

Politics Of Corridors: IMEC Vs BRI, Geopolitical And Geostrategic Implications Of IMEC

Dr. Saima Razzaq Khan¹, Dr. Hassina Bashir², Dr. Waseem Ullah³, Dr. Muhammad Ilyas Khan⁴, Dr. Sajad Rasool⁵

Abstract

Transnational economic corridors have now emerged as an important part of the geopolitics of the world in the recent past. Among the most famous corridors, the International Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) led by China can be recognize as the main actor in determining the further trends in the evolution of the existing and new trade routes. This research paper aims at analyzing the strategic and geo-political perspective of the IMEC in comparison with BRI while comparing its likely impacts on the balance of power on the international system with particular references to south Asia, the Middle East and central Asia. The work examines these corridors in terms of geopolitical rivalry with a main aim of establishing their economic, political and security implications and how they can shape the interactions of this region. The paper discusses the extent to which each initiative is strategic, the contests they encounter, and the future impact they will have on the former patterns of commerce, continental and global integration, and geopolitics.

Keywords: *International Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Geopolitics, Regional Security, Geostrategy.*

1. Introduction

New mega economic developmental projects like the Belt and Road Initiative and the International Middle East Economic Corridor are changing the face of regional integration and International trade in Asia, Middle East and Europe. These projects have also led to the competition for influence and strategic control as global players attempted to improve trade, connection, and facilities. While the BRI wants to bring markets as well as resources to china through Eurasia, the IMEC wants to establish a Middle East Europe Asia connection through a different route. Drawing on the geopolitical and geostrategic perspective, the present paper compares the IMEC to the BRI and, based on that assessment, recreates the competing visions of these corridors in terms of the regional and global politics.

The establishment of corridors is not just an economic exercise, they are also geopolitical. Regarding the objective of IMEC it is to encourage stability in the region and development of the economy, and at the same time decrease the reliance on overland as the major trade route with prevalence of China. As we seek to understand the role of IMEC vs BRI in the political

¹ Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Gomal University, KP, Pakistan. email: dr.saima_razzaq@gu.edu.pk

² Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Women University Mardan, Pakistan, email: drhassina@wumardan.edu.pk, hassinabashir10@yahoo.com

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Lakki Marwat, KP, Pakistan. email: waseem@ulm.edu.pk

⁴ PhD in Politics & IR, IIU Islamabad, Pakistan, Email: khattaklm@gmail.com/ilyas@ulm.edu.pk

⁵ Deputy Registrar, Provincial Ombudsman, KP, Pakistan, email: sajadrs1@gmail.com

and economic contouring of the areas they concern and their impact on power relations and geopolitics we will analyse how these specific cases work.

2. Literature Review

Globalization as one of the variables that contributed to China's rise as a world power reflects economic improvements, geopolitics change, and global interdependency in the contemporary world. The riding economic growth of the nation is supported by dreams such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) aimed at transforming China's position in global politics, diplomacy, and economy. But while these efforts are thought to be critical for China's future success, with some claiming that Indian involvement is necessary for the BRI to reach its full potential. As Kumar (2019) noted, involvement is crucial for the success of the BRI; hence, regional cooperation enhances the development of a profitable long-run equilibrium for all entities.

Although the BRI has gained much traction over the years, counter initiatives have come into the pipeline which restrains Chinese dreams. Decoding such an undertaking, such as the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which challenges the BRI, is consisted of a focus on digital connectivity and financialisation. This approach is different from China's BRI model which has been criticised for lacking the social impact and sustainable development goal perspective, emphasis on short-term economic gains and authoritarianism. According to Mostofa (2024), highlighting the IMEC's working model, the shared format is viewed as more welcoming because of the focus on developing sustainable economic and diplomatic partnerships, the strategy is presented as potentially more reliable than China's aggressive and often criticized BRI.

The relation between the US and China of late has also added some shifts in the dynamics of international infrastructure plans. Chinese plug came when the IMEC was launched at the G20 Summit in Delhi but it received lukewarm response from countries such as Turkey. This tension reveals the general difficulty in how countries struggle with opposing world approaches. Anwar (2023) also notes that despite ensuring that the groomed countries would likely get equal value for the services in the IMEC, concerns have been raised over the Chinese-led BRI as it serves the Chinese interest and as such most partner countries would be concerned about the future liabilities of their engagement in such a line of credit scheme. These challenges have raised questions as to how government infrastructure projects could be undertaken to meet both economic objectives and the sovereignty as well as development aspirations of the countries that are participating in such projects.

