Europe, IMEC, and the Emerging Syrian-Turkish Corridor

Emmanuel Navon / 26 July 2026

Executive Summary

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has made alternative trade routes between India, the Gulf and Europe a strategic necessity. It has vindicated the rationale of IMEC (India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor) while exposing a weakness in its original design: a corridor entering the Arabian Gulf does not fully bypass Hormuz.

The answer is to expand IMEC, not to replace its route through Israel. Saudi Arabia is exploring additional connections through Jordan, Syria and Turkey, while Ankara seeks to restore its role as the indispensable bridge between Asia and Europe. Such routes may strengthen resilience if they complement IMEC. They would weaken it if they displaced Israel as its Mediterranean anchor.

The Israeli and Syrian options are not equivalent. Israel's ports, railways and border crossings require major investment, but they operate within a functioning state offering legal predictability, established security institutions and advanced logistical and technological capabilities. Syria remains territorially fragmented, insecure and [illegible]e immense cost of reconstructing its transport infrastructure.

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Israel's role is also political. Its inclusion embeds the Abraham Accords in lasting economic infrastructure and preserves incentives for further regional normalization. Replacing it with a Syrian-Turkish route would strengthen Ankara's leverage over European connectivity and signal that regional integration can proceed through Israel's exclusion.

Europe should therefore promote an IMEC+ network: gateways outside Hormuz, Saudi Arabia as the overland backbone, Jordan and Israel as the principal route to the Eastern Mediterranean, and complementary branches through Oman, Egypt and, when conditions permit, Syria.

The objective must be redundancy without displacement: more routes, but no replacement of IMEC's most stable Mediterranean anchor.

Introduction

Maritime chokepoints are often treated as permanent features of the international economy: vulnerable and contested, but too indispensable to remain closed for long. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has shattered that assumption. A narrow passage carrying a substantial share of the world's energy and trade has become an instrument of coercion, showing how easily geography can be weaponized against economies that have suppliers but lack alternative routes.

For Europe, the lesson goes beyond the immediate disruption of energy markets. The continent depends on a chain of exposed passages linking it to the Gulf and Asia: Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. A crisis at any one raises costs; simultaneous disruption can threaten supply chains. Diversification can no longer mean only buying from more suppliers. It must also mean access to several routes.

This was the rationale behind the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. Announced at the 2023 G20 summit in New Delhi, IMEC was conceived as a

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work linking India to Europe through the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and the Mediterranean. It would combine shipping with

railways, ports, digital cables, energy links and integrated customs systems. Its aim was not merely to shorten transit times, but to build a durable economic architecture while reducing dependence on vulnerable sea lanes and Chinese-dominated infrastructure.

The Hormuz crisis has vindicated that ambition while exposing a weakness in IMEC's original design. Its eastern leg carries goods from India to ports inside the Arabian Gulf before transferring them to the overland network. A corridor beginning behind Hormuz cannot fully answer the closure of the strait. IMEC therefore needs additional gateways on the Indian Ocean and the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula, allowing cargo to enter the land network without first crossing Hormuz.

This need for redundancy has revived interest in another route connecting Saudi Arabia to Europe through Jordan, Syria and Turkey. Rail, road and digital projects are advancing in parallel, while Syria's transitional authorities seek to make their country a logistics and energy hub. Saudi Arabia wants greater strategic flexibility; Turkey wants to ensure that no major Eurasian corridor bypasses it; Syria needs investment, transit revenue and international rehabilitation. Together, these ambitions have produced the outline of a Syrian-Turkish corridor that could either complement IMEC or compete with it.

That distinction is decisive. Additional routes can strengthen resilience. But resilience does not require removing Israel from IMEC or replacing it with Syria and Turkey. Such a substitution would shift the corridor's Mediterranean anchor from a functioning state with established ports, institutions and commercial ties to a Syrian state still rebuilding its territory and infrastructure. It would also make Turkey an increasingly indispensable intermediary between the Gulf and Europe.

Corridors are not politically neutral. They shape investment, commercial flows and geopolitical leverage. IMEC was designed to embed cooperation among India, the Gulf, Israel and Europe and to translate the Abraham Accords into durable economic interdependence. Excluding Israel would weaken that architecture and

Skip to content gional integration can proceed through circumvention rather than normalization.

Europe should therefore reject the false choice between preserving the 2023 map unchanged and abandoning it for a Syrian-Turkish alternative. The answer to Hormuz is an expanded, networked IMEC: new gateways outside the strait, additional regional branches, and Israel preserved as the principal Mediterranean anchor. The objective must be redundancy without displacement.

