DOI: 10.22034/isj.2026.592951.2498

International Studies Journal (ISJ)
Vol. 23, No. 1 (89), Summer 2026
Reseived Date: 2026/6/20
Accept Date: 2026/3/27
Article Type: Original Research
PP: 31-55

فصلنامه مطالعات بین‌المللی
سال ۲۳، شماره ۱ (۸۹)، تابستان ۱۴۰۵
تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۵/۱/۷
تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۵/۳/۳۰
نوع مقاله: علمی- پژوهشی
صفحات: ۵۵-۳۱

The Outlook for the India-Middle East-Europe (IMEA) Corridor in Light of Corridor Competition and Future Scenarios

Reza Dehbanipour Ph.D.* - Rahmat Hajimineh Ph.D **

Abouzar Fattahizadeh Ph.D ***

This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Abstract

Governments consistently strive to expand their political and economic influence by asserting control over strategic international corridors that pass through their territories. As a result, these corridors often become arenas of geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry and collaboration among states. Given the complexity and diversity of the geopolitical and geoeconomic forces at play in each corridor project, a wide range of future scenarios can emerge—frequently diverging significantly from the project's original plans. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is no exception. In this article, we have answered the question of what are the scenarios facing the iMac Creed in light of geopolitical competition? The primary objective of this study is to identify and elaborate on the possible, probable, and preferred scenarios for this corridor. This study employs the Schwartz Global Business Network (GBN) scenario planning methodology to develop and evaluate these futures. The findings show identifies the “Abraham Accords”, “Noah’s Ark”, and “Tower of Babel” as the probable, preferred, and possible scenarios for IMEC, respectively. At present, the “Abraham Accords”

* Assistant Professor, Department of International Law, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Yasouj University, Yasouj, Iran.

** Associate Professor. Department of Law, ET. C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran./ Corresponding Author / Email: rahmat.hajimineh@iau.ac.ir

*** Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Literature and Political Science, Yasouj University, Yasouj, Iran.

Article Link: https://www.isjq.ir/article_255644.html?lang=en
Online ISSN: 2676-5136 Print ISSN: 2045-1735

scenario appears to be the most plausible trajectory. However, significant changes across six key indicators could shift the outcome toward the «Tower of Babel» scenario.

Keywords
IMEC, International Corridor, Geoeconomics, Geopolitics, Scenario Planning

Introduction

International corridors serve as vital arteries of global politics and economics, playing a decisive role in national development and the enhancement of countries' geopolitical standing. Governments, aware of this significance, consistently strive to expand their political and economic influence by asserting control over strategic corridors that pass through their territories. Consequently, these corridors often become arenas of geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry and collaboration among states. Given the complexity and diversity of the forces at play in each corridor project, a wide range of future scenarios can emerge frequently diverging significantly from original plans. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), as one of the newest and most ambitious corridor initiatives, is no exception. It is subject to numerous geopolitical competitions that introduce considerable uncertainty regarding its future trajectory. Against this backdrop, the main research question of this article is: What scenarios face the IMEC corridor in light of geopolitical competition? A secondary question addresses: What factors could potentially shift the course of these scenarios? The central hypothesis posits that, under current conditions, the «Abraham Accords» scenario appears to be the most probable trajectory for IMEC; however, significant changes across six key indicators could redirect its future toward the «Tower of Babel» scenario. The primary objective of this study is to identify and elaborate on the possible, probable, and preferred scenarios for this corridor. The research employs the Schwartz Global Business Network (GBN) scenario planning methodology. The overall findings indicate that the “Abraham Accords”, “Noah’s Ark”, and “Tower of Babel” represent the probable, preferred, and possible scenarios for IMEC, respectively.

The structure of this article is organized as follows: following this introduction,

the second section reviews the research background and existing literature. The third section presents the conceptual framework and theoretical foundations of the study. The fourth section traces the history and evolution of the IMEC corridor. The fifth section is dedicated to the presentation and analysis of the research findings. Finally, the concluding section offers a summary and synthesis of the discussions, along with recommendations for future research.

1- Research Background

Articles have been published on the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, and a few examples are mentioned:

Suri et.al., in an article titled «India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: Towards a New Discourse in Global Connectivity», concluded that the dynamics and important role of the iMac Corridor are in transportation, digital communications, and trade facilitation and energy transfer. The strength of this article lies in its elaboration on the significance of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor's dimensions in expanding connectivity and transportation. However, its weakness is the failure to address the vulnerabilities and potential scenarios concerning this corridor. (Suri et.al., 2024: 1-33).

Bhat and Roychowdhury, have written article titled «India-Middle East-Europe Corridor: Bridging the Economic Gap and Digital Aspirations». The research findings show that the IMAC corridor will increase efficiency, reduce costs and strengthen economic cohesion of the member countries. The strength of this article lies in its examination of economic benefits, including cost reduction and bridging the economic gap among member countries. However, its weakness is the failure to address the costs and potential vulnerabilities associated with the construction of this corridor. (Bhat & Roychowdhury, 2023: 1-10).

Delurias and Falkenberg, have analyzed «India's connectivity initiatives, a multifaceted strategy in some aspects of the India-Middle East-Europe corrid». The research findings show that India's adoption of bilateral policies in the field of corridors, such as investment in national corridors such as the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor and participation in major international projects, are among India's initiatives in this area. The strength of this article lies in its examination of the benefits of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor for India. However, its

weaknesses include the failure to address other positive dimensions of this corridor for the Persian Gulf countries and European nations, as well as the lack of examination of the corridor's vulnerabilities. (Delurias&Falkenberg, 2024: 1-12).

Tanchom, has published an article titled «India-Arab-Mediterranean Corridor: A Paradigm Shift in European Connectivity Strategy». The research findings show that the construction of this corridor will mean that Europe will become a trade hub between India and the Gulf countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia and enhance India's position in the emerging global economy. The strength of this article lies in its examination of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor's role in enhancing India's position in the global economy and transforming Europe into a trade hub. However, its weakness is the failure to address the existing obstacles to the construction of this corridor. (Tanchom, 2023: 1-46).

