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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Geo-strategic Competition between India and China: A Comparative Analysis of BRI and IMEC

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to do a comparative analysis between two development initiatives, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), with a particular emphasis on the geostrategic rivalry between these projects. This analysis demonstrates that both of the countries are attempting to increase their power and economic interests, despite their differing goals and techniques. In this study, a qualitative methodology has been used and the secondary sources used to analyze both of the projects and states their significance in contemporary period. The Regional Security Complex Theory assists the geostrategic rivalry among both of states. The study examines the strategic competition among China and India along with other nations in the region using an exploratory, descriptive techniques. The comparison between the BRI and the IMEC highlights Pakistan's distinct and complicated geostrategic implications as an essential communicating element, including financial dependability, local circumstances, development of infrastructure, safety risks and financial benefits. The results of this study shows the security concerns regarding the infrastructure schemes and initiatives that has been started in this region. This study recommends that if both China and India works on multilateral cooperation and shared security risks and works on using cultures as measures of soft power, then it would be beneficial for both of them.

**KEYWORDS** China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Economic Cooperation, Geo-Political, Globalization, Regionalism

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### Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the BRI is a worldwide development project launched by the Chinese executive in 2013. It seeks to improve connectivity and collaboration across countries, mainly in Asia, Africa, as well as Europe (Shah, et. Al. 2020). The strategy encompasses development projects for infrastructure that include roads, trains, seaports, and energy power lines, along with commercial corridors and industrial areas. The BRI aims to boost commerce and investments, economic expansion, and cultural exchange. It is regarded as one of the greatest infrastructure as well as developmental initiatives in the world, having the capacity to affect nearly sixty nations and territories. However, the plan has received condemnation for its fiscal long-term viability ecological impact, & strategic ramifications.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) & the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) take different methods to developing infrastructure as well as economic convergence. BRI, with its greater scope, vast international reach, and multi-directional

system, is expected to have a greater worldwide effect. IMEC, while encouraging, remains in its early phases and largely focuses on connecting Europe with India via both land and sea approaches (Rahim, et. al. 2018). The selection between both of these initiatives will be based on the states' strategic goals and economic aims, with each bringing its own set of possibilities and issues.

Whereas, India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor IMEC may provide monetary advantages and increased connectivity, it is critical to remember that Pakistan's strategic relevance stays intact. Overblown similarities among IMEC, CPEC or BRI ought to be balanced against a knowledge of Pakistan's distinctive position in regional geopolitical affairs. Pakistan's geographical location, critical role in promoting interaction, and the need for cooperation in realizing IMEC demonstrate that the advent of new initiatives such as IMEC cannot lessen Pakistan's geopolitical importance. Instead, Pakistan's backing and assistance must be viewed as critical to the survival of any international endeavor (Mostofa, 2024).

### **Literature Review**

China's growth under globalization is notable owing to its global consequences, including rapid growth in the economy, geopolitical progress, and uniting among the Chinese the global community. Western countries are modernizing its armed forces and pursuing a robust marine trade strategy. China has enormous ambitions to sustain its rise, including the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Project (BRI). The Chinese government has invested heavily in mobilizing political, economic, and diplomatic resources to achieve this goal. Nonetheless, BRI will not achieve excellent results without India's vital participation. This article examines the elements driving China's BRI initiative and its influence on its sustainable rise and regional relations. This analysis critically examines India's approach and strategies to BRI. The study examines the benefits and obstacles for India and China in successfully implementing the BRI (Kumar, 2019).

As powers compete for predominance in targeted areas, they have formed blocs or coalitions to oppose or balance their major opponents. China, for example, has grown increasingly ambitious in its efforts to enhance its regional influence. The initiative known as the Belt and Road (BRI) began in 2013, making it popular. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) poses a substantial threat to the Belt and Road Initiative in China. IMEC's cooperative strategy, which prioritizes digital links and monetary integration, offers a compelling alternative. Although BRI has maturity and centralized control, IMEC's novel method indicates potential success. BRI's challenges, including a focus on China's advantage and short-term projects, make IMEC a more dependable and inclusive alternative (Mostofa, 2024).

