

Title: *“Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC): a comparative analysis of rising commercial and geopolitical strategies”*.

Type of paper: comparative case study about logistics.

Authors:

1. Dr. Alessandro Bonifazi, PhD student at Niccolò Cusano University
alessandrobbonifazi1@pec.it
2. Enrico Ubiali, PhD. Postdoctoral Researcher in Political Science at the University of Bergamo. enrico.ubiali@unibg.it
3. Matteo Vicari, bachelor student in History and Politics at the London School of Economics (LSE). Analyst at the UIS Research Centre, co-founder and vice-president of the LSE War Studies Society. m.vicari@lse.ac.uk
4. Jie Liu, PhD in Sociology, Lecturer and Researcher at School of Foreign Studies, Shandong Technology and Business University, China robin.jie.liu@sdtbu.edu.cn

Abstract.

This study aims to analyze and compare two significant logistical-geopolitical initiatives: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of the People's Republic of China and the western-driven India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). These initiatives highlight the growing intersection between logistics and geopolitical strategy in the modern conflict for global supremacy. The BRI focuses on expanding terrestrial and maritime infrastructure across Asia, Africa, and Europe, aiming to consolidate China's position in these territories. Concurrently, the IMEC seeks to strengthen economic ties between the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and Europe, offering an alternative to the traditional passage through the Suez Canal. Both initiatives share the goal of extending infrastructure networks to facilitate access to European markets and promote economic development in the involved regions, simultaneously enhancing the influence of their respective superpowers. This work will examine key logistical infrastructures, such as strategic ports, maritime routes, railway connections, and major intermodal hubs along both routes. The analysis will reflect on how the logistical competition between China and the United States not only underscores the strategic importance of logistics in current geopolitical dynamics but also reveals how this rivalry is manifested through competing logistical strategies for global dominance.

Keywords: strategic logistics, BRI, IMEC, geopolitics.

Introduction.

Any strategy devoted to strengthening the logic of power encompasses logistics. This is the very fundamental step of any geopolitical challenge, especially if supported by a governmental will. In ancient, modern, and contemporary history, any initiative to foster commerce has sparked synergies or contrasts among countries (Rutner et al, 2012). This is not only a matter of profits but also of prestige: when private or public companies have the chance to gain market shares or propose their products, the export country can benefit from a higher recognition and reputation (Roscoe et al., 2022). Additionally, when such supplies are considered providential, they strengthen the relationship among the parties. It can happen at the individual level and at the aggregate level (Neilson, 2012). This last case is the most crucial one, involving big companies and states. The spread of commerce has always been an occasion of interaction among different people, not only sharing products but also knowledge and experiences. The stereotyped role of the merchant characterized the collective imaginary, perfectly embodied by Marco Polo (1254 -1324). Despite not having been the first European that reached China, he bore witness to his travels, embracing also the role of ambassador and writer. His very well-detailed testimony became a crucial piece of literature entitled “The Million – book of the marvels of the world”, co-authored by Rustichello da Pisa. The interest around this book not only encompassed an exotic narrative, but also a proactive interaction with foreign cultures. More specifically, Marco Polo’s travel towards the Asian continent became an occasion of trade, contact and, finally, diplomatic stature. For this reason, “The Million” inspired the ideas and the values of any structured routes (Jackson, 1998).

Outside the narration, any explorer paved the way for tracking itineraries that, later, assumed multiple purposes. In any case, such efforts boosted any ambitious logistic process. Any empire structured its power also on paths devoted to facilitating the mobility of its army and its businesses (Kehne, 2007). The Romans began the traditions of giving a name to their principal roads, and even nowadays such a denomination survives. This political decision of naming their streets allowed to facilitate their identification, strengthening the identity of the territory and sending an indirect message to the foreigners: any named infrastructure follows a ‘projectability’, immediately identifiable as the Romans’ willingness to manifest their imperial vision. Using a business terminology, it was like to a sort of “brand identity” ante litteram (Roth, 1999; Tichelaar, 2002).