2- Theoretical Framework: Critical Geopolitics

The term geopolitics was first coined by the Swedish jurist Rudolf Schillen in 1899. Geopolitics is the analysis of the effects of geography on power relations in international relations… (Britannica,2025:1). Traditional geopolitics studies how political power is strengthened or weakened by geographical arrangements of borders, alliances, spatial networks, natural resources, etc., and expresses the practical decisions of political and social leaders with respect to geographical arrangements. However, critical geopolitics examines the assumptions about the world behind such decisions… (Dijkink, 2009:1) and does not deal with power in general but with power relations in specific places… (Agnew, 2003:2).

“Tuttle and Dalby are the main figures of critical geopolitics. In 1994, they co-edited a special issue of the journal Environment and Planning: Society and Space, which was specifically devoted to the various dimensions of critical geopolitics. In their editorial, they argue that the field of geography, and specifically geopolitics, has traditionally been dominated by the naturalization of geography, state-centered rationalism, and the primacy of a Western patriarchal observer subject as the central subject of geopolitics and international relations” (Ó Tuathail, 1996:2).

“Critical geopolitics is a critical response to this traditional trend in geographical studies. In fact, critical geopolitics, as a subfield of human

geography, examines the assumptions and branches of geography that enter into the formation of world politics. It does this by examining the practices by which political actors relate international politics to the human environment and present it as a «world» characterised by particular types of places" (Agnew, 2003:2). "Critical geopolitics sought to give geopolitics a new and emancipatory role, insisting that the role of geographers is not to advise statesmen and politicians but to critique their approaches and concepts and expose the interests behind them" (Kelly, 2006: 40).

"For Ottoline, the focus of critical geopolitics, based on the Foucaultian nexus of knowledge and power, is to reveal the power games involved in grand geopolitical schemes" (Dodds & Sidaway, 1994: 518). In practice, «critical geopolitics abandons the traditional way of examining the behaviour of actors and attempts to expose the interests of power behind decision-making. By examining these power structures and interests that lie behind geopolitics, it is possible to discern a somewhat different, but apparently more accurate, picture of what a country's real geopolitical interests are likely to be. From the perspective of critical geopolitics, geopolitics has been fundamentally an imperialist science that, by understanding spaces and places, has shown great powers how to better dominate them and create war and violence» (Dittmer&Gray, 2010:169). "For critical geopolitical theorists, understanding the world must be achieved on a fundamentally interpretive basis, and not by relying on a set of sacred truths such as the fundamental separation of world politics between land and sea powers" (Kelly, 2006:40).

3- India-Middle East-Europe Corridor History

The India-Middle East-Europe Corridor is the product of the G20 summit held in New Delhi in September 2023 by the leaders of France, Germany, India, Italy, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and the European Commission. «This ambitious trade and investment initiative consists of two corridors: an Eastern Corridor connecting India with the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel, and a Northern Corridor connecting Middle Eastern countries with Europe. The countries participating in the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor represent 40% of the world's population and almost 50% of

the global economy» (Cafiero, 2023:1).

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor is part of a larger initiative called the Global Infrastructure and Investment Partnership, which is itself a global initiative of the G7 countries, a strategic and multilateral plan to finance infrastructure projects in developing countries and is seen as a rival to China's Belt and Road Initiative. The initiative is aligned with the «Biden Doctrine» and aims to address global infrastructure needs while promoting sustainable and inclusive growth. It was first announced in June 2022 at the 48th G7 summit in Germany. This plan, in turn, was shaped by another initiative called Rebuilding the World for the Better, which Biden announced at the 48th G7 summit in Britain (Iran Chamber of Commerce Research Center, 2023: 4).

The India-Middle East-Europe Corridor includes approximately twenty countries, "each with its own set of interests, priorities, and bureaucratic processes" (Baabood, 2024: 1). "This corridor represents an effort by Western countries to reduce China's influence and transform their infrastructure initiatives into more concrete programs. The project aims to strengthen communication routes along the old "road of…" that connected India to Europe via the Persian Gulf – a network that existed from ancient times until the British withdrawal from India in 1947. But this 21st-century trade route will feature undersea cables and internet pipelines to transport electricity and hydrogen to Europe and India, produced using renewable resources in the Arabian Peninsula» (Rizzi, 2023:2).

Ports connecting to the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor:

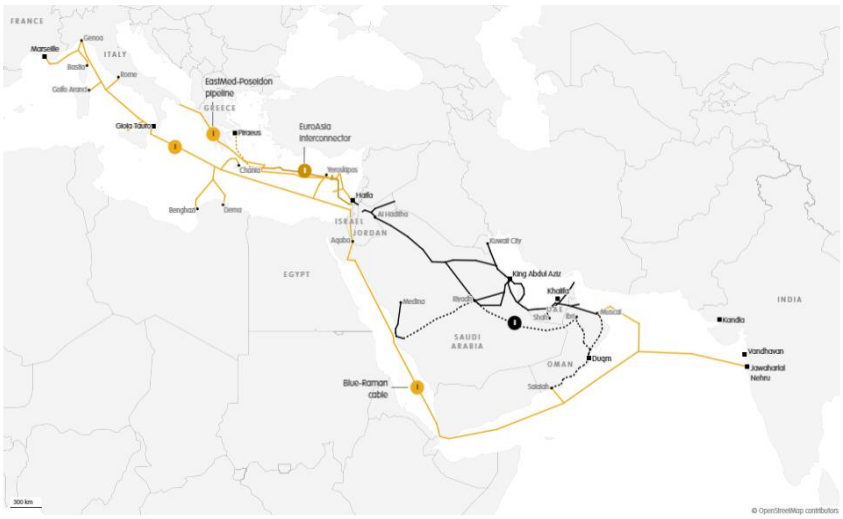
"India: Mundara (Gujarat), Kandla (Gujarat) and Jawaharlal Nehru; Middle East: Fujairah, Jebel Ali and Abu Dhabi in the Emirates and Dammam and Ras Al Khair in Saudi Arabia; Railway: Port of Fujairah in the Emirates to Port of Haifa in Israel: via Saudi Arabia and Jordan; Israel: Port of Haifa; Europe: Pyrgos in Greece, Messina in Italy and Marseille in France". (drishtiias, 2023:1-2).