I. IMEC After Hormuz

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has confirmed IMEC's central premise: economies cannot rely indefinitely on maritime routes whose continuity depends on the restraint of hostile powers. Europe's vulnerability stems not only from dependence on particular suppliers, but also from the concentration of trade and energy flows through a handful of passages that states, militias or regional wars can obstruct.

IMEC was designed to introduce redundancy. Its eastern corridor would carry goods by sea from India to the United Arab Emirates, while its northern corridor would connect the Gulf to Europe through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and the Mediterranean. Railways would be accompanied by digital cables, energy links, logistics hubs and coordinated customs procedures. Its value lay not only in reducing transit times but in creating an integrated economic space from the Indo-Pacific to Europe.

The crisis has strengthened the case for combining maritime and overland transport. Rail cannot match the volume or cost efficiency of ocean shipping, and IMEC was never intended to replace it. Rather, it can provide an alternative for time-sensitive, high-value or strategically important cargo when conventional routes become unreliable. Even limited capacity can ease shortages, contain costs and reduce the coercive power of a chokepoint.

Yet Hormuz has exposed a weakness in the original design. IMEC's eastern leg terminates at ports inside the Arabian Gulf, so goods arriving from India must cross

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entering the railway network. From the UAE or Saudi Arabia, they

can bypass Bab el-Mandeb, the Red Sea and Suez by travelling overland to the Mediterranean. But IMEC does not solve access to the Gulf itself.

IMEC was conceived primarily as an alternative to the maritime route from the Gulf through Bab el-Mandeb and Suez—not as a bypass of every regional chokepoint. Hormuz has changed the requirement. A genuinely resilient corridor must allow cargo to enter the Arabian Peninsula directly from the Indian Ocean.

That requires expanding IMEC, not abandoning it. Ports in Oman and on the UAE's eastern coast could serve as gateways into the overland system, connecting to Saudi networks before proceeding through Jordan and Israel to the Mediterranean. This would transform IMEC from a largely linear route into a network with several points of entry.

Such a network would allow flexible responses to different crises. If Hormuz were obstructed, traffic could enter through ports outside the Gulf. If the Red Sea or Suez were disrupted, goods could cross the Arabian Peninsula to Israel's Mediterranean ports. If one railway segment or border crossing became unavailable, alternative branches could absorb part of the traffic. Resilience lies not in finding a perfect route, but in preventing any single disruption from paralysing the system.

This expansion will require substantial investment. The northern corridor remains IMEC's least developed component. Saudi and Emirati railways must connect more effectively to Jordan; Jordan needs new freight infrastructure; and the links between Jordan and Israel remain far below the capacity required for intercontinental trade. Haifa is operational but would need significant expansion. The Israeli route is neither complete nor immediately sufficient. Its advantage is that these are identifiable gaps within functioning states and established commercial systems.

The next stage should focus less on announcing new maps than on building

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. Rail gauges, customs procedures, digital tracking, insurance rules otocols must be coordinated, while ports, border crossings and

logistics centres must function as parts of one system. Otherwise, IMEC will remain a diplomatic concept rather than an operational alternative in a crisis.

Hormuz has therefore vindicated IMEC while raising the standard by which it must be judged. Europe and its partners must build an expanded corridor capable of bypassing Hormuz as well as the Red Sea—while preserving the Saudi-Jordanian-Israeli route as its principal connection to the Mediterranean.

II. The Syrian-Turkish Route: Complement or Competitor?

The search for alternatives to vulnerable maritime passages has accelerated projects that predate the Hormuz crisis but have acquired new strategic significance. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan and Syria are developing links that could eventually connect the Gulf to Turkish and Syrian Mediterranean ports. The unresolved question is whether these initiatives will become branches of a wider network or the basis of a rival corridor designed to bypass Israel.

Several projects are advancing in parallel. Turkey, Syria and Jordan have agreed to coordinate the rehabilitation of their transport infrastructure, while Saudi Arabia is studying a railway connection through Jordan and Syria toward Turkey. Riyadh and Ankara have also signed agreements on railways and logistics. At the same time, Saudi-backed data infrastructure is being developed through Syria toward the Mediterranean, raising the prospect of a corridor combining freight, energy and digital connectivity.

The participants do not share the same objectives. Saudi Arabia seeks strategic flexibility. As IMEC's geographical centre, it aims to become an indispensable logistics platform between Asia, Europe and Africa. Multiple northern routes would reduce Riyadh's dependence on any single agreement, border crossing or neighbouring state. This does not prove that Saudi Arabia has abandoned IMEC, is of Israeli-Saudi normalization is clearly encouraging alternatives end upon it.

