



Geopolitics and Corridor Wars in the Greater Middle East: A Comparison of BRI and IMEC from Mackinder and Spykman's Eyes

Geniş Orta Doęu'da Jeopolitik ve Koridor Savaşları: Kuşak-Yol Girişimi (BRI) ile IMEC'in Mackinder ve Spykman Perspektifinden Karşılařtırması

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC) as competing geopolitical projects that redefine Eurasia's strategic landscape with a specific focus on the Middle Eastern region as the overlapping area of clashing designs. Drawing on the classical theories of Halford J. Mackinder and Nicholas J. Spykman, the study argues that the BRI represents a twenty-first-century effort at *Heartland consolidation*, while IMEC embodies a *Rimland-based balancing strategy*. Through comparative conceptual analysis, it explores how infrastructure and connectivity function as instruments of power, linking economic corridors to spatial theories of dominance and containment. The findings suggest that China's BRI operationalizes Mackinder's vision of continental control through overland integration, whereas India's IMEC reflects Spykman's logic of maritime coalition and peripheral containment. The interplay between these initiatives reveals an emerging order of competitive connectivity, in which infrastructure networks serve as geopolitical tools rather than neutral conduits of globalization. By bridging classical geopolitical theory with contemporary infrastructural rivalry, the article demonstrates that geography remains central to global power politics: in the twenty-first century, again, influence belongs not only to those who hold territory but also to those who build and command the routes that connect it.

KEYWORDS

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) | India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC) | Classical Geopolitics
Heartland and Rimland Theories | International Political Economy

ÖZ

Bu makale, Avrasya'nın stratejik jeopolitięini yeniden tanımlayan iki rakip jeopolitik proje olarak Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi (BRI) ile Hindistan–Orta Doęu–Avrupa Koridoru'nu (IMEC) incelemekte; özellikle bu iki tasarımın kesişim alanı olarak Orta Doęu bölgesine odaklanmaktadır. Halford J. Mackinder ve Nicholas J. Spykman'ın klasik jeopolitik kuramlarından hareketle çalışma, BRI'nin 21. yüzyıla özgü bir "Kalpgâh (Heartland)" bütünlendirme çabası, IMEC'in ise "Kenar Kuşak (Rimland)" temelli bir dengeleme stratejisi olarak okunabileceğini ileri sürmektedir. Karşılařtırmalı kavramsal bir analiz aracılığıyla, altyapı ve baęlantısallığın birer iktidar aracı olarak nasıl işlediğini; ekonomik koridorların mekânsal hâkimiyet ve çevreleme (containment) teorileriyle nasıl ilişkilendirildiğini tartışmaktadır. Bulgular, Çin'in BRI aracılığıyla kara entegrasyonu üzerinden Mackinder'in kıtasal hâkimiyet vizyonunu somutlařtırdığını; Hindistan'ın IMEC girişiminin ise Spykman'ın deniz gücüne dayalı koalisyon ve çevresel sınırlama mantığını yansıttığını göstermektedir. Bu iki girişim arasındaki etkileşim, "rekabetçi baęlantısallık" (competitive connectivity) temelinde şekillenen yeni bir düzenin ortaya çıktığını, altyapı ağlarının küreselleşmenin tarafsız araçları olmaktan ziyade jeopolitik araçlara dönüştüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Klasik jeopolitik kuram ile günümüzün altyapı rekabeti arasındaki köprüyü kuran makale, coğrafyanın küresel güç siyasetinde hâlâ merkezî [U1.1]bir unsur olduğunu vurgulamaktadır: 21. yüzyılda da nüfus, yalnızca toprakları elinde tutanlara deęil, o toprakları birbirine baęlayan yolları inşa eden ve kontrol edenlere aittir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELELER

Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi (BRI) | Hindistan–Orta Doęu–Avrupa Koridoru (IMEC) | Klasik Jeopolitik |
Kalpgâh (Heartland) ve Kenar Kuşak (Rimland) Teorileri | Uluslararası Politik Ekonomi

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Introduction

In an era defined by renewed competition over connectivity, trade, and strategic geography, transcontinental infrastructure projects have re-emerged as tools of geopolitical influence. Among these, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) stand as emblematic cases of how states use economic corridors to project power and reconfigure global alignments. Both initiatives demonstrate that geography remains a decisive factor in international politics despite globalization's promises to transcend it.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by China in 2013, has evolved into a comprehensive connectivity strategy that integrates terrestrial corridors across Eurasia with maritime routes connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe, bolstering Beijing's strategic influence along critical energy and trade routes. In response to China's growing infrastructural and geopolitical influence, the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC), which was unveiled at the 2023 G20 Summit, is envisioned as a multimodal transport and energy network connecting India to Europe via the Arabian Peninsula, with support from India's Western allies as part of a comprehensive balance strategy. This article examines the burgeoning competition between the BRI and IMEC through the lenses of Sir Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory and Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory, two classical geopolitical frameworks that emphasize, respectively, the strategic significance of the Eurasian landmass and the critical importance of its adjacent coastal periphery. It asks, to what extent can these classical principles explain the strategic reasoning of modern corridor politics, and how do the BRI and IMEC exemplify the changing power relations across Eurasia? According to the article, the BRI represents a modern iteration of Heartland-centric consolidation, combining continental depth with maritime extension, whereas the IMEC represents a Rimland-focused balancing strategy aimed at limiting China's territorial expansion by strengthening coastal alliances in the Middle East and Indian Ocean. The research employs a comparative conceptual analysis, which is supported by actual observations of infrastructure development trends and burgeoning regional partnerships. The article connects contemporary connection projects to core geopolitical notions, enhancing debates about infrastructural statecraft, great-power competition, and the persisting spatial dimensions of global power dynamics.

Thus, this study will examine the viability, considerations related to security, and potential consequences of these initiatives in reconfiguring regional dynamics, trade networks, and strategic alliances within the wider framework of global geopolitics. The objective of this investigation is to offer a thorough comprehension of the complex relationship between geographic placement, resource control, and global power dynamics, as demonstrated in the BRI and the IMEC, the two initiatives with the potential to impact the very dynamics of present-day international relations.

A Brief Look into Theoretical Geopolitical Background: Mackinder and Spykman

The conceptual roots of modern geopolitical analysis lie in the early twentieth-century writings of Sir Halford J. Mackinder and Nicholas J. Spykman, whose theories continue to shape how scholars interpret spatial dimensions of power. Although developed in a vastly different technological and political context, their ideas remain strikingly relevant for understanding contemporary infrastructure rivalries such as the BRI and IMEC.

Mackinder's Heartland Theory emerged at a time when the global balance of power was shifting from maritime empires to continental states. In his seminal 1904 lecture "*The Geographical Pivot of History*," Mackinder argued that control of the vast, resource-rich landmass of Eurasia's Heartland—stretching from Eastern Europe through Central Asia—was the key to global dominance. His famous dictum, "*Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world*," captured his belief that the world's fate hinged on this central zone. The Heartland's geographic insulation from sea power and its potential for self-sufficiency made it, in Mackinder's view, the ultimate "pivot area" of global strategy.

