

India, Middle East and Europe Economic Corridor

Azizahmad Fazli

Student of the second semester of the International Relations Master's Program at Khatam Al-Nabiin University and head of the Mili University's Professional Development Center. Kabul, Afghanistan.

Azizahmadfazli200@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper investigates the India, Middle East, and Europe Economic Corridor (I-ME-EEC), a key infrastructure project introduced during the G20 summit in India. Assessing its potential to boost trade, energy production, and regional cooperation, it emerges as a potential counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Employing qualitative method, the study delves into economic, political, security, cultural, and environmental facets. The analysis explores implications for international trade, regional cooperation, and global geopolitics, contributing to understanding trans-regional projects' roles in shaping global landscapes.

Keywords: I-ME-EEC, economy, security, culture, politics.

Introduction

The evolving landscape of global trade and geopolitics has witnessed the emergence of large-scale economic corridors, playing a pivotal role in shaping regional dynamics and international relations. The India, Middle East, and Europe Economic Corridor (I-ME-EEC) stands as a testament to this trend, representing a significant venture in the realm of international infrastructure and trade facilitation. This paper provides an in-depth exploration of the I-ME-EEC, initiated at the G20 summit in India, and its multifaceted implications.

The I-ME-EEC project, encompassing a vast geographical expanse from India through the Middle East to Europe, is not just an economic initiative but a strategic endeavor with far-reaching implications. It aims to establish a robust network of rail and shipping routes, enhancing connectivity and trade relations among the participating regions. Moreover, it serves as a strategic counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative, introducing a new dimension to global economic competition and cooperation.

This introductory section lays the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of the corridor, highlighting its economic objectives, security implications, cultural impact, and political significance. It also sets the stage for a discussion on the challenges and opportunities presented by this ambitious project. The corridor's role in economic development, political cooperation, and security stabilization in a region characterized by complex geopolitical dynamics forms the crux of this research.

By examining the I-ME-EEC through various analytical lenses, this paper seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the project's potential in reshaping regional and global economic and political landscapes. It aims to contribute to the discourse on the significance of economic corridors in contemporary international relations, offering insights into their capabilities to transform trade, cultural exchanges, and political alliances.

Research Methodology

This research uses a mixed-method approach, incorporating descriptive, analytical, and exploratory methods to examine the India, Middle East, and Europe Economic Corridor (I-ME-EEC). The study provides comprehensive explanation of the project's structure, objectives, and the involved stakeholders. The study further analyzes its effects on the economy, politics, security, and culture, using reports, journals, and analyses from reliable sources. Additionally, this paper explores possible future developments and challenges related to the I-ME-EEC, identifying areas for further inquiry.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To assess the strategic importance and potential impact of the I-ME-EEC on regional and global trade, politics, and security.
2. To analyze the challenges and opportunities presented by the I-ME-EEC, particularly in the context of its role as a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative.
3. To explore the potential of the I-ME-EEC in fostering economic development, cultural exchange, and political cooperation among the participating nations.

Research Questions

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the strategic goals, roles, and potential threats of the I-ME-EEC?
2. How does the I-ME-EEC compare with China's One Belt One Road initiative in terms of scope, objectives, and geopolitical implications?
3. What are the potential impacts of the I-ME-EEC on the regional and global economic and political landscape?

Data Collection and Analysis

This research uses data from a variety of sources. Governmental publications and official statements provided insight into the project's scope and objectives. Academic journals and international relations analyses were instrumental in understanding the geopolitical implications. News articles and reports from credible international news agencies offered current and diverse perspectives on the I-ME-EEC. This multi-source approach ensured a balanced and comprehensive analysis of the corridor.

1. India, Middle East, and Europe Economic Corridor (I-ME-EEC)

The India, Middle East, and Europe Economic Corridor (I-ME-EEC) is a substantial infrastructure project that was formalized on the sidelines of the G20 summit held on 10th September in India. This ambitious project, signed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and U.S. President Joe Biden, marks a significant collaboration aimed at global infrastructure investment. The United States has recognized the I-ME-EEC as a key component of its partnership strategy in global infrastructure development.

The I-ME-EEC is designed to bolster economic, commercial, political, security, cultural, and environmental cooperation across its span. By fostering relations and creating trade and investment facilities among the participating nations - India, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Italy, France, and Germany - the corridor aims to contribute substantially to regional economic growth, sustainable development, and political and security stability.

