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Le Cercle des Economistes Arabes

IMEC Infrastructure and Security Readiness in 2026

Ahmad Ghosn

June 2026

PAPERS ON POLITICAL ECONOMY AND STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the infrastructure and security readiness of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) in 2026 through its four principal pillars: transport and logistics, digital and data connectivity, energy integration, and defense and security cooperation. It distinguishes between operational assets, projects under development, and initiatives that remain largely prospective, while examining how the participating actors' divergent strategic interests and sources of political legitimacy shape the corridor's evolution. The analysis finds that IMEC does not yet constitute an integrated, end-to-end transport corridor. Its principal physical constraint is the absence of a continuous and interoperable railway linking the Gulf to the Eastern Mediterranean, compounded by limited gateway capacity, transshipment requirements, border procedures and regional insecurity. Digital connectivity is the most advanced pillar, although genuine resilience requires route diversification, protected landing points, independent terrestrial backhaul and secure data infrastructure. Selected energy assets also offer near-term potential, while proposed hydrogen, ammonia and electricity interconnection projects remain dependent on investment, regulatory coordination, commercial viability and political stability. Security arrangements are fragmented among naval missions, bilateral partnerships and infrastructure-protection initiatives and do not amount to a corridor-wide security architecture. The paper concludes that IMEC is better understood as an uneven portfolio of nationally driven projects - or a potential Indo-Mediterranean resilience framework - than as an operational transcontinental corridor. Its transformation into a coherent regional structure will depend not only on infrastructure investment but also on institutional coordination, political legitimacy, regional consent and the – now difficult - reconciliation of competing strategic interests.

This report is the result of a secondment undertaken as a member of Le Cercle des Economistes Arabes at the Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA) within the framework of the EU-funded TRACHMED project.

1. Introduction and Research background

The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) was unveiled at the G20 Summit in New Delhi in September 2023[1] as a project linking India to Europe through the Arabian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean. It did not emerge in isolation, but within the wider G7 and EU turn toward strategic economic corridors, notably the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment[2] (PGII) and the EU's Global Gateway[3]. In this wider connectivity landscape, IMEC was proposed alongside other strategic routes, such as the Lobito Corridor in Southern and Central Africa, the Luzon Economic Corridor in the Philippines, and the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR, or Middle Corridor) linking Central Asia and the South Caucasus to Europe. These corridors share broad objectives of improving transport, energy and digital connectivity; diversifying supply chains; and mobilising investment in high-standard, sustainable and trusted infrastructure. The corridor involves maritime shipping, railways, electricity interconnection, clean-hydrogen infrastructure and digital networks. Not all assets commonly associated with IMEC are formal corridor projects; many are national, bilateral, commercial or prospective initiatives whose relevance depends on future investment, regulatory coordination, commercial demand and political agreement. The projects still lack a precise and tangible planning, we will show later that this is not a mere technical underperformance, but rather it is a problematic governed by political and economic consideration. The original MoU participants are India, the United States, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Germany and Italy. Jordan and Israel were not included in the signing of the agreement. Their inclusion in commonly discussed overland configurations reflects the geography of a proposed Gulf–Mediterranean land bridge, but it does not establish their participation as politically agreed, operationally available or institutionally integrated into IMEC.

The visual timeline below traces the policy and geopolitical evolution that preceded IMEC's announcement. It shows how the strategic logic of Indo-Pacific connectivity, the competitive

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[1] The White House. 2023. "Fact Sheet: World Leaders Launch a Landmark India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor." September 9, 2023. https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/09/fact-sheet-world-leaders-launch-a-landmark-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor/

[2] G7/G20 Documents Database. 2023. "Factsheet on the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment." May 20, 2023. https://g7g20-documents.org/database/document/2023-g7-japan-leaders-miscellaneous-factsheet-on-the-g7-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment

[3] European Commission. n.d. "Global Gateway." https://commission.europa.eu/topics/international-partnerships/global-gateway_en

backdrop of China's Belt and Road Initiative, and successive G7, EU and UK infrastructure initiatives created the wider policy environment in which IMEC designed.

2013	China announces the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), combining land and maritime connectivity under a broad overseas infrastructure and economic-cooperation strategy. BRI becomes the main strategic reference point against which later G7 and EU initiatives are framed.
2017–19	The U.S., Japan, India, Australia, and European actors emphasize a "free and open Indo-Pacific," resilient supply chains, maritime connectivity, and standards-based infrastructure.
June 2021 — G7 Carbis Bay	The G7 announces Build Back Better World (B3W), initially a U.S.-led framework for values-driven, climate-conscious, high-standard infrastructure investment in low- and middle-income countries.
December 2021	The EU launches Global Gateway, while the UK advances its Clean Green Initiative.
February 2022	E3G (independent think tank) publishes One Vision in Three Plans, arguing that B3W, Global Gateway, and the UK Clean Green Initiative need stronger coordination, credible finance, viable project pipelines, and country ownership.
June 2022 — G7 Elmau	The G7 formally launches the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment[4] (PGII), succeeding and reframing B3W. Its collective ambition is to mobilize up to USD 600 billion by 2027 for sustainable, inclusive, resilient, and high-quality infrastructure.
September 2023 — G20 New Delhi	India, the United States, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the European Union, France, Germany and Italy signed the IMEC Memorandum of Understanding on the margins of the G20 Summit in New Delhi. IMEC is politically associated with the G7's PGII and the EU's Global Gateway, although it remains a distinct initiative with no general secretariat, comprehensive implementation plan or unified financing mechanism.

[4] U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China. 2022. "Fact Sheet: President Biden and G7 Leaders Formally Launch the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment." June 28, 2022. https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-formally-launch-the-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment/

This report does not approach the proposed corridor primarily as a technical issue, but rather as a question of political economy. Accordingly, while certain technical dimensions will be addressed, they will be analysed as outcomes of broader political choices, institutional constraints, and underlying internal legitimacies of each actor. The report will also examine the context in which the project was proposed through three interrelated analytical dimensions: first, its place within the broader reconfiguration of the global political economy; second, its role within ongoing regional transformations; and third, as a manifestation of the distinct forms of legitimacy underpinning the various actors involved in the project, as well as the interaction between these legitimacies and the first two dimensions.

The report will identify a structural problem within the political design of the project that arises from the legitimacies of the participating actors, and its implications for the region. It will also assess ongoing developments in the region and examine their potential implications for the project's trajectory, viability, and political significance.

To structure the technical assessment, the report uses four concise pillars: Physical Transportation, Digital and Data Connectivity, Energy Integration and Defense and Security Cooperation.

- **Pillar 1: Physical Transportation (Ports and Rail):** This pillar covers ports, maritime routes, and rail links that move goods between India, the Gulf, the Levant and Europe.
- **Pillar 2: Digital and Data Connectivity:** This pillar focuses on subsea cables and data centres that form the corridor's digital infrastructure.
- **Pillar 3: Energy Integration:** This pillar tracks renewable energy, pipelines, electricity interconnectors and emerging hydrogen projects that underpin IMEC's energy role.
- **Pillar 4: Defense and Security Cooperation:** This pillar focuses on the security and defense partnerships including formal alliances, defence cooperation agreements, arms procurement and joint ventures in weapons production and supply.