Mackinder divided the world into three concentric zones:

1. The Heartland, the continental core of Eurasia;
2. The Inner or Marginal Crescent, the surrounding coastal territories later termed the Rimland;
3. The Outer Crescent, composed of the maritime powers beyond Eurasia. For Mackinder, history reflected a perpetual contest between land-based powers seeking continental control and sea-based powers aiming to contain them. This framework would later inspire both geopolitical strategy and academic debate throughout the twentieth century (Bassin & Aksenov, 2006; Chowdhury & Kafi, 2015; Clover, 1999; Dugan, 1962; Hess, 2004; Kearns, 2006; Knutsen, 2014; Krause, 2023; Mackinder, 1887, 1904, 1919; Meinig, 1956).

Nicholas Spykman, writing four decades later, reinterpreted Mackinder's model to account for the rising importance of maritime access and coastal regions. In his *Rimland Theory* (1942), Spykman argued that power in Eurasia resided not in the Heartland itself, but in the Rimland—the densely populated, economically dynamic coastal belt stretching from Western Europe through the Middle East and South Asia to East Asia. Whereas Mackinder emphasized land dominance, Spykman highlighted maritime mobility, trade routes, and access to the seas as decisive factors in global strategy. His concise counter-formula—"*Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world*"—reversed the analytical lens of classical geopolitics. Spykman's framework deeply influenced U.S. containment strategy during the Cold War and continues to inform modern analyses of littoral security and maritime chokepoints. By emphasizing the balance between continental and coastal forces, Spykman offered a more dynamic and economically grounded vision of geopolitics—one that resonates with today's competition over ports, pipelines, and sea lanes. Moreover, both theories underscore that geography is not static but strategic: infrastructure and

connectivity can reinforce or transform spatial hierarchies of power (Bowman, 1942; Dugan, 1962; Fox, 1948; Furniss, 1952; Holmila, 2019; Østerud, 1988; Owens, 1999; Spykman, 1938, 1942, 1944; Spykman & Rollins, 1939).

Expanding on the classical geopolitical principles established by Mackinder's Heartland thesis and Spykman's Rimland framework, current global dynamics indicate a revived competition for connectivity, access, and influence throughout Eurasia. The strict division between continental and marine regions has evolved into a more dynamic geography of interdependence, where economic corridors, digital pathways, and energy pipelines function as the modern counterparts of territorial boundaries. In this changing environment, the rationale of geographic control endures, albeit refracted through the mechanisms of trade, infrastructure, and finance—tools that influence political alignment as effectively as military force ever did. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC) can be viewed as material expressions of these enduring ideas. The BRI's overland and maritime routes echo Mackinder's quest for Heartland integration and continental control, while IMEC's maritime orientation and its reliance on coastal nodes align with Spykman's logic of Rimland containment. Read together, Mackinder and Spykman frame geopolitics as a contest over the spatial organization of power—whether through continental depth or coastal leverage. In the contemporary era, this spatial logic has shifted from territorial control to infrastructural connectivity. Corridors, ports, railways, and pipelines function as mechanisms for structuring influence across regions without direct sovereignty claims. The emerging competition between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC) thus reflects a renewed struggle over Eurasian spatial order, articulated through geo-economic instruments rather than classical military expansion.

In this light, the subsequent sections utilize these theoretical frameworks to evaluate how emerging transcontinental initiatives—particularly China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the expanding network of Middle Eastern connectivity, and India's increasing strategic influence through projects like the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC)—embody conflicting geographical paradigms of order. Each corridor signifies not merely an infrastructure initiative but a geopolitical assertion regarding the forthcoming allocation of power and influence. This research analyzes modern Eurasian and Middle Eastern alignments via the framework of classical and critical geopolitics, contextualizing them within the ongoing discourse of land versus sea, continental depth versus maritime access, and integration versus containment.

The Geopolitics of the Overlapping Transit Area

Within the context of a comprehensive discourse on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the India Middle East Corridor (IMEC), this analysis examines the geopolitical implications of the trade route rivalry between these two initiatives. Additionally, it explores the potential outcomes for the parties involved, focusing on the specific relationships between the BRI and IMEC and certain countries that are already connected to their respective corridors. By considering these factors, valuable insights can be gained regarding the viability of these projects, as well

as the associated risks and opportunities. While the study of geopolitics can aid in understanding the rationale behind various efforts and the objectives of involved parties, doing process tracing on the ground can serve as a crucial component in determining whether these parties possess the necessary resources to accomplish their aims. Henceforth, this part will expound upon the Chinese dimension and Indian links with the key overlapping interest areas of rival trade routes.

China and the Greater Middle East

This section investigates China's growing interaction with the Greater Middle East, a region that serves as a vital juncture between the Eurasian Heartland and the surrounding Rimland, to see how the spatial logic mentioned above manifests itself in practice. Rather than viewing China's connections with Iran, Israel, Iraq, the Gulf States, and Pakistan as isolated bilateral situations, this study sees them as interconnected nodes in a larger strategy of infrastructure interconnection, energy security, and geopolitical positioning. The Greater Middle East plays a critical role in the growing corridor competition, serving as a transit hub, an energy reservoir, and a maritime chokepoint zone connecting Asia and Europe. The section highlights how China's distinct yet complementary ties across this region operationalize traditional geopolitical logics through current geo-economic statecraft instruments.

To begin with, Iran's role within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative is critical. Over the past five years, China-Iran relations have significantly strengthened of which a key embodiment is the 25-year bilateral pact of 2026, indicating considerable collaboration. This agreement required China to invest \$400 billion in Iran's energy, infrastructure, and other sectors at a time of deepening economic difficulties experienced in the Iranian economy. Resolving these obstacles will benefit both Iran's energy revenues and Sino-Iranian strategic relations. Over the last decade, cooperation between the two countries has grown in the energy, trade, defense, and technological sectors. Following Total's exit from Iran's South Pars gas field due to US sanctions, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) purchased Total's interest in the field in 2018, indicating Beijing's willingness to fill holes left by Western corporations. Despite persistent US sanctions, China has continued to import Iranian oil, providing Tehran with an important source of money. The 25-year Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, inked in March 2021, strengthens bilateral cooperation in energy, infrastructure, defense, and cultural exchange. Iran serves as a significant energy provider and transit corridor for China's larger Eurasian agenda, particularly through collaborative development projects in North Azadegan and Yadavaran. Chinese companies have also played an important role in infrastructure development, such as railways, road networks, and port renovation initiatives. Engagements in telecommunications, particularly Huawei's long-standing presence, have increased technological interdependence. Taken together, these measures place Iran as a key node in China's Belt and Road Initiative, allowing both parties to alleviate the consequences of Western economic sanctions. (Azad, 2023; Belal, 2020; Chen, 2010; Garlick & Havlová, 2020; Madani, 2022; Shariatnia & Kermani, 2022).

Iraq is another key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) commitment in the Greater Middle East. In recent years, Sino-Iraqi relations have strengthened in areas such as energy, infrastructure, and political collaboration. High-level talks, including President Xi Jinping's 2019 visit, facilitated a number of agreements aimed at strengthening commerce, infrastructure development, and security cooperation. Energy is at the heart of the collaboration, with Chinese firms, particularly the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), playing key roles in the development of major oil and gas resources such as Al-Mansuriya and Halfaya. Beyond upstream investments, bilateral agreements have included transportation infrastructure projects such as highway building and energy transit arrangements that connect southern Iraq to larger export routes.