With rising rivalry in geopolitics between the USA and China, the introduction of the IMEC at the recent G20 Summit in Delhi has sparked worry in China, but it has not received backing from Turkey, which has also declared a replacement for the IMEC. The path ahead is fraught with difficulties and possibilities for countries with similar values to work, as well as those like China seeking methods to remain relevant and secure initiatives such as the Belt and Road Agreement in order to realize the Chinese Dream 2049. IMEC, on the other hand, assures poor and linked countries that it would benefit all of its constituents, as opposed to China, which has solely benefited itself while raising concern and challenges for its partnered governments (Anwar, 2023).

The BRI's development has gotten more difficult, despite the fact that it is still moving slowly. This also applies to BRI research. There are "conductors" in BRI research, but many authors, journal and book editors, and reviewers appear to be more interested with expanding the number of passengers than with ensuring that the research train arrives at its intended destination. The full benefits of BRI research, however, will be realized only when there is a stronger focus on study, more attention to the infrastructure underlying the social science analysis, better project data collection, more connections along the various pathways that analysts have embarked on, and full use of existing tracks from the BRI's diverse realms (Blanchard, 2021).

BRI is recognized for its vast geographical coverage, which includes around 150 nations. These nations are primarily underdeveloped or new economies, creating the BRI a genuinely global endeavor. On the other side, the IMEC is intended to encompass approximately 20 nations, especially in the region of the Middle East & Europe. These economies tend to be economically more advanced than the BRI's member nations. Thus, BRI's reach is significantly greater in comparison of IMEC (Raja, 2024).

Tensions among China and India impact some geopolitical circumstances around IMEC, as do New Delhi's motivations for engaging in this intercontinental route. With Chinese-Indian ties at an impasse due to a border controversy, these two Asian powers are competing to authority, with India attempting to balance the nation's influence in Himalayan and South Asian countries. As tension between China and India ramps up, Indian Ocean island nations such as the Maldives nation and the Republic of Sri Lanka have been able to capitalize on growing tensions among Beijing and New Delhi; GCC countries will do likewise (Cafiero, 2023).

An objective analysis shows the fact that IMEC has an advantage over the BRI. First, the BRI is officially constructed, whereas the IMEC is the result of discussions with all parties involved. Second, the BRI has been created to fit China's interests, whereas the IMEC is intended to benefit the entire region. Third, whereas the BRI focuses solely on creating jobs for Chinese enterprises, the IMEC strives to provide jobs for the local populace. Fourth, the IMEC will uphold national sovereignty, which the BRI does not. Lastly, although the Chinese the Belt and Road Initiative offers loans at excessive rates, the IMEC recommends adhering to the most effective debt management standards (Pradhan, 2023).

Finally, the literature study emphasizes the complexities of India and China's geostrategic differentiation, especially in terms of the BRI & IMEC initiatives. Although the BRI creates huge economic potential, it also raises issues concerning fiscal sustainability, ecological impact, as well as geopolitical implications. IMEC, on the other hand, is viewed as a more inclusive and long-term solution that promotes regional accessibility and cooperation. Further analysis is required to determine the long-term effects of these activities on stability in regional affairs, economic growth, and international relations.

## **Material and Methods**

A Geo-strategic competition between India and China is the main focus of this study in accordance to comparative analysis. Using qualitative research method, this study analyzes the contest between India and China on the base of comparative analysis of BRI and IMEC. Through existing data, the comparative analysis take place and the Regional Security Complex Theory is applied on it for building perception regarding the security concerns across the geo-strategic location of India and China.

## Results and Discussions

### Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is an empirical framework utilized in international affairs and security studies to examine security dynamics in distinct regions of the world. RSCT, created by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in the beginning of the 1990s, provides a framework for understanding how security concerns are perceived, managed, and ordered across different geographic locations (Zahid, 2022).