This preamble aims to demonstrate how logistics shapes the overall image of a country, not only economically but also sociologically. Any ambitious logistic project faces multiple phases, each one driven by apparently fruitful (or even hegemonic) purposes.

Coming back to contemporaneity, the overall mentality behind structured logistic infrastructure and their interconnections additionally shapes partnerships and alliances (Nuseva et Al, 2023). This is even more manifested when physical and technological aspects blend, with a special reference to artificial intelligence (Richey et Al., 2023). Actually, this age is characterized by multiple contemporary challenges that coexist, especially when huge investments are declared and made concrete. The huge investments behind BRI and IMEC are a matter of mutual trust among the involved players and investors. Surely, it is a matter of finance but also a matter of policy. The overall idea of building harbors, roads, bridges, and their associated infrastructures requires investors to have a clear long-term vision. This is not a new imperialistic logic but can be simultaneously an opportunity and a threat to the countries involved. The economic potentialities behind the BRI and the IMEC’s

plans could, in parallel, launch new forms of path dependence: not only a commercial dependence but also a political one. This risk does not affect the state partners in both initiatives; nevertheless, it will surely condition further interlocations. In the post-covid era, when the global value chains are put under discussion under the frameworks of “nearshoring” and “reshoring”, being part of a huge infrastructure route means a choice of fields for the involved parties (Akbari, 2024). This is the reason behind the comparison between BRI and IMEC, opening a debate on the major ongoing commercial and geopolitical challenges.

2. Part 1: The Belt and Road Initiative (B.R.I)

2.2 Descriptive Section

The Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the New Silk Road or One Belt One Road, is a strategic endeavor announced in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The primary objective of the BRI is to strengthen trade links with countries across Eurasia and Africa, acting as a countermeasure to the American naval containment strategy in the India-Middle East-Europe region, which poses a significant vulnerability for China (Bonifazi, 2024).

The contemporary global scenario is complex and difficult to interpret. Geopolitical analysts need broad knowledge to navigate different sectors, and logistics operators, who are the backbone of global trade, must have a holistic understanding of geopolitical dynamics. International balances are increasingly attentive to Beijing's maneuvers: on one hand, the Taiwanese elections on January 13, 2024, confirmed the pro-American stance of the voters with the victory of the Democratic Progressive Party candidate Lai Ching-te; on the other hand, the crisis in the Red Sea triggered by the Houthi rebels is hindering the access of Chinese merchant ships to the Mediterranean and thus to European markets. Both events impact the logistics sphere of the People's Republic of China (中国大陆 Zhōng Guó Dà Lù), affecting its maritime autonomy and forcing China to look inland along the railway route characterizing the BRI (Bonifazi, 2024).

Consequently, China has redirected its focus towards developing land routes. In both logistics and geopolitics, the maritime sector plays a pivotal role in global dynamics. As Lucio Caracciolo asserts, “controlling the seas equates to controlling the world” (Caracciolo, 2022). Similarly, Dario Fabbri highlights that “great civilizations which dared to conquer the seas achieved thalassocracy—a feat accomplished by ancient Rome after its victory over Carthage in the Punic Wars, leading to dominance over the Mediterranean, as well as by England and the United States” (Fabbri, 2023). In contrast, China is fundamentally a land power. The reliance on critical maritime chokepoints for the passage of Chinese merchant ships has compelled China to seek alternative solutions (Fabbri, 2023).