Within the BRI framework, Iraq plays a strategic role as both an energy provider and a link between the Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean. China's growing participation in Iraq's hydrocarbon industry, along with infrastructure investment, indicates a geoeconomics strategy aimed at assuring long-term resource access while consolidating power in a strategically important state in the area. (Chaziza, 2020a, 2020b; Gulmohamad, 2022; Hooghe et al., 2025).

Israel has a unique role in China's Middle Eastern engagement owing to its sophisticated technological sector and its strong strategic alliance with the United States. In the last ten years, Sino-Israeli relations have intensified mainly in the economic and technological sectors, with Chinese investments focusing on high-tech industries including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, medical technologies, and clean energy. Numerous prominent Chinese corporations have initiated research and development operations in Israel, indicating Beijing's focus on engaging with innovation ecosystems rather than energy resources, which predominate its collaborations in other parts of the area. Infrastructure collaboration has garnered attention, especially with Chinese participation in port management initiatives like Haifa. These ties have attracted scrutiny from the United States, which regards Israel as a vital security ally and has articulated worries about Chinese access to sensitive infrastructure and dual-use technologies. Consequently, Israel has enhanced its foreign investment review processes in recent years, imposing restrictions on specific types of Chinese involvement. In contrast to other regional states, Israel is not an official participant in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and its cooperation is characterized by selectivity rather than strategic breadth. Although bilateral economic relations have grown, political sensitivities—particularly Israel's reliance on U.S. security and overarching geopolitical tensions—limit the extent of alignment. Thus, China-Israel ties exemplify a distinct type of engagement in the Greater Middle East, focusing on technology and innovation rather than energy transit or extensive corridor integration. (Efron et al., 2020; Harutyunyan, 2020; Kumaraswamy, 2013; Lavi, 2022; Solomon, 2019, 2025; Yu, 2020; Zhang & Lazin, 2023).

In the Gulf, China's increasing presence has coincided with changing dynamics in U.S. regional participation. As the preeminent oil importer globally, China regards the Gulf as essential to its enduring energy security, positioning the area as a fundamental component of its Middle Eastern policy. In the last ten years, Beijing

has strengthened commercial and political connections with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, with energy collaboration serving as the foundation of these partnerships. Chinese companies have engaged in upstream oil and gas initiatives in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, including participation in Abu Dhabi's offshore concessions and the growth of Qatar's North Field.

In addition to hydrocarbons, China has expanded its presence in infrastructure, logistics, telecommunications, and finance, especially in the United Arab Emirates, which serves as a regional commercial center. Trade volumes between China and Gulf states have increased markedly, with China being a principal trade partner for numerous GCC countries. Financial institutions and state-owned corporations have bolstered these initiatives, enabling investment flows and further integrating Gulf economies into China-centric trade networks. The Gulf has a dual function within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a vital energy provider and a marine conduit connecting the Indian Ocean to Europe. China's multifaceted involvement in energy production, infrastructure development, and financial services illustrates a comprehensive geo-economic strategy designed to ensure resource access while integrating the region into its growing connectivity framework. (Fulton, 2019; Huwaidin, 2022, 2024; Kang & Wang, 2024; Noroozi & Akbari, 2024).

A Chinese group signed a contract with Qatar Petroleum in 2018 to build a new LNG facility in Ras Laffan Industrial City. Chinese companies have invested heavily in Qatari oil and gas exploration. China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and Qatar Petroleum partnered in South China Sea and Gulf exploration in 2017. Qatari infrastructure projects like the Lusail Sports Arena and Doha Metro Red Line South have involved Chinese companies. Chinese banks have opened in Qatar. ICBC opened a Doha branch in 2015 (Bakir & Al-Shamari, 2025; Chaziza, 2020a, 2020b; Chen et al., 2018; Dorraj, 2020; Duan & Aldamer, 2022; Fulton, 2020a, 2020b; Mesfer, 2025; Niu & Wang, 2024; Saidy, 2017; Sharma, 2019; Zreik, 2025).

Chinese-Saudi relations have improved over the past decade, with a focus on economic and energy cooperation. Saudi Arabia is China's main oil supplier, forming a major Belt and Road Initiative connection. Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Saudi Arabia in 2016 and 14 energy, financial, investment, and culture agreements were signed during this visit. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visited China in 2019. The two nations signed \$28 billion in deals during this visit. Chinese state-owned firms and Aramco have signed agreements to build a refinery and petrochemical complex in Saudi Arabia. China launched its first yuan-denominated crude oil futures contract in 2018, threatening the US dollar's dominance in global oil commerce. Saudi Arabia reportedly wanted to trade oil via yuan futures contracts. China has also invested heavily in Saudi Arabia's oil and gas sector through partnerships and direct funding. Sinopec bought a 10% stake in Saudi Aramco's Qingdao oil refinery in 2019. Chinese companies have invested heavily in Saudi Arabia's Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure projects (Chen et al., 2018; Dorraj, 2020; Duan & Aldamer, 2022; Fulton, 2020a, 2020b; Sharma, 2019).

The bilateral relationship between China and Pakistan has experienced substantial

expansion and exerted notable influence throughout the course of the previous decade, with a special emphasis on concerns pertaining to Afghanistan. In recent times, a significant consolidation of the bilateral relationship between China and Pakistan has been observed. This consolidation is marked by the reciprocal acknowledgment of both nations as “all-weather friends” and “iron brothers.” The two countries share a contiguous border and have actively engaged in several economic and infrastructure initiatives, most notably the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a significant part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. China has invested heavily in Pakistan’s transportation, energy, and maritime infrastructure. The investments include roads, railways, power plants, and ports. The massive China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure project requires a lot of money. Xinjiang and Pakistan’s Gwadar port will be connected by this project to give China a more direct and efficient marine route to the Arabian Sea. The initiative is projected to boost Pakistan’s economy and create jobs. Politically, militarily, and economically, China and Pakistan are closely linked. Pakistan has received weaponry and training from China. Over the past decade, China and Pakistan have signed many major infrastructure, energy, and defense deals. Several notable agreements were reached: China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) includes the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which connects Xinjiang province to Pakistan’s Gwadar port. This project entails building roads, trains, and pipes. This project aims to boost Pakistan’s economy and development. Due to its role in CPEC, China has invested heavily in Gwadar. The China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) has a 40-year lease to run the port and make it a global commerce hub. China has invested heavily in Pakistan’s Thar coalfield, which contains some of the world’s greatest coal reserves. Pakistan can minimize its reliance on foreign fuels by producing energy over 6,000 MW. China and Pakistan have a long-term defense cooperation agreement for cooperative military exercises and defense production. Pakistan has received fighter planes, submarines, and ballistic missiles from China in recent years. China’s involvement in Punjab’s modern agricultural park shows their investment in Pakistan’s agricultural business. China–Pakistan investments and collaborations have enhanced their strategic alliance and benefited Pakistan economically. China’s closest BRI partner in the region, Pakistan, represents the southern extension of the Heartland into the Arabian Sea. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—linking Xinjiang to the port of Gwadar—embodies Mackinder’s logic of securing a reliable outlet from the continental core to warm-water ports. This land–sea axis reduces China’s dependency on the Strait of Malacca and deepens its integration into South and Central Asia. In Spykmanian terms, Gwadar functions as a crucial Rimland node, granting China a foothold along the Indian Ocean littoral and symbolizing its fusion of continental and maritime power. (Ahmar, 2014; Esteban, 2016; Faisal, 2018, 2020; Gulrez, 2015; Hali et al., 2014; Hilali, 2019; Khan & Khan, 2019; Lalwani, 2023; Samad, 2025; Saud & Ahmad, 2018; Sharif & Mansoor, 2025).