4-Scenarios for the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC)

4-1Scenario One: The Abraham Accord

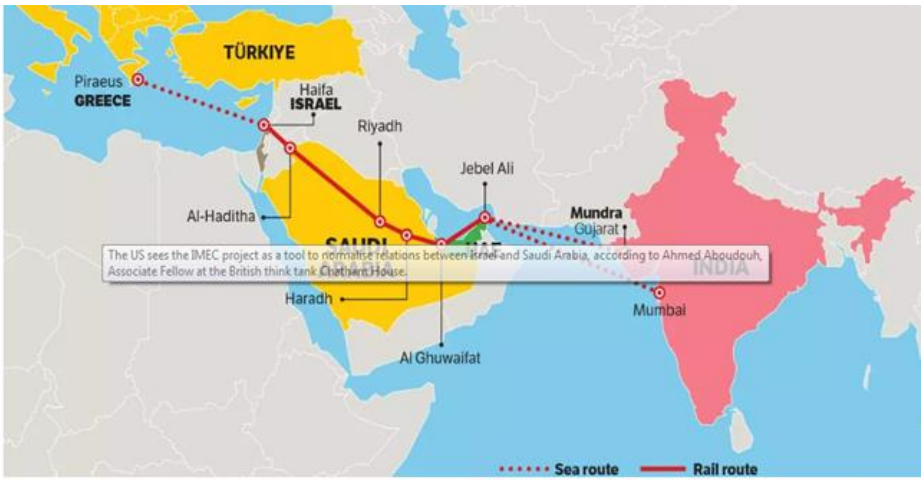
This scenario reflects the vision jointly presented by the leaders of France, Germany, India, Italy, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, and the European Commission during the G20 Summit held in New Delhi in September 2023, outlining the framework for the India-Middle East-Europe

Corridor (IMEC). «This ambitious trade and investment initiative envisions two main routes: an eastern corridor connecting India with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel, and a northern corridor linking the Middle East to Europe. According to its architects, the countries situated along the IMEC route collectively represent approximately 40% of the global population and nearly 50% of the world's GDP» (Cafiero, 2023:1), positioning the corridor as a strategic counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). IMEC also forms part of the broader Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), a multilateral strategy launched by G7 nations to finance infrastructure development in emerging and developing economies, explicitly conceived as an alternative to the BRI. PGII was formally introduced in June 2022 during the 48th G7 Summit in Germany and evolved from the earlier Build Back Better World initiative, which U.S. President Joe Biden announced at the 47th G7 Summit in the United Kingdom (Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, 2024: 4).



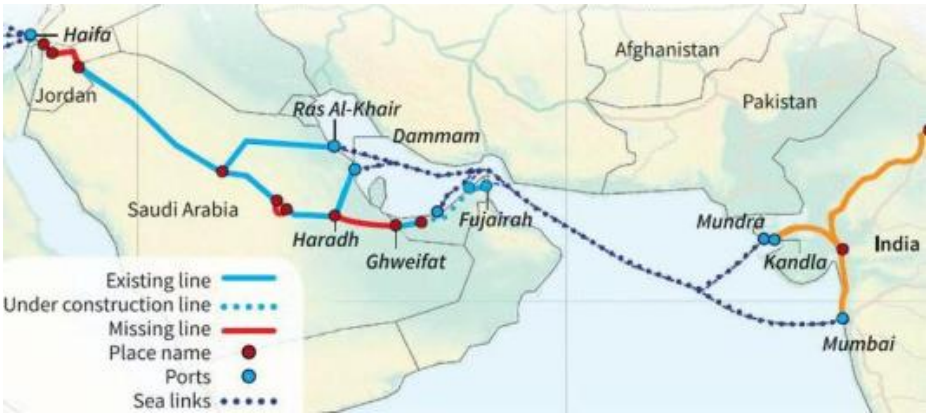
Overview of the IMEC Corridor Routes

Source: (ifsa-network, 2025:1)



Northern Route of IMEC

Source: (Gilani, 2023:2)



Preliminary plan for the railway and maritime routes of the northern section of IMEC

Source: (imec.international, n.d: 1)

The India-Middle East-Europe Corridor is endowed with multiple economic and geopolitical merits. «The attractiveness of IMEC stems from its potential to lessen the participating countries' reliance on the Suez Canal and to transport goods approximately 40% faster than the Suez route, as its high-speed freight trains travel at speeds of 120 kilometers per hour—nearly four times faster than typical freight trains» (Tanchum, 2021:15). «Additionally, unlike China's Belt and Road Initiative, IMEC is not limited to goods transportation; it also offers a secure and

fast corridor for exporting India's information technology services to Europe and West Asia»(Suri et.al.., 2024:2). «Another key difference between IMEC and the Belt and Road Initiative is the integration of electrical networks within the corridor. India, a prominent member of the International Solar Alliance, has introduced the ambitious «One Sun, One World, One Grid» initiative, aiming to connect major regional power grids into a unified green electricity network» (Suri et.al.., 2024:2).