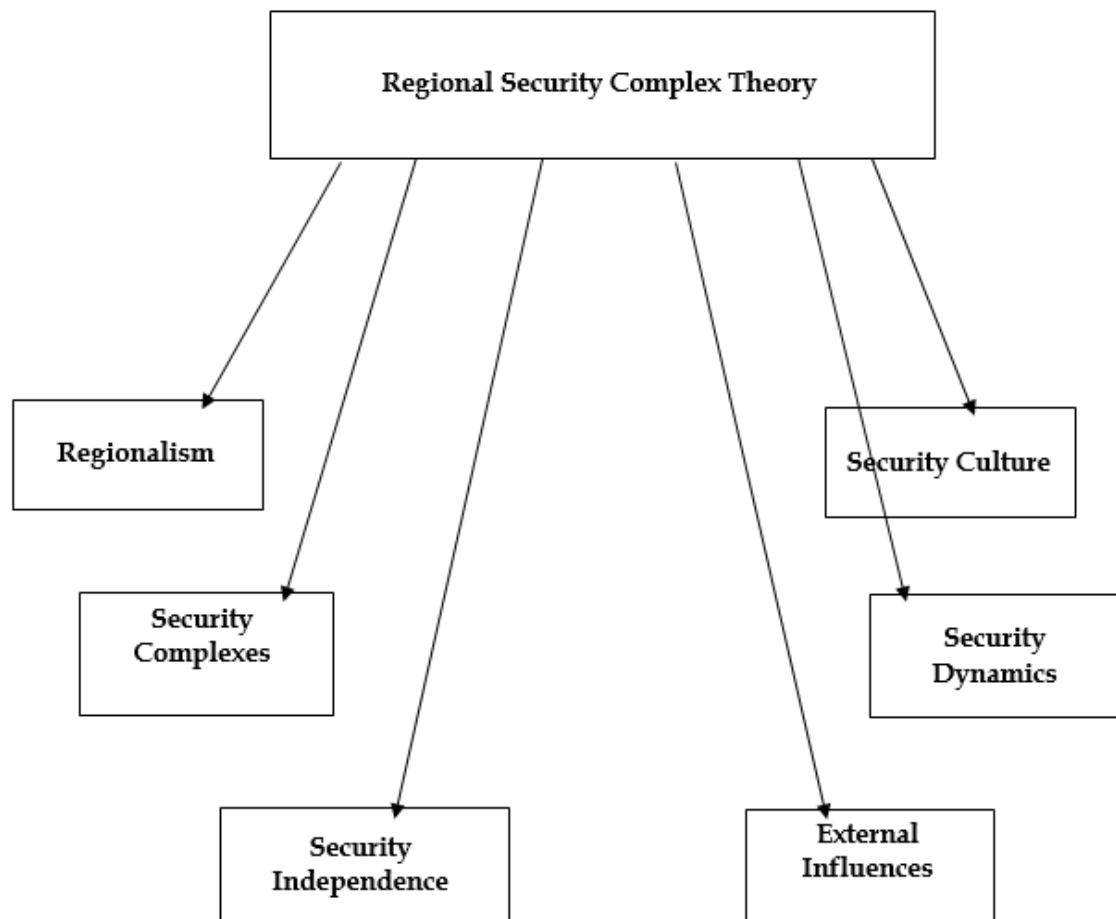


Figure 1 Regional Security Complex Theory

### Comparative Analysis of IMEC and BRI in context of Theory of Regional Security Complex

Both IMEC and the BRI influence regional security dynamics in the Indian Ocean geography, but in different ways. IMEC concentrates on maritime security cooperation among littoral governments, therefore contributing to the formation of a regional security complex. On the contrary, the BRI's construction projects and economic initiatives have far-reaching consequences for regional security, altering power dynamics, economic interdependence, and strategic alignments among member governments. Understanding these projects through the prism of RSCT sheds light on their involvement in influencing regional security infrastructures and cooperative mechanisms.

## **Regionalism**

The RSCT emphasizes the importance of regional fluctuations in affecting security perceptions and actions. Geographic closeness, common history, cultural links, and political exchanges among governments are what form regions.