The corridor comprises two main sections: the Eastern Corridor, which connects India with the Arab nations of the Persian Gulf, and the Northern Corridor, linking the Persian Gulf countries with Europe through Jordan and Israel. This project is pivotal in connecting major trade hubs across Asia and Europe. It facilitates the development and export of clean energy, enhances cooperation in current trade and production sectors, bolsters food security, and strengthens supply chains. Moreover, it aims to expand communication lines via an extensive energy transmission network.

2. Economic Objectives of the Project

2-1. Economic Development and Stability of the Region: The India-Europe-Middle East Corridor is more than just a strategic transportation route; it's a vital conduit for trade and transportation between Asia and Europe. This corridor is instrumental in fostering economic prosperity and development in these regions, leading to job creation, increased incomes, and a reduction in poverty, thereby enhancing both regional and international security (Coordinates Corridors India, Middle East, and Europe; Battle Corridors Ahead, 1402).

2-2. Creating Trade Facilities: Facilitating trade between the Asian and European regions, this corridor enhances trade and economic exchanges. These facilities, including fast and low-cost goods, logistics services, and customs facilities, are pivotal in speeding up the flow of goods and services between countries, making European markets accessible to India, the Middle East, and Africa and vice versa.

2-3. Development of Industries and Infrastructure: The corridor plays a significant role in the development of industries and infrastructure like ports, transportation routes, railways, and pipelines. These infrastructures are vital for the economic well-being of the areas it traverses, leading to increased trade, foreign investment, and job creation (NEWS, 2023).

2-4. Tourism Development: With its route through regions like Oman and Iran, the corridor holds great potential for tourism. The development of this corridor is expected to boost the number of tourists and generate foreign currency, contributing to the economic well-being of the regions it passes through (Economic Times of India, 1402).

2-5. Development of Natural Resources: Traversing regions rich in natural resources such as oil, natural gas, mines, and water, the corridor facilitates the better exploitation of these resources, significantly impacting the oil trade and its prices in the international market (Economic Times of India, 1402).

2-6. Diversification of Financial Transactions: This corridor aids in diversifying financial transactions in the regions it connects. Establishing financial and banking links between countries is essential for facilitating trade, investment, and international money transfers.

2-7. Impact on Maritime Trade: The corridor has a significant bearing on maritime trade, with direct links to the Oman Sea, Arabian Sea, and Caspian Sea. It serves as a crucial route for sea transport of goods between South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, affecting international shipping.

2-8. Cooperation and Technology Exchange: It opens up opportunities for cooperation and technology exchange among countries, leading to technology transfer, knowledge exchange, and the development of joint projects and ventures.

2-9. Creating Global Supply Chains and Connecting Global Markets: As a major transportation route, the corridor is instrumental in strengthening the global supply chain, connecting major markets in India and Europe and facilitating global trade (NEWS, 2023).

2-10. Impact on Commodity Prices: The corridor significantly influences global commodity prices. For example, the supply of oil from the Middle East to Europe through this corridor can directly impact oil prices in the international market.

2-11. Increasing Regional Cooperation: It enhances regional cooperation, strengthening ties across commercial, economic, technical, cultural, and political fields, thereby aiding the development of the region.

2-12. Reducing Dependence on Other Modes: The corridor reduces the dependence of transit areas on other modes of transportation by providing more direct and shorter routes, enhancing the independence of these transit areas (Nasri, 2023).

3. Security Purposes

3-1. Security Stability of the Region: The India, Middle East, and Europe corridor is pivotal for regional and global stability. It fosters security cooperation by facilitating relations and interactions between countries, thereby aiding in countering threats such as terrorism, illegal trade, and drug trafficking. The project also enhances defense and military capabilities through increased military interactions and technology exchange, contributing significantly to regional and international stability (Geopolitics Aura Asia, 2023).

3-2. Energy Security: Traversing regions rich in oil and natural gas, the corridor aids in diversifying energy sources and reducing reliance on any single source. This enhances energy security for the countries involved and the consumers in Europe.

3-3. Economic Security: The development of the corridor promises economic prosperity and job creation in the regions it connects. By boosting trade and investment, it contributes to economic development and poverty reduction, subsequently reducing violence and security threats at both regional and international levels.