The four pillars are progressing unevenly. Digital connectivity and selected energy assets show the greatest operational or near-term development, whereas the transport pillar remains constrained by missing cross-border rail links, limited Mediterranean gateway capacity and politically sensitive transit arrangements. To evaluate IMEC's strategic value, commercial rationale, and operational limitations, the report first examines current trade flows among its principal economic stakeholders.

Table 1: Goods Trade Between India, the GCC and the European Union

India ↔ EU (~$130–135 billion)	India's exports to EU ~$75–80 billion – mainly chemicals, machinery and appliances, mineral products, textiles, and base metals.	India's imports from EU ~$55–60 billion – mainly machinery and appliances, transport equipment, optical and medical instruments, and chemicals.	~$15–20 billion SURPLUS in India's favor, reflecting India's stronger export position in goods vis-à-vis the EU.
India ↔ GCC (~$178.6 billion)	India's exports to GCC~ $56.87 billion – agricultural products (rice, cereals, meat), jewellery, refined petroleum, textiles, construction materials.	India's imports from GCC ~$121.68 billion – mainly crude oil, LNG, petrochemicals, industrial fertilizers, raw aluminium.	India records an estimated $64.81 billion goods-trade deficit with the GCC, largely reflecting hydrocarbon imports. Equivalently, the GCC holds a corresponding surplus in this bilateral relationship
GCC ↔ EU (~$182–184 billion)	EU exports to GCC ~$121–122 billion – primarily machinery and appliances, transport equipment, and chemicals.	EU imports from GCC ~$61–62 billion – predominantly mineral products (fuels), plus base metals and some chemicals.	~$60 billion SURPLUS in the EU's favor, with EU exports about twice its imports from the GCC.

Table 1 illustrates the different trade structures that shape stakeholder interest in IMEC. India's relationship with the GCC is dominated by energy imports, while its trade with the European Union includes a larger manufactured-goods component. For GCC states, the corridor may support diversification into logistics, energy-transition industries and digital infrastructure. For the European Union, it may contribute to supply-chain diversification and connectivity with Gulf energy suppliers and Indian producers.

To understand what IMEC can actually provide for each participating country, this paper examines what the corridor is in practice in 2026 and identifies where the project really stands along its different pillars. By mapping the existing infrastructures and security arrangements that already form IMEC reality, the study assesses how far the corridor can serve the distinct economic and strategic interests of India, the GCC and the European Union?

2. Transportation and Logistics

IMEC's transport pillar remains incomplete in 2026. India–Gulf maritime links and several major ports are already operational, while the UAE and Saudi Arabia possess significant domestic rail infrastructure; however, the proposed Gulf–Mediterranean land bridge lacks critical cross-border connections between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia and the Mediterranean.

2.1 Maritime Nodes and Port Infrastructure

Ports are the structural anchors and critical landing zones for IMEC, acting as the physical interface between the global maritime dimension and the overland continental railway networks. However, in the geopolitical reality of 2026, the value of these ports is no longer measured solely by their draft depth or container capacity, but by their precise geographical coordinates.

Disruption in the Red Sea and uncertainty surrounding navigation through the Strait of Hormuz underline the risks of relying on a limited number of maritime entry points. Major Gulf ports, including Jebel Ali and Dammam, remain important commercial hubs, but they are exposed to disruption affecting the Strait of Hormuz. Fujairah in the UAE, and Duqm and Salalah in Oman, are located outside the Strait and could provide additional route diversity. However, Oman is not an actor in the proposed project. These ports also remain exposed to risks in the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea, as well as to domestic security and onward-transit constraints. For better understanding of the maritime scene, table 2 maps major ports relevant to IMEC and distinguishes capacity, cargo type, ownership or concession and current status and needs.

Table 2: IMEC Stakeholder Ports Capacity and Ownership (2026)

Country	Port	Max. Annual Capacity	Cargo Type	Ownership & Operators	Expansion Need

India	Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNPT)	~10.0M TEU[5]	Multi-purpose (Container Dominant)	Government of India PSA International (Singapore)	Low Need
India	Mundra Port	~8.0M TEU[6]	Multi-purpose (Container & Bulk)	Adani Ports (National) Dubai ports world	Low Need
India	Mumbai Port	75.15 MMT (bulk/liquid only)	Multi-purpose (Liquid/Dry Bulk Dominant)	Government of India (Mumbai Port Authority)	Undergoing Major Transformation[7]
Oman	Salalah	~5.0M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container Dominant & Transshipment)	Government of Oman / Asyad Group APM Terminals (Netherlands)	Low medium Need
Oman	Sohar	~2.5M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container, Dry Bulk, Liquid Bulk, & Industrial Freezone)	Sohar Industrial Port Company (Equal joint venture: Government of Oman & Port of Rotterdam) Hutchison Ports (OICT)	High expansion Need in containers
Oman	Qalhat	~10.4M to 12.0M tonnes (LNG)	Energy / Liquid Bulk (LNG Export Terminal)	Government of Oman (Oman LNG) / TotalEnergies, Shell, LNG Japan	Low to Moderate Need

[5] Construction Times. *Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority: India's Largest Container Port*. Retrieved from https://constructiontimes.co.in/JAWAHARLAL-NEHRU-PORT-AUTHORITY:--INDIAS-LARGEST-CONTAINER-PORT

[6] Tradlinx Blogs. n.d. "India Port List: Mundra, Nhava Sheva, Paradip, Deendayal, Visakhapatnam." https://blogs.tradlinx.com/india-port-list-mundra-nhava-sheva-paradip-deendayal-visakhapatnam/

[7] Press Information Bureau, Government of India. n.d. "Mumbai Port's Eastern Waterfront to See ₹22,672-Crore Maritime-Led Transformation: Sarbananda." https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2224723&reg=48&lang=2

UAE	Port of Jebel Ali	~19.4M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container Dominant)	Dubai ports world	Low Need
UAE	Khalifa Port	~8.0M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container & Industrial Bulk)	Abu Dhabi Ports Group CMA CGM (French)	Low Need
UAE	Port of Fujairah	~1.0M TEU	Multi-purpose (Liquid Bulk Dominant)	Government of Fujairah Dubai ports world	High expansion Need in containers
KSA	Dammam Port	~3.5M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container & Liquid Bulk)	Saudi Ports Authority (Mawani)	Medium Need
KSA	Jeddah Islamic Port	~13M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container Dominant)	Saudi Ports Authority Dubai ports world RSGT	Low need
Jordan	Port of Aqaba	~1.3M TEU	Multi-purpose (Dry Bulk Dominant)	Aqaba Development Corp Jordan APM Terminals	High expansion Need in containers
Israel	Port of Haifa	~1.5M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container Dominant)	Adani Group India 70% Gadot Group Israel 30% SIPG (China SOE) operates Bay Port	High expansion Need in containers

Israel	Port of Ashdod	~1.5M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container Dominant)	Israel Ports Authority TIL Swiss	High expansion Need in containers
Greece	Port of Piraeus	~7.2M TEU	Specialized Transshipment Gateway:	COSCO Shipping China	Low need
Italy	Port of Trieste	~1.0M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container & Liquid Bulk)	AdSP Italy HHLA German	High expansion Need in containers
Italy	Port of Genoa	~3.0 M TEU	Multi-purpose (Container Dominant)	AdSP Italy PSA Singapore	High expansion Need in containers
France	Port of Marseille-Fos	~1.5M TEU	Multi-purpose (Liquid Bulk Dominant)	Grand Port Maritime France	High expansion Need in containers

Oman is not currently a formal IMEC participant, but its ports at Salalah, Sohar and Qalhat sit directly on the Arabian Sea beyond the Strait of Hormuz and therefore function as critical "bypass" nodes. If integrated through viable rail, road, customs and commercial arrangements, these Omani ports could improve route diversity and reduce direct exposure to the Strait of Hormuz. Their contribution would depend on the availability of onward connections to Gulf and Mediterranean logistics networks.