One such chokepoint is the Strait of Malacca between Malaysia and Indonesia, controlled by the USA and its allies. To circumvent this obstacle, China has forged alliances and developed inland routes through satellite countries. This initiative encompasses land routes such as pipelines, roads, and railways, alongside maritime routes facilitated by the development of ports in countries with which China has established international relations. These routes connect China with its partners in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. In 2015, the Digital Silk Road was launched, emphasizing

Chinese influence in the digital sphere from e-commerce to telecommunications. During the pandemic crisis, another route was established: The Health Silk Road. Given its extensive scope, the Belt and Road Initiative encompasses over 60 countries, representing approximately 65% of the world's population and 40% of global GDP. China negotiates agreements with these countries, offering resources and logistical infrastructures they lack. These agreements are supported by loans, which are often repayable in exchange for access to markets and the use of strategic structures such as ports, facilitating China's geopolitical rise. Notably, China commits to respecting the cardinal principle of non-interference in the internal politics of other countries (Colarizi, 2022).

2.3 Analytical Section

The BRI offers significant advantages, including enhanced economic connectivity, improved logistics, access to resources, economic growth, cultural and academic cooperation, and political stability. However, it also faces several challenges such as increased sovereign debt, environmental impact, lack of transparency, threats to national sovereignty, geopolitical conflicts, and concerns about the quality of infrastructure. Italy, for example, was the only G7 country to join the BRI but then withdrew from the New Silk Road, announcing its intention not to extend the memorandum signed in 2019 beyond its expiration in 2024. Key infrastructures of the New Silk Road include railways, ports, economic corridors, and pipelines. The railways directly connect China to Europe through Central Asia, providing a significant land route for goods transport. This improves regional connectivity and promotes economic development along the railway route, offering an alternative to traditional maritime routes, thus reducing transit times and increasing long-distance freight transport efficiency (Fang, 2023).

Notable railway projects include Chinese high-speed railways, the Trans-Siberian Railway, the Trans-Carpathian Railway, and various Central Asian railways. Ports are crucial hubs in the BRI, providing essential access points to global markets and enabling the transportation of goods by sea to destinations worldwide. Maritime transport is one of the most efficient and economical ways to transport large quantities of goods over long distances, reducing transit times and transport costs. Ports also serve as intermodal connections between maritime transport and other modes such as railways, roads, and pipelines. Significant ports in the BRI include Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Piraeus Port in Greece, Colombo Port in Sri Lanka, Djibouti Port, Lamu Port in Kenya, Chittagong Port in Bangladesh, Mombasa Port in Kenya, and Lomé Port in Togo. Economic corridors in the BRI facilitate the development of transport and logistics infrastructures connecting various regions and countries along the Silk Roads. Notable economic corridors include the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, the New Eurasian Land Bridge, the China-Middle East-Southwest Asia Economic Corridor, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor. Pipelines are crucial for ensuring the circulation of oil and natural gas, contributing to infrastructural development and regional economic integration. Significant pipelines include the Kazakhstan-China Petroleum Corridor, the Turkmenistan-China Gas Corridor, the Russia-China Petroleum Corridor, the Myanmar-China Gas Corridor, and the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey Petroleum Corridor (Bonifazi, 2024)

The BRI's strategic significance extends beyond economic connectivity. It serves as a tool for China to expand its geopolitical influence by fostering dependency through infrastructure development. The

strategic placement of ports and the construction of railways and pipelines enhance China's leverage over participating countries, potentially reshaping global power dynamics. The Digital Silk Road initiative is a testament to China's ambition to lead the global technological landscape (Shaobin, 2024).

By promoting digital infrastructure, China aims to dominate e-commerce, telecommunication, and digital services. The Health Silk Road, introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores China's commitment to global health governance, providing medical supplies and technology to BRI countries, thereby strengthening diplomatic ties. The BRI has the potential to significantly boost the economies of participating countries by creating new trade routes, reducing transport costs, and enhancing access to international markets. The development of infrastructure such as high-speed railways and ports not only facilitates trade but also attracts foreign investment, stimulates local economies, and creates jobs (Chan, 2024).