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Turkey’s calculations are more competitive. The original IMEC route bypassed Turkish territory, challenging Ankara’s claim that any viable connection between Asia and Europe must pass through Turkey. Ankara has therefore promoted rival projects, including the Development Road through Iraq and the emerging route through Syria and Jordan. Restored north-south rail links would allow Turkey to re-establish itself as the principal terrestrial gateway between the Gulf and Europe.

For Syria, the corridor promises investment, employment, transit revenue and political rehabilitation. Rebuilding railways, roads, ports and data infrastructure could reconnect a country fragmented by war. Syria should not be excluded indefinitely from regional connectivity. Its eventual inclusion could support recovery and create incentives for stabilization.

A complementary Syrian-Turkish branch is therefore understandable and potentially useful. A route extending north from Jordan through Syria could provide access to Turkish ports and European land networks, while Syrian Mediterranean ports might offer additional outlets during crises. More connections could ease pressure on individual ports and borders and allow traffic to be redirected.

These benefits depend, however, on complementarity. The project becomes a competitor when its purpose shifts from adding capacity to removing Israel from the regional architecture. Reports that Riyadh is examining Syria as an alternative Mediterranean connection, combined with Turkish opposition to Israel’s role in regional trade, make that possibility credible. The distinction determines whether new infrastructure strengthens IMEC or dismantles the coalition on which it was founded.

Substitution would also expose Europe to risks absent from the Israeli route. Syria’s government does not yet exercise uncontested authority nationwide. Several regions remain unsettled, armed groups are only partially integrated into state institutions, and persistent violence shows that the security environment is not ready for infrastructure carrying strategic volumes of freight, energy and data.

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ıallenge is equally serious. Much of Syria’s railway network remains damaged or inoperative, while ports, electricity supply, customs administration,

insurance mechanisms and secure logistics facilities require reconstruction or major modernization. The task is not merely to repair missing tracks, but to rebuild the institutional and physical ecosystem on which a dependable intercontinental corridor relies.

Turkey offers far stronger infrastructure, but making it the principal Gulf-Europe gateway would create another vulnerability. Ankara would gain leverage over European trade at a time when its relations with the European Union remain strained by disputes over Cyprus, the Eastern Mediterranean, migration and regional security. Diversification should reduce the ability of any one actor to pressure Europe—not transfer leverage from a maritime chokepoint to a terrestrial gatekeeper.

The Syrian-Turkish route should therefore meet four tests: interoperability with IMEC; openness to multiple regional participants rather than Israel's exclusion; no monopolistic Turkish control over access to Europe; and European investment tied to measurable improvements in Syrian security, governance and regulatory reliability.

The policy question is not whether new routes should be built, but what strategic architecture they will serve. A Syrian-Turkish branch can strengthen resilience as an addition to IMEC. If designed to replace the Israeli route rather than complement it, the Syrian-Turkish corridor would not enhance resilience; it would fundamentally alter IMEC's geopolitical architecture.

III. Why Israel Must Remain the Mediterranean Anchor

The case for preserving Israel's role in IMEC does not rest on the claim that no other Mediterranean outlet can ever be developed. It rests on a practical judgment: among the routes under consideration, Israel offers the strongest combination of nstitutional reliability, technological capacity and strategic alignment. ork may eventually include Syrian, Turkish and Egyptian branches, but Israel should remain its principal Mediterranean anchor.

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Israel's first advantage is that the foundations already exist. Haifa and Ashdod are functioning commercial ports linked to international shipping networks, advanced logistics services and Western regulatory systems. Israel also has an established customs administration, modern transport infrastructure and commercial institutions capable of supporting long-term contracts. These facilities cannot yet handle the volumes envisaged under IMEC, but the challenge is expansion and interconnection, not wholesale reconstruction.

The deficiencies are real. Haifa's container capacity remains below projected needs, Israeli-Jordanian crossings handle only a fraction of the required freight, and rail links between the Jordanian border and the Mediterranean must be expanded. Yet these are identifiable gaps within functioning systems, addressable through port expansion, railway construction, customs modernization and greater border capacity.

The Syrian alternative starts from a very different position. Its advocates must account not only for damaged railway lines but also for the reconstruction of ports, electricity networks, customs services, security arrangements and regulatory institutions. A corridor is more than a continuous track on a map. It requires predictable border procedures, reliable power, secure logistics centres, insurance and enforceable contracts. Syria may gradually rebuild these capacities, but it cannot presently match Israel.

This difference is decisive for private investment. Infrastructure corridors require commitments measured in decades. Investors must assess political risk, obtain insurance and rely on legal and administrative continuity. Israel's democratic institutions, independent judiciary and integration into Western financial systems provide predictability that Syria's transitional order cannot yet offer. The question is not whether Syria may stabilize, but whether Europe should make a principal connectivity project dependent on that expectation.