## **Security Complex**

A security complex is a collection of governments whose security issues are inextricably linked owing to geographic closeness and historical contacts. These countries see each other as major dangers or security partners. Security complexity can overlap and be nested inside broader global security organizations.

## **Security Interdependence**

RSCT emphasizes the interconnectedness of security in a regional setting. Nations in a security complex are united by common security worries and interests. Security interdependence can result in cooperative security structures, which include alliances or regional organizations', to handle shared concerns.

## **Security Culture**

RSCT emphasizes how norms, attitudes, and identities shape security perceptions and behavior. Security cultures across a region shape how nations evaluate challenges, assess risks, and develop security policies.

## **Security Dynamics**

RSCT recognizes that security conditions within territories are dynamic and can change over time. Power transitions, geopolitical upheavals, economic integration, and technical breakthroughs all have an impact on regional security dynamics.

## **External Influence**

While RSCT is primarily concerned with regional interactions, it also recognizes the impact of foreign players on regional security, which include powerful nations or international organizations. External players can influence security dynamics in an area by their decisions, interventions, and relationships with regional entities.

## **IMEC**

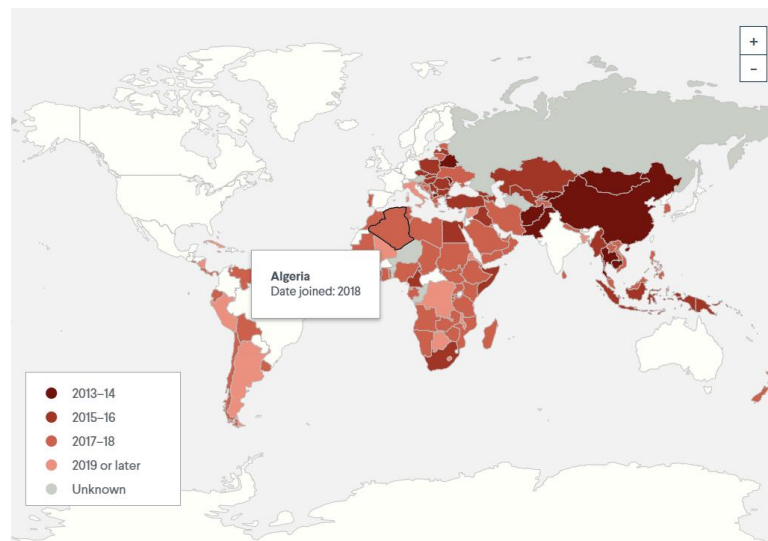
The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) serves as a planned multimodal transportation corridor that intends to improve communication and increase economic cooperation among India, the Middle East, and Europe. To facilitate the flow of product, services, and individuals among regions, the corridor is expected to include energy lines, digital infrastructure, road, rail, and maritime linkages. The IMEC has the potential to stimulate trade, investment, and economic development throughout its course, enhancing countries in South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. It may also encourage cultural interchange and build diplomatic connections between the regions. While the IMEC provides great prospects for development and growth in the economy, its execution may confront difficulties such as geopolitical complexity, finance constraints, and logistical challenges. But, with proper planning (Siddiqi, A, 2023).



Source: <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-the-india-middle-east-europe-corridor-imec-a-complex-endeavor/>

## BRI

The Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the BRI, and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) represent two major infrastructures as well as economic growth initiatives that have received significant attention at a worldwide scale. While the BRI, launched by China in 2013, has been in action, the IMEC is still at the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) phase. In this article, the evaluation of these two initiatives takes place which based on a number of critical criteria, including magnitude, geographical coverage, transportation options, orientation, and the extent of the project (McBride, J, 2023).



Source: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

## Variations in the Scope

BRI is well-known for its comprehensive portfolio of ventures, which encompasses everything from building infrastructure (roads, trains, and seaports) to renewable energy initiatives, optical fiber, agricultural, and commercial areas. It is a multifaceted project aimed at meeting numerous development requirements in the participating nations. On the other hand, IMEC have a narrower scope and mostly

focused on maritime channels, highway's and rail systems. It implies that IMEC may not have the same potential for growth as BRI (Mostofa, 2024).

