

ANALYSIS OF THE DYNAMICS OF THE TRADE CORRIDORS, THE CONFLICT BETWEEN GAZA AND ISRAEL AND THE ROLE OF TURKEY AS AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Trade is one of the most important elements of economic growth and change. The development of civilisation has been linked to trade and trade routes. The Silk Road, which developed in the 2nd century BC, is the source of commercial, cultural and social communication between East and West. The Fur and Spice Roads, which ran parallel to the Silk Road, served a similar purpose. The Silk Road, which officially ended in 1453 with the discovery of new sea routes, marked the end of an era.

The geographical regions reached by long sea voyages made maritime transport more important. In 2013, the concept of the Silk Road Economic Belt heralded a new beginning. If the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project is followed by the IMEC project and the Trans-Africa projects in general, we see that the world has entered an era of corridors with more technological and faster means of transport. Countries located near these corridors want to be part of the project. In this study, the aforementioned corridors and IMEC in particular will be highlighted, threats such as the Israel-Gaza conflict will be discussed and the discussion will be clarified within the framework of alternative routes on the axis of Türkiye.

Keywords: Silk Road, IMEC, BRI, Trans Africa, Türkiye, Hamas-Israel Conflict

1. Introduction

This study discusses trade routes from the past to the present, their political, social and economic characteristics and importance, and examines the trade corridors that have been initiated, are at the project stage and have been partially realised. In this context, the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative), IMEC (India Middle East, Europe Corridor) and Trans-Africa projects and their significance are examined.

The historical Silk Road is analysed in terms of its characteristics and effects in the historical process, and the historical dimension is completed with the adventure of geographical discoveries. In the following sections, the characteristics of the BRI, IMEC and Trans-Africa projects are critically analysed in the context of reciprocity and complementarity.

The IMEC corridor is analysed in the context of the recent and worsening Hamas-Israel conflict, which is expected to deepen and widen, and the IMEC route is interpreted.

The final chapter discusses the place and role of Türkiye, which has recently emerged as a global power, in the IMEC equation. Türkiye has facilitated access to the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and Europe with its recent investments in railways, roads and tunnels. In addition, the planned "development road" with Iraq, expected to be operational in 2025, will link Türkiye to the Persian Gulf by rail and road. The Zengezur Corridor, which aims to provide a direct link to Central Asia, is expected to be completed in 2024. The Zengezur Corridor includes investments in energy lines, railways and roads.

2. Historical Silk Road Establishment and Developments

*"There Are Two Big Roads
in The Universe. The Milky Way in
The Sky and The Silk Road on Earth."
Uzbek Proverb*

Throughout history, developments and events have taken place around the 'critical matter' of the time. These developments and events occur on the axis of the critical matter in question, either as cause or effect, or both cause and effect, and are largely based on economic reasons. The fact that the first civilisations were established in areas suitable for agriculture in river valleys made these regions important in the transition to sedentary life. At that time, rich agricultural areas could be defined as critical material. As civilisations developed and trade increased, trade routes became more important. The Silk Road is one of the most important of these routes. It was very important for states to have a say in the Silk Road or this route. The route of the caravans passing through the country's territory was one of the most important economic, social and cultural issues of the time. Ensuring the safety of the roads used by the caravanserais, providing accommodation for the traders and building bridges on the roads were all aimed at having a say in this critical material. Just as energy, energy security and energy transport are critical today, the Fur Road, the Spice Road, the Silk Road and the secondary roads connecting them were critical then.

The extensive trade routes of the Silk Road were about much more than the movement of goods. The mobility and mixing of populations had a profound effect on Eurasian societies, enabling the widespread transmission of ideas, science, culture and beliefs. Along these routes, trade and cultural exchange drew travellers to cities that became centres of culture, civilisation and learning. Along these long routes, crafts, technology and literature were shared between societies; languages, religions and cultures began to influence each other (UNESCO, 2023). The ancient Silk Road is one of the most important trade routes in the world, stretching from China to Europe with a length of 10,000 km. Türkiye has become a bridge on the route of the Silk Road by connecting this road from Asia to Europe. The caravansaries on the Silk Road were stopovers and they were the heart of trade in the cities (Tüğen, 2019: 634). Cities such as Nishapur, Merv, Balkh, Herat, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khwarizm, Tus and Termez came to the fore with their political, economic and scientific characteristics. The cities of Khorasan and Turkestan were built on the main roads connecting Iran, China, India and Europe. These cities were home to many philosophers, thinkers and scientists who shaped history.