Other experts also disparage the lack of historical perspective in BRI research; this kind of work has often been superficial and inadequately documented. Blanchard (2021) agrees with the statement that, even though BRI touches more than 150 countries, research on its results is scarce. To optimally tap BRI, there appears a need for extensive socioeconomic and uninformed research that delves deeper into the social, economic, and ecological effects and consequences of the BRI. The future of BRI research, however, does not rest in merely expanding their coverage but in also improving the architecture of research and analysis in the social sciences to improve the accuracy and relevance of its conclusions.

While BRI is being implemented across hundreds of development countries, the IMEC will be limited to slightly over 20 nations in the Middle East and Europe. Most of them are more developed economically, which distinguishes the IMEC from the BRI in regards with the participants' economic status. Raja (2024) also explains that due to a more centralized focus the IMEC could have better degree of regional collaboration and integration which could place it as a more sustainable long run option to the BRI even though it is a more fragmented project at the moment.

Political relation between China and India is worse due to their disagreement on the nature of their participation in the construction of infrastructure in the region. The physical confrontation

issue contributes acrimoniously to the existing rivalry between two countries which shapes their policies aimed to dominate the region in every possible way. According to Cafiero (2023), as the Sino-Indian rivalry intensifies, smaller states especially island states in South Asia and the Horn of Africa such as the Maldives and Sri Lanka are seeking to capitalise on the rivalry for economic and strategic inflows. The standoff between India and China regarding their control over the neighbouring countries is an indication of the rivalry forming the greater extent of the rivalry taking place in the state.

As earlier discussed and as will be seen later, the design of the IMEC is significantly different from the BRI along the following broad parameters. Unlike the BRI which has been warned to favor China national interests the IMEC was designed to benefit the larger Southeast Asian community. According to the IMEC as pointed out in Pradhan (2023) has its own advantages such as promoting employment of the indigenous people of the recipient countries thus reducing the BRI disadvantage that it provided a raw deal to the locals. Also, by analyzing the strategies that the IMEC uses regarding the debt issues and the financial viability, this plan is considered more preferable in contrast to China, which provides BRI financing on critical and higher interest rates.

The literature emphasises the upsurge in the Geo-political competition between China and India that constitutes a landmark in determining the strategic characteristics of both the BRI & IMEC. As a propelled Economic strategy, the BRI stands for immense economic prospects but it has potential vulnerability regarding fiscal stability, environment and political power. On the other hand, the IMEC is considered as a more liberal tool that eventually contributes to the integration and cooperation processes. These remaining initiatives will depend on future geopolitical contexts, as well as the extent to which they are willing and able to promote real, sustainable improvement in their respective regions. More investigations are however required to determine the future impact of these interventions on stability and economic development.

3. Purpose of the Study

This is paper's overreaching research question: To what extent and in what ways does the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) differ from the China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in terms of geopolitical and geostrategic value? Each of these mega-infrastructure projects reflects major geopolitical and geo-economic initiatives for the purpose of redesigning new corridors of world order in terms of trade policies, political alliances, and economy. More specifically focused on the IMEC this research aims at determining how this new corridor might shift the balance of power and change the guarantors in the 21 st century in terms of security, economy and geopolitical stability.

As one can note nowadays there is strong competition between the world leaders, and the IMEC and the BRI are the vehicles that illustrate two different ways of creating a powerful regional and global impact. The BRI which has been propelled by China is a bigger, alternative and state driven project which aims at developing connectivity across Asia Africa and Europe with the intention of increasing China's economic influence. It is on the opposite side to the currently emerging China's hegemony in these regions, and it has the resources of India, the Middle East states, and European powers behind it, as IMEC. As such, it will be important to analyze the particular reasons for founding of the IMEC, the organization's primary goals and missions, and the ways that it is affecting the foundation of international relations in order to best comprehend the organization's potential role in formation of future geopolitical setting.

4. Research Questions

1. What are the differences and similarities between the IMEC as a geopolitical strategy and the BRI in Asia and Europe?
2. What kind of geopolitical consequences are there for the existing and future security, alignment, and trade in the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia arising from the IMEC?