Overall, the Middle East occupies a pivotal position in China’s Belt and Road Initiative, functioning simultaneously as a Heartland gateway and a Rimland corridor linking Asia, Africa, and Europe. Within this geography, China’s

partnerships reveal a deliberate strategy to integrate continental routes with maritime access, thereby transforming Mackinder's and Spykman's theoretical frontiers into concrete infrastructure and energy networks. Iran occupies a uniquely strategic position at the junction of the Heartland and Rimland. Through its 25-year cooperation agreement with Tehran, China seeks to secure overland energy routes and logistical connectivity westward toward the Mediterranean. For Mackinder, Iran's central plateau forms part of the transitional belt connecting the Eurasian interior to maritime domains. By investing in Iranian railways, ports, and energy infrastructure, China transforms Iran into a bridge state linking Central Asia to the Gulf. In Spykman's framework, this constitutes the reactivation of the Rimland's central arc—containing the Heartland's influence while granting Beijing access to Western Asia's coasts. In Iraq, China's engagement illustrates the economic side of Heartland outreach. Investments in oil, gas, and transport infrastructure—such as the Baghdad–Basra expressway—extend BRI's continental network into Mesopotamia. Mackinder would interpret this as an effort to stabilize the Heartland's southwestern flank by embedding it within Chinese-controlled supply chains. Yet, because Iraq also borders the Gulf, it simultaneously reinforces China's Rimland presence, underscoring the dual nature of BRI expansion. China's relations with Israel expose the geopolitical tensions that accompany Rimland penetration. While Beijing has invested in high-tech sectors and infrastructure (notably Haifa port operations), these ventures raise concerns among the United States, Israel's principal ally. From Spykman's perspective, control over Mediterranean entry points—Haifa, Piraeus, Port Said—represents an effort to dominate the maritime terminus of Eurasia's Rimland belt. Israel's cautious stance reflects the political fragility inherent in this part of the Rimland, where external influence collides with alliance politics. The Gulf region epitomizes the Rimland's economic and strategic value. Chinese partnerships with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar combine energy security, infrastructure financing, and port development. These states provide the maritime depth that the Heartland lacks. For Spykman, the Gulf littoral is a linchpin of Eurasian balance—control of which ensures dominance over east-west trade and energy flows. Through participation in BRI projects such as industrial zones, petrochemical complexes, and railway networks, China cements its status as a Rimland stakeholder, balancing U.S. military presence with economic leverage.

Overall, China's multifaceted engagement across the Middle East demonstrates a strategic synthesis of Heartland consolidation and Rimland projection. CPEC and Iran anchor the continental dimension of BRI, while investments in the Gulf and Mediterranean embody its maritime extension. This hybrid geography aligns with both Mackinder's and Spykman's insights: the Heartland provides strategic depth and resource access, whereas the Rimland offers gateways to trade and influence.

India and the Greater Middle East

The connection between India and the Middle East is characterized by its complexity and carries considerable significance across multiple dimensions.

From an economic perspective, the Middle East holds significant importance for India due to its role as a prominent provider of energy resources. Notably, nations such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the UAE serve as primary suppliers of oil and gas to India. In addition to the energy sector, there is an increasing emphasis on the expansion of economic diversification, investments, and trade alliances between India and countries in the Middle East. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the Middle East accommodates a considerable Indian diaspora, whose presence plays a crucial role in bolstering the economies of nations such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. The inflow of remittances from expatriates is a substantial component of India's economy.

From a strategic standpoint, India aims to enhance its alliances with diverse Middle Eastern nations in order to foster regional stability and provide security. This entails the establishment of cooperative measures in counter-terrorism endeavors, collaborative efforts in defense, and activities aimed at enhancing marine security. India has established significant cultural, historical, and diplomatic relations with many Middle Eastern nations, resulting in strong people-to-people interactions and cultural exchanges. India regularly participates in bilateral and multilateral forums to foster engagement with Middle Eastern nations, with the aim of boosting collaboration across a wide range of areas such as trade, technology, healthcare, and agriculture. Over the course of time, India's involvement with the Middle East has seen a significant expansion, encompassing a wider range of collaborative endeavors that extend beyond the realms of energy and trade. Partnerships in contemporary times encompass a wide array of collaborative endeavors, ranging from technological partnerships and healthcare initiatives to educational exchanges and infrastructural development. India's foreign policy, such as the "Neighborhood First" and "Act East" initiatives, encompass the Middle East as well, with a focus on fostering enhanced involvement, reciprocal collaboration, and strategic alignments within the area. The current advancements, like the introduction of the India Middle East Corridor (IMEC) and diplomatic exchanges between Indian officials and their Middle Eastern counterparts, demonstrate India's continuous endeavors to bolster relationships and improve connectivity with the region. The dynamic nature of this relationship exemplifies a holistic approach employed by India, with the objective of cultivating stronger economic, political, and cultural connections with the heterogeneous nations situated in the Middle East (Basak & Soltanieh, 2024; Das, 2024; Inamdar, 2023; Mahmud, 2023; Pant, 2023; Rajagopalan, 2023; Reisinezhad & Reisinezhad, 2025; Singh et al., 2025; Suri et al., 2024).

Since their 1947 partition, India and Pakistan have had complex and conflicted relations. Kashmir has become a major point of contention between the two nations, leading to many wars. Normalized relations and diplomatic conflict resolution have faced challenges, limiting peacekeeping success. Security issues like cross-border terrorism and terrorist operations have strained relations between the parties. India and Pakistan have commerce and people-to-people exchanges, but political and security issues sometimes hinder them. Despite infrequent communication and peace negotiations, the relationship remains tense and unresolved. The 1947, 1965, and 1971 Indo-Pakistani Wars and the 1999 Kargil

conflict are significant historical events. Peace initiatives like the 1972 Shimla Agreement and 1999 Lahore Declaration sought to resolve problems. However, these initiatives did not produce lasting answers. The pursuit of lasting peace and normalized ties between India and Pakistan has faced many obstacles, hindering progress in resolving persistent issues and fostering lasting stability. China, Pakistan, and India form a geopolitical triangle with strategic alliances, economic cooperation, and regional power dynamics. China and Pakistan have a strong bilateral relationship, highlighted by economic collaboration on the Belt and Road Initiative's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This collaboration focuses on infrastructure development and strengthens bilateral ties. China-India relations include economic interdependencies and unresolved territorial disputes, particularly along the Line of Actual Control. Despite economic cooperation, geopolitical competition and unresolved geographical issues may cause difficulties. Pakistan and India have fought over Kashmir and cross-border tensions for decades. Political tensions and security concerns between the two administrations have hampered diplomatic talks. China's diplomatic relations with Pakistan and India affect this geopolitical triangle. Despite economic and strategic collaborations, unresolved disputes, particularly between India and Pakistan, continue to strain bilateral relations. The above interactions significantly affect power distribution in South Asia, emphasizing the need of regional conflict resolution and stability efforts (Hassan, 2019; Mishra, 2019).

