

# IMEC corridor and Israel's ambition to isolate Iran

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**PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE**

At the annual UN General Assembly meeting last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, shortly before issuing an order to assassinate Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, presented two maps of the Middle East. Netanyahu used these visuals to depict what he referred to as a "bright future" and a "dark future." His speech emphasized that a Middle East without the Islamic Republic of Iran would hold hope and progress. He also described the current instability of the region as the result of the "curse" of Iran's presence. Netanyahu's Iranophobic narrative reflects a broader strategy by Israel, which seeks to promote the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) as part of its efforts to counter the Iran-led Resistance Front. Through an appealing portrayal of the benefits of this corridor, Netanyahu aims to secure cooperation from key regional players, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, leveraging their economic, diplomatic, and even religious influence to rein in Iran's regional power and its allied resistance movements, particularly Hezbollah. Netanyahu used the maps to paint a picture of a Middle East where the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies are absent, suggesting that Israel could expand its influence and reduce the threats posed by the Resistance Front. In essence, this proposal forms part of Israel's larger plan to shift the balance of power in the Middle East.



Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the 79th United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York on September 27, 2024. ● REUTERS

## IMEC and its long-term goals

The IMEC is an ambitious mega-infrastructure project officially introduced during the G20 summit in 2023. The corridor aims to link three economically vital regions—India, the Middle East, and Europe—through an extensive network of railways, ports, and trade routes. Its primary objective is to increase efficiency, reduce shipping costs, and enhance economic and trade relations between these regions. Technically, the corridor includes several critical components designed to facilitate the flow of goods and services. It will feature high-speed rail networks, developed ports, maritime trade routes, and advanced digital infrastructure, all aimed at cutting down transportation time and improving supply chain productivity. One of the key elements of the IMEC is the use of maritime routes to connect India and the Middle East, with strategic ports such as Dubai and Jeddah serving as hubs. These routes will then be connected to rail networks extending northward into Europe. While the project has significant economic potential, its geopolitical and security implications are even more profound. A core goal of the IMEC is to reduce regional dependence on traditional trade routes controlled by rival or hostile forces. Moreover, for Israel, the corridor represents a unique opportunity to solidify its influence in the region and lessen reliance on routes under Iranian and Resistance control. The IMEC positions Israel as a central hub in the global trade network between Europe and Asia. Access to these markets and strengthened economic cooperation with Persian Gulf states via this corridor could help Israel establish itself as a major geopolitical player in the Middle East.

## Israel's underlying objectives

Economically, the IMEC project offers Israel the chance to gain a larger share of global trade, especially in advanced technology, transportation, and communication sectors. Innovative technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) will play key roles in managing logistics and supply chains in the corridor—industries where Israel is already a major player. Politically, the IMEC aligns with Israel's broader strategy to contain Iran and the Resistance Front. During his UN speech, Netanyahu suggested that this project could pave the way for a future where the region no longer faces threats from Iran. From Tel Aviv's perspective, the Resistance Front's presence in the Middle East is a significant obstacle to cementing Zionism's dominance in the region. Leading Persian Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are crucial partners in the project. These nations stand to gain economically and geopolitically from the IMEC's success, as the corridor enables them to bypass routes influenced by Iran and reduce reliance on the Strait of Hormuz. However, the geopolitical competition between regional and global actors could impact the IMEC's success. China, as a major investor in global infrastructure through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), might view the IMEC as a rival project, potentially hindering its progress.

## Israel's ambition to contain Resistance Front

From Israel's national security perspective, the IMEC is a strategic tool aimed at weakening the Resistance Front's capabilities in the Middle East. If not carefully countered, this project could lead to the formation of a new economic and security alliance in the region, posing threats to issues such as territorial disputes over islands, gas fields like Arash, and even the identity of the Persian Gulf. The IMEC not only seeks to reshape the region's economic dynamics but also serves as a geopolitical weapon to strengthen regional coalitions against Iran and its allies.

## Iran's role and the Resistance Front's response

Iran and the Resistance Front cannot afford to remain passive in the face of this project, although, for various reasons, Iran may not be able to expect significant contributions from countries like Iraq and Syria. Given the strategic importance of the Middle East and its energy resources, Iran must employ its hard and soft power, particularly intelligent diplomacy, to mitigate the threats posed by the IMEC. From Israel's perspective, Hezbollah, as a key player in the Resistance Front, poses a significant challenge to the success of projects like the IMEC. Hezbollah's capabilities allow it to create substantial obstacles to this corridor's implementation. Israel's assassination of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah should be understood in this context, as Hezbollah is recognized as a powerful force preventing the expansion of Israeli and its allies' influence in the region. As noted, the IMEC is not merely an economic project but a geopolitical tool wielded by Israel and its allies. The initiative aims to alter the strategic landscape in the Middle East and curb the influence of the Resistance Front. However, Iran's geopolitical acumen can undoubtedly influence the future trajectory of this project. Netanyahu's efforts at the United Nations to highlight the IMEC and confront what he calls the "Iranian threat" reflect Israel's long-standing attempts to shift the balance of power in the Middle East. However, this is not the first time the region has faced such schemes. Iran, with its strategic wisdom, must leverage its full capabilities to effectively counter these challenges posed by "forces of evil."

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## Eurasia; a gateway...

Focusing on regional unions like the SCO and the EEU not only opens new windows for Iran's economy but also strengthens security and political cooperation between Iran and member states. This, in turn, consolidates economic agreements and cooperation. In terms of bilateral relations, Iran and Armenia have had good neighborly ties for a long time, based on geographical proximity, common interests, and regional benefits. During his visit to Armenia, Aref is expected to engage in talks to foster bilateral cooperation. Tehran supported the peace process between Yerevan and Baku in

the recent conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, aiming to maintain regional security and mutual interests. Any tension in the region would naturally divert the attention of union members and regional countries from economic and political cooperation to unconstructive rivalries, which is not in Tehran's interests. It appears that the Iranian first vice president will raise the importance of signing a peace agreement between Yerevan and Baku during his meeting with Armenian officials, as well as the risks of external powers intervening in the Caucasus and Eurasia. Notably, assessments of the future

of the Eurasian region suggest that it will soon become a global economic powerhouse. Iran's potential membership in the EEU is expected to open up opportunities for the country, much like its membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Iran's transit routes serve as a bridge connecting the eastern and western parts of the Eurasian region, just as they will link the East and West of the world. Coincidentally, one of the main topics discussed by Aref at the Armenian summit was Iran's transit capacities and their potential to ease transportation in the Eurasian region and the EEU.