The geopolitical and geoeconomic competition between China and India is another driving force behind this scenario. «Disputes between the two countries over control of the Himalayas in recent decades have led China not only to show reluctance in involving India in the Belt and Road Initiative but also to attempt to define neighboring opposing countries, particularly Pakistan, as key parts of this initiative. For example, the maritime belt of the project effectively bypasses Indian territory. This has further heightened India's concerns» (Akkas Ahmad & Rahman, 2020:371). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this initiative is expected to enhance the geoeconomic and geopolitical standing of Iran and Turkey, thereby increasing concerns among Arab countries and Israel. Similar apprehensions also exist regarding Russia's dominance, which would be on an even larger scale than that of the latter two countries.

The above-mentioned driving forces have led to an increased political will among IMEC member countries to cooperate. The initiation of the normalization process between Arab states and Israel is the most significant driving force within this second key factor. An examination of the normalization process shows that the composition and hierarchy of the countries involved align closely with their roles in the IMEC project. The 2019 Warsaw conference marked the beginning of this normalization process. At this conference, Israel and several Arab countries agreed on the need to counter Iran's increasing influence in the region and to curb its proxy groups. Consequently, the first step involved bilateral negotiations between Israel and Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. While negotiations with the UAE resulted in an agreement on normalization and subsequently the initiation and facilitation of trade relations, talks with Saudi Arabia made little progress. Shortly after the negotiations with these three governments began, the scope of talks expanded to include second-tier Gulf Cooperation Council countries: Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Finally, on September 15, 2020, Trump,

Netanyahu, and the foreign ministers of the UAE and Bahrain signed the peace and normalization agreements with Israel, known as the Abraham Accords, at the White House… (Samiee Esfahani et.al., n.d: 1).

Jordan plays a critical role alongside Saudi Arabia and the UAE in advancing IMEC. "In this framework, Israel is identified as the land bridge, and Jordan serves as a regional logistics hub. Together, these two players connect the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf through the shortest and most efficient route. This 2,200-kilometer railway network will be a vital segment of the India-Middle East-Europe corridor" (Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, 2024: 3). "Considering that IMEC links Israel and Jordan—two countries that have not signed a formal peace treaty—one outcome of the corridor will be the strengthening of ties between Israel and Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and the UAE. Consequently, the initiative realizes the idea of increasing synergy between Israel and the Arab world, while offering a U.S.-led alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative" (Baabood, 2024:2).

India seeks to advance certain strategic interests through its involvement in this corridor. "India, alongside its collaboration with the U.S. to counter China in the Indo-Pacific, has sought to expand its partnerships with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Despite past diplomatic tensions with Saudi Arabia due to its support for Pakistan, trade volumes, Saudi investments in India, and India's Hajj quota have all increased in recent years. Saudi Arabia has also facilitated India's observer status in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation" (Arab News, 2019: 2). India's cooperation with the UAE has been significantly broader, partly because Indians form the largest foreign minority in the UAE and hold many service-sector jobs there. As a result, both countries are major trade partners. In 2022, India and the UAE signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, aiming to increase bilateral trade beyond $100 billion by 2027» (Kanojia et.al.., 2024:143). «India and the UAE have also sought to deepen military cooperation through counterterrorism agreements and joint exercise» (Agarwal, 2022:21). «Relations between India and Israel have steadily grown since formal recognition in 1992. Israel ranks as India's second-largest arms supplier after Russia and its third-largest trading partner in Asia. Following the rise of Modi and the Hindu nationalist government, India shifted from its traditional policy of strengthening

ties with Iran to counter Pakistan, replacing Iran with Israel as a key partner. This shift has increased trade and military cooperation between India and Israel» (Naha, 2020: 88).

Alongside India, the United States also pursues specific objectives through its participation in this corridor. «Given rising geopolitical tensions between the superpowers over the past decade and the U.S. interest in reducing economic dependence on Beijing, the India-Middle East-Europe corridor initiative reflects America's resolve to reassure its allies and partners in the Middle East. Although Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and European countries like Italy and Greece participate in China's Belt and Road corridor, China's use of «debt trap» tactics in countries like Sri Lanka has tarnished the initiative's reputation, creating an opportunity for U.S. leadership. Likewise, India has avoided participation in China's Belt and Road due to objections over projects in the disputed Kashmir region. Recent violent border clashes between India and China and concerns over China's expanding economic and strategic footprint in South Asia have prompted Indian leaders to strengthen ties with the West, particularly the U.S» (Alert, 2024: 1).

From the perspective of critical geopolitics, the driving forces of this scenario, such as the containment of China by India, the United States, and the EU, the strengthening of relations between Arab countries and Israel, the expansion of relations between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the strengthening of Israel's position, are influenced by «spatial metaphors», the representation of norms, and the construction of mentalities that have been formed in the minds of the members of the IMAC Corridor. From the perspective of the United States and Europe, geopolitics and the IMAC Corridor are a subject that must be consistent with the order and norm of the Western state-centered observer, and its completion means imposing space on competitors such as China and Russia. Critical geopolitical theory considers the strengthening of Israeli relations with the Arabs to be the result of a break in stable, subjective, and future realities that have led the parties to cooperate and participate in the IMAC Corridor. For years, Arab relations with Israel have been strained over the Palestinian issue, but in recent years this has changed based on an understanding of power considerations, and the iMac Corridor could be a manifestation of the rationalization of space among these actors and the dismantling of their discursive order and subjectivity. Regarding the

strengthening of Saudi Arabia and the UAE's relations with India, one can also point to this critical geopolitical proposition that all three actors see the completion of the corridor as an increase in power, organization, occupation, and command over space. The elites of these countries, understanding the hidden aspects of the power game and increasing the scope of national security, have become leading actors in completing this corridor.