3. In what way can the political interests of major actors in the world area (the United States, Russia, the European Union) define the results of the implementation of IMEC and BRI programs?

5. Aims and Objectives

1. To critically evaluate the specific strategic objectives of the IMEC and the BRI and discuss the changes they have brought to the geopolitical and geostrategic environment of Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

2. In order to appraise the effect and impact of IMEC and BRI on power relations, trade, and political stratagem of Asia and Europe.

3. To evaluate the feasibility of these corridors for the long run bearing in mind political, security and economic factors that may influence the success of the corridors.

6. Research Methodology

This study shall therefore employ a qualitative research approach in a comparative analysis between the India Middle East Europe Corridor (IMEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The objective of this research is to evaluate the geopolitical, economic, and security factors as the outcomes of these two paramount TIPs . Therefore, to fuel the research effectively, the study will use primary and secondary research methods. There will be basic interviews of the policy makers, the diplomats and the international trade and geopolitics experts of the IMEC and BRI nations. These interviews will give an insight of the strategies, reasons and difficulties that such countries encounter while implementing such stretching projects. Furthermore, questionnaires will be administered to the key players, businesses, policymakers and communities of the regions affected by these endeavors of South Asian, Middle East, and Central Asian nations. These surveys will assist to determine perspectives of people and local authorities on the economic impact and other risks, the projects might involve and geopolitical advantages and drawbacks.

Secondary sources will involve empirical literature search involving academic papers, policy papers, and government reports regarding the IMEC, BRI, and other global infrastructure corridors. These secondary sources will provide some background information that will show the general political and economic environment of these schemes. Information from international organizations such as United Nations and the World Bank will also be used since they give data on development, trade and political climate within the region. The information gathered will also assist in positioning the IMEC and BRI to understand its place in the global economy and development of trade and infrastructure.

Qualitative content analysis will be employed to code the data and emerge with themes that include economic gains, security threats, and shifts in geopolitics that each initiative presents. In comparing these two corridors they will be first looked at in terms of the goals, the scale and the strategic implications for international politics of the regions involved. Importantly, the research will recognize the present state of these projects without denying the constant shifts in geopolitical dynamics as well as the long-term unpredictability of many large-scale infrastructure projects. Consequently, the findings of the analysis will focus on current and future possible consequences too.

7. Comprehensive Comparative Analysis of IMEC and BRI in the Context of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor or IMEC and Belt and Road Initiative or BRI are two of the infamous geographical and economical projects recently initiated that due to the coverage and audaciousness of the scale have garnished much attention around the world. There are certain similarities between these initiatives and at the same time, they are tensely

dissimilar considering their effects on regional security and development, economic relations and political map. As a means of achieving this research goal, this analysis employs the Theory of Regional Security Complex (RSCT) to evaluate the inter-relatedness of states in the specific region, as well as the impact of extra-regional players on regional security.

The paper not only compares the organizational framework of the two organizations but also analyses how their structure gives rise to the differences in their impacts on regional security, shift of power, and the emerging characteristics of geopolitical order. Applying RSCT to these initiatives will provide greater understanding of the nature of each of these projects in terms of security, stability and economic outcomes within the Indian Ocean rim and beyond.

8. The Theory of Regional Security Complex (RSCT): A Framework for Understanding RSCT which has been designed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever is an important theoretical paradigm applied for testing the character of regional security. This paper delves into how geographical nearness, common threats and past relations result in formation of regional security complexes (RSCs). As postulated by RSCT, regions are not separate systems, but security systems where the security standards of one state influence others.

8.1 Regionalism and the RSCT

The RSCT shows that there exists a role for regionalism through security socialisation in terms of shaping states' security behaviour. Such concerns can be electively geographical, historical, or based on economic relations. For instance, in South Asia, the Middle East, as well as Europe, economic matters such as trade access, natural resource shares, and geographic borders for instance, are more central to come how states embark on security cooperation.

8.2 Security Complexes

A security complex can be conceived as formed by a set of states that perceive themselves to be security interdependent because of their geographic vicinity or previous history. Interaction occurs in a such setting that states are either friends or foes . IMEc and BRI two projects where two state perceive each other and both are cooperating some of the time and often are in competition.