Table 2 indicates an important imbalance between high-capacity eastern ports and the more constrained Mediterranean gateways envisaged for the land bridge. Jebel Ali and JNPT have substantially larger container-handling capacity than Haifa and Ashdod. This constrains the potential of Israel to handle a major, sustained diversion of containerised cargo in any scenario relying on single Mediterranean gateways. An important question appears here, could these ports replace the annual[8] around 1 billion tonnes passing through the Suez Canal? Or if they could offer a better alternative than other proposed projects in which Türkiye is the central pillar? The short answer is no.

[8]ShipNEXT. n.d. "Port of Suez Canal (Egypt)." https://shipnext.com/port/suez-canal-egszc-egy

Additional Levantine ports could provide redundancy, but they are not currently integrated into IMEC or into a continuous Gulf–Mediterranean logistics system. Beirut and Tripoli offer limited container capacity; Tartous and Latakia are subject to separate modernisation programmes. These ports are not part of the proposed project; legitimacy constraints and competing initiatives make their potential integration uncertain.

Beirut	Lebanon	0.8 MTEU/y[9]
Tripoli	Lebanon	0.4 MTEU/year
Tartous	Syria	Not available / Estimated 0.5 MTEU/year
Latakia	Syria	More than 1.0 MTEU/year planned

The principal constraint is therefore not the aggregate number of ports, but the absence of an integrated Gulf–Levant logistics system, which is the result of regional legitimacies based on separation.

2.2 The Overland Railway Network

A prospective Gulf–Levant rail network is a major unresolved element in the Gulf–Mediterranean land-bridge configuration frequently associated with IMEC. Without interoperable cross-border rail links, the corridor remains a set of separate maritime, port, and domestic-rail systems rather than a continuous India–Europe multimodal route. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have developed substantial domestic freight-rail assets. However, their value for IMEC remains contingent on cross-border connections that are not yet operational, particularly between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and Jordan and Israel.

Table 3: IMEC Middle East Railway Mapping and Operational Status

Country / Section	Railway Details	Capacity	Operational Status

[9] Shafer, Nicholas. 2025. *The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor: Connectivity in an Era of Geopolitical Uncertainty*. Atlantic Council, August 2025. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/The-India-Middle-East-Europe-Economic-Corridor-Connectivity-in-an-era-of-geopolitical-uncertainty.pdf

Oman - UAE	**Hafeet Rail**: Connects Sohar Port in Oman to Al Ain and the UAE national rail network/Abu Dhabi	Up to 15,000 tonnes per freight train, 270–276 TEU per trip. No published annual capacity yet	**Under construction:** approximately **40% completed** in April 2026[10]
UAE	**Etihad Rail**: Ghuweifat–Fujairah via Abu Dhabi, Khalifa Port/KIZAD, Jebel Ali and the northern emirates	Up to 50 Mt/y; ~3.6 MTEU/y equivalent[11]	Built & Operational
UAE - Saudi Arabia	**Cross-Border Link:** Al-Ghuwaifat/al-Batha border crossing to the Saudi East Train network at Haradh or Dammam.	—	Not built (in design/tender phase as of May 2026)[12]
Saudi Arabia	**North–South railway:** Riyadh → Al-Haditha/Qurayyat, towards Jordan's border **Saudi East Train:** Riyadh → Al-Hofuf → Dammam, towards Saudi Arabia's Gulf ports **Planned GCC Railway:** Dammam/Al-Khafji → Al-Batha, to the UAE border, connecting onward to Etihad Rail at Ghuwaifat	30 Mt/y freight carried (2025) ~2.1 MTEU/y equivalent	Built & Operational

[10] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sultanate of Oman. 2026. "Oman–UAE Railway Link 40% Complete." April 22, 2026. https://www.fm.gov.om/en/42991/

[11] Assuming that all 50 Mt/y is containerised cargo and applying a planning average of 14 tonnes per TEU, Etihad Rail's 50 Mt/y freight capacity is equivalent to approximately 3.6 million TEU annually (50,000,000÷14=3,571,429 TEU). This is an indicative conversion rather than an official TEU capacity: actual throughput would vary with the share of bulk versus containerised freight, commodity mix, and average container payload.

[12] Zawya. 2026. "Saudi Arabia Issues Tender for Design Consultancy of Its Part of GCC Railway." May 14, 2026. https://www.zawya.com/en/business/transport-and-logistics/saudi-arabia-issues-tender-for-design-consultancy-of-its-part-of-gcc-railway-flnzoad4

Saudi Arabia - Jordan	**Cross-Border Link:** Saudi rail reaches Al-Haditha; no rail line continues into Jordan	—	Not built
Jordan	**Aqaba Rail Project:** Links Jordanian mining hubs to Port of Aqaba, forming the foundation for a national network	16 Mt/y of phosphate and potash ~ 1.14 MTEU/y	Not built (UAE signed a $2.3B[13] deal in April 2026 to build/operate the line)
Jordan - Israel	**Cross-Border Link:** Sheikh Hussein–Jordan River crossing to Beit She'an / Bisan	—	Not Built
Israel	**New Jezreel Valley railway:** Rail line from Beit She'an / Bisan to Haifa Port	No line-specific freight capacity publicly verified	Built

Note: *Mt/y = million tonnes per year*
MTEU/y = million twenty-foot equivalent units (container) per year.

The proposed Gulf–Mediterranean land-bridge configuration commonly associated with IMEC remains incomplete, politically contingent and operationally unavailable. Although it is designed to provide an alternative to the Bab el-Mandeb–Suez maritime route, critical gaps persist between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, across Jordan, and at the Jordan–Israel border. The proposed Jordanian and Jordan–Israel segments are among the most consequential bottlenecks in the Gulf–Mediterranean land-bridge scenario. Without politically agreed, interoperable cross-border rail arrangements between Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel, that specific configuration cannot operate as a continuous corridor. Even if the missing rail links are completed, IMEC would not substitute for the scale of all-sea traffic through the Suez Canal. Any GCC–Haifa rail capacity estimate should be treated as a scenario dependent on train frequency, axle-load limits, containerisation rates, border dwell time, terminal productivity, port capacity and commercial demand. If political and operational conditions permit, this configuration could offer one possible alternative for selected high-value, time-sensitive or resilience-critical cargoes, rather than a universal substitute for uninterrupted maritime carriage through Suez.