Despite its potential benefits, the BRI faces several criticisms. The increasing sovereign debt of participating countries raises concerns about debt sustainability and economic sovereignty. Environmentalists highlight the potential ecological damage caused by large-scale infrastructure projects. Additionally, the lack of transparency in project financing and execution has led to accusations of corruption and mismanagement. Geopolitical tensions also arise as the BRI's expansion is perceived as a challenge to the influence of other major powers, particularly the United States and the European Union. The future of the BRI hinges on its ability to adapt to evolving global economic and political landscapes. Success will depend on China's commitment to addressing the criticisms and challenges associated with the initiative, fostering genuine partnerships with participating countries, and ensuring that the benefits of the BRI are equitably distributed. As the BRI continues to evolve, it has the potential to redefine international trade and diplomacy, positioning China as a central player in global affairs. In conclusion, the Belt and Road Initiative represents a monumental effort by China to reshape global trade routes and strengthen its geopolitical standing. The initiative's extensive network of infrastructure projects, including railways, ports, economic corridors, and pipelines, highlights the strategic importance of logistics in contemporary geopolitics. While the BRI offers significant economic benefits and opportunities for cultural exchange, it also faces considerable challenges related to debt sustainability, environmental impact, and geopolitical tensions. The success of the BRI will largely depend on China's ability to address these challenges and foster mutually beneficial relationships with participating countries. As the global landscape continues to evolve, the BRI remains a key driver of China's ambition to cement its position as a leading global power (Oberhouser, 2024).

3. Part 2: The India - Middle East - Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is a proposed economic initiative designed to enhance economic development through improved connectivity and integration between Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Europe. IMEC exemplifies the interconnection between logistics and geopolitics and showcases how superpowers, middle powers, and smaller powers interact with these intertwined elements, impacting their relationships.

The following section will first describe the IMEC corridor, its origins, its economic and geopolitical features, and potential effects. Then, it will focus on the analytical aspect by investigating potential opportunities and challenges of the project and highlighting future possibilities to assess whether IMEC can provide a new template for global connectivity and trade facilitation.

Before proceeding, it is essential to outline some methodological premises. Unlike the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), IMEC is a newly established project without a detailed funding plan or next steps presented by the participating countries. Therefore, the considerations in the following section are based on current literature, which offers economic predictions rather than empirical data. Moreover, as IMEC cannot be solely categorized as a Western-led initiative (Gili, 2024), this essay seeks to move beyond the Western-centric approach prevalent in current literature to encompass diverse perspectives on the potentialities and challenges of the IMEC corridor.

3.2 Descriptive Section

IMEC is an ambitious economic initiative designed to enhance economic development through improved connectivity and integration between Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Europe. This corridor aims to establish a logistical route from India to Europe, passing through key countries including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Greece. On September 10, 2023, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed during the 2023 G20 Summit in New Delhi by the governments of India, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, and the European Union (The White House, Memorandum of Understanding on the Principles of an India - Middle East - Europe Economic Corridor, 2023).

Historically, IMEC emerges from the convergence of various international projects and strategic initiatives. These include the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) by the G7, the Global Gateway by the EU, the International Solar Alliance by India, and other US-led efforts. The PGII, established in 2022 by the G7 with a budget of \$600 billion, and the EU's Global Gateway, with a budget of €300 billion for infrastructure investments from 2021 to 2027, form the economic backbone of IMEC (Basso and Mazza, 2023). These projects aim to meet the high demand for infrastructure in the Global South and counter Beijing's strategic expansionism. However, non-Western initiatives, which partially influenced IMEC, should not be underestimated. The Indian-led International Solar Alliance, for example, provides the background for the technological and energy connectivity sponsored by IMEC (Gili, 2024). Furthermore, transport connectivity conceived by IMEC heavily relies on previously envisioned railway connections designed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Rizzi, 2024). Consequently, IMEC represents the joint effort of different powers with various strategic interests coming together for a shared objective: enhancing connectivity.