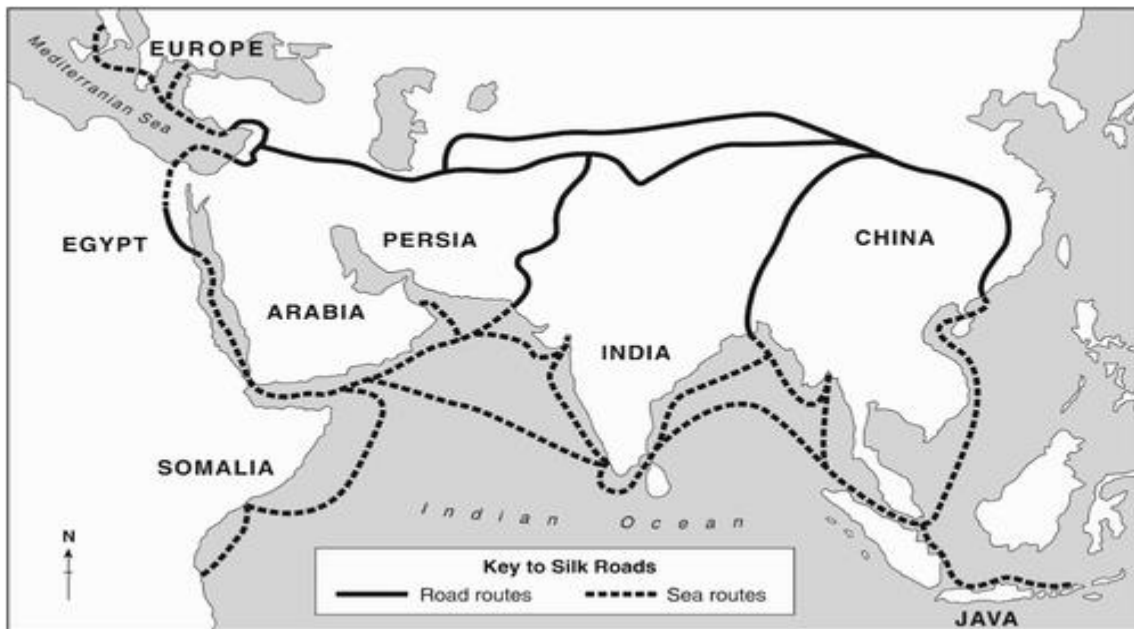


Figure 1. Ancient Silk Roads Sea Routes and Road Routes

Source: Akiner (2011).

The road from Trabzon north to Persia later (in the 13th century) became the main route for Europeans to reach Asia. Caravans of thousands of horses, camels and mules passed through Erzurum

(Gordlevski, 1988: 213-214). Very large caravans or smaller caravans carried not only trade goods but also culture and way of life. The caravans chose times of the year when the seasons and natural conditions were favourable, taking into account the nutritional possibilities of the animals used for transport and riding in the caravan.