3-4. Geographical Security: Passing through areas with existing tensions and security threats, the corridor's development is key in establishing extensive trade and economic relations. This fosters regional cooperation, aiding in conflict resolution, reducing violence, and enhancing diplomatic relations between countries.

3-5. Transport Security: As a crucial international transport route, the corridor significantly impacts transport security. Modern and safe transportation facilities along the corridor reduce risks and threats associated with international transportation. Furthermore, cooperation in transportation security and combating threats like terrorism and drug trafficking strengthens regional and international security.

3-6. Environmental Security: The corridor plays a vital role in addressing environmental issues regionally and globally. Establishing cooperation in environmental protection, the project facilitates the sustainable development and conservation of natural resources. It enables the exchange of expertise and technical knowledge in environmental protection and natural resource management, enhancing the protection of water resources, forests, deserts, and other environmental elements. Additionally, the corridor aids in the development of green industries and the promotion of renewable resources, thereby reducing fossil fuel usage and improving air quality both regionally and globally (Khani, 1392).

In light of these factors, the India, Middle East, and Europe corridor emerges as a crucial player in environmental issues, contributing effectively to the protection of natural resources and sustainable development.

4. Culture Purposes

The Indian Cultural Corridor from the Middle East to Europe is integral in fostering cultural exchange, developing tourism, enhancing cultural integration, creating educational and research opportunities, and promoting peace and cultural understanding. This corridor serves as a bridge for cooperation between diverse regions, strengthening cultural and social relations.

4-1. Cultural Exchanges: This corridor, spanning from India through the Middle East to Europe, is significant for its role in cultural exchanges. It acts as a cultural route, enhancing connections and mutual understanding between various tribes and communities. The corridor facilitates increased cultural exchange, deepening the understanding of diverse cultures. This contributes to the development of international relations. By establishing international relations and cooperation, the project enables cultural exchanges across different countries and regions. Considering the cultural diversity of these regions, the project significantly contributes to the deepening of cultural ties and exchanges, thereby aiding in the development of international relations. Such exchanges foster cooperation in arts, music, literature, popular culture, and other cultural fields, strengthening relationships between people and communities. This exchange is instrumental in bolstering cultural identity, increasing hope, and fostering mutual understanding among ethnic groups and communities. By familiarizing with different cultures, traditions, and languages, there is an increase in understanding and attention to each other's needs and problems, thereby enhancing social relations, reducing cultural conflicts, and laying the foundation for mutual cooperation in various fields, including education, science and technology, sports, among others (Zahdi, 2023).

4-2. Creation of Educational and Research Opportunities: The corridor also opens avenues for knowledge exchange, education, and cultural research. By fostering cooperation between universities, cultural institutions, and research establishments, it amplifies educational and research opportunities in various disciplines. This significantly contributes to the scientific and cultural development of the regions it connects, elevating the level of knowledge and technology, and cultivating effective human resources.

5. Political Objectives

Understanding the India, Middle East, and Europe corridor necessitates more than just an economic perspective; there are strategic political objectives underpinning this project, including:

Reducing Regional Violence: The corridor is instrumental in mitigating regional violence and resolving conflicts. Through economic and trade cooperation, participating countries can strengthen their economic ties, enhance political relations, and thus alleviate regional tensions.

5-1. Development of Regional Political Exchanges and Relations: This corridor plays a vital role in fostering political exchanges and relations between countries. It establishes international relations and cooperation, thereby facilitating political exchange among various countries and regions. Acknowledging the political diversity of the involved countries, this project contributes to the deepening of political relations and the development of international interactions, enhancing cooperation in political, economic, and security fields (Salami, 2023).

5-2. Strengthening American Influence: This project aims to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative and diminish China's growing influence among Arab countries in the Persian Gulf. It represents an economic alternative provided by the US to bolster its influence in the region and address its concerns regarding China's expanding commercial relationships (Alavi, 2023).

5-3. Affirming US Commitment in the Region: The Joe Biden administration's support for the economic corridor underscores the US commitment to remaining a key player in the region, counteracting the influences of China, Russia, and Iran. The project highlights the strategic importance of the Middle East in terms of global trade waterways, supply chains, and energy resources (BBC, 2023).

5-4. Israel's Integration in the Region: Following the Abraham Accords¹, the US is focusing on normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia in 2023. The economic corridor project is a significant step in this direction, hailed as a transformative cooperative project in the Middle East (NEWS, 2023).