From a structural standpoint, IMEC is organized around two main corridors: the Eastern Corridor and the Northern Corridor. The Eastern Corridor connects India to the Arabian Gulf, with ships from the Indian ports of Mumbai and Gujarat sailing to the Emirati ports of Jebel Ali and Fujairah. The Northern Corridor links the Arabian Gulf to Europe, connecting the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel via railways. From the Israeli port of Haifa, ships will sail to European ports such as Piraeus, Gioia Tauro, and Genoa. This network includes a railway system that, once completed, will provide a cross-border ship-rail transit network, complementing existing maritime and road transport routes. This infrastructure will facilitate the movement of goods and services between India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Europe (Suri et al., 2024).

IMEC's connectivity plan encompasses three primary areas: transportation, digital connectivity, and energy. The transportation network includes both maritime and rail routes. Key maritime infrastructures, such as ports in Mumbai, Jebel Ali, and Fujairah, are well-established, providing robust support for the corridor. However, the railway links, especially those connecting Jordan and Israel, present challenges. IMEC's priority is to establish conducive policies and regulatory frameworks to ensure a thriving transportation corridor (Basirat, 2024). Once fully operational, the corridor is expected to reduce transportation costs and times significantly. According to Ursula von der Leyen, the project could make trade between India and Europe 40% faster, especially thanks to the high-speed trains in the Arabian Peninsula (European Commission, State of the Union, 2023).

IMEC also focuses on enhancing digital connectivity through the development of an undersea data cable, a telecommunications network, and digital payment ecosystems (Suri et al., 2024). Establishing this digital infrastructure faces challenges, especially with the geopolitical fault lines in West Asia. However, mutual trade and technology imperatives could accelerate the process. The project aims to counter the dominance of Chinese companies under the Digital Silk Road (DSR) and position India prominently in this emerging digital landscape (Ain et al., 2024).

Energy is the last crucial component of IMEC, with a focus on interconnected grids and green hydrogen pipelines. This emphasis on renewable energy aims to facilitate an ambitious and equitable energy transition, addressing bottlenecks such as the Bab al-Mandeb Strait and the Suez Canal that could hinder progress. Hence, the announcement of IMEC also marks an essential step toward creating a green transit corridor linking Asia and Europe (Siddiqa, 2023).

A crucial part of describing IMEC is investigating its several actors and their logistical and geopolitical interests. India participates in the IMEC corridor for both economic and geopolitical reasons, which are often intertwined. Logistically, New Delhi aims to boost exports and establish itself as a major international trade hub (Subburayan, 2023). IMEC provides India with logistical alternatives to routes passing through Pakistan, a historical adversary, and allows New Delhi to counter the Chinese presence in the Indian subcontinent, which has been strengthened by Pakistan's joining of the BRI. Additionally, India has witnessed a decrease in trade along another vital route: the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Sanctions on Iran and Russia, two pillars of this route, have contributed to this decline. IMEC offers a strategically viable alternative to mitigate these losses and enhance India's role in global trade networks (Johny, 2023).

Middle Eastern countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, also have economic and geopolitical interests at stake. IMEC supports economic diversification efforts, particularly for Saudi

Arabia's Vision 2030. The corridor could enhance the Gulf countries' positions as central hubs in global trade by avoiding several chokepoints such as the Bab al-Mandeb Strait and potentially the Hormuz Strait. This aligns with their geopolitical strategies, as both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have strengthened ties with Beijing in various areas, including logistics, security, and construction. Their participation in IMEC could be seen as a tactical move to diversify their strategies, gaining more autonomy by balancing relationships with India's booming economy and the West (Cafiero, 2023). Furthermore, IMEC is regarded as an essential economic pillar of the Abraham Accords, which are currently stalled (Basak and Soltanieh, 2024).

The United States views the IMEC corridor as vital for American economic and geopolitical interests. The corridor supports US efforts to de-risk supply chains and secure access to critical raw materials. Washington also supports IMEC to reassure Middle Eastern allies and counter China's BRI. IMEC integrates Middle Eastern and South Asian partners into a unified geo-economic framework, enhancing US geopolitical influence in the region (Monroe, 2023).