[13]Asharq Al-Awsat. 2026. "UAE, Jordan Sign $2.3 Billion Aqaba Rail Project Deal. https://english.aawsat.com/business/5262703-uae-jordan-sign-23-billion-aqaba-rail-project-deal

Overall assessment, IMEC's transport pillar should be assessed through three distinct tests: connectivity, capacity and reliability. Connectivity remains incomplete because key UAE–Saudi, Saudi–Jordan and Jordan–Israel rail links are missing; capacity will remain materially below that of the Suez Canal even after the core route is completed; and reliability will depend on the political-security environment, border procedures and the efficiency of port–rail transshipment. To date, IMEC can primarily be imagined as a targeted velocity hedge for high-value logistics rather than a structural alternative to maritime shipping.

3. Digital and Data Connectivity

Digital connectivity seems to constitute IMEC's most mature pillar. Existing and planned subsea cable systems, together with rapid data centre expansion in India, the Gulf and Europe, could diversify Europe–Asia data flows beyond the highly concentrated Suez–Red Sea route. Yet greater cable capacity alone does not guarantee resilience: meaningful redundancy requires geographically separated landing stations, independently routed terrestrial backhaul, diversified power supplies, repair access and secure cloud continuity arrangements.

3.1 Subsea and Terrestrial Cables

Subsea cable systems carry the overwhelming majority of international digital traffic and connect landing stations to terrestrial networks, cloud infrastructure and data centres. Their strategic importance derives not only from their capacity, but from the vulnerability of cable routes, landing points, terrestrial backhaul, power supplies, repair access and national regulatory arrangements. Serving as the primary arteries of the modern global economy, these cables carry over 95% of all intercontinental data traffic and underpin an estimated $10 trillion[14] in daily financial transactions. Historically, the digital connection between Europe, the Middle East, and Asia has relied heavily on routes passing through the Suez Canal, the Bab al-Mandeb, and the Strait of Hormuz—three critical maritime chokepoints vulnerable to both kinetic and geopolitical disruption.

In parallel with IMEC's wider connectivity agenda, public and private actors have advanced cable projects that could strengthen digital links between India, the Gulf, the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe. This digital layer fulfils two essential strategic roles. First, it establishes vital path redundancy to diversify traffic away from the chokepoints. Second, it

[14] TeleGeography. 2023. "2023 Mythbusting (Part 1): Do $10 Trillion of Financial Transactions Flow Over Submarine Cables Every Day?" https://resources.telegeography.com/2023-mythbusting-part-1

aligns with a broader Western and US-aligned preference for trusted suppliers, secure connectivity and reduced dependence on Chinese-controlled digital infrastructure under the digital silk road[15]. This preference overlaps with, but should not be equated directly to, the earlier U.S. Clean Network[16] initiative.

Table 4: Subsea Cable Systems Relevant to IMEC's Wider Digital-Connectivity Environment

The systems listed below should not be interpreted as a unified IMEC digital network or as an endorsement of any particular transit route. They represent separate commercial and strategic projects whose relevance to IMEC varies and whose routes may be politically contested, commercially uncertain or not yet operational.

Cable System	Route	Ownership	Supplier	Capacity
Blue & Raman	EU ↔ India through Israel and Saudi Arabia	Google, Sparkle, Zain Omantel Intl.	ASN (France)	218 Tbps
East to Med Corridor EMC West-1 and EMC West-2	EU ↔ Saudi Arabia through Israel	EMC Subsea Cable Co. Ltd	ASN (France)	Not publicly specified
India-Europe-Xpress (IEX)	EU ↔ India through Egypt and Saudi Arabia	Reliance Jio Infocomm and China Mobile	SubCom (USA)	200 Tbps
Medusa	EU ↔ Syria, Lebanon and Egypt	AFR-IX telecom	ASN (France)	480 Tbps

[15] The Digital Silk Road is the technological and cyberspace component of China's Belt and Road Initiative. It expands China's digital footprint globally by financing and constructing critical telecommunications hardware.

[16] U.S. Department of State. 2020. "The Clean Network." https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-clean-network/

GreenMed System	EU ↔ Jordan	Sparkle	ASN (France)	Not publicly specified
2Africa	EU ↔ Africa ↔ India	Bayobab, China Mobile, Meta, Orange, Telecom Egypt, Vodafone, WIOCC, center3	ASN (France)	180 Tbps
Andromeda (proposed)	EU ↔ Israel connected to landing stations in Saudi Arabia	Etisalat Group, Exelera, Grid Telecom	Not publicly specified	Not publicly specified
SilkLink	EU ↔ Saudi Arabia through Syria	75% Saudi Telecom Company 25% Syrian Sovereign Fund	Not publicly specified	Up to 100 Tbps

Note: *Listed system capacity is a design-capacity figure, not available commercial capacity or observed traffic. Route descriptions are simplified; actual cable paths, branch units and landing points may vary by segment.*

The development of cable systems using Israeli landing points or terrestrial routes also has a wider regional political-economy dimension. Such configurations may seek to diversify Europe–Asia connectivity away from Egypt's highly concentrated Suez–Red Sea corridor and could, if commercially successful, redistribute transit revenues, data-centre investment and strategic leverage among Eastern Mediterranean states. This does not make Israel an inevitable or politically neutral regional cable hub: the viability of these routes depends on commercial demand, security conditions, landing-station resilience, terrestrial backhaul, regulatory arrangements and regional political acceptance. It also raises the prospect of strategic competition with Egypt, whose cable infrastructure remains central to Europe–Asia connectivity. External powers and firms with economic, telecommunications or strategic interests in Egypt's stability - including Chinese entities involved in regional digital infrastructure - may therefore have incentives to preserve the Egyptian route, rather than let connectivity concentrate in an alternative Israeli digital corridor.

The digital infrastructure listed in Table 4 above operates under a complex governance structure where owners and suppliers' roles define the corridor's digital security. Cable ownership and landing-party arrangements shape commercial access to capacity, maintenance

obligations and network-routing options. However, control is shared among consortium members, landing-station operators, national regulators and, in most cases, state security authorities; it should not be treated as a form of sovereign authority.

The involvement of European and U.S. suppliers in several listed new cable systems indicates a substantial role for these firms in the region's emerging digital infrastructure, in competition with the dominant position of China. This may align with Western partners' preferences for trusted suppliers, supply-chain diversification and secure connectivity. However, cable governance remains distributed across consortium owners, landing parties, regulators, maintenance providers and host states.

IMEC-related digital investments illustrate efforts by several states and firms to diversify regional connectivity routes; these nations are moving beyond a passive reliance on legacy global infrastructure and are instead investing in a more regionally anchored and potentially more resilient digital architecture. This ensures that as they evolve into global hubs for data and finance, their critical economic operations remain resilient, secure, and subject to stronger domestic and regional governance regardless of the broader shifts in global digital competition. However, it is vital to maintain a pragmatic perspective: while these new systems significantly enhance regional resilience, they do not constitute a total alternative to the Egyptian route, which currently facilitates approximately 17% of global internet traffic[17] and 90% of Europe-Asia traffic. Instead, these investments may create a more complex, multi-layered regional digital environment. Some proposed cable configurations use Israeli landing points or terrestrial routes, but their operational and political viability remains contingent on regional conditions, commercial agreements and the security of network infrastructure.