Israel also contributes capabilities beyond physical transit. Modern corridors

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tal tracking, cybersecurity, automated logistics, data protection and the defence of critical infrastructure. Israel's technological ecosystem and security experience can help protect IMEC's rail, port, energy and data components against

cyberattacks, terrorism and hostile state interference. It is therefore not merely the last territory crossed before the Mediterranean, but a technological and security partner.

Geography reinforces these advantages. Israel provides a direct route from Jordan to the Eastern Mediterranean without turning north through Syria and Turkey. From Haifa and Ashdod, cargo can continue toward Greece, Cyprus, Italy and France, allowing several European gateways to operate within one network. A route through Turkey would instead advance Ankara's ambition to become the obligatory intermediary between Asia, the Gulf and Europe. Preserving an Israeli outlet prevents dependence on a single regional gatekeeper.

This matters particularly for Greece and Cyprus, which have developed close ties with Israel in energy, maritime security and infrastructure. An Israeli terminus enhances their role as European gateways; a Syrian-Turkish substitution would strengthen Ankara at their expense. Europe's interest therefore concerns whether Eastern Mediterranean connectivity rests on several cooperating nodes or is concentrated through Turkey.

Most importantly, Israel gives IMEC a political meaning that an alternative route cannot reproduce. The corridor was conceived amid efforts to extend the transformation initiated by the Abraham Accords and encourage Saudi-Israeli normalization. By connecting Gulf economies physically with Israel and Europe, IMEC would turn diplomacy into durable commercial relationships, shared infrastructure and mutual interests.

Removing Israel would reverse that logic. It would suggest that regional integration can advance through circumvention rather than normalization, allowing Arab states to gain the benefits of connectivity without the political process the original architecture was designed to encourage. This would weaken incentives for further normalization and erode one of the few regional frameworks to replace estrangement with practical cooperation.

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direct interest in preserving this dimension. Its own history shows how infrastructure and economic interdependence can consolidate political

reconciliation. It would therefore be contradictory for Europe to support a route whose principal effect would be to detach regional connectivity from Arab-Israeli normalization. Syrian reconstruction may serve legitimate objectives, but it should not undermine this integration model.

None of this requires Israel to be IMEC's exclusive Mediterranean outlet. Additional terminals can provide useful redundancy, and Syria should not be permanently excluded from regional transport networks. But an additional branch and a replacement anchor are not the same. The former spreads risk; the latter changes the corridor's geopolitical purpose and concentrates greater leverage in Turkey.

Israel must therefore remain at the heart of IMEC's northern corridor. Its infrastructure must be expanded, its links with Jordan completed and its ports connected to several European gateways. Israel does not offer a finished route, but it provides the strongest foundation for one that is secure, scalable and politically sustainable.

IV. France Between IMEC and the Syrian-Turkish Corridor

France occupies a distinctive position in the competition over Eurasian corridors. It is not merely a potential user of IMEC but one of its original sponsors. Paris has promoted a Mumbai–Marseille connection. In February 2026, France and India reaffirmed IMEC's potential and called for the first ministerial meeting devoted to advancing it. Two months later, President Emmanuel Macron declared in Cyprus that the route would pass through the island and encompass maritime transport, energy links and data transmission.

France therefore remains formally committed to IMEC. Its engagement with Syria does not amount to an announced withdrawal, nor has Paris officially endorsed Israel's removal from the route. Yet it is simultaneously advancing another strategic

elationship with IMEC remains undefined.

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During his visit to Damascus on 6 and 7 July 2026—the first by an EU head of state since the fall of the Assad regime—Macron attended an economic forum on Syrian reconstruction and regional connectivity. He described Syria's future as that of a regional hub through which logistical chains and energy and data links could connect the Gulf to Europe. He linked this vision to the vulnerability exposed by Hormuz and encouraged French companies and investors to participate.

This went beyond general support for Syrian recovery. Macron presented reconstruction as the first stage in restoring Syria's place at the centre of regional connectivity. CMA CGM was identified as expanding its investments, while TotalEnergies expressed interest in energy transit, electricity interconnections and the rehabilitation of the Kirkuk–Banias corridor. France thus appears determined to secure an early commercial and political position in rebuilding Syria's transport and energy infrastructure.

The logic is understandable. Reconstruction offers commercial opportunities and a means for Paris to recover influence in a Levant increasingly shaped by Turkey and the Gulf states. A more stable Syria could reduce terrorism and displacement, while French engagement might shape the transition rather than leave reconstruction entirely to other powers.