### **Variation in the Scope of Capital**

One of the most significant variation among BRI and IMEC is regarding their dissipations. The estimated cost of the massive BRI initiative is over \$8 trillion. This substantial financial commitment covers a wide range of building and development projects across many countries. While, there is having a possibility that IMEC will gain far less investments of few billion dollars. This kind of variation declares that Belt Road Initiative (BRI) may have stronger impact on the global economy (Raja, 2024).

#### **The disparities in geographical range:**

BRI is well-known for its vast geographical scope, which includes nearly 150 countries. These nations are primarily emerging or new economies, making the BRI a genuinely global endeavor. Contrarily, the IMEC is expected to encompass approximately 20 nations, especially in the region of Middle East & Europe. These nations tend to be economically more advanced than the BRI's participating nations. As a result, BRI has a much greater scope than IMEC (ELDoh. M, 2023).

#### **Comparison between Commencement & Development:**

China formally began the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, and it has been vigorously pursued thereafter. It has experienced substantial spending as well as development across multiple regions. In comparison, IMEC continues to be in the Memorandum stage, suggesting that it's currently in the early stages of preparation and negotiations. This disparity in commencement and progress indicates that BRI has a major advantage over IMEC (Rizzi. A, 2024).

### **Variation in Logistics Mechanisms**

Another significant distinction amongst BRI and IMEC is the major types of transportation they use. BRI is distinguished by its varied transport system, with around 70% of its efforts centered on ground-based networks such as highways and trains. IMEC, on another hand, focuses exclusively on marine transportation. It anticipates the creation of shipping routes, as well as transportation interconnections. This discrepancy represents the geographical and logistical contrasts between these two ventures (Raja, 2024).

### **Difference in Orientation**

BRI is a multifaceted effort with global implications. It intends to connect China to the other parts of the world, such as Asia, Europe, Africa, even the Americas as well. This multifaceted method improves connection and trading prospects. While, IMEC is intended to be one-way, connecting India's to Europe. While this targeted strategy offers benefits it could restrict the variety of trade channels and prospects when contrasted to the BRI's extensive network (Mostofa, 2024).

### **Possibilities for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**

#### **Overview**

The India-Middle East-Europe-Economic Corridor (IMEC) is a revolutionary building project designed to link the Indian subcontinent to European Communities via

the Middle East, thus establishing a continuous trading route. It has high chances for achievement for several motives.

### **Redefining the existing Pathway**

IMEC is 90% complete and for operation 70% of its path comprises on marine waterways, negating the further land infrastructure. The European portion of the route is currently well connected to the railway network, which makes movement much easier. The largest building need remains in Saudi Arabia, wherein China, famed for its rapid building of infrastructure, might play an important role. Given China's history of success, building this stretch in just five years represents a determined but feasible aim. IMEC's benefit over BRI is its modest size and focus on prosperous nations, making it an endeavor of the "Rich Men's Club." This contributes to its sustainability and wealth. The nations involved, which include India, the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, & European countries, have the financial resources to purchase and promote the corridor's growth. This reduces the financial load on any single country and assures a common commitment to the initiative's success (Shankar. P. R, 2023).

### **The threat of Chinese Predominance**

The IMEC project aims at establishing a new trade route that reduces reliance on China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) and provides bigger strategic freedom. Insecurity of Chinese dominance drives collaboration among countries associated with the effort (ELDoh. M, 2023).

### **Involvement by Private Sector**

The commercial sector in nations that participate, such as India, the Middle East, and Europe, is willing to contribute in construction projects and discover IMEC as an appealing chance for expansion. Participation by the private sector may hurry up the execution of projects by operating with greater effectiveness and creativity compared to state-led proposals (Mostofa, 2024)

### **Economic Impact and Local Cooperation**

IMEC will enhance global trade and promote economic integration between regions. The route could promote the movement of products, services, and expenditures, hence boosting economic development in the nations involved. Furthermore, it might act as an approach for collaboration across regions that have traditionally been seen as independent entities, thereby improving regional growth and security. These chances for rapid development via connectivity enhance its opportunities (Burger. J, 2024).