Digital resilience depends on more than adding cable kilometres. It requires geographically separated landing points, independently routed terrestrial backhaul, diversified power supplies, secure cable-repair access and commercially viable spare capacity. A cable that bypasses one maritime chokepoint but converges on the same landing station, terrestrial corridor or power grid does not provide full redundancy. IMEC's digital value therefore lies in creating both physical route diversity and administrative diversity across cable owners, landing parties, jurisdictions and network operators.

[17] Rest of World. n.d. "Stat of the Day: Egypt Internet Connectivity. https://restofworld.org/stat-of-the-day/egypt-internet-connectivity/

3.2 Data Centres: The Processing Hubs

While subsea cables act as the high-speed nervous system transporting data, data centres are where data is stored, processed, and exchanged. A data centre is a physical facility that houses computing infrastructure - such as servers, storage systems, and networking equipment - used to store, process, and distribute digital data and applications. It provides the power, cooling, and security needed to keep these systems operating reliably. For nations along the IMEC corridor, hosting data centres can strengthen digital sovereignty by improving domestic data-processing capacity and reducing dependence on foreign infrastructure. However, meaningful sovereignty also depends on ownership structures, applicable law, cloud-provider governance, encryption-key management, and domestic regulatory capacity. When linked to subsea cable landing points, these facilities become "digital hubs" that drastically reduce latency, allowing real-time data flow between India, the Gulf, and Europe.

The table below maps the operational IT load - the standard industry measure for a data centre's processing capacity - against long-term growth projections.

Table 5: Data Centres in IMEC Countries - Ownership and Ecosystems

Country	Operational IT load (MW, year)	2030 outlook (IT load) (MW)
India	~1,500	~3,000–8,000
UAE	~400	~1,000–1,500
Saudi Arabia	~300–350	~1,300–1,500
Jordan	~30	n/a (no robust figure)
Israel	~300	~532
Greece	~150	"Several-hundred" (no single figure)
Italy	~500–700	>1,000 (early 2030s, indicative)

France	~566	~1,800
Germany	~2,730	~4,850

The IMEC data centres landscape reveals a clear bifurcation between established European markets (France, Italy and Germany) and rapidly scaling regional hubs in the Middle East and India. France and Italy represent mature, high-capacity ecosystems where the strategy is to reinforce Marseille and Milan as the primary connectors between the Mediterranean and the wider EU. In contrast, the Gulf states (led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE) are shifting from "consumer-to-provider" status. By prioritizing state-backed sovereign cloud initiatives (such as Saudi Arabia's center3[18], these nations are transforming from simple transit points into processing hubs. India, meanwhile, is experiencing a massive scaling phase, driven by domestic digital transformation and its role as the eastern anchor of the projected IMEC corridor. The expanding presence of hyperscalers and regional cloud providers across several of these markets indicate that they are building the infrastructure necessary to host the next generation of AI and computing power.

A potentially transformative development is Saudi Arabia's draft Global AI Hub Law[19], published for public consultation in 2025. The proposed framework would establish "data embassy[20]" arrangements through three types of data hubs - Private, Extended and Virtual Hubs - under which designated foreign governmental or commercial data could be hosted in Saudi Arabia while remaining subject to agreed foreign legal frameworks. Although the proposal signals Saudi Arabia's ambition to become a global hub for sovereign data hosting and AI infrastructure, it has not yet entered into force.

Table 6: Proposed hub categories under Saudi Arabia's draft Global AI Hub Law

[18] center3 is a major digital infrastructure company based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Launched in October 2022 as a subsidiary of the STC Group (Saudi Telecom Company), it serves as the digital connectivity hub for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

[19] Gardezi, Syeda Eimaan. 2025. "Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global AI Hub Law." *Securiti*, May 8, 2025. https://securiti.ai/saudi-arabia-global-ai-hub-law/

[20] Introl. 2025. "Saudi Arabia Pioneers Data Embassies as First G20 Nation with AI Hub Framework." December 30, 2025. https://introl.com/blog/saudi-arabia-data-embassy-global-ai-hub-law-december-2025

Feature	Private Hub	Extended Hub	Virtual Hub
Operator	Guest Country	Approved Service Provider	Authorized Service Provider
Purpose	Host Guest Country data/services	Host Operator/Subscriber data	Host customer content
Jurisdiction	Guest Country law	Guest Country law	Designated Foreign State law
KSA Role	Provide infrastructure & immunities	Provide infrastructure & immunities	Enforce valid foreign orders
Compliance	International law & KSA support	International law & KSA support	KSA law & Competent Authority

If enacted, the draft framework could make Saudi Arabia more attractive to hyperscalers and foreign governments by offering defined legal arrangements for sovereign or semi-sovereign data hosting. Its significance lies in potentially lowering regulatory uncertainty for international operators seeking to establish AI and cloud infrastructure in the Kingdom. Combined with expanding subsea-cable landings and domestic terrestrial networks, the proposal could reinforce Saudi Arabia's role as a major regional data-processing hub; however, its eventual impact will depend on enactment, implementing regulations, and commercial uptake.

In this context, IMEC could act as a unified digital ecosystem. This integration turns the corridor from a logistical transit line into a permanent, high-value digital asset, embedding the participating nations more deeply into the architecture of the global digital economy. This investment may improve domestic processing capacity and regulatory leverage. Its contribution to digital sovereignty will nevertheless depend on ownership structures, cloud-provider governance, encryption-key management, applicable law, power reliability, cyber resilience and continuity arrangements.

The rapid concentration of cloud and data-centre capacity creates a resilience paradox. These facilities are essential to national digital transformation and AI ambitions, but their strategic importance, links to financial systems and potential use by government or defence customers can also make them attractive targets during conflict. Recent regional escalation highlights that strategically significant digital infrastructure may be exposed to kinetic, cyber and coercive threats. The resilience of IMEC-related digital assets should therefore be assessed not only through cable capacity and data-centre load, but also through survivability during disruption.

Table 7: Reported incidents and allegations affecting GCC cloud infrastructure.