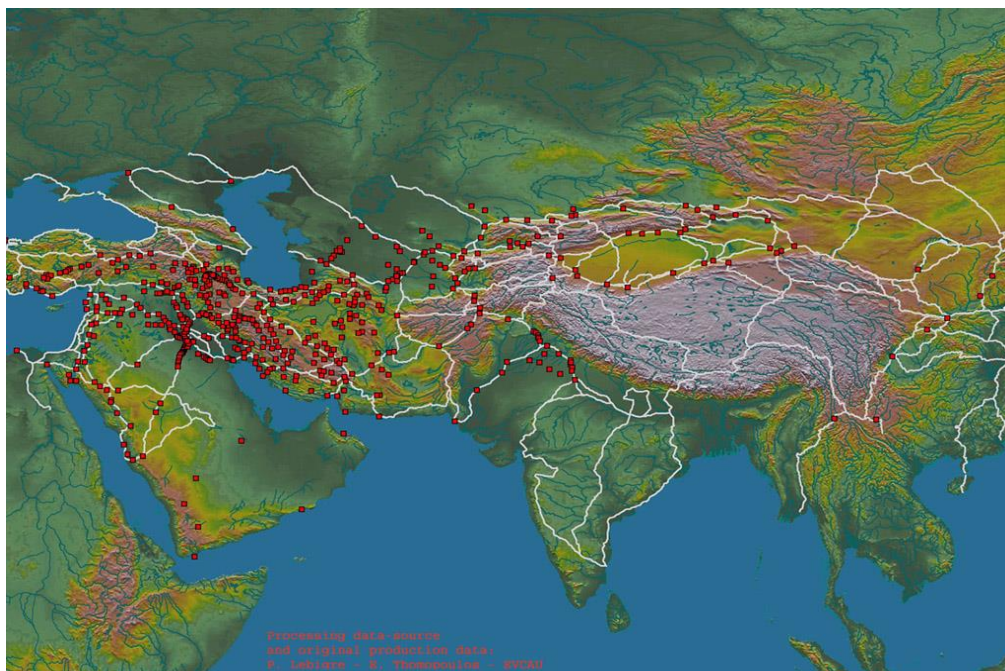


Figure 2. Silk Road Route and Caravanserais Location

Source: <https://www.unesco.org/culture/dialogue/eastwest/caravan/countries.htm>

Meeting the accommodation needs of caravans was as important as ensuring their safety. States built caravanserais where caravans could stay (usually) free of charge in return for caravans using their territory. These caravanserais were important both for safe overnight accommodation. They were also places of cultural exchange for travellers from different regions. Figure 2: Looking at the Silk Road route and the location of the caravanserais, a large number of caravanserais in close proximity to each other stand out. Considering that caravanserais travelled 30-40 km per day, this is a normal situation.

"Most of the caravanserais built outside the cities between 8-10 hours of camel trekking were free of charge. Merchants and travellers were hosted here and all their needs were met. For the people staying there, the caravanserai was not only a place where they could stay overnight, but also a fortress where they could stay in safety and keep their lives and property safe. In addition, these buildings were also a place of cultural cohesion for people from different countries. People from different religions, traditions, and customs would get to know each other here and exchange ideas about countries they did not know. In caravanserais, which were free of charge, the rooms were usually without doors. Incoming guests would stay here for short periods. To take precautions against theft, the doors would be closed after the evening prayer and reopened in the morning after all caravanners had checked their goods. If anything was stolen, the gates would not be opened until it was found. In later periods, caravanserais built on behalf of individuals became places where more detailed services were provided and operated with today's business logic, which is subject to a fee" (Tüğen, 2019: 636-637).

There are also external factors that influence the routes. It can be said that the Ottoman sultans made special efforts to direct important trade routes to their capitals (first to Bursa and then to Istanbul). Sultans and high-ranking state officials built foundation inns and caravanserais, and established lodges and ranges to ensure comfortable and safe travel on the main roads. Before the Ottomans, the

Seljuks had built many caravanserais (Turan, 1946). The Ottomans preserved these caravanserais and increased their number (Koloğlu, 2002). The Ottomans also improved the transport infrastructure by building bridges, wells, fountains and masjids along the main roads. In the absence of a gendarmerie or police force as we know it today, they tried to ensure the safety of the roads and passages by means of curbs. A village located at the crossroads of commercial and military roads, bridges and river crossings, and deserted and dangerous places crossed by mountains was assigned to guard (Alkan, 2006: 143).

Towards the end of the 15th century, with the geographical discoveries and the discovery of new routes, maritime transport became more important, which caused the Silk Road to lose its importance. As a result of this event, the cities along the road became isolated and the caravanserais were gradually abandoned (Tüngen, 2019:635).

The conquest of Constantinople, together with the collapse of the Eastern Roman Empire, led to a new quest in the "New Age" and European sailors embarked on long voyages to the oceans. The Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias discovered the Cape of Good Hope (Cabo das Tormentas) in 1488. This increased the importance of the sea route and led to new searches. Another Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, crossed the Cape of Good Hope in 1497-98 and reached India by sea. Subsequent voyages and companies began to cover the entire Far East with more and more ships, bringing the wealth of the East to Europe. This commercial mentality led to the reign of mercantilism, which led to the accumulation of wealth throughout Europe and lasted for three centuries.