The European Union also considers IMEC strategic for economic and geopolitical aims. IMEC fosters economic connectivity, sustainability, and inclusivity, key goals of the Global Gateway. It is also crucial for the EU's de-risking geo-economic strategy, especially as traditional trade routes are either virtually frozen (such as the Northern Corridor with Russia) or overloaded with goods (such as the Central Corridor) (Das, 2024).

Overall, IMEC is expected to have significant economic and geopolitical impacts. By improving connectivity and potentially reducing trade barriers, it aims to make the movement of goods more efficient, reducing transportation costs and times. The development of new infrastructure will create job opportunities and foster economic growth in the participating regions. The emphasis on green hydrogen pipelines and renewable energy aligns with global sustainability goals, contributing to energy security and reducing dependence on fossil fuels. The corridor is projected to increase trade efficiency, with estimates suggesting a 40% reduction in time and a 30% cut in transit costs for goods moving from Mumbai to Europe (Monroe, 2023).

IMEC enhances the geopolitical influence of the participating countries by providing a counterbalance to China's BRI. The corridor allows these countries to assert their strategic importance in the global economic landscape. The project will strengthen geopolitical ties between the participating countries, fostering cooperation and collaboration, contributing to regional stability and security. IMEC enhances the strategic importance of the Middle East as a global trade hub, boosting the geopolitical standing of countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This strategic positioning will attract investments and promote economic development. However, it is crucial to note that IMEC is not solely a Western-led initiative. Middle Eastern countries and India have their interests, and the project's outcomes will likely reflect their strategies as well (Rajagopalan, 2023).

3.3 Analytical Section

This section analyzes the interdependencies, logistical and geopolitical advantages and disadvantages, and recent developments affecting IMEC's finalization, economic sustainability, and financial and geopolitical viability.

IMEC has several logistical advantages. It aims to improve the efficiency of goods movement, reducing transit times and costs. Additionally, the project includes significant investments in ports, railways, digital infrastructure, and energy pipelines, which are expected to stimulate economic growth and create job opportunities in the participating regions. IMEC's comprehensive plan includes undersea data cables and pipelines for green hydrogen, aiming to enhance digital connectivity and create a sustainable energy market (Gili, 2024).

However, there are significant logistical disadvantages. The complex nature of IMEC means that it will be costly to implement, and securing funding from both public and private investors is essential but challenging. Establishing conducive policies and regulatory frameworks for a thriving transportation corridor is complex, particularly given the economic rivalries in the region. The Middle East is one of the least integrated regions regarding regulations and tariffs. Regional conflicts and political instability can disrupt the project's progress, as seen with the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Yemen (Rossi, 2024). These tensions have delayed crucial meetings and discussions necessary for IMEC's development. The G20 statement indicated that a series of meetings would be held within 60 days, but no meeting has been summoned due to ongoing tensions (Alhasan and Solanki, 2023).

Geopolitically, IMEC offers several advantages. It provides a significant counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), enabling participating countries to assert their strategic importance in the global economic landscape. The corridor fosters geopolitical ties between participating countries, enhancing regional stability and security. By offering alternative routes to the traditional Suez Canal, IMEC can enhance the strategic importance of the Middle East as a global trade hub, attracting investments and promoting economic development (Cafiero, 2023).

However, there are geopolitical disadvantages. The multi-aligned foreign policies of GCC states and their deepening relationships with China suggest that IMEC may not significantly shift the geo-economic balance away from China. For instance, China has brokered a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, acquiring substantial diplomatic influence in the region (Gili, 2024). The involvement of countries with existing geopolitical tensions, such as Israel and its neighboring states, adds complexity to IMEC's implementation (Kaddorah, 2024). Internal conflicts within the GCC, such as the financial clash between Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Said et al., 2023), and external geopolitical tensions, such as Turkish opposition to the project, pose significant risks to IMEC's success (Samson, 2023).