Date	Target	Location	Attribution
March 2026[21]	Two AWS facilities directly hit by drone strikes	UAE	Iran (IRGC)
March 2026[22]	AWS facility affected by a nearby drone strike	Bahrain	Iran (IRGC)
March 2026[23]	AWS Bahrain facility reportedly struck / fire reported	Bahrain	Iran (IRGC)
April 2026[24]	Oracle facility/building incident	UAE	Iran (IRGC)

This militarization of infrastructure creates a resilience paradox: data centres and cable systems are essential to national digital transformation and AI ambitions, yet their strategic importance also makes them potential targets for coercion and disruption. IMEC's digital pillar should therefore be measured not only by aggregate cable capacity or data-centre megawatts, but by survivability under disruption. A resilient regional digital architecture requires multiple

[21] Kalia, Shubham, Aditya Soni, and Mrinmay Dey. 2026. "Amazon Cloud Unit's Data Centres in UAE, Bahrain Damaged in Drone Strikes." *Reuters*, March 2, 2026. https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/amazon-cloud-unit-flags-issues-bahrain-uae-data-centers-amid-iran-strikes-2026-03-02/

[22] Ramanand, Reeta, and Liv McMahon. 2026. "Amazon Says Drones Damaged Three Facilities in UAE and Bahrain." *BBC News*, March 3, 2026. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgk28nj0lrjo

[23] Morales, Jowi. 2026. "Amazon's Middle East Data Centres Damaged by Iran Drone and Missile Attacks Will Be Down for Several Months during Repairs." *Tom's Hardware*. https://www.tomshardware.com/desktops/servers/amazons-middle-east-data-centers-damaged-by-iran-drone-and-missile-attacks-will-be-down-for-several-months-during-repairs-u-s-and-iran-currently-observing-an-uneasy-truce-but-renewed-strikes-possible-if-talks-break-down

[24] Al-Maswari, Mansour. 2026. "IRGC Claims Strikes on Oracle's Dubai Data Center." *Eurasia Review*, April 3, 2026. https://www.eurasiareview.com/03042026-irgc-claims-strikes-on-oracles-dubai-data-center/

geographically separated cable routes, diversified landing points, protected terrestrial links, redundant power and cloud capacity, rapid repair arrangements, and governance structures that preserve operational continuity during a crisis. Without these elements, increased digital capacity may deepen regional connectivity while simultaneously creating new concentrated points of strategic vulnerability.

4. Energy Integration

Energy infrastructure relevant to the IMEC project spans two interconnected domains: hydrocarbon and green-molecule supply chains, including oil, natural gas, hydrogen and ammonia, and cross-border electricity interconnectors. Most of the assets assessed are not formal IMEC projects; rather, they are national, bilateral or commercial initiatives that could strengthen the corridor's wider objectives of route diversification, energy resilience and decarbonisation. Their relevance depends on whether separate projects can be connected through viable infrastructure, compatible regulation, secure demand and durable political and economic cooperation.

4.1 Hydrocarbon, Hydrogen and Ammonia Infrastructure

In 2026, IMEC-relevant energy projects pursue two distinct objectives: near-term resilience and longer-term decarbonisation. The first aims at reducing exposure of hydrocarbon exports to disruption at strategic chokepoints, particularly the Strait of Hormuz. The second involves developing renewable-electricity, hydrogen and ammonia supply chains capable of serving prospective European and Asian markets. Green-hydrogen exports require an integrated, purpose-built supply chain rather than reliance on uncertain surplus electricity from national grids. Dedicated solar and wind facilities must supply the electrolysers; the hydrogen may then be converted into ammonia to facilitate storage and long-distance transport; and ports must be equipped for storage, handling and export. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and India are developing production hubs that could eventually form part of an IMEC-linked green-hydrogen and green-ammonia network. However, these projects are at very different stages of development. NEOM is the most advanced large-scale project, while progress at other facilities depends on completing construction and renewable-energy capacity, securing sufficient water and financing, concluding long-term purchase agreements, and generating sustained demand for green ammonia.

Table 8A: Hydrogen, Ammonia Export Hubs and Renewable-Energy Assets Relevant to IMEC

Project & Region	Renewable Energy Infrastructure	Output Capacity	Status

Saudi Arabia – NEOM Green Hydrogen Project	~ 4 GW solar and wind	Up to 600 tonnes/day green hydrogen; up to 1.2 Mt/y green ammonia	Commissioning stage; commercial production expected in 2027
Saudi Arabia – Shuaibah PV IPP	2.6 GW solar PV	No dedicated hydrogen/ammonia chain announced; enabling renewable-energy asset rather than an export hub	Operational / grid-connected
UAE – KIZAD hydrogen–ammonia project[25]	~ 2 GW proposed renewable-powered facility	Green hydrogen, ammonia production, storage, bunkering and export planned	Proposed / development stage
India – AM Green Kakinada[26]	~ 4.5 GW solar & wind integrated with Greenko's 1.68 GW / 10.8 GWh Pinnapuram pumped hydro storage	1.0 Mt/y green ammonia (backed by ~1.28 GW alkaline electrolyzers)	Under construction / Phased commercial production targeted for 2028

Table 8A distinguishes between dedicated hydrogen-export hubs listed in the table and renewable-electricity assets that could support future industrial decarbonisation or hydrogen production. This distinction is important: installed solar capacity does not automatically create hydrogen-export capacity without electrolysers, water supply, ammonia-conversion facilities, port storage and long-term offtake agreements.

The projects below should not be interpreted as a unified IMEC pipeline system. The Saudi East–West Pipeline is an operational Saudi resilience asset, whereas the EastMed Pipeline, H2Poseidon and the SoutH2 Corridor are Mediterranean or European projects whose relevance to IMEC is indirect and comparative. Together, they illustrate the wider regional infrastructure environment within which IMEC-related energy connectivity could eventually develop.

[25] TAQA. 2021. "TAQA Group and Abu Dhabi Ports Planning 2 GW Green Hydrogen to Ammonia Project." July 7, 2021. https://www.taqa.com/press-releases/taqa-group-and-abu-dhabi-ports-planning-2-gw-green-hydrogen-to-ammonia-project-2/

[26] Ammonia Energy Association. 2026. "AM Green: Production Nears at India's First Renewable Ammonia Mega-Project." *Ammonia Energy*, February 2026. https://ammoniaenergy.org/articles/am-green-production-nears-at-indias-first-renewable-ammonia-mega-project/

Table 8B: IMEC-Relevant Hydrocarbon and Hydrogen Transport Infrastructure

Project	Type	Route	Status
EastMed Pipeline	Natural-gas pipeline	Israel → Cyprus → Greece → Italy	Proposed / effectively stalled amid commercial, geopolitical and maritime-boundary constraints
SoutH2 Corridor	Green-hydrogen corridor	Algeria → Tunisia → Italy → Austria → Germany	Planned; based largely on repurposed and new hydrogen infrastructure
H2 Poseidon	Hydrogen pipeline	Greece → Italy	Planned
Saudi East–West Pipeline	Crude-oil pipeline	Abqaiq / Eastern Province → Yanbu, Red Sea coast	Operational; bypasses the Strait of Hormuz

The Saudi East–West Pipeline is the only mature resilience asset in this group. It allows crude oil from Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province to reach Yanbu on the Red Sea without transiting the Strait of Hormuz. It does **not**, however, eliminate exposure to Bab al-Mandeb for cargo moving south from Yanbu toward Asian markets; nor does it replace the Suez route for exports moving north to Europe.

The EastMed Pipeline illustrates how Eastern Mediterranean gas integration remains conditional on commercial viability and unresolved regional disputes. The proposed line would connect Israeli and Cypriot gas resources to Greece and Italy, but its future remains uncertain due to high costs, maritime-boundary disputes and Turkish opposition. By contrast, H2Poseidon and the SoutH2 Corridor represent an EU-oriented hydrogen pathway that could connect future North African renewable production to Italy, Austria and Germany.