"In 1602, the Netherlands established a company called the East India Company. The Dutch administration gave this company-wide powers such as trading in the entire region between the Cape of Good Hope and the Strait of Magellan, engaging in military activities, waging war and building fortresses. As can be seen, the process of the Netherlands' initiation of geographical discoveries was mainly carried out through a commercially based and professional company, and also had a colonialist character. This process initiated by the Netherlands through a company became a model for England in the following period. In the first half of the 17th century, the Dutch made discoveries in the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean. (Uluerler, 2018: 70).

2.1. BRI: "Promote People-to-People Friendship and Create a Better Future"

"Creating a better future" is the declaration of a new formation and a new initiative. Chinese President Xi Jinping's (toronto.china-consulate.gov.cn: accessing: 31.10.2023) speech under this heading on his trip to Kazakhstan on 7 September 2013 is a statement for closer relations with immediate neighbours, but it also hints at the Silk Road Belt that will extend inland Asia and into Europe.

Since Xi Jinping became leader, China's foreign policy has shifted from risk-averse caution to optimistic 'dreaming' of a better world in which China has regained its rightful place. One Chinese commentator has suggested that China should convene a summit of all the countries that have agreed to participate in the BRI to press for broader changes in global governance as well (Ferdinand, 2016: 955).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) development strategy aims to build connectivity and cooperation across six major economic corridors, encompassing China and: Mongolia and Russia; Eurasian countries; Central and West Asia; Pakistan; other countries of the Indian subcontinent; and Indochina. Asia needs USD 26 trillion in infrastructure investment by 2030, and China can certainly help provide some of it. Its investment in building infrastructure has a positive impact on the countries involved. Mutual benefit is a feature of the BRI, which will also help develop markets for China's products in the long term and reduce industrial overcapacity in the short term. The BRI prioritises hardware (infrastructure) and financing first (OECD; 2018: 46).

While this investment, which will allow China to make radical changes in global change, is at the forefront, it is curious to see how the global powers outside this plan will react. Perhaps IMEC is the name of this reciprocity.

3. Trans-Africa Project

Africa has suffered much more than other mainland countries from the high costs of inadequate infrastructure. This problem is preventing Africa from moving forward on the path of development, despite its rich underground and surface resources. Projects such as the Trans-African Highway could be a very important source of development for this great continent. The wealth of natural resources has become a "curse" rather than a wealth for Africa. Therefore, investments should be very well planned and targeted.

The Trans-African Highway, an overland route linking African countries, is one of the greatest projects of our time. It starts in Cairo, Egypt and goes through Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa. The motorway is about 60,000 km long and passes through at least 18 countries. The Trans Africa Highway is recognised as an important route for trade goods. The main focus of this route is to improve economic growth in all countries involved by providing new opportunities for trade along the route (www.transportafrica.org, accessed: 05.11.2023). Cross-border road corridors play a crucial role in supporting Africa's regional economic integration. They improve transport links between neighbouring countries and provide landlocked countries with access to seaports (AfDP; 2019) Despite having the world's richest underground and surface resources, Africa has not been able to turn this positive situation to its advantage. Exposure to colonialism, poor governance and military coups, the "resource curse" (also known as the paradox of plenty or the paradox of poverty) are among the reasons for this unfavourable outcome. Africa has changed significantly in recent years and has embarked on the long-term and costly Trans-Africa project and is determined to see it through. It is hoped that Trans-Africa will create closer links between countries and facilitate access for landlocked countries to ports and world markets.

During the G20 Summit (18th G20 Summit in New Delhi, India-2023), the European Union announced plans for a "Trans-African Corridor" to run alongside IMEC. This transport network will link Angola, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The press release describes the Trans-African Corridor as a major development of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). (Rajagopalan, 2023).

This project, which is currently estimated to cost \$30 billion, with \$8 billion from the African Development Bank (AfDB), will create one-stop shops in 26 locations and directly affect 239 million people.

Expected benefits of the investment:

Economic development

Acquisition of entrepreneurial skills

Overcoming the problem of a "culture of poverty"

Overcoming the negative effects of fatalism

Job creation

Connectivity

Improved access to markets

Expected costs of the investment:

The desire of global power centres to turn this major investment in their favour

Environmental impact

Cost of construction

The likelihood that revenues will be lower than costs



Figure 3. Trans- African Highway Maps

Source: Uneca, 2014.