IMEC's economic sustainability hinges on proving its economic efficiency, which may be achieved through the signing of a free trade agreement between the partners, such as the EU-India Free Trade Agreement, which is currently being negotiated (Das, 2024). The corridor needs to be economically viable to justify the significant investments required. The economically prosperous Middle-Eastern countries involved can decisively contribute to the project, reducing reliance on foreign investments. The Abraham Accords have facilitated political and economic normalization, particularly between

the UAE and Israel (Basak and Soltanieh, 2024). However, on the financial front, stability can only be achieved through de-risking mechanisms, which are yet to be implemented. Ensuring financial and strategic stability is critical to attracting the necessary investments (Gili, 2024).

Despite the challenges linked to ongoing geopolitical tensions, efforts to advance IMEC continue, with India actively engaging with other participant countries, namely France and the US, to ensure the project's success (Rossi, 2024). India has been particularly proactive, organizing meetings with key stakeholders, such as the Greek Prime Minister and the US Senior National Security Advisor, and seeking to strengthen its strategic partnerships (Rizzi, 2024). The involvement of European countries and the United States has also been crucial in maintaining momentum for the project. However, geopolitical tensions and regional conflicts remain significant challenges that need to be addressed.

4. Conclusion

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent yet unstable international system, competition extends across all political and economic domains, with connectivity and economic links emerging as critical arenas. Major powers are vying to establish connections with other countries, seeking to gain influence through investment and development projects. Ports, energy plants, railways, and pipelines are high on the wish lists of developing countries. Those who can deliver these infrastructures are poised to gain significant political leverage. Additionally, logistic activism helps forge links between diverse powers, mitigating the risks of extreme fragmentation. It is precisely in this context that logistics and geopolitics become intertwined in a mutually reinforcing process, with the former serving the latter and the latter being influenced by the former.

As previously described, BRI has the potential to enhance economic connectivity across Asia, Africa, and Europe and serves as a powerful tool for China enabling it to expand its influence through strategic infrastructure investments, fostering economic dependencies and reshaping international trade dynamics in order to enhance its global hegemony and standing. However, the question remains whether economic benefits will outweigh the primary geopolitical tensions and debt burdens faced by the participating countries, and how these challenges will shape the future balance of power in the global arena.

Similarly, IMEC represents a significant geopolitical and logistical initiative with the potential to enhance economic connectivity between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. While the project faces numerous challenges, including political complexities, financial sustainability, and geopolitical tensions, its potential benefits in terms of economic growth, energy sustainability, and strategic influence are substantial. The ultimate question remains whether strategic calculations will actually play into the hands of the West or serve different purposes, not always Western-oriented.

In both cases, policymakers and stakeholders projected the roots in a logic of excellence, not only from a commercial perspective but also from a strategic one. The rivalry among powers aims at reaching also geopolitical goals, strengthening the presence of the involved actors in the largest possible area. Moreover, this additionally emerges in this “age of complexities”, especially after the pandemic and the spread of the ongoing tensions. The way in which the global value chains are rethought will guarantee prosperity and further political influence for the winning political and economic stakeholders. Such common logistic projects are expected to enhance the relations of the respective involved countries, calling for the continuation of their synergistic relations to face the current global competition.

4.1. Further research avenues

Future research should focus on monitoring both projects’ progresses, evaluating their economic impacts, and analysing the evolving geopolitical dynamics among the participating countries. Additionally, examining the long-term sustainability of both the BRI and the IMEC, considering the financial, environmental, and geopolitical factors, will be crucial. Furthermore, understanding the potential implications of these initiatives for diverse countries such as Pakistan and Greece (in the case of the BRI) and Saudi Arabia and India (in the case of IMEC) will be critical areas for further study.

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