### **Resources Stability**

IMEC might improve energy safety for India & Europe, as the region around the globe is an important supplier of energy. Expanding energy supply lines decreases sensitivity to interruptions and price variations, maintaining a steady energy source for these power-hungry areas (Raja, 2024).

### **Ecological Concerns**

Critics argue that IMEC's shipping routes and related railways are more sustainable than other modes of transportation. As worldwide concern over global



warming rises, the corridor's ecological advantages, such as fewer emissions of carbon and transport expenses, become more crucial (Khalid, 2024).

### **Limitations to the India-Middle East-European Economic Corridor (IMEC)**

Although the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) has enormous possibilities, it also confronts a number of challenges that could impede its successful implementation:

#### **Coordination among countries**

IMEC encompasses around 20 nations each with special interests, objectives, and administrative processes, making coordination challenging. The cooperation required to complete an endeavor of this size is difficult. Despite the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), that benefits from centralized decision-making, IMEC's multiple structure slows and complicates making decisions. Coordination of regulations and customs processes, as well as dispute resolution among such different kinds of states, is a challenging endeavor that may result in bottlenecks and inefficient operations (Rizzi. A, 2024).

#### **Financial Challenges**

Despite being known as a "Rich Men's Club," several IMEC member countries have considerable financial burdens. This financial hardship raises issues about where IMEC's money will come from. Although India and Saudi Arabia could be able to fund their serving sizes of the endeavor, the other nations might have trouble meeting their pledges. Reliance on foreign loans or nonprofit organizations may worsen the debt crisis and jeopardize this corridor's financial sustainability (SIMPSON. W. S, 2023)

#### **International Security Issues**

The IMEC path travels across several of the world's more internationally sensitive areas, particularly the Middle East. Strategic rivalry, wars, and safety issues might all offer significant barriers to the corridor's efficient operation. Regional conflicts, like those who are the Persian Gulf, may interrupt commercial flows, discourage investment from the private sector, and need expensive security measures. This unpredictability may discourage stakeholders while rendering it difficult to guarantee the pathway's safety (Elmali. B).

#### **Ecological Concerns**

The building and running of IMEC may cause ecological problems, especially in environmentally sensitive places. Combining financial growth with safeguarding the environment and conforming to global ecological norms will be a difficult undertaking. Finding this balance alongside satisfying the different regulatory needs of several countries along the way is a challenging task, threats to Pakistan's Strategic Importance from the IMEC. The India-Middle East-European Economic Corridor (IMEC) is regarded by many as a possible turning point in the vicinity. However, it is critical to confront the overblown hype around IMEC and its possible impact on Pakistan's geopolitical relevance, particularly in light of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Kumar, 2019).

## **Misconceptions regarding IMEC's scale**

One of the most significant issues is a misperception about the scale of IMEC and its relationship to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While IMEC is clearly a big project, it is far smaller in magnitude than BRI, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The financial scale of CPEC alone is several times greater than the total IMEC project. Nevertheless, the idea in India, and to a certain extent worldwide, has been exaggerated, producing unfounded assumptions that IMEC will lessen the importance of CPEC. It is critical to emphasize that the BRI and CPEC continue to be enormous initiatives with significant geopolitical implications for Pakistan (Mostofa, 2024).

## **Pakistan's Strategic Geopolitical Location:**

Pakistan's location plays a crucial role in the structure of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Being close to China, Iran, Afghanistan, and India positions it as a key factor in global international affairs, trade, and accessibility. IMEC, being a project primarily concerned with India, the Middle East, and Europe, does not lessen Pakistan's tactical significance in the area. Pakistan's importance as an Asian trade and energy hub remains unique, and initiatives like IMEC cannot readily replace it (Siddiqi, A, 2023).