India and Iran possess enduring economic, political, and cultural connections influenced by strategic alignment and external limitations. Diplomatic relations were initiated soon after India's independence, with energy cooperation becoming a fundamental aspect of the relationship in the 1990s, as Iran emerged as a prominent crude oil supplier to India. Political discourse has intermittently reiterated shared interest in collaboration, particularly through the 2003 New Delhi Declaration and the 2016 Chabahar Agreement involving India, Iran, and Afghanistan. The advancement of Chabahar Port has been notably significant, granting India critical access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, while augmenting Iran's position as a transit center. In addition to energy and infrastructure, commercial exchanges have traditionally encompassed areas including agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and textiles, supported by lasting cultural and intellectual connections.

Notwithstanding variations induced by sanctions and changing regional dynamics, India and Iran persist in regarding each other as strategically significant allies. Their relationship exemplifies a balancing dynamic: India pursues connectivity and regional access while mitigating sanctions risk, whilst Iran endeavors to diversify ties in the context of geopolitical isolation. The advancement of Chabahar Port constitutes the foremost foundation of India-Iran commercial collaboration. The port grants India direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, circumventing Pakistan and so augmenting its strategic autonomy in regional connections. Chabahar enhances Iran's position as a transit nexus connecting South Asia to Eurasia. Bilateral involvement necessitates meticulous diplomatic equilibrium beyond infrastructure. India has sustained pragmatic relations with Tehran despite international sanctions and overarching geopolitical concerns, while endeavoring to mitigate exposure to sanctions-related risks. The two

nations have worked on regional matters, especially with Afghanistan's stability and reconstruction initiatives, indicating shared security interests. In addition to these strategic factors, enduring cultural and civilizational ties—formed through centuries of interaction and Persian influence in the Indian subcontinent—persist as a historical basis for bilateral relations. (Baidya, 2017; Cheema, 2011; Kim & Blank, 2021; Rizvi, 2011; Soltaninejad, 2017; Teja, 2015; Tisheyar & Noorafkan, 2021).

India and Saudi Arabia uphold diverse economic, political, and social connections, with energy collaboration serving as the cornerstone of their partnership. For decades, Saudi Arabia has served as one of India's primary crude oil suppliers, rendering the kingdom integral to India's energy security plan. Bilateral commerce, primarily fueled by hydrocarbons, represents a substantial aspect of India's external energy reliance. Diplomatic relations have progressed into a more organized collaboration, especially following the 2006 Delhi Declaration and subsequent high-level visits, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2016 visit to Riyadh. The political discussion has broadened to include counterterrorism collaboration, regional stability, and defense participation, indicating mutual objectives in addressing Gulf security problems. In addition to intergovernmental collaboration, the substantial Indian diaspora in Saudi Arabia significantly contributes to both economic and social spheres, strengthening interpersonal connections and remittance transfers. In recent years, the relationship has evolved from a solely transactional energy framework to encompass broader strategic and economic coordination, establishing Saudi Arabia as a pivotal partner in India's Gulf policy. (Ahmad, 2020; Ashwarya, 2023; Das & Pradhan, 2014; Gauri, 2013; Janardhan, 2020; Jin & Janardhan, 2020; Kumar, 2023; Mathew, 2021; Prashath & Vinodkumar, 2020; Sarwar, 2020; Siyech, 2020).

India and the United Arab Emirates uphold a very dynamic bilateral partnership in the Gulf, marked by profound economic interdependence and increasing strategic collaboration. The UAE is one of India's largest commercial partners, with bilateral trade encompassing energy, infrastructure, technology, and financial services. Energy collaboration is pivotal: Emirati crude oil and natural gas exports substantially enhance India's energy security infrastructure. Diplomatic relations, initiated in 1971 with the establishment of the UAE, have developed into a robust strategic partnership, especially following high-level interactions that commenced in 2015. Political discourse increasingly transcends commerce to include investment flows, defense collaboration, and regional stability. Both nations have proactively pursued diversification of their interactions beyond hydrocarbons, indicating a transition towards enhanced economic integration and enduring strategic alignment. The UAE's function as a financial and logistical nexus connecting South Asia, the Gulf, and international markets amplifies its significance in India's foreign economic policy. Consequently, India-UAE ties exemplify a sophisticated and institutionalized cooperation propelled by energy interdependence, trade diversification, and mutual regional interests. (Ahmad, 2020; Das & Pradhan, 2014; Janardhan, 2020; Jin & Janardhan, 2020; Prashath & Vinodkumar, 2020; Siyech, 2020).

India and Iraq sustain a relationship predominantly based on oil reliance. In recent years, Iraq has been one of India's principal crude oil suppliers, constituting approximately one-fifth to one-quarter of India's overall oil imports. Bilateral commerce has thus attained an annual value of around 30–35 billion USD in the early 2020s, with hydrocarbons comprising the predominant share of transactions. This concentration highlights the uneven yet mutually reinforcing characteristics of the partnership: Iraq depends on constant export profits, whereas India requires diversified and reliable energy supply to maintain economic growth. Despite the establishment of diplomatic relations in the mid-twentieth century, the 2003 Iraq War and ensuing turmoil hindered trade and restricted further economic interaction. As Iraq has sought rehabilitation and economic stabilization, bilateral engagement has progressively extended beyond crude oil sales. Indian companies have selectively engaged in infrastructure, electricity, and service-sector projects, indicating a cautious intent in diversifying collaboration. Iraq holds a significant position within India's overarching West Asia strategy framework. The energy-focused connection, coupled with increasing rebuilding demands and changing regional dynamics, presents chances for strategic economic collaboration. Notwithstanding ongoing security and political instability, India–Iraq ties exemplify a pragmatic alliance based on oil security, commercial prospects, and gradual post-conflict reintegration. (Bhattacharya, 2024; Khan, 2004; Kotecha & Khatik, 2018; Prakash, 2003; Quamar, 2024).

Since the formal establishing of diplomatic relations in 1992, India and Israel have cultivated a multifaceted cooperation. Defense represents the most established foundation of bilateral relations. Since the late 1990s, Israel has become one of India's three principal defense suppliers. Significant acquisitions have encompassed radar systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), air defense platforms like as the Barak missile system, and collaborative development initiatives like the Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM). From 2010 to 2020, India constituted a substantial portion of Israel's worldwide arms exports, occasionally surpassing 40 percent of total Israeli defense sales. This defense interdependence signifies a convergence of strategic goals, especially in counterterrorism, border security, and sophisticated military technology. In addition to defense, commercial and technological collaboration has consistently grown. Bilateral commerce (excluding defense) has varied between around 5–7 billion USD annually in the early 2020s, with diamonds historically representing a significant share, along with chemicals, machinery, and high-technology exports. Recently, both governments have aimed to diversify trade into innovation ecosystems, fintech, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and digital technology. Institutional structures like the India–Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F) have been created to facilitate cooperative ventures. Agricultural collaboration exemplifies a prominent success narrative in bilateral relations. Israeli proficiency in drip irrigation, arid-zone agriculture, and water management has been formalized through numerous Centers of Excellence throughout Indian states. These programs have enhanced crop productivity and water-use efficiency, especially in semi-arid areas. Water desalination, wastewater recycling, and precision agriculture technology exemplify how technological diplomacy