4-2 Scenario Two: Noah's Ark

In this scenario, the success of IMEC encourages member countries to develop their own corridor projects aligned with the broader IMEC framework. Consequently, by expanding these projects throughout much of West Asia and North Africa, these regions become supportive hubs for IMEC. A set of geopolitical and geoeconomic forces act as the primary drivers behind this scenario. The key players are countries capable of participating in both the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and IMEC corridors, or solely in the latter. Currently, only Iran, Turkey, Greece, and Egypt possess such capacities. «On one hand, IMEC's success threatens Iran's investments in the port of Chabahar and other northern Persian Gulf ports. On the other hand, it risks marginalizing China's Belt and Road Initiative and, consequently, Iran as its most cost-effective route» (Singh, 2025:1). These factors may motivate Iran to attempt destabilizing the IMEC route. For this reason, Arab countries and India will likely try to accommodate Iran by proposing alternative sub-routes within Iranian coastal areas while maintaining its political isolation with the support of the United States, the hegemonic backer of the project.

Turkey holds a similar geoeconomic significance. positioned at the final stretch of the Belt and Road route, it serves as China's land gateway to Europe. Additionally, Turkey's control over the Dardanelles and Bosporus straits, as well as its potential to disrupt operations at Greece's port of Piraeus, gives it a crucial role in the initiative's success. Moreover, recent changes in the Levant region such as the fall of Bashar al-Assad and the rise of Turkish-backed proxy forces in Syria have revitalized Turkey's traditional influence in this region, which is the final destination of IMEC. In other words, Turkey indirectly controls Assad's regime's capacity to destabilize the corridor. Therefore, IMEC members will likely have to balance limiting Turkey's dominance over the Eastern Mediterranean while

encouraging its secondary participation in the project.

Egypt, due to its control over the Sinai Desert, the nearby railway route, and its eagerness to participate in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, aims to become the linking hub between IMEC's rail section and Saudi Arabia's African railway program. Consequently, in recent years, Egypt and Saudi Arabia's foreign policies have aligned closely, especially regarding the Libyan crisis... (Fattahizadeh et.al..,2024: 9). Egypt's integration into IMEC's rail network would likely enhance the corridor's security, leveraging its military strength and prestige within the Arab world.

Notably, Greece's port of Piraeus is the final destination for both projects. However, in the Belt and Road Initiative, Piraeus is considered the main gateway connecting Asia to continental Europe, which led China to lease the port. In contrast, IMEC planners do not intend to limit exports from Haifa to Piraeus alone. Thus, Greece's support is vital, and as an EU member, the European Union's overall stance on the project plays a critical role. The EU's current indecision about favoring either the Belt and Road or IMEC projects will significantly impact the success of both corridors.

Furthermore, Sudan and Morocco have expressed interest in joining IMEC's important political agenda of normalizing relations with Israel. «Morocco's move aims to balance its ties between IMEC members and China, as it seeks to join China's maritime belt in the Mediterranean through agreements while also benefiting from Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 railway project in Africa. On December 10, 2020, Morocco announced its intention to join the Abraham Accords, and twelve days later, on December 22, signed a joint declaration with Israel to establish full diplomatic relations, open liaison offices, boost economic cooperation, and initiate direct flights. Subsequently, the U.S. and Israel recognized Morocco's claim over Western Sahara» (U.S. Department of State, 2020:7). "Sudan, which had prohibited relations with Israel since 1958, announced its willingness to normalize ties in October 2020, repealed the law on April 20, 2021. and finalized normalization on February 2. 2023" (Tawfik. 2022:901). "Sudan's motivation was to join IMEC's southern maritime route. China, meanwhile, views Sudan as a strategic link between the Arab world and Africa in its Belt and Road Initiative" (Large, 2023: 366).

By applying the theory of critical geopolitics, one can understand the increase in the number of IMAC members and the tendency to develop this project. The elites of Iran, Turkey, Oman, Sudan and Egypt, understanding the behind-the-scenes decisions of the leaders of the IMAC member countries, consider their lack of presence in this project as a weakening of their power and influence in the competition for supremacy over space and the minds of the citizens of the countries in the corridor. From the point of view of the leaders of Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Sudan, the IMAC corridor reflects a power structure that stems from imperialist knowledge and a bloc of power-seeking actors to dominate space and place. According to the belief of critical geopolitics, the realization of the second scenario is influenced by the starting point of thinking, action and optimal policy-making adopted by the elites of Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Oman and Sudan, and the leaders of the IMAC members will expand the scope of occupying geopolitical space by accepting the request of these countries.

4-3 Scenario Three: The Tower of Babel

The third potential scenario for IMEC envisions its failure to fully achieve some components and phases of the project. In this scenario, various geopolitical and geoeconomic forces would enable China's Belt and Road Initiative to surpass IMEC in becoming the dominant global trade route. Two possible outcomes exist: first, the project may be completed, but the driving forces mentioned below will weaken support and reduce enthusiasm for IMEC; second, only certain phases of IMEC will be implemented. In either case, the geographic scope of IMEC would contract.

The most important geopolitical and geoeconomic driving force in this scenario is China's strong economic ties with Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE. «This relationship, which was initially formed merely on the basis of mutual need for energy and commodity trade, has now, due to the shifting global geopolitics and the «Look East» approach adopted by Arab countries, been elevated to the level of a «comprehensive strategic partnership».(Bahadori et.al.,2025:89) For example, Saudi Arabia and China signed the «1+2+3» Framework Agreement in 2016 to collaborate on energy, trade, investment, infrastructure development, satellite industries, nuclear power, and renewable energy» (Fulton, 2020:522). «By 2020, over one hundred major Chinese

companies were involved in projects across sectors like real estate, communications, railways, roads, bridges, airports, ports, power plants, and other critical national infrastructure» (Alqahtani, 2020:1). “Most of these projects are concentrated near the Red Sea, forming part of China’s Maritime Silk Road within the Belt and Road Initiative. For instance, Chinese shipping firms and ports have jointly invested with the Saudi Public Investment Fund to develop and operate shipping lanes at Jeddah port” (Smith & Mottaqin, 2025: 280).