## **IMEC's Reliance on Pakistan**

It is a great possibility of future that IMEC needs Pakistan's assistance to gain entry to its area for overland links among India & the Middle East. Pakistan's involvement would be required for the route to operate effectively. This reliance on Pakistan demonstrates its enduring geopolitical importance in the area. Every attempt to avoid the nation of Pakistan would need significantly longer and more expensive routes through other nations, rendering IMEC financially untenable. The complicated strategic circumstances in South Asia, such as the India-Pakistan conflict, show Pakistan's continued relevance. Local peace and cooperation are required for any massive development of infrastructure to thrive. It might be doubtful that in future IMEC run smoothly until the long-running disputes and safety issues are resolved (Khalid, 2024).

## **Conclusion**

Globally, the system of politics is undergoing considerable changes as key international actors' connections adjust. As states compete for hegemony in specific regions, several blocs or initiatives have emerged to achieve this goal. Addressing or rebalancing against primary competitors. Asia is gaining popularity among countries due to its strategic position, inventiveness, military value, and other factors that make it a desirable region. China and other countries have increased their ambition to expand their influence in the region, taking into account these factors. It gained popularity in 2013 with the launch of the BRI initiative. The initiative prompted the Western world to reconsider their approach to the region in order to reclaim their supremacy in Asia, that was being threatened by China. Furthermore, China's BRI initiative is predicted to be capable of China's dominance over the Asia-Pacific area to the next level. India, an Asian power, announced the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) program in the middle of 2023. The project offers potential for India, Western nations, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and other countries to counter China's growing influence in the area.

When contrasting the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) to the Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the BRI, in the framework of Pakistan,

numerous major geostrategic consequences arise. While Pakistan has become a key participant in the BRI, receiving significant investment and growth of infrastructure, the establishment of the IMEC may provide Pakistan with a possibility to diversify its commercial partnerships, lessening reliance on China. However, this could affect Pakistan's ties with China, its longtime ally, necessitating a fine balance between the two pathways. Furthermore, rivalry between the IMEC and the BRI may result in duplication projects or a concentration on various routes, prompting Pakistan to carefully evaluate its technical development goals. Security issues are particularly significant, as participation in both efforts could bring up concerns regarding strategic vulnerabilities. Although these difficulties, Pakistan aims to prosper commercially from expanded possibilities for trade and investment along both corridors, underscoring the importance of strategic intelligence and diplomatic skill in managing these complex geostrategic forces.

### **Recommendations**

- Conduct a thorough economic analysis of both efforts, examining their possible advantages, hazards, and long-term consequences for the area and the world economy.
- Invest in infrastructure schemes that improve regional connectivity, commerce, and economic integration, with an emphasis on areas of mutual benefit.
- Assist in diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions and foster interactions among India and China on topics of construction of infrastructure and regional connectivity.
- Create multilateral cooperation forums with other regional players to solve mutual concerns and enhance stability.
- Evaluate the security consequences of infrastructure projects linked with both efforts, especially in areas prone to regional conflicts or wars.
- Enhance security collaboration mechanisms to address shared security risks and protect the safety of key infrastructure projects.
- Increase cultural interaction and people-to-people links among India and China to build trust and mutual comprehension.
- Use soft power measures like academic and cultural exchanges to strengthen bilateral ties and encourage collaboration in building infrastructure and regional connectivity.
- Create risk management techniques to meet possible problems and interruptions to infrastructure projects, that include political unrest, financial hazards, or natural calamities.
- Incorporate environmental factors into infrastructure design and development to reduce environmental impact and promote long-term growth.
- Collaborate on initiatives that use green technology to enhance ecological sustainability in the entire area.
- Invest in the growth of human capital and technical capacity enhancement to improve the skills of stakeholders who participate in infrastructure design, development, and management.
- Facilitate sharing of expertise and technology transfer in infrastructure projects to boost innovation and efficiency.
- Diversifying investment portfolios reduces exposure to particular risks and increases resistance to external shocks.

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