According to CCA's projects in the pipeline initiative, Although the corridors remain largely unconnected, planners estimate that around 7,000 km of additional roads and 10,000 km of additional rail will be needed to complete the highway network, at a total cost of around \$32 billion (Mawire, 2016). These short and long corridors connect Africa with road networks. Land-locked countries, will be able to reach countries with harbours in this way. Although they have very rich natural resources, this wealth is not reflected in the economy of the country. Such big projects are seen as an opportunity for Africa to get rid of its backward image. The "Curse of Natural Resources" will be "Natural Resources" wealth with the reflection of wealth resources on the welfare of the society. This can only be realised if the rich resources are supported by a strong political will.

3.1. Some Corridor of The Project:

3.1.1. East – Southern Africa:

The AfDB has injected USD 4 billion into the project areas, covering a distance of 4.781 km, with a population of 94 million people. The project has also built 9 one-stop border posts that connect the East African coast, including Mombasa and Dar es Salaam, to the Southern Africa region and the seaport of Nacala in Mozambique (AfDP: 2019).

3.1.2. Central Africa:

Roads account for almost 90% of the transportation of domestic passengers and goods within the CEMAC region, serving as the primary mode of movement for people and commodities. Despite

Central Africa's lower road density in comparison to the rest of the continent, roads remain crucial for movement. Additionally, no two capitals within the region are connected via a fully paved road. However, there is a significant lack of properly paved roads linking countries, with only 15.7% of the total road network of 147,314 km meeting the standards (AfDP, 2019: 24).

3.1.3. West & North Africa

2.6 billion USD from AfDB, 5682 km of roads. The AfDB financed the construction of 12 one-stop border posts. The WAEMU countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo) have six seaports (Cotonou, Abidjan, San-Pédro, Dakar, Lomé and Bissau) in addition to Ghana's two ports (Tema and Takoradi) and the ports of Conakry and Nouakchott. These ports handle most of the international traffic between West Africa and the rest of the world. The Trans-Saharan Highway, linking West Africa with North Africa from Lagos to Algiers, has entered its final phase of construction. The 9,400-kilometre road is crucial to the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area. The African Development Fund, the concessional lending window of the African Development Bank Group, is one of the main financiers (AfDP, 2023:34).

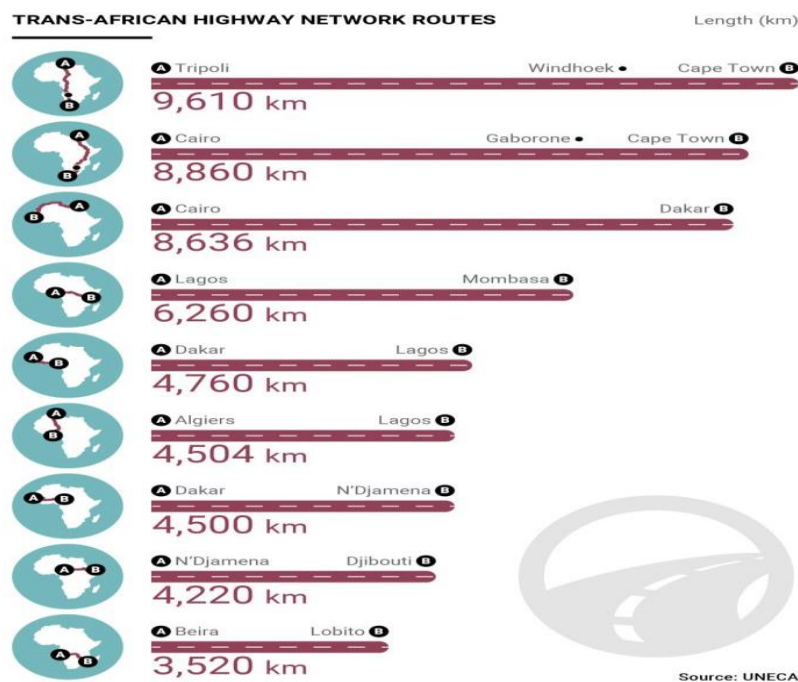


Figure 4. Trans-African Highway Network Routes

Source: www.webuildvalue.com

Africa's place and importance in the global financial system is also a matter of debate. Pluralities around the world also support increasing the influence of low-income countries in institutional decision-making, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). At present, Africa's 54 countries hold only 6.5% of the Fund's voting shares, even though they account for nearly 20% of the world's population and rely on the Fund more than any other region. However, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States are less enthusiastic (Pecquet, 2023) This major project will connect coastal countries to the world's ports and landlocked countries to the ports. It will integrate the whole continent with the world. Easy access to foreign markets is expected to bring prosperity and development to the whole continent. The fact that it coincides with the BRI and IMEC projects led by China and India reinforces the "era of corridors" thesis. As a result, positive effects are expected.