enhances strategic alignment. The relationship gained political prominence with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2017 visit to Israel—the inaugural visit by an Indian Prime Minister—which symbolically dissociated India–Israel relations from the Palestinian issue and indicated strategic normalization. India has concurrently sustained diplomatic connections with the Palestinian Authority, indicative of a hedging strategy aimed at maintaining its overarching balancing stance in West Asia, encompassing ties with Gulf states and Iran. In conclusion, although defense cooperation constitutes the foundation of the partnership, the evolution of India–Israel relations that can be regarded as the backbone bilateral link within the context of the IMEC, indicates a shift towards diversification in high-technology sectors, innovation ecosystems, and strategic economic collaboration, mirroring both structural interests and adaptive regional diplomacy (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Blarel, 2017; Pate, 2020; Zahra & Liaqat, 2023).

Overall, the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC), announced at the G20 New Delhi Summit, represents India's most ambitious attempt to extend its strategic reach beyond South Asia into the broader Afro–Eurasian Rimland. Designed to connect Mumbai to European markets via the Arabian Peninsula, the corridor integrates ports, rail networks, and energy infrastructure across India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and the Mediterranean basin. Beyond commercial connectivity, IMEC functions as a geo-economic counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative, reflecting a deliberate effort to consolidate a Rimland coalition that balances continental power projection.

From a Mackinderian perspective, IMEC embodies a westward strategy aimed at preventing the consolidation of Eurasian connectivity under a single Heartland-centered actor. By reinforcing alternative trade and energy routes that circumvent China-dominated corridors, India seeks to preserve plural access to Eurasian markets and resources. The corridor's trajectory—skirting the periphery of the Eurasian landmass through Middle Eastern and Mediterranean littorals—echoes Mackinder's argument that equilibrium between maritime and continental powers underpins systemic stability. A Spykmanian reading further clarifies IMEC's logic. The initiative consolidates the arc of coastal states linking Europe and Asia, strengthening maritime and overland arteries along the Arabian and Mediterranean seas. In this sense, IMEC is less an infrastructure project than a geo-economic architecture of Rimland consolidation, sustained through coordination among India, European actors, and the United States. India's partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates form the corridor's economic backbone. These Gulf states occupy pivotal positions along the Indian Ocean–Arabian interface and remain central to India's energy security and investment flows. Their integration into IMEC anchors India more firmly within the maritime periphery that structures global commerce. Israel functions as the corridor's northwestern gateway, connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean through planned trans-Arabian rail links. Cooperation with Israel adds technological and security depth while reinforcing the broader alignment of maritime-oriented states.

The corridor's viability, however, is shaped by India's relations with Iran and

Iraq, both situated along the transitional zone between Heartland and Rimland. Iran—once central to India’s westward access strategy through the Chabahar project—remains constrained by sanctions and deepening strategic alignment with China, limiting India’s continental penetration. Yet its geography continues to reflect Mackinder’s “pivot” logic, where alignment choices carry systemic consequences. Iraq presents parallel complexities: while energy ties and reconstruction engagement create openings for influence, domestic instability and external competition constrain sustained integration. In Spykmanian terms, such volatility underscores the structural fragility of Rimland buffer zones. Taken together, IMEC traces a maritime arc that contrasts with the continental thrust of the Belt and Road Initiative. Whereas BRI prioritizes inland corridors across Eurasia, IMEC emphasizes littoral connectivity and energy-rich coastal states. Its strategic purpose is not containment in a rigid military sense, but the preservation of multipolar access to transcontinental trade routes. By investing in ports, logistics networks, and energy interconnections across the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean, India operationalizes classical geopolitical insights under twenty-first-century conditions. IMEC thus represents not merely an infrastructure scheme, but a doctrine of balance through connectivity.

Comparative Framework Visualized: Strategic and Spatial Logics of BRI and IMEC

Although both initiatives seek to transform Eurasian connectivity, they fundamentally differ in strategic framework, geographic focus, partnership structure, and infrastructural capability. A direct comparison elucidates that these programs are not equivalent rivals but rather unique geopolitical endeavors rooted in disparate material foundations and strategic rationales.

The BRI exemplifies a model of centralized expansion at the strategic level, rooted in China’s industrial capabilities and financial resources. It amalgamates continental and marine corridors into a cohesive extension of influence. IMEC, in contrast, embodies a coalition-oriented balancing framework. Instead of expanding from a continental center, it aims to maintain access and diversify routes through collaborations along the maritime perimeter. The BRI projects extend from the heartland of Eurasia while concurrently safeguarding marine chokepoints. IMEC delineates a circumferential arc throughout the Indian Ocean, the Gulf, and the Mediterranean. Their spatial patterns show divergent geopolitical concepts: consolidation vs circumvention; structural centrality versus diffused connection.

Table 1
Competing Corridor Architectures: BRI and IMEC in the Global Geopolitical Economy

| Dimension | BRI | IMEC |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Strategic Logic | Heartland consolidation + outward maritime projection | Rimland-based balancing and circumferential access |
| Geographic Axis | Continental Eurasia (Central Asia → Europe) + Maritime Silk Road | Indian Ocean → Gulf → Mediterranean littoral |
| Core Partners | Pakistan, Central Asian states, Russia (selective), Global South nodes | Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel, EU partners |
| Infrastructure Focus | Rail corridors, pipelines, ports, digital silk road | Ports, rail integration, energy grids, digital connectivity |
| Power Projection Model | Centralized, China-led network expansion | Multilateral, coalition-based connectivity |
| Primary Objective | Structural centrality in Eurasian trade flows | Preservation of multipolar access and route diversification |
| Key Risks | Debt exposure, geopolitical backlash, overextension | Regional instability, financing gaps, political fragmentation |
| Structural Capacity | Backed by China's large-scale manufacturing base, state financing mechanisms, and global supply-chain centrality | Dependent on multilateral coordination, external financing, and partner-driven implementation; limited unilateral capacity |
| Scale & Financial Depth | Trillions pledged; centralized execution through state-owned enterprises | Project-based, coalition-dependent, financially fragmented |
| Industrial Backbone | Integrated industrial-export ecosystem | Emerging manufacturing power with constrained export leverage |

This contrast demonstrates that the BRI wants structural depth through continental integration, whereas the IMEC prioritizes lateral connectivity among marine states. One expands from the center outward, while the other consolidates along the periphery inward. As a result, their struggle is regionally diverse rather than symmetrical, reflecting divergent perceptions of Eurasia's geopolitical center of gravity.

Structural capability is where the differences are most noticeable. Large foreign exchange reserves, a vertically integrated industrial ecosystem, and centralized state coordinating procedures all promote China's Belt and Road Initiative. Few entities can match the scale at which Beijing is able to finance, build, and operationalize infrastructure. China's centrality to global supply chains helps the plan by enabling it to integrate infrastructure development into cycles of industrial overproduction and export capacity.