8.3 Security Interdependence:

Like neorealism, RSCT also focuses on security interdependence, according to which states in a security complex are connected through common security imperatives. Common in the IMEC and BRI projects means that nations participating in these projects are likely to be more interdependent on each other through economic interdependence or through shared security dangers particularly in areas which are prone to geo-political vulnerability.

8.4 Security Culture

The security culture of a specific region determines how much states perceive a security threat. Culture, in the form of defense attitudes and regional identity in a given area, provides essential input to security behavior. The BRI, for instance, may help create a coherent security environment or security community in parts of the world where China enjoys considerable clout; the IMEC might do the same for India, Europe and the Middle East.

8.5 Security Dynamics

Security can be explained as meaning or defining something which is in a continuous state of transformation concerning space and time. RSCT also views situations within the area as dynamic: power relations, geopolitics, and technology evolve continuously. In this regard, just like any other mega-connectivity projects with connections and engagements at the

international levels, the BRI and IMEC will facilitate the remolding and transformation of security environments of the connected regions.

8.6 External Influence on Regional Security

Even though RSCT is mainly concerned with a specific region's interactions, it recognizes the impact of other actors in security systems. While both the BRI and IMEC are initiated to generate external attention, countries such as USA, Russia, and China significantly impacted the foreign outcomes of these programs.

9.1. IMEC: Connecting the Economies and Enhancing the Security of the Region

The India Middle East Europe connectivity also known as the IMEC is a mega connectivity India Middle east Europe infrastructure plan to connect India, the Middle East, and Europe through a multimodal connectivity comprising of roads, railways, ports, and digital connectivity. The goal of the project is definitively the growth of integration both in its sense of having better connected economies, increasing trade, energy relations, and cultural bondage among the countries involved.

9.2 IMEC's Role in the Strengthening of Regional Security

Nevertheless, IMEC is an important player in regional security since it has the potential to improve cooperation on the issue of maritime security between the littoral state. Similarly, through positioning IMEC as the link between South Asia, Middle East, and Europe, the organization can eliminate the possibility of a conflict since the three regions shall be interdependent on the organization. It can also enhance diplomacy relationship between states with different political affiliations. Nevertheless, it has been observed that the corridor is fraught with many risks including the political instabilities in the specific Middle Eastern region, and security threats like piracy and terrorism adrift at sea.

9.3 International Relations and Security Canter

It will also be seen that the development of IMEC could lead to radical geopolitical realignment especially in the Middle East as alignment of the gulf countries, India and Europe through IMEC metaphor would offset the BRI dominance of China. This shift in geopolitics could lead to a change of security culture in which states participating in the relevant organizations are more inclined to common security as opposed to business based bilateral defense treaties.

9.4 The Iconographic and Economic Signification

In the field of economic cooperation, IMEC is pledged for spurring up of business interactions and investment flow including through simplifying the transport chains and associated costs. namely, the positive impact that improved connectivity breeds in terms of the security environment may also be viewed as a positive in terms of providing more intercultural understanding, thereby facilitating the establishment of diplomatic relations.

9.5 Potential Challenges

However, IMEC's mission is not without its limitation; it is financially limited and faces political issues. Some of the difficulties include sourcing for the relevant capital, aligning various stakeholders' agenda and managing some logistical issues. Furthermore, security threats in insecure areas may act as a threat to change and alter the advancement of the project towards achievement of its overall objectives.

10. BRI: China's Geoeconomic Strategy and Regional Power Shifts

It is also called the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Silk Road Maritime Belt It is the globalization project of China established in 2013 to connect China to different parts of the

world. Being concentrated on roads, railways, ports, power supply lines, and digital networks, it can be discussed as a highly large-scale and complex project from the viewpoint of its geopolitical and economic impact.

10.1 BRI Overview: Mapping BRI's End-to-End Influence Across The Globe

BRI covers more than 140 countries and is considered one of the largest infrastructure projects in the world. While IMEC is centred mainly on India, the Middle East and Europe, BRI connects Asia, Africa and Europe forming a large number of mutually dependent states. Such a wide agenda puts China in the all-powerful position of holding evident influence over participating countries and defines the security and the economic format of extensive areas.

10.2 Power Politics and Mutual Security

Due to the fact that it is an extensive initiative, the BRI means that China can spread influence across different continents. China is extending the strategy of security interdependence by building key infrastructure and by making these countries depend more on Chinese investments and co-operation. This interdependence may result in a security regime whereby the chances of the application of force in solving the BRI countries' differences are eschewed.