5-5. Isolation of Iran: The US aims to strengthen the partnership between India, Persian Gulf Arab countries, and Israel, thus isolating Iran and preventing its closer ties with India. This includes discouraging Indian investments in Iran's Chabahar port in favor of the Arabian Sea (Zada, 2023).

1 . It was a joint declaration by Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States, which ended on August 13, 2020.

5-6. Enhancing India's Global Position: Investment in this project is set to boost India's economy, create job opportunities, and open international market access. It is projected to reduce transport costs between India and Europe by 40%, positioning India as a significant global economic power (Fatimi, 2022).

5-7. Reaffirming America's International Leadership: This project serves as a testament to America's international leadership, as emphasized by President Biden. It represents a commitment to addressing global challenges and demonstrates a transparent approach, in contrast to the criticized One Belt, One Road project by China (The ambitious rail-sea project to connect India to the Middle East and Europe will be announced at the Group of 20 meeting in 2023).

6. Competition between I-ME-EEC and China (BRI)

The India, Europe, and the Middle East Corridor (I-ME-EEC) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) engage in competition for several reasons:

6-1. Geographical Focus: The I-ME-EEC primarily focuses on Central Asia and the Middle East, while the BRI is more oriented towards East Asia and Eastern Europe. This difference in geographical focus is a fundamental aspect of their competitive nature (Jamshidi, 1399).

6-2. Political and Economic Interests: The two projects also differ in their political and economic objectives. The I-ME-EEC aims to develop the Middle East and India regions, contributing to economic development and peace. In contrast, the BRI seeks to expand and strengthen China's influence in Asian and European regions, contributing to their economic and regional development (Jamshidi, 1399).

Therefore, competition arises due to differences in geographical focus, operational methods, and political and economic interests. However, both initiatives share common goals of fostering economic and regional development and enhancing cooperation between countries, facilitating trade and transportation between Asia and Europe.

The I-ME-EEC is also a strategic response by the United States to challenge China's influence in regions crucial to American interests. Through this project, the U.S. aims to maintain its sphere of influence and present an alternative partnership model to developing countries within the G20 framework.

7. Obstacles and Reactions to the Project

The strategic importance of trade routes in the international system cannot be overstated. They serve not only for commercial purposes but also for political and economic influence. Historically, strategic trade routes have been at the center of global empires' wars. Consequently, the India-Middle East-Europe corridor (I-ME-EEC), being a significant transit project, attracts both supporters and opponents due to its potential impact on existing trade routes.

- Security and Stability Challenges: Ensuring the security and stability of countries involved in the corridor is paramount. The regions it spans are plagued with security threats such as terrorism, tension, and political instability, necessitating robust regional cooperation in defense, security, and information sharing to ensure the corridor's successful operation.

- Complex Geopolitical Dynamics: The corridor traverses geopolitically sensitive areas, presenting a challenge to its execution. This complexity can lead to security and political issues, impacting the feasibility and sustainability of the project.

- Geopolitical Tensions and Diversity in Political Systems: Conflicts such as the India-Pakistan dispute, Saudi-Iranian rivalry, and interventions in Syria and Yemen, coupled with the diversity in political ideologies and systems of member countries, can impede the effective implementation of the project and create divisions among stakeholders (Fatimi, 2022).

7-1. The Gaza War's Impact: The conflict in Gaza, particularly the operation of Al-Aqsa storm² and the Israel-Palestine conflict, casts a significant shadow over the future of the I-ME-EEC. The corridor's success is closely tied to the normalization of relations in the region, which is currently met with skepticism and opposition from the public and the media. Legal harmonization among member countries is crucial for the corridor's functionality.

7-2. Iran's Response: Iran's strategic location, especially its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, poses a potential threat to the corridor. Actions such as sabotage or support for terrorist groups by Iran could jeopardize the security of the corridor.

7-3. Turkey's Stance: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has emphasized Turkey's crucial role in any such corridor, highlighting the country's strategic position and interests in maintaining its influence and economic benefits.

2. Against Israel and for the crimes of the Zionist regime and for the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the military operation of the Hamas forces, which took place on October 15, 2023, in the border area between Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories, started.

7-4. Iraq's Concerns: Iraq's response aligns with its economic and political interests. The corridor's role as an alternative to Iraqi ports could elicit a negative reaction from Iraq due to its significant investments in its ports.