4. IMEC (India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor) The New Spice Route

The IMEC runs along both rail and maritime routes. Already dubbed the "New Spice Route", this ambitious project is driven as much by commercial imperatives as by geopolitical concerns, with the

sovereign states involved bringing their varying resources to the table and laying the groundwork for its realisation. While most experts welcome the proposal for its commercial potential, they also recognise the difficulties involved in implementing such a large undertaking (Kaur, 2023).

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project aims to redefine global trade routes, promote connectivity and facilitate the growth and export of clean energy and digital communications. The proposed IMEC corridor starts in India and crosses the Arabian Sea to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). From there it will pass through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and Europe. This route includes both maritime and rail components. (Figure 5) It also includes cables to connect power grids and telecommunications lines (Akbulut, 2023).



Figure 5. IMEC Economic Corridor "One World, One Family, One Future"

Source: <https://foreignpolicy.org.tr/connecting-continents-the-proposed-imec-india-middle-east-and-european-economic-corridor/>

The existing world order is transforming into a new world order and the world is beginning to be shaped by corridors. The world is witnessing the launch of the India-Middle East and Europe Corridor (IMEC), a geo-economic and geo-strategic project, at the 18th G-20 Summit (to be held in Delhi, India on 9-10 September 2023 under the theme "One World, One Family, One Future"). IMEC aims to strengthen US and EU leadership, increase global supply chain solutions based on multilateral cooperation and prosperity across Eurasia, and provide practical economic and infrastructure benefits to the regions involved (Akdemir and Adanani, 2023).

At present, this is only a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between a rather large group of countries, which is its main attraction. They include Saudi Arabia, the European Union, India, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), France, Germany, Italy and the United States. Look at the map. It's a huge area for the IMEC, as it's called. The project is split into two corridors. One connects India to the Arabian Gulf, and a corridor to the north connects the Arabian Gulf to Europe. The key project is a railway for a reliable and cost-effective cross-border ship-to-rail transit network to complement existing routes for the transit of goods and services between countries. The political dilemma is not just transit between India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, but also Israel and then Europe. And the icing on the cake. All this is to be decided within 60 days, with specific timetables. Impossible? Not really. Much of this has already been discussed and is part of the I2U2 (India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, United States) joint statement last year. This included mobilising private sector capital and

expertise for infrastructure and "promoting physical connectivity between countries in the Middle East region", not to mention clean energy and agricultural innovation. It also involved the UAE (which hosts the International Renewable Energy Agency) in the development of 'food parks' in India using climate-friendly technologies, with Israel involved in providing just that, as well as a hybrid renewable energy project in Gujarat. All this is encouraging private investment. So does IMEC. That gives you an idea of the role of the US. It is US companies looking for big investments that can give the Belt and Road Initiative a run for its money (Karthi; 2023). The new corridor has other important aspects, including reliable and secure regional supply chains, improved trade accessibility and facilitation. Participating countries aim to improve efficiency, reduce costs, enhance economic harmony, create employment opportunities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, leading to a revolutionary integration of Asia, Europe and the Middle East (Rajagopalan; 2023). International trade is based on reciprocity. China's implementation of the costly Belt and Road project to revive the Silk Road has raised the question of how countries not involved in the initiative will respond with a similar project. IMEC can be seen as a reciprocity in this sense. The project, which aims to transport goods and services between Europe and Asia via the Middle East, has attracted international attention. Countries along the route are eager to participate in order to boost their economic growth and trade relations. Türkiye, which has publicly expressed its interest, wants to take advantage of its geographical location and play a major role in the global economy. On 7 October, Hamas launched attacks against Israel, leading to a rapid escalation of hostilities between the two nations, which has been closely watched by the world. However, this has caused significant difficulties and delays in the implementation of the Middle East project, which is a crucial part of the IMEC corridor. While the direct effects of the conflict are currently limited to the local area, its geopolitical implications are more far-reaching (Maritime Gateway, 2023). All the nations in this geographical region are keen for the project to include their own countries. In order to be part of this route, nations will need to undertake significant studies in areas such as road maintenance and repair, and ensuring security. In addition, similar to the historic Silk Road, it is imperative that accommodation is built and improved along the route.