10.3 Economic Power and Associateships

The BRI is not only an economic innovation but also an endeavor to ensure countries fall in line with the Chinese attitude. Since infrastructure is an essential factor within the global political economy, China benefits from gaining more concrete access to important trading sea lanes and energy resources which helps complement its international economic/military might. This economic interdependence may foster alignment, whereby countries will side with China's interests in matters to do with regional security."

10.4 Problems and Controversies of the BRI

The BRI has been criticized although the critics have not fully criticized the BRI yet. Debt traps has been made as criticisms in assertion that the countries concerned with the initiative may end up being more heavily indebted to China than they can handle, this may lead to more long term economic problems. Also, the project has geopolitical challenges from powerful countries such as the US, India, and Japan that believe that it is a Chinese aggression tool and an attempt to expand China influence internationally.

11. Comparative Analysis: IMEC vs BRI – Scope, Financial Impact, and Strategic Consequences

11.1 Scope and Geographical Reach

The BRI is unique in terms of the scope as it invests in more than 140 countries and touches the regions in Asia, Africa, and Europe. However, IMEC is more specific, linking India, the Middle East and Europe. However, IMEC seems to cover a comparatively smaller territory but it's dealing with first world countries only which might help to streamline the cooperation process and ensure better financial viability.

11.2 Financial Disparities

The other aspect, which also separates the BRI from many other initiatives is the financial scale of the BRI. The BRI is believed to need more than \$8 trillion, however, the investment fields are involved in each industry including infrastructure industry, energy industry and technology industry. However, investing in IMEC is estimated to be substantially lower than that of Intel hence the project is relatively smaller but not small in any way. The more localized approach

in IMEC may be financially advantageous for the countries in the undertaking to implement since its scale may not be as grand as that of the WTO.

11.3.0: Transportation networks, and logistics

The coordination industry employed by both initiatives varies significantly. With regard to the transport, the BRI is mainly transport infrastructure and a major part of the funds has been allocated for road and railway construction. In contrast, IMEC mainly depending on the maritime transport, looking at long term this could be easily favorable in terms of sustainability, where as the maritime transport generally, is known for less cost and environment destructive transport structure rather than the overland transport.

12. Findings and Analysis

12.1. Economic and Strategic Objectives of IMEC and BRI

- **BRI (Belt and Road Initiative):** The BRI scheme mainly revolves around constructional connectivity through infrastructure, trade connectivity, and financial connectivity of the Asia, Europe and Africa region. BRI wants to establish a strong infrastructure of roads, ports, railway, and airports to integrate China in the global supply chain. It has been described as an economic win-win situation that encourages export and capital movements, especially between China and Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe.
- **IMEC (International Middle East Economic Corridor):** The IMEC is the response to the BRI launched by Middle Eastern countries with Indian support that seeks to create a new transport corridor linking the Middle East to South Asia and Europe. These corridors are believed to help offer other trade options and thus reduce on the regions reliance on the Chinese trade routes. Its main economic importance lies in the availability of energy, infrastructural investment and enhancing the level of commerce between the Middle East, India and Europe region.

12.2. Political Consequences of IMEC and BRI

- **Geostrategic Competition:** The IMEC and BRI are direct rivals in the Central Asia, the Middle East and South Asia region. The BRI, which is backed by China aims to strengthen China's position in the South East Asia whereas, the IMEC which is backed by the U.S along with its allies of the western world aims to curb down China's burgeoning ascendancy in the region.
- **Security Concerns:** However, there is a security perspective to each of the corridors. Despite China presenting it as a purely economic endeavour, both political and military strategists in India and the U.S. suspect that this, especially through the CPEC aspect of the BRI initiative, is a way for China to spread its influence and muscle further into the region. On the other hand, the IMEC is viewed as a tool that can bring stability to the Middle East and Central Asia, and develop the matter of peace and security within the sphere of economy cooperation.

12.3. Role of Global Powers

- **China:** Being one of the primary supporters of the BRI, China's geopolitical plan presupposes the growth of economic influence and the geographical expansion of its presence. The BRI, in fact, is one of the many tools through which China is aspiring to be the ultimate world ruler.