4.2 Electricity Grids and HVDC Interconnectors

Cross-border electricity trade relevant to IMEC is developing through a series of HVDC interconnectors linking Gulf, North African, Eastern Mediterranean and European power systems. Rather than moving fuels, these links transmit electricity directly between grids, enabling renewable-energy exports, peak-demand balancing and greater system flexibility.

HVDC links can connect asynchronous electricity systems; they do not necessarily create a fully synchronised regional grid.

Table 9: IMEC-Relevant Electricity Interconnectors

Project	Route	Capacity	Status
Great Sea Interconnector	Israel ↔ Cyprus ↔ Greece	**1,000 MW** Phase I; **2,000 MW** ultimate target	Under development, construction scheduling is being revised
Egypt–Saudi Arabia Interconnection	Saudi Arabia ↔ Egypt	**3,000 MW**	Final testing / phased commissioning; 1,500 MW initial exchange, rising to 3,000 MW
India–UAE HVDC Link	India ↔ UAE	**2,000 MW** reported concept capacity	Feasibility / strategic concept under the OSOWOG framework
India–Saudi Arabia HVDC Link	India ↔ Saudi Arabia	**2,000 MW** reported concept capacity	Feasibility / technical and regulatory groundwork
ELMED Interconnector	Tunisia ↔ Italy	**600 MW**	Development and permitting; target operation around 2028
GREGY Interconnector	Egypt ↔ Greece	**3,000 MW**	Feasibility and development stage; intended to connect Egyptian renewable generation to Europe
EuroGulf Interconnector	Saudi Arabia ↔ Egypt ↔ Cyprus ↔ EU	**2,000 MW** proposed	Concept / under consideration

The Egypt–Saudi Arabia interconnection is the most advanced Gulf–Mediterranean electricity project. Its phased commissioning would create the first major electrical bridge between the GCC and North Africa.

On the Mediterranean side, the Great Sea Interconnector is intended to link Israel, Cyprus and Greece through subsea HVDC cables. Its timetable should nevertheless be treated cautiously,

as project activities have been rescheduled and a revised execution plan remains under review. ELMED and GREGY could similarly enable North African renewable electricity to reach Italy and Greece, reinforcing the southern Mediterranean as a potential low-carbon power-export platform. These projects are relevant to IMEC's wider energy environment, but their implementation remains subject to financing, permitting, regulatory and geopolitical constraints.

The India–UAE and India–Saudi Arabia HVDC proposals represent a more ambitious extension that could be included in the IMEC logic, potentially linking South Asian and Gulf electricity systems. However, they remain strategic concepts rather than operational projects and would require substantial progress in technical design, seabed routing, financing, power-market rules, grid integration, regulatory coordination and political agreement before construction could begin.

The proposed EuroGulf Interconnector represents an even broader vision: a long-distance electricity spine connecting Saudi Arabia to Europe through Egypt and Cyprus. If implemented, it would link parts of the GCC, North African and European power systems into an interconnected transmission chain. Such connectivity could improve renewable-energy balancing and diversify power supply, but it would also create shared vulnerabilities: disruption, cyberattacks, political disputes or technical failures could propagate across several jurisdictions.

The imagined IMEC's energy pillar is likely to develop in phases. In the near term, operational oil infrastructure - especially the Saudi East–West Pipeline - and selected electricity links offer the clearest resilience benefits by diversifying routes and improving regional system flexibility. Over the longer term, hydrogen and ammonia hubs, pipelines and HVDC interconnectors could connect currently fragmented energy systems across India, the Gulf, North Africa and Europe. Their contribution will depend on competitive delivered costs, dedicated renewable supply, secure offtake, storage and port infrastructure, financing, regulatory compatibility, cyber and physical resilience, and durable political cooperation. The IMEC concept should therefore be understood as a potential long-term framework for energy diversification, decarbonisation and resilience rather than as a fully integrated energy network.

5. Defense and Security Cooperation

5.1 Security considerations

Since IMEC relies on rent distribution and physical connectivity, strategic security considerations are at the foundation of the project. This is as ports, shipping lanes, rail networks, energy facilities, data centres, and subsea cables are vulnerable to regional conflict, maritime disruption, cyberattacks and political interruptions of transit. Existing arrangements - including EU naval missions in the Red Sea and western Indian Ocean, India–UAE defence cooperation, US–Saudi security ties and EU cable-resilience initiatives—provide relevant but fragmented support. They do not amount to a unified IMEC security architecture or a binding collective defense framework. They are currently being revalued as a result of the developments in the region and in the world. This section refers to the fragmented set of defense partnerships and security initiatives existing between actors relevant to the proposed IMEC project.

Table 10: Security Partnerships, Defence Frameworks and Critical-Infrastructure Protection Relevant to IMEC

Cooperation / mechanism	Participants	Primary role	Status / limitation	IMEC relevance
EUNAVFOR Atalanta[27]	EU and contributing states	Maritime security, counter-piracy, maritime-domain awareness and monitoring of risks to critical subsea infrastructure in the western Indian Ocean and Red Sea	Operational since 2008; mandate and tasks updated in 2026	Supports shipping security and situational awareness along Indian Ocean and Red Sea approaches

[27] Council of the European Union. 2026. “Maritime Security: Council Updates Mandates of EU Naval Operations Aspides and Atalanta.” March 30, 2026. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/03/30/maritime-security-council-updates-mandates-of-eu-naval-operations-aspides-and-atalanta/

EUNAVFOR Aspides[28]	EU and contributing states	Defensive protection of civilian shipping in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and adjacent waters	Mandate extended until **28 February 2027**; protects vessels but cannot eliminate regional missile, drone or mine threats	Protects the Red Sea maritime segment that connects IMEC-related ports with European markets
I2U2[29]	India, Israel, UAE and United States	Cooperation on investment, water, food security, energy, transport, space, health and technology	Economic and technology framework; **not** a collective-defence alliance	A minilateral policy framework whose relevance to IMEC is indirect
India–Israel defence-industrial cooperation[30]	India and Israel	Defence trade, supply of weapons, ammunition, military components and dual-use items, alongside longer-standing technology and industrial cooperation	Amnesty International identified **2,596 shipments** of small arms, ammunition and military vehicles from India to Israel since 7 October 2023.	Extend beyond technology exchange into active defence-industrial supply chains
EU Submarine Cable Security Toolbox[31]	European Union	Cable-route resilience, risk assessment, monitoring, repair readiness, landing-point protection and supply-chain diversification	Non-binding policy and risk-mitigation framework; not an EU operational military command	Supports protection of IMEC-related subsea cables and Mediterranean landing points

[28] European External Action Service. 2026. "EUNAVFOR ASPIDES Mandate." May 27, 2026. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eunavfor-aspides/eunavfor-aspides-mandate-0_en

[29] U.S. Department of State. n.d. "I2U2." https://www.state.gov/i2u2

[30] Amnesty International. 2026. *Made in India: The Supply of Weapons and Ammunition to Israel.* https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa20/1327/2026/en/

