The Middle Eastern countries will become a critical node of the global economy, enhancing their position as middle powers in the international system. The corridor could also serve as a confidence-building framework in a region often marked by rivalries, and it could advance security cooperation among the participant countries, as the region's volatile environment requires robust safety protocols for the successful operationalisation of the corridor. Besides, it cannot be denied that being part of both the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the IMEC would provide more space for diplomatic maneuvering and strategic autonomy to the West Asian countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Growing defence and economic cooperation between these two powerful nations of the Arab World and China has caused irritants in Washington (Taneja, 2022). However, despite that, none of the Gulf states would pick a side and sever their relations with either Washington or Beijing. They view IMEC and BRI as strategic opportunities to diversify diplomatic partnerships and act as a bridge between the Global North and Global South in an increasingly polarised international political system (Baabood, 2024). Furthermore, the corridor provides another reason for India and West Asia to expand their scope of cooperation in diverse areas and deepen their age-old cultural and civilisational ties (Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2025). Overall, IMEC presents a unique opportunity for West Asia to overcome its persistent geopolitical instability by fostering peace through economic integration and regional cooperation.

Conclusion

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) offers a unique opportunity to its participants in an increasingly volatile global economic order, affected by supply chain disruptions and protectionist policies. It is a pivot towards economic integration, cooperative development, and regional interdependence. However, it is not devoid of challenges. The financial viability of the corridor, different standard operating procedures in each member country, difficult terrains of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, rising extremist activities and persistent conflicts in West Asia are some of the major obstacles in its path. Moreover, competition from

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) should be considered too, as the Chinese company COSCO holds majority control of Greece's Piraeus port, which has been identified as an entry point to Europe under the IMEC (Krzyszowski, 2024). China is also a major investor in the Etihad rail project of the UAE and the Red Sea Gateway Terminal of Saudi Arabia (Khan, 2023), potentially creating a geopolitical hurdle for the IMEC participants.

To overcome these challenges, IMEC members should establish a common platform, hold regular talks, and appoint special envoys to chalk out plans for the smooth implementation of the project. The future of IMEC largely depends on how nations navigate these challenges. But it is beyond doubt that IMEC could mark the beginning of a new phase in the liberal international order and could evolve as a stabilizing force for long-term peace and stability in West Asia.

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Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest exists.

Declaration

I, Navodita Kumari, hereby declare that this paper has been neither published nor submitted for publication, either in whole or in part, in a professional journal or as a part in a book which is formally published. However, this paper was first presented at the 11th Young Scholars' Conference, organised by the Center for West Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, on 8th May 2025.

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