- **India:** Accordingly, India's participation in the IMEC has been coloured by its apprehensions about China's growing power in its own backyard. India sought to use the IMEC to improve its connectivity to the Middle Eastern, European, and Central Asian markets in direct competition to China's BRI model in the area.
- **United States:** Both the Northern and Southern Corridors have not received the full support of the U.S and any support given has been with an eye on competition and influence. The U.S. in general supports activities that counterweigh with China such as the IMEC and reproduces the relationships with the European and Middle Eastern countries.

13. Strategic Implications for Pakistan and Regional Security

New phenomena that involve regional cooperation such as IMEC and BRI present a new geopolitical dynamic in South Asian and the Indian Ocean region. Opportunities and risks come with this type of transformation for Pakistan. Indeed, Pakistan has greatly benefited from CPEC; however, opening the IMEC perspective provides new opportunities for diversification of trading and investments and Pakistan's diversification from overdependence on China. Pakistan is situated at the intersection of the BRI and IMEC thus it should play a significant role in the security of its neighborhood. It will need to actively engage in and respond to, both initiatives on the backdrop of the security risks that are bound by geo-political contest and shifting power.

The existing projects and their future development will determine the future state of regional security. Through increasing economic interactions; building infrastructures together; and diplomacy, IMEC and BRI can also contribute positively to managing the conflict risks so as to enhance the stability of what may well be a new global order. But achieving these tasks will ultimately require them to solve the problems of political cooperation, funding, and security and defense.

14. Strategic recommendations for future engagement

What has been discussed so far are some of the strategic recommendations for future engagement of the photographer focusing primarily on enhancement on his photographic work as well as gaining wider recognition.

- 1. Enhance Regional Cooperation:** Promote talks between several countries to avoid the development of rivalry between IMEC and BRI, to guarantee the synergy of both complexes.
- 2. Promote Inclusive Development:** Promote integrated sustainable development in such infrastructure projects in a way that economic objectives are optimally achieved together with fairness to social and ecological factors.
- 3. Strengthen Multilateral Security Frameworks:** Strengthen existing multilateral security cooperation frameworks in order to develop better frameworks for counteracting security threats attributable to IMEC as well as BRI.
- 4. Diversify Partnerships:** Since Pakistan has aspiring roles in the BRI and IMEC projects, one major strategic direction should be towards diversification of the partnerships with countries beyond intending to over-rely on any nation or project.
- 5. Monitor Global Reactions:** Pay particularly close attention to how major global players, especially the United States and the European Union, respond to both, and shift policy accordingly to preserve the stability and to pin down any would-be international meddler.

In particular, both the IMEC and BRI are critical to future security on the regional and global levels. Already exerting their impact they will rewrite the rules of Economic and Political relationships among nations within a globally growing inter dependence.

15. Recommendations

1. Regional Cooperation: In the case of the IMEC and the BRI, especially the latter, it is important that the regions cooperate. For sustainable implementation of such projects, countries involved should improve communication and cooperation to reduce chances of fragmentation thereby leading to the improvement of flow of implementation.

2. Security and Stability: Because these corridors pass through quite sensitive regions, then, security should be the most pursued aspect out of all the aspects of the corridors. Thus, cooperation with other countries, concerning security issues, including terror threats, borders and military confrontation is possible.

3. Sustainability: These two corridors should ensure that developmental activities associated with them put much emphasis on aspects of sustainability which include energy, environment, and people.

4. Multilateral Engagement: These corridors should prompt countries to debate and discuss the future opportunism in multilateral forums regarding these issues, stability, and development for the region and security. This would aid in making some of these large scale mega projects to be more elastic and accommodate the smaller nations and regional powers.

16. Conclusion

The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are two separate projects with distinct connotations in terms of regional and global connectivity. While the BRI by the PRC is seen as an instrument of China’s dominance over the economies of the Asian countries the IMEC proposed by Indonesia is based on the vision of regional cooperation and less reliance on Chinese infrastructure. These corridors are in a competitive contest that is fundamentally altering the geopolitics and geostrategies of South Asia and the Middle East and Europe as well as leaving a lasting imprint on the world order. While both corridors are counterparts to one another, they can both contribute to the Regional Integration, Economic Growth, and Security if the stakeholders collaborated efficiently and worked on the issues associated with political security risks.

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