4.1. IMEC and Hamas – Israel Conflict

A new and more deadly and destructive chapter has opened in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This development is a reality check for an ambitious trade route. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), championed by Washington at the G20 summit in New Delhi last month as a Western rival to China's Belt and Road project, has already had a lot to prove. The project's ability to renew itself in the face of emerging problems and its flexibility are being tested. Recent conflicts have put the brakes on grand financial visions for the neighbourhood (alias 2023). Recent conflicts have put grand financial visions for the environment on hold. The conflict and its regional impact have led to polarisation in non-conflict regions and globally. In this polarisation, Israel has been isolated in the region while receiving support from the world, especially from Europe and the US. In the context of these problems, it would be quite pointless to put major investments such as IMEC on the agenda.

Since 7 October 2023, the Hamas-Israel conflict has gradually gained in depth and breadth, and has developed into a global protest against Israel. Two dimensions of this conflict come to the fore in the context of IMEC. First, at the end of this conflict, Israel wants to eliminate Hamas as a security threat to itself and the IMEC corridor route, and to reassure international investors. The other is to shift the route to the Turkish axis as a result of the spread of this conflict and the global boycott of Israel. It should not be forgotten that the most important feature of such routes is security. The relentless war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip enters its 31st day and shows no signs of abating. In the midst of this turmoil, Jordan's Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh has taken a tough stance, declaring that any attempt to displace Palestinians is a 'red line' for Jordan, tantamount to a declaration of war. Al-Khasawneh insists that Jordan is keeping all options open in response to Israel's attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip, branding these actions as "crimes against international law and international humanitarian law" (Laxmi, 2023). This statement, attributed to the Jordanian Prime Minister, is a

good example of the cancellation or change of course of a huge investment planned to pass through both Jordan and Israel.

At the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit in Riyadh: The Secretary General stresses the OIC's rejection of the plans for forced displacement and demands the immediate cessation of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation; 2023).

The final declaration of the joint summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League held in Riyadh on 11 November 2023 contained very harsh statements against Israel. It emphasised that regional peace cannot be achieved by bypassing the Palestinian cause. The conclusions are very strong and impressive: "We strongly support the Palestinian cause and stand in full solidarity with the Palestinian people in their quest to achieve their just rights and liberate their occupied territories. This includes the internationally recognised right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent and sovereign state within the borders of 4 June 1967, with Jerusalem al-Sharif as its capital".

All these developments can be seen as the failure of normalisation initiatives for Israel. Both the security problem and Israel's isolation mean that Israel will remain outside the IMEC equation.

5. IMEC, BRI and Türkiye

Türkiye has a long history of investing in the expansion and improvement of the country's road network. Bridges and new motorways have been put into operation using the build-operate-transfer model. Tunnels have also been built to overcome the main obstacles to traffic. It has virtually ended terrorist attacks within the country and created safe areas beyond its borders. The 14.5 km Zigana Tunnel is important not only for Türkiye, but also for all countries in the region, especially Iran, Iraq and all Middle Eastern countries, in terms of access to the Black Sea. It will have a multiplier effect when combined with the rail and road "Development Road" from the Persian Gulf port of Faw to the Habur border gate. The project, which includes railway and road lines extending from the port to the Turkish border via Diwaniyah, Najaf, Karbala, Baghdad and Mosul, is expected to provide access to the Mersin port from the Turkish border (Alaca ve Karaalp, 2023). On the other hand, the Zengeur Corridor project, which includes rail and road, is scheduled for completion in 2024. In this way, the BRI and the Turkish corridor will become more important. Thanks to this corridor, Türkiye will have direct access to the Turkic republics and the depths of Asia and the energy resources of this region.



Figure 6. Development Road Project

Source: Alaca & Karaalp, 2023.

The ambitious infrastructure initiative aims to link the regions of Asia, Europe and the Gulf with the support of Türkiye and key stakeholders. The Iraqi Silk Road is being built to provide an alternative trade route to the Suez Canal, with the aim of significantly increasing trade efficiency. The 745-mile (1,200-kilometre) rail and highway system will connect the Great Faw Port, which is expected to become the largest port in the Middle East. The \$17 billion project is expected to reach the Turkish border and be operational by 2025 (Alaca ve Karaalp, 2023). At a conference held in Kuwait in 2018, Türkiye became the largest country to pledge a \$5 billion loan for the reconstruction and stabilisation of Iraq.