7-5. Russia and Iran's Opposition: The corridor could face opposition from Russia and Iran, as it might challenge the effectiveness of their North-South Corridor³ projects, which have been a focus of their long-term political and economic strategies.

7-6. Egypt's Response: Egypt's strategic location, particularly the Suez Canal, is crucial for international trade. The I-ME-EEC, serving as an alternative route, might threaten Egypt's economic interests and its role in the region. Therefore, it is essential to address Egypt's concerns in the planning and implementation stages of the project (Nasri, 2023).

Egypt is apprehensive about the project's potential to diminish the Suez Canal's⁴ value and reduce its economic and transportation reliance on the canal.

Findings of the Research

The research on the India, Middle East, and Europe Economic Corridor (I-ME-EEC) reveals several key findings:

1. **Economic Impact:** The I-ME-EEC is set to significantly improve economic growth by promoting trade and investment, leading to job market expansion and overall economic development in the participating regions.

2. **Security Enhancements:** The project contributes to regional security and stability by encouraging cooperation among nations, addressing threats like terrorism and regional conflicts.

3. **Cultural Exchange:** The corridor promotes cultural integration and exchange, enhancing understanding and relationships among diverse communities along its route.

4. **Political Cooperation:** The I-ME-EEC enhances political cooperation between South Asia and the Middle East, further deepening their bilateral relations and fostering regional stability.

5. **Infrastructure Development:** The project supports the development of vital infrastructures such as ports, transportation routes, and industrial zones, which are essential for regional growth.

6. **Tourism and Natural Resources:** It opens up opportunities in tourism and the effective utilization of natural resources, contributing to diversified economic activities.

7. **Regional Cooperation:** The project strengthens regional ties, the corridor facilitates cooperation in various fields, including security, economy, culture, and politics.

These findings highlight the diverse and transformative impact of the I-ME-EEC in the regions it covers.

Conclusion

The India, Middle East, and Europe corridor, encompassing nations such as India, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Italy, France, and Germany, emerges as a landmark project with multifaceted implications. Its impact extends beyond economic development, fostering crucial political cooperation between South Asia and the Middle East, and enhancing regional connectivity. This project is instrumental in forging closer relationships among these countries, catalyzing trade and transportation opportunities, stimulating investments, and generating employment.

Reflecting on its geographical and strategic significance, the corridor stands as a pivotal development for both the regional and global landscape. It deepens bilateral relations, augments peace and stability, and fortifies environmental security across these regions. The corridor's role in promoting economic development, facilitating international trade through the creation of commercial facilities, advancing industrial and infrastructural development, bolstering tourism, harnessing natural resources, diversifying financial transactions, and fostering cultural exchanges cannot be overstated.

3. This route is the most important trade link between Asia and Europe; it replaces the 16,000 km of goods transported through the Suez Canal with a 7,000 km route and is 40 percent less in terms of distance than traditional routes. is In terms of time and cost, it is up to 30% cheaper. The North-South Corridor is one of the most important transit routes in Central Asia, and the countries along this corridor form an alliance.

4. The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway in Egypt, 192 kilometers long, that connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.

Strategically, the India-Europe-Middle East Corridor holds immense significance. It not only contributes to regional and economic development but also plays a critical role in the broader geopolitical chessboard. It acts as a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative, underscoring the United States' efforts to strengthen its influence in the region and provide an economic alternative to the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. This project symbolizes Washington's renewed commitment to strategic cooperation with its allies and its initiative to bridge gaps of mistrust in the region. It aims to integrate Israel within the regional framework, strengthen the partnership between Arab countries and Israel, isolate Iran, and boost India's capacity to stand as a counterforce against China.

Despite its substantial economic and strategic advantages, the corridor's implementation faces numerous challenges. These include the varied responses from countries like Turkey, Russia, Iraq, and Egypt, geopolitical tensions, the ongoing Gaza crisis, and the security threats posed by Iran's presence in the region. Each of these factors contributes to the complex tapestry of regional politics and security issues that the project must navigate.

In conclusion, the India, Middle East, and Europe corridor is a project of great strategic importance with the potential to reshape the economic and political landscape of the involved regions. While it promises significant advancements and cooperation, it also confronts a myriad of geopolitical challenges that necessitate careful and strategic handling to realize its full potential.

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