Furthermore, increase in trade exchanges between Saudi Arabia and China indicates the interconnectedness of their mutual interests. “trade between China and Saudi Arabia reached over $106 billion in 2022—almost twice the volume of trade between Saudi Arabia and the United States. China also owns a 20% stake in the Red Sea Gateway Terminal, the largest port in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, China’s non-oil trade with the UAE exceeded $72 billion in 2022, with previous investments in various development projects there. These include an integrated railway project intended to connect Fujairah in northeastern UAE with the Saudi border. This will be the largest railway corridor in the UAE, linking major industrial zones, production hubs, logistics centers, and key ports throughout the country” (Khan, 2023: 2).

The second major challenge facing IMEC is financing. “Early discussions on which countries or institutions would fund the project were vague, and the United States has not committed any budget. Moreover, Europe, grappling with various economic challenges, has limited capacity to invest in expensive infrastructure projects” (Siyech, 2024:1). “This situation presents an opportunity for wealthier Arab countries and India to take the lead in financing IMEC. However, despite these countries possessing the financial means and Saudi Arabia’s previous commitment of $20 billion, it remains to be seen whether these pledges will be fulfilled. Historically, similar multinational infrastructure projects have been announced with great fanfare but failed to materialize. One example is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline, first proposed in 1995 but delayed for many years" (Siyech, 2024: 1-2).

The third driving force behind this scenario is the differing perspectives of Saudi Arabia and the UAE regarding the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC). “Rather than viewing the project as a confrontation or competition with

China, the Gulf countries see it as an opportunity to diversify their economies beyond fossil fuels. The project's potential to enhance tourism, investment, and transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy aligns closely with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, spearheaded by Mohammed bin Salman. Additionally, Saudi Arabia and the UAE stand to gain increased access to India's emerging and expanding market. Fundamentally, this initiative offers Gulf states a valuable chance to maximize their geopolitical influence across multiple regions by positioning themselves as a critical bridge between Asia and Europe. While policymakers in Washington and European capitals hope to curb China's geoeconomic expansion in the Middle East, they will soon realize that their Gulf partners pursue different goals by joining this corridor" (Khan, 2023: 2).

The fourth geopolitical and geoeconomic factor in this scenario is the exclusion of certain countries such as Iraq, Oman, Turkey, and Egypt, all of which could have contributed to this major trade route. »For example, Oman, alongside the UAE, could have served as a gateway linking Saudi Arabia to the corridor (Alhasan & Solanik, 2024). Egypt also desires to join the railway component of IMEC but views the southern maritime route — the primary sea passage — as a significant threat to its interests because its final destination bypasses the Suez Canal» (Tekir, 2025: 141). Moreover, Turkey's influence in Libya enables it to overcome obstacles created by Greece and other major powers through the so-called Sevilla Map initiative, which aims to limit Turkey's maritime power in the Mediterranean... (Fattahizadeh et.al., 2024: 8). By expanding its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey could disrupt the corridor's function as the crucial link between the Middle East and Europe.

The fifth challenge arises from local producers and consumers who oppose Israel and its policies toward Palestine, potentially resisting the benefits of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor—especially if Israeli ports become central hubs where goods transfer from rail to maritime transport. "The ongoing escalation of violence between Hamas and Israel underscores the longstanding political challenges Israel's involvement in such commercial projects faces" (Monre, 2023: 1). "Given the strong opposition among public opinion throughout the Middle East to relations with Israel, Arab populations are likely to resist any governmental efforts to participate in economic corridor projects involving Israel. Israel's

disproportionate response following Hamas's attack on October 7 has thrust the Palestinian issue back to the forefront of Middle Eastern foreign policy, impacting regional integration efforts like IMEC" (Siyech, 2024: 2).

The symbols of the realization of the third scenario in the theory of the constructed interactionist mentality of Saudi Arabia and the UAE against the confrontational mentality of India, the US and Europe towards China can seriously challenge the intentions and goals behind the construction of the IMAC corridor. Because in the eyes of the Saudi and UAE elites, interaction and friendly relations with China are essential to strengthening their power and national interests, while in the eyes of the leaders of India, the US and the EU, the contingency that focuses on containing China takes precedence over the essential. The opposition of Arab producers and consumers, which is one of the drivers of the third scenario, namely the failure to complete the IMAC project, can be analyzed mainly within the framework of the system of "production of space/power/knowledge" in this world and the dismantling of the willfulness of the elite members of this project. Arab public opinion, by constructing a reality based on experience and a mentality based on the need to marginalize Israel and sympathize with Palestine, expresses its own truth of geopolitics in a historical and abusive language.

Current status	Rout	supporters	Corridor name
Under construction	China-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye-Europe-Poland	Central Asian countries - China - Iran	China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran to Türkiye rail corridor
Parts of it are made	Asia-Europe-Africa-Latin America	One hundred and thirty-eight countries	Belt and Road Corridor
The corridor has been completed, but its operation has been suspended after the Russia-Ukraine war and .due to sanctions	Connecting the eastern and western regions of Russia and transporting goods to Europe via Belarus	Russia – China-Kazakhstan-Belarus	Trans-Siberian Corridor

Current status	Rout	supporters	Corridor name
Under construction	China-Central Asian countries-Türkiye-Europe	Central Asian countries - China - Turkey - European countries	Trans-Caspian Corridor Trans-Siberian Corridor
Most of this corridor has been built	Russia-Kazakhstan-Iran-India	India, Iran, Russia, Central Asia, Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan	North-South Corridor
Agreement between members to build a corridor	Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Bulgaria-Europe	Iran-Armenia-Georgia-India-Bulgaria-Greece	Corridor connecting the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea
Under construction	Iraq-Türkiye-Europe	Türkiye-Iraq-Saudi Arabia-United Arab Emirates-Qatar	Development Corridor (Persian (Gulf-Iraq-Türkiye

Table 1: Important corridors in East, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East
Source: (Authors' findings,2026)

Discussion and Conclusion

As previously stated, the three scenarios—Abraham's Covenant, Noah's Ark, and the Tower of Babel—represent the probable, ideal, and possible futures of the IMEC corridor, respectively. These scenarios are primarily propelled by two critical factors: geopolitical and geoeconomic competition, and the political will and cooperation among the member countries. Each of these factors includes a range of strong, either converging or diverging, driving forces. Table 1 offers a summarized overview of these forces.