India has comparable manufacturing supremacy, established foreign finance tools, and financial depth. As a result, IMEC follows a different logic, functioning as a coalition-based strategic alignment rather than a unilateral system-shaping instrument. Gulf capital, European involvement, technology alliances,

and consistent diplomatic coordination are necessary for its sustainability. IMEC externalizes execution capacity across partners, whereas the BRI internalizes it. Analytically, this imbalance is essential. While IMEC wants strategic diversification within Eurasian connectivity, the BRI aims to structurally alter it. While the latter is balanced and system-corrective, the former is expansionary and system-defining. As a result, the two initiatives are competing on different scales and using different models: distributed connective diplomacy vs centralized infrastructure statecraft.

By being aware of this difference, analytical exaggeration can be avoided. IMEC should be viewed as a geographically focused counter-architecture intended to maintain strategic pluralism across important maritime corridors rather than as a straight replacement for the BRI's global reach. In this way, the competition between the two projects represents a fundamental conflict between consolidation and evasion within Eurasia's changing geopolitical order rather than a symmetrical struggle for supremacy.

Conclusion

A Mackinderian lens situates the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the most ambitious contemporary attempt to consolidate influence across Eurasia. By expanding railways, pipelines, digital infrastructure, and energy corridors through Central Asia and toward Europe, China operationalizes the logic of Heartland centrality. Viewed under the prism of Mackinder's Heartland Theory, the BRI emerges as a modern embodiment of continental unification. By connecting Western China to Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, Beijing is effectively establishing a terrestrial sphere of influence that bypasses conventional maritime limitations. The Heartland, previously an abstract strategic notion, is now being actualized through trains, pipelines, and digital corridors.

Simultaneously, the BRI projects influence across the maritime periphery. Through port investments in Gwadar, Hambantota, and Piraeus, and through the Maritime Silk Road's extension into the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean, China consolidates positions along Eurasia's coastal arc. In this respect, the initiative synthesizes Mackinderian and Spykmanian logics: consolidating the Heartland while expanding leverage across the Rimland's commercial chokepoints. The BRI thus represents not merely an infrastructure network but a spatial reconfiguration of Eurasian connectivity under Chinese leadership.

India's countervailing response emerged in 2023 with the announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor at the G20 New Delhi Summit. The corridor links Mumbai to European markets via Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel, integrating ports, railways, energy grids, and digital infrastructure. From a Mackinderian perspective, IMEC seeks to prevent the monopolization of Eurasian access routes by constructing a circumferential alternative that skirts the continental core. Rather than penetrating the Heartland directly, it preserves access to its markets through maritime and littoral pathways.

From a Spykmanian standpoint, IMEC reinforces the strategic centrality of the Rimland. By consolidating cooperation among Gulf and Mediterranean coastal

states, the corridor strengthens the arc of maritime actors positioned between Europe and Asia. Control over logistical nodes, energy corridors, and digital infrastructure along this coastal belt enhances leverage over continental flows without requiring territorial dominance. IMEC therefore represents a Rimland-based balancing framework rather than a continental expansion strategy.

The comparative logic of BRI and IMEC reveals two distinct but intersecting spatial strategies. The BRI projects power outward from the continental interior, seeking to integrate the Heartland with peripheral markets while securing maritime access points. IMEC, by contrast, consolidates a ring of coastal partnerships designed to counterbalance that expansion through connectivity rather than confrontation. Whereas the BRI emphasizes inland corridors across Eurasia, IMEC prioritizes littoral integration across the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean basins. Yet IMEC's realization is conditioned by regional instability. Political fragmentation in Iraq, prolonged conflict in Syria, and enduring tensions between Israel and Palestine complicate infrastructural integration. The corridor's effectiveness depends on sustained diplomatic coordination, capital investment, and regional security—factors that remain uncertain within the Middle East's volatile environment.

Taken together, the BRI and IMEC illustrate the re-territorialization of globalization. Infrastructure corridors increasingly function as instruments of strategic alignment rather than neutral channels of trade. The BRI embodies a Heartland-to-Rimland projection of power; IMEC reflects a Rimland-centered balancing mechanism. Both initiatives reaffirm a central insight of classical geopolitics: geography continues to structure power, even in an era defined by digital interdependence and global markets. In the twenty-first century, great-power competition unfolds less through territorial conquest than through the construction and control of connective arteries. Whoever shapes the routes shapes the balance of influence across Eurasia.

The juxtaposition of BRI and IMEC thus reveals two complementary yet competing spatial logics:

- The BRI projects power from the Heartland outward, integrating continental interiors with peripheral markets;
- The IMEC consolidates the Rimland as a balancing ring encircling that expansion.

Viewed together, the BRI and IMEC illustrate the persistence of classical geopolitical patterns within contemporary globalization. Both initiatives reaffirm Mackinder's and Spykman's enduring insight: that geography continues to constrain and channel power, even in an era defined by digital flows and global markets. At the global level, this rivalry illustrates the re-territorialization of globalization. Infrastructure corridors—once symbols of integration—are increasingly instruments of strategic alignment. Economic flows now reinforce security blocs, and corridors function as geopolitical statements of intent. The BRI's expansion across the Heartland and the IMEC's construction along the Rimland signal a shift from open globalization toward competitive connectivity, where control of routes equates to influence over regions. Future research, in this

light, is needed to determine if corridor projects result in measurable shifts in trade dependency, supply-chain resilience, and political alignment among participating governments. Second, comparative studies might focus on how “competitive connectivity” influences regional security dynamics, especially in volatile areas like the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf. Moreover, further research is needed into the technological dimensions of corridor geopolitics, such as digital infrastructure, energy transition networks, and standards-setting competition, to determine whether twenty-first-century rivalry is increasingly based on control of data and energy grids rather than territory alone. Future research can better assess whether BRI and IMEC are long-term structural reforms or context-bound strategic experiments within a developing multipolar order by combining geopolitical theory with empirical economic and technology indicators.

In conclusion, the twenty-first century’s great-power competition is being waged less through territorial conquest than through corridor construction—a struggle over who builds, controls, and secures the arteries of global connectivity. The BRI embodies the logic of Heartland consolidation; the IMEC represents the logic of Rimland balancing. Together, they confirm that while the methods of power projection have evolved, the spatial grammar of geopolitics remains unchanged: whoever shapes the routes, shapes the world.