[31] European Commission. 2026. "Submarine Cable Security Toolbox and Cable Projects of European Interest." *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/submarine-cable-security-toolbox-and-cable-projects-european-interest

India–UAE Strategic Defence Partnership Framework[32]	India and UAE	Defence-industrial collaboration, technology transfer, innovation, maritime security, cyber defence and secure communications	Agreed in May 2026; implementation depends on specific industrial and operational agreements	Strengthens security links between India and a principal Gulf logistics and digital hub
UAE–Israel defence cooperation[33]	UAE and Israel	Defence-industrial contacts, counter-drone technologies, air-defence procurement and security cooperation following the Abraham Accords	Public evidence of integrated Gulf-wide operational air-defence architecture remains limited	Potentially relevant to the protection of UAE ports, logistics hubs, energy facilities and data infrastructure
US–Saudi defense partnership[34]	Saudi Arabia and United States	Long-standing military cooperation, training, arms sales, intelligence exchange and protection of regional energy infrastructure	Strong bilateral relationship, but not a formal treaty-based collective-security guarantee	Important for the security of Saudi energy, port and logistics nodes relevant to IMEC

Existing security arrangements relevant to IMEC remain fragmented, bilateral or mission specific. They do not constitute a corridor-wide collective-security architecture, nor do they resolve the political contestation surrounding particular transit routes and regional alignments. IMEC-related assets face four broad threats: disruption at Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb and the Red Sea; kinetic strikes on ports, energy facilities, rail terminals and data infrastructure;

[32] European External Action Service. 2026. "Security and Defence: EU and India Sign Security & Defence Partnership." January 27, 2026. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/security-and-defence-eu-and-india-sign-security-defence-partnership_en

[33] Ravid, Barak. 2026. "Scoop: Israel Sent 'Iron Dome' System and Troops to UAE during Iran War. *Axios*, April 26, 2026. https://www.axios.com/2026/04/26/israel-iron-dome-uae

[34] The White House. 2025. "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Solidifies Economic and Defense Partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." November 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/11/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-solidifies-economic-and-defense-partnership-with-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia/

cyberattacks on control and management systems; and political or border decisions that interrupt transit even without open conflict. Where cross-border infrastructure exists or is proposed, continuity planning must account for interdependence among ports, railways, power systems, cable landings and border procedures. Such planning remains subject to the political legitimacy, consent and participation of the states and societies concerned.

Recent regional realignments also demonstrate the limits of assuming a stable and unified IMEC security architecture. Saudi Arabia's security relationships extend across multiple partners (Mecca Joint Defense Agreement[35]) and should be understood as part of a broader hedging strategy. Saudi Arabia is cautious about Israel having a dominant position in a regional security arrangement, especially without a solution to the Palestinian rights. At the same time, the 2026 US–Israeli confrontation with Iran exposed the vulnerability of IMEC-related infrastructure to regional escalation: disruption around the Strait of Hormuz, attacks affecting Gulf data centres, and pressure on maritime traffic demonstrated that ports, energy facilities, digital infrastructure and shipping routes can become targets or collateral damage during conflict. In the present context, it is difficult to imagine a common security system capable of sharing information, planning, protecting infrastructure, and launching multinational or overseas military operations.

A central limitation of IMEC analysis is that infrastructure maps often obscure the political choices embedded in proposed routes. A rail line, cable landing or port gateway is not simply a technical asset: it creates patterns of dependence, revenue, access, security coordination and political recognition. This is particularly relevant to proposals that rely on Israeli transit, ports or digital infrastructure. Such configurations should be evaluated as politically contested options, not as default or necessary expressions of regional integration. A rigorous assessment must therefore compare their technical and commercial advantages, where they exist, with their political constraints, legitimacy deficits, security risks and possible alternatives.

5.2 Political considerations

Crucially, this corridor must be understood simultaneously from the perspective of regional powers and from the vantage point of American great-power strategy. On the regional side, the EU seeks to de-risk supply chains, to control Gulf energy flow to Asia, and to secure access to

[35] Reuters. 2026. "Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan Sign Joint Defence Deal Amid Regional Turmoil." August 7, 2026. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/saudi-arabia-turkey-pakistan-sign-joint-defence-deal-amid-regional-turmoil-2026-08-07/

Indian manufacturing while reducing its dependence on crisis-prone maritime arteries. India uses IMEC to offset its energy-driven trade deficit with the GCC by scaling manufactured exports to Europe and to position itself as a credible counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative, which bypasses Indian territory and involves Pakistan, its main foe. GCC states—particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who have divergent interests—see IMEC as a cornerstone of post-oil diversification: by combining logistics platforms, hydrogen and ammonia export hubs, and rapidly growing data infrastructures, they aim to transform themselves from simple energy suppliers into central nodes in global trade and digital networks. Israel is seeking a major role in selected logistics, digital and technology configurations associated with IMEC. However, Israel-centred transit arrangements cannot be treated as politically neutral, technically inevitable or regionally consensual. Their viability is conditioned by the Palestinian question, the wider Arab–Israeli conflict, domestic political constraints in potential transit states, border access, commercial demand and the security environment. Jordan could benefit from investment in domestic rail, logistics and trade infrastructure. Yet any IMEC-linked cross-border role must be assessed against economic priorities, political legitimacy, regional conflict dynamics and the practical feasibility of transit arrangements.

From the American perspective, IMEC fits neatly into the November 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy's call to "organize a burden-sharing network, with our government as convener and supporter". In practice, this means that partners—India, Gulf state, and EU members—should finance and operate most of the physical infrastructure, while the United States focuses on convening, setting standards, and shaping the digital and security environment. IMEC is thus an American instrument for implementing a burden-sharing approach in an Indo-Mediterranean space (the concept of an "Indo-Abrahamic alliance"[36]) without large new U.S. deployments.

[36] https://mei.edu/publication/indo-abrahamic-alliance-rise-how-india-israel-and-uae-are-creating-new-transregional/

6. Conclusion and Research Outputs

In 2026, IMEC is not yet a structured and operational end-to-end India–Europe transport corridor. It is better understood as a potential Indo-Mediterranean resilience framework: an unevenly developed portfolio of ports, rail plans, cable systems, data infrastructure, energy projects and security arrangements. Its clearest near-term perspectives lie in digital connectivity and selected energy assets. Its most consequential weakness is the absence of a continuous and interoperable Gulf–Levant railway, particularly across the UAE–Saudi, Saudi–Jordan and Jordan–Mediterranean segments. Limited Mediterranean gateway capacity, mandatory transshipment stages, border procedures and regional insecurity further constrain the prospect of large-scale freight diversion. The central challenge is governance. IMEC lacks a general secretariat to coordinate investment sequencing, customs procedures, resilience standards, security arrangements and crisis response. Without such arrangements, it remains a portfolio of nationally driven projects associated with a common political label rather than a functioning transcontinental corridor system. These enduring divisions of potential partners currently complicate the reconciliation of competing agendas and constrain IMEC's prospects of developing, at this stage, into a coherent and transformative regional corridor.