Scenario / Key Factors	Abraham Accord	Noah's Ark	Tower of Babel
Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Competitions	The resurgence of land powers against	The capacity of southern Iran's coasts as a secondary	Economic relations between China and Arab countries

	maritime powers The rivalry between China and India Concerns of the U.S., Arab countries, and Israel regarding the rising geopolitical and geoeconomic status of Iran, Turkey, and Russia	supportive shore for IMEC The increasing influence of Turkey in the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean Egypt's ability to link IMEC's land route to Africa Greece and the European Union's willingness to participate in both projects	such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates Financing the project Different goals and interests of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the UAE compared to India, European countries, and the USA Opposition of Arab public opinion to Israel's participation Neglect of some countries such as Iraq, Oman, Turkey, and Egypt Improving India's relations with China and Russia
Political Will and Cooperation of Member Countries	Normalization of relations between Arabs and Israel India's shift from alliance with Russia toward increased cooperation with the U.S. Expansion in the level and scope of India's cooperation with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE	Normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain with Iran Normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the new Syrian regime Sudan and Morocco's willingness to normalize relations with Israel	1 Increased cooperation between Saudi Arabia and China based on Vision 2030 Enhanced diplomatic relations and investments between Saudi Arabia and Russia Hesitation and reluctance of Arab countries in advancing normalization due to concerns over Israel's growing power The Gaza war India's support for Israel in the Gaza war

Table2: Driving Forces in the Three Scenarios of IMEC

Source: (Authors' findings, 2026)

Considering all the points discussed so far, the expert panel believes that the most likely current option is the Abraham's Covenant scenario. Nevertheless, changes in the above indicators could potentially push the project toward the third scenario.

A comparison of the three scenarios proposed about the IMAC from the perspective of critical geopolitics shows that in all three scenarios, the link between knowledge and power from a Foucauldian perspective indicates the competition between regional and global powers in geopolitical plans. In the first scenario, India, the United States, and the European Union, aware of China's growing power and its superiority in creating corridors, especially the Belt and Road Corridor, bring the Gulf states and Israel with them and consider the completion of the IMAC Corridor as a superiority in geopolitical competition with China and Russia. In the second scenario, Iran, Turkey, Sudan, and Egypt, who were left out of the original plan, try to be present in the IMAC Corridor through consultation and negotiation. From a critical geopolitics perspective, the participation of these countries in the IMAC Corridor strengthens their national security and allows them to maintain their hegemony in competition with other regional powers. In the third scenario, which will lead to the suspension or elimination of some of its members, changing power relations in the international system are the determining factors. For example, the worsening of India's relations with the US and the strengthening of New Delhi's relations with Beijing may deconstruct and deconstruct India's constructed discourse of competition with China, and its elites may represent relations with the US and China. In addition, the different mentality and interpretation of the objectives of this corridor by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which is different from the constructed and confrontational mentality of the US, India and the EU towards China, could be a serious obstacle to the completion of the corridor.

According to analysts, the IMAC corridor could reshape global trade routes and act as a strategic counterweight to China's broader Belt and Road Initiative. As foreign affairs expert Rabindranath Sachdev has put it, "The IMAC corridor will enhance India's economic opportunities and global standing, while working with the G7 and regional players to act as a multilateral counterweight to China's [Belt

and Road Initiative] ... (Kathju, 2025: 1). "New Delhi is keen to break free from the barriers created by the BRI, and the Abraham Accords and IMAC agreements offer New Delhi a complement to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and its partnership with the United States, Japan, and Australia. As the world's risk from China diminishes, India's potential as both an export-oriented manufacturing base and a growing consumer market is growing. As trade with the United States is currently plagued by tariffs, the European Union and India are finally planning to conclude a free trade agreement this year" (Oxnevad, 2025).

From a critical geopolitical perspective, the iMac initiative is not just about economic goals or expanding ties between member states, but also about the interests of each member state, the realization of which could shift the balance of power in their favor. The iMac helps governments like India to keep up with China's competition for corridors, including the Belt and Road Initiative, and allows European and US governments to distance India from Russia while responding appropriately to China's growing influence. Just as the Autotail perspective is a critical geopolitical theory that seeks to reveal the power games involved in large geopolitical schemes, the IMAC corridor is also a manifestation of the intentions of actors such as India, the United States, the European Union, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to gain superiority over other actors and sometimes competitors. By understanding the complexities of the intentions and actions of competitors in the construction of various corridors and power games, these actors correctly recognized the importance of space and places and, with the IMAC initiative, revealed their real interests. Interests that are not only in developing communications and accelerating the transportation of goods and services, but more importantly in challenging the small and large corridors that have been built in the last decade.