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Geniřletilmiř zet

Bu alıřma, son yıllarda Avrasya jeopolitiđinin merkezine yerleřen iki byk uluslararası bađlantısallık projesini, in nclđndeki Kuřak ve Yol Giriřimi (Belt and Road Initiative – BRI) ile Hindistan, Krfez lkeleri, Avrupa Birliđi ve ABD tarafından desteklenen Hindistan-Orta Dođu-Avrupa Koridoru’nu (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor – IMEC) karřılařtırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Makalenin temel amacı, bu iki giriřimin yalnızca ekonomik ve ticari projeler olmadıđını, aynı zamanda kresel gc mcadelesinin yeni araları olarak ortaya ıktıđını gstermektir.

alıřma, analizini klasik jeopolitiđin iki nemli dřnr olan Halford J. Mackinder ve Nicholas J. Spykman zerine inřa etmektedir. Mackinder’in “Kalpgh (Heartland)” teorisine gre Avrasya’nın i kesimlerini kontrol eden gc, uzun vadede dnya siyasetinde stnlk sađlayabilir. Buna karřılık Spykman’ın “Kenar Kuřak (Rimland)” teorisi, Avrasya’nın kıyı kuřaklarını kontrol eden devletlerin kresel dengeleri belirleyeceđini savunur. Makale, bu iki teorisinin gnmzde altyapı koridorları, enerji hatları, limanlar, demiryolları ve dijital ađlar aracılıđıyla yeniden hayat bulduđunu ileri srmektedir. Bu erevede, BRI’yi Mackinder’in Kalpgh mantıđının modern bir uygulaması, IMEC’i ise Spykman’ın Kenar Kuřak yaklařımına dayanan bir dengeleme stratejisi olarak deđerlendirmektedir. in, BRI aracılıđıyla Orta Asya’dan Avrupa’ya uzanan kara bađlantıları kurarken aynı zamanda Hint Okyanusu, Kızıldeniz ve Akdeniz’de liman yatırımları yaparak hem kıtasal hem de denizsel bir nfuz alanı oluřturmaktadır. Buna karřılık Hindistan nclđndeki IMEC, in merkezli kara bađlantılarını dengeleyecek alternatif ticaret ve enerji gzerghları oluřturmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu nedenle iki giriřim arasında yalnızca ekonomik deđer, aynı zamanda jeostratejik bir rekabet sz konusudur.

Makalede zellikle Orta Dođu’nun bu rekabetin merkezindeki blge olduđu vurgulanmaktadır. nk blge hem enerji kaynaklarının yođunlařtıđı bir alan hem de Asya, Afrika ve Avrupa arasındaki geiř yollarının dđm noktasıdır. in’in İran, Irak, Krfez lkeleri, İsrail ve Pakistan ile geliřtirdiđi iliřkiler bu bađlamda incelenmektedir. İran, in aısından hem enerji tedarikisi hem de Orta Asya’dan Akdeniz’e uzanan kara gzerghlarının temel halkasıdır. Irak, enerji kaynakları ve ulařtırma ađları bakımından nemli bir geiř lkesi olarak deđerlendirilmektedir. Krfez lkeleri ise in’in enerji gvenliđinin temel dayanaklarından biri olmanın yanında, deniz yolları zerindeki stratejik konumları nedeniyle BRI’nin vazgeilmez paralarıdır. İsrail ise teknoloji, inovasyon ve liman altyapıları nedeniyle in iin farklı bir nem tařımaktadır. zellikle Hayfa Limanı’na ynelik in ilgiyi, ABD tarafından dikkatle takip edilmektedir. Pakistan ve in-Pakistan Ekonomik Koridoru (CPEC) ise in’in kara gc ile deniz eriřimini birleřtiren en nemli proje olarak sunulmaktadır. Gwadar Limanı sayesinde in, Malakka Bođazı’na olan bađımlılıđını azaltmayı hedeflemektedir.

te yandan Hindistan’ın enerji ihtiyaının nemli kısmı Suudi Arabistan, Irak ve Birleřik Arap Emirlikleri gibi lkelerden karřılanmaktadır. Ayrıca Krfez lkelerinde yařayan milyonlarca Hint vatandařının gnderdiđi dviz transferleri

Hindistan ekonomisi aısından byk nem tařıtmaktadır. Son yıllarda Hindistan, enerji bağımlılıęının tesine geerek savunma, teknoloji, lojistik ve yatırım alanlarında da blge lkeleriyle iliřkilerini geliřtirmeye alıřmaktadır. Bu erevede IMEC, Hindistan'ın Orta Doęu ve Avrupa ile entegrasyonunu artırmayı amalayan en kapsamlı giriřim olarak deęerlendirilmektedir. Hindistan'ın İnan ile iliřkileri zellikle abaha Limanı zerinden řekillenmektedir. Bu liman Hindistan'a Pakistan'ı bypass ederek Afganistan ve Orta Asya'ya ulařma imkânı saęlamaktadır. Suudi Arabistan ve BAE ise IMEC'in ekonomik omurgasını oluřturmaktadır. İsrail ise koridorun Akdeniz'e aılan kapısı olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu yapı, Hindistan'ın in'e karřı doęrudan askerî bir evreleme stratejisinden ziyade, alternatif baęlantı aęları oluřturarak ok kutuplu eriřimi koruma amacına hizmet etmektedir.

Makalenin karřılařtırmalı analiz blmnde BRI ve IMEC arasındaki temel farklar sistematik biimde ortaya konmaktadır. BRI, in'in merkezi olarak ynettięi, devasa finansman kaynaklarına dayanan ve kara ile deniz gzergâhlarını btnleřtiren geniř lekli bir giriřimdir. in'in gl sanayi altyapısı, yksek dviz rezervleri ve devlet destekli řirketleri bu projeye byk avantaj saęlamaktadır. IMEC ise ok taraflı iř birlięine dayanan, ortakların koordinasyonuna baęlı ve finansal olarak daha paralı bir yapıdadır. Bu nedenle BRI sistem kurucu ve dnřtrc bir proje olarak deęerlendirilirken, IMEC daha ok dengeleyici ve alternatif oluřturucu bir giriřim olarak tanımlanmaktadır.

Makalenin temel bulgularından biri, gnmzde yařanan rekabetin klasik anlamda toprak iřgali veya askerî fetihler zerinden deęil, altyapı, lojistik ve baęlantısallık aęları zerinden yrtldędr. Demiryolları, limanlar, enerji hatları ve dijital altyapılar yeni jeopolitik aralar hâline gelmiřtir. Bylece kreselleřmenin tarafsız ticaret yolları olarak grlen koridorlar, byk glerin nfuz mcadelelerinin merkezine yerleřmiřtir.

Sonuç olarak alıřma, BRI'nin Kalpgâh merkezli geniřleme ve btnleřme stratejisini, IMEC'in ise Kenar Kuřak merkezli dengeleme ve alternatif oluřturma stratejisini temsil ettięini savunmaktadır. Her iki proje de Avrasya'nın gelecekteki ekonomik ve siyasi dzenini řekillendirme potansiyeline sahiptir. Makaleye gre 21. yzyılın byk g rekabeti artık doęrudan toprak kazanımı zerinden deęil, kresel baęlantı aęlarını inřa etme, kontrol etme ve ynlendirme kapasitesi zerinden yrmektedir. Bu nedenle geleceęin jeopolitięinde belirleyici olan, yalnızca belirli blgeleri kontrol edenler deęil, aynı zamanda bu blgeleri birbirine baęlayan koridorları kuran ve yneten aktrler olacaktır.

Sonuç olarak bu alıřma, in'in BRI aracılıęıyla Avrasya'nın i kesimlerini merkeze alan bir "Kalpgâh hâkimiyeti" kurmaya alıřtıęını; Hindistan'ın ise IMEC zerinden Orta Doęu ve Akdeniz kıyılarında bir "Kenar Kuřak koalisyonu" oluřturarak bu ykseliři dengelemeye alıřtıęını ve gnmz jeopolitięinin artık koridorlar ve baęlantı aęları zerinden řekillendięini savunmakta, bu noktada ele alınan projeler kapsamında ise in'in asimetrik bir avantaja sahip olduęu zerinde durmaktadır.