The Northern Marmara Motorway is another major project in Türkiye, linking Europe with Anatolia, the Middle East and Asia. The motorway route between Tekirdağ and Sakarya, which connects to the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge and the Istanbul Airport access roads, has significantly reduced the traffic load on the existing transport networks, especially the Bosphorus crossings (MMM Anatolian Motorway; 2019). The railway line to be built on the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge will increase Türkiye's importance in the supply chain.

Çanakkale Bridge; With the Malkara-Canakkale Motorway and the 1915 Çanakkale Bridge, ports, rail and air transport systems in the Marmara and Aegean regions will be integrated with land transport projects to ensure balanced planning and structuring required by economic development and industry in the regions (Balcıkoca, 2023). This motorway and the Çanakkale Bridge will not only connect the Marmara region with Anatolia and the Aegean without interruption, but will also provide Europe with access to Anatolia, the Aegean and the Eastern countries at a lower cost and in a shorter time.

6. Concluding Remark

International trade is very important in terms of the scope, direction, change and transformation of global relations. Throughout human history, trade routes have played a very important role in this regard. Trade routes, which first developed between nearby countries, later reached a length of thousands of kilometres and played an important role in the development of road routes. The historic Silk Road is one of the most important of these routes. Considering its length of more than ten thousand kilometres and the impact it has had, it is clear that it has created a unique value. The settlements along the road, especially at the caravan stops, not only developed economically but also became centres of scientific, literary and religious discussion. All the states were anxious for the caravans, large and small, to pass through their lands. To this end, they built small fortresses (derbent), caravanserais, inns and (for the most part) did not charge for accommodation. From the 1450s, European seafarers who sailed the oceans in search of discoveries and new routes began a period of "geographical exploration", reaching both the natural riches and the lands with these riches that had previously been reached by caravans on foot, by sea and in previously unknown geographies. They created (invented) colonies with very large fleets of ships and transported riches and raw materials to Europe at very low cost. As a result, the Silk Road, the Fur Road and the Spice Road, which were travelled by caravans, lost their importance.

In the 21st century, a new initiative has been launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping with the slogan "Promoting Friendship Among People and Building a Better Future". Countries along the historic Silk Road, especially China, are trying to launch and implement this new initiative. The aim is to create an uninterrupted trade route by rail and road from China to the UK. This initiative is known as the BRI. This investment is very expensive. The main risk in the project is that the value added should be greater than the cost. At the 18th G-20 meeting in New Delhi, it was planned to implement IMEC, a very large and very important project that will connect India with Europe. Although it is emphasised that the IMEC project is not opposed to BRI, it can be seen as a reciprocal reaction of the major economic powers that are outside the BRI equation. On the one hand, BRI and IMEC, on the other hand, the formation of very large corridors such as the Trans-African projects, on the other hand, countries' own initiatives or smaller regional comprehensive corridors indicate that the era of corridors has begun. Türkiye aims to consolidate its place in the grand equation with the

"Development Road Project" with Iraq and the Zangezur Passage, which will connect Türkiye by land with the Turkish states in Asia.

The aggravation of the Hamas-Israeli conflict and Israel's total isolation in the region will lead to a change in the route of the corridor, which was previously planned to pass through Israel, or to its total or partial cancellation. Because, historically, the roads through which such routes pass must be safe. Therefore, Türkiye will be the most important actor in this situation.

In this regard, the world, which is witnessing a mysterious change, especially after 2019, is evolving in a different direction with new power searches and trade wars. It can be said that Turkey, which has an important historical past and continues to integrate its economy into the globalised world on a daily basis, will have an important position in the IMEC project because it is a country with the potential to transform its regional power into a global power in today's world where the countries of the world are connected by corridors.

Trade corridors and networks will become increasingly important in the coming period. Countries that want to be on these routes will be in competition with each other. The two critical issues of this period are trade corridors and energy. The desire for these two critical issues and the efforts to be in the equation will intensify. Regional and global competition and cooperation may lead to unexpected results. Turkey, with its geopolitical importance, is very close to all formations.

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