References

1. Agarwal, R. (2022). India's Strategic Partnership with the UAE. Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 17(1/2), 15-28.
2. Agnew, j (2003). Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics. London: Routledge, 2nd edn

3. Akkas Ahamed, M., and Rahman, S. (2020). A Review of China-India Geopolitical Relations in the Context of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Saudi Journal of Economics and Finance, 4(7), 368-376.
4. Alert, C .(2024). The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges for U.S. Businesses, available at: https://www.bradley.com/insights/publications/2023/10/the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor-prospects-and-challenges-for-us-businesses
5. Alqahtani, K. M. (2020). Does Saudi Arabia Benefit from China's Belt and Road Initiative?. Available at: https://B2n.ir/bm1241
6. Arab News. (2019). Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announces Hajj gift for India with 30,000 increase in quota. 29 June, Available at: https://B2n.ir/hh2637
7. Baabood, A. (2024). The Geopolitics of Economic Development in the Middle East, available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/research/2024/03/the-geopolitics-of-economic-development-in-the-middle-east
8. Bahadori, M. Y., Shokouhi, S., & Karimi Porsheh, S. (2025). Geoeconomic opportunities and challenges of the Belt and Road Initiative in the context of China's relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Journal of International Studies, 3(87), 75-93. [in Persian]
9. Bhatt, Y& Roychoudhury, J.(2023). titled India-Middle East-Europe Corridor: Bridging the Economic Gap and Digital Aspirations, available at: https://www.kapsarc.org/our-offerings/publications/india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor-bridging-economic-and-digital-aspirations.
10. Britannica. (2025). Geopolitics, available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/geopolitics
11. Cafiero, G. (2023). The Geopolitics of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, available at:https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-geopolitics-of-the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corrido
12. Dijkink, G. (2009). Geopolitics and Religion. International Encyclopedia of Human,Geography, 453-457
13. Dittmer, J., & Gray, N. (2010). Popular Geopolitics 2.0: Towards New

Methodologies of the Everyday, Geography Compass, Volume 4, Issue 11, pp, 166- 177.

14. Dodds, K. J., & Sidaway, J. D. (1994). Locating Critical Geopolitics. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 12 (5), 515–524
15. Drishtiias. (2023). India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, available at: https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/india-middle-east-europe-corridor
16. Falkenberg, D., & Delivorias, A. (2024). India's connectivity initiatives A multi-faceted strategy, EPRS European Parliamentary Research Service, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762471/EPRS_BRI(2024)762471_EN.pdf
17. Fattahizadeh, A., Bagheri D., & Kazemi, A. (2024). Comparative Study of Turkey and Saudi Arabia Foreign Policy in Syria and Libya (2011-2024). Crisis Studies of the Islamic World. [in Persian]
18. Fulton, J. (2020). China-Saudi Arabia relations through the '1+ 2+ 3'cooperation pattern. Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 14(4). 516-527.
19. Gilani, I. (2023). India- Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: A passage of possibilities. Available at: https://B2n.ir/xm4169'
20. ifsa-network. (2025). Deconding the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, available at: https://ifsa-network.com/publications/the-new-silk-route-decoding-the-india-middle-east-europe-corridor-imec/
21. imec.international. (n.d). About the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), available at: https://www.imec.international/about/
22. Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture. (2024). "Middle East-India-Europe Economic Corridor: From Idea to Implementation". Available at: https://B2n.ir/gh6423 [in Persian]
23. Kanojia, A., Linda, N., & Verma, N. M. P. (2024). "The Impact of the UAE-India CEPA Deal on Trade and Investment Flows: A Comparative and Econometric Analysis". Saudi J Econ Fin, 8(5), 139-148.
24. Kathju, J. (2025). India's answer to China's belt and road starts to take shape,

available at: https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/economics/article/3301532/indias-answer-chinas-belt-and-road-starts-take-shape

25. Kelly, P. (2006). A Critique of Critical Geopolitics, Geopolitics, 11: 24–53. (doi: 10.1080/14650040500524053
26. Khan, A. M. (2024), The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC): Too Little, Too Late?, available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2023/12/the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor-imec-too-little-too-late?lang=en
27. Large, D. (2023). China and Sudan. In Routledge Companion to China and the Middle East and North Africa (pp. 360-372). Routledge.
28. Naha, A. (2020). India-Israel Relations: Opportunities and Complexities. Social Inquiry: Journal of Social Science Research, 2(2), 80-102.
29. Ó Tuathail, G. (1996). Critical Geopolitics: the Politics of Writing Global Space, Routledge.
30. Oxnevad, I. (2025). IMEC could reshape Europe's trade dynamics, available at: https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/imec/
31. Rizzi, A. (2024). The Infinite Connection How to Make the India-MiddleEast-Europe Economic Corridor Happen. European Council on Foreign Relations, Available at: https://B2n.ir/zm9789
32. Samiee Esfahani, A., Samiee, H. & Fattahizadeh, A. (n.d). Identifying and Analyzing the Driving Forces in the Normalization of Arabs-Israel Relations.
33. Singh, M. (2025). "IMEC as a Strategic Asset: Imperative of Security in a Multi-lateral, Multi-sectoral and Multi-stakeholder Connectivity Corridor". New Delhi: Center for Land Warfare Studies, Available at: https://claws.co.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/IB_429.pdf
34. Siyech, M. S. (2024). Will the Gaza War Derail the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor?, available at: https://agsiw.org/will-the-gaza-war-derail-the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor/
35. Smith, M. A. N. A. &Muttaqin, M. I. (2025). Intensification of China's Influence in the Middle East Region: Geoeconomics Approach on the Saudi-Iran Peace Agreement. International Conference on Strategic and Global

Studies (ICSGS 2024) (pp. 272-289).

36. Suri, N., Gh, N., Taneja, K., Patil, S., & Mookherjee, P. (2024). India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: Towards a New Discourse in Global Connectivity". *Observer Research Foundation*.
37. Tanchum, M. (2021). India's Arab-Mediterranean Corridor: A Paradigm Shift in Strategic Connectivity to Europe, *The Institute of South Asian Studies*, available at: https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/South-Asia-Scan-Aug-2021-V4.pdf
38. Tawfik, R. (2022). Sudan's Normalization with Israel: A Break with the Past or Another Phase of Extraversion?, *African Studies Review*, 65(4), 886-910.
39. Tekir, G. (2025). Connectivity in Crisis: The IMEC Initiative amid the Gaza Conflict. letişim ve Diplomasi, (Filistin Özel Sayısı), 135-152.
40. *U.S. Department of State*. (2020). Joint-Declaration: The Kingdom of Morocco, the United States of America and the State of Israel. Available at: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Joint-Declaration-US-Morrocco-Israel.pdf.