Nor is rebuilding Syria inherently incompatible with advancing IMEC. Syrian ports and transport links could eventually become branches within a broader network. France could invest in them while continuing to support the Saudi-Jordanian-Israeli corridor and its European links. That would add redundancy without sacrificing IMEC's original architecture.

The danger is that infrastructure creates geopolitical effects regardless of the intentions of its financiers. A Syrian corridor linking the Gulf to Turkey and the Mediterranean may begin as a reconstruction project but evolve into a substitute for the Israeli route. As capital, contracts and political attention shift toward Syria, the original northern corridor could remain underfunded. What Paris presents as an

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could become the preferred route, especially for governments seeking integration without normalization with Israel.

France's ambiguity is therefore consequential. Paris now supports two connectivity visions with different political geographies. The Mumbai–Marseille route links India and the Gulf to Europe through an Eastern Mediterranean architecture that includes Israel. The Syrian-hub vision connects the Gulf to Europe through a country under strong Turkish influence and can serve Ankara's ambition to become the indispensable Eurasian gateway. Unless France defines how the projects fit together, commercial momentum may decide in favour of substitution.

Present conditions also warrant caution. France's own Foreign Ministry advises against all travel to Syria, citing armed confrontations, insecurity and transport networks heavily affected by military operations. These warnings do not rule out long-term investment, but they underline the difference between assisting reconstruction and making Syria the backbone of European supply-chain resilience. France must distinguish between three legitimate but separate objectives: stabilizing Syria, securing opportunities for French companies and designing Europe's principal connection with India and the Gulf. The first two do not answer the third. Reconstruction can proceed gradually amid disruption; a strategic corridor requires continuous operation, insurability and legal predictability.

The danger is not that France consciously intends to place European commerce under Turkish control, but that its policies could produce that result by default. Ankara opposes corridors that bypass Turkey and is investing in links connecting Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria to its own network. If the Israeli route remains unbuilt while French and European resources accelerate the Syrian alternative, Turkey will acquire the gatekeeper role that IMEC sought to avoid. European dependence would shift from a maritime chokepoint threatened by Iran to a terrestrial route shaped by Ankara.

The political cost would be equally serious. France supports the Abraham Accords and has an interest in further Arab-Israeli normalization. Yet a corridor organized around Israel's exclusion would show that regional states can obtain the benefits of integration while avoiding normalization, weakening the incentive structure on

Skip to content as based. The Syrian alternative would not merely offer another railway; it would embody a different regional order.

Paris should therefore state clearly that its Syrian engagement complements rather than replaces IMEC. French and European support for Syrian transport, port, energy and data projects should depend on interoperability with the wider corridor, openness to multiple routes and compatibility with the Jordanian-Israeli connection. Public financing and export guarantees should not support infrastructure designed to exclude Israel or grant Turkey monopolistic control over Gulf-Europe connectivity.

France should also align its two diplomatic tracks. Officials responsible for IMEC and Syrian reconstruction should work within a common strategy coordinated with the corridor's principal participants and European gateways. Investment made in the name of Syrian recovery should reinforce a network of routes rather than determine which one will dominate.

France need not choose between Israel and Syria. It must, however, choose between strategic coherence and the uncoordinated pursuit of competing projects. Paris can help rebuild Syria while preserving Israel as IMEC's principal Mediterranean anchor. It cannot credibly champion both architectures without defining which one constitutes Europe's strategic backbone.

V. Building a Resilient IMEC Network

The debate over IMEC is too often framed as a choice between two exclusive routes: the original corridor through Jordan and Israel or an alternative through Syria and Turkey. Hormuz has shown why that binary is misguided. No single itinerary can protect sufficiently against regional disruption. Europe should instead build a network that absorbs shocks without allowing supplementary branches to displace its most reliable backbone.

A resilient IMEC would retain the Saudi-Jordanian-Israeli route while adding entry points and outlets. The backbone must offer the highest available level of institutional continuity, security, infrastructure and political alignment. Branches can

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nd flexibility even when they do not meet the same standards.

Treating all routes as interchangeable would ignore the difference between

expanding infrastructure in a stable state and making a strategic corridor dependent on a country still emerging from war.

The first priority is to address IMEC's eastern vulnerability. Its original design connected India to the UAE before carrying cargo overland across the Arabian Peninsula. This reduced exposure to Bab el-Mandeb and Suez but did not bypass Hormuz. An expanded network should therefore include ports with direct access to the Indian Ocean, especially in Oman and on the UAE's eastern coast. Cargo could enter road and rail systems linked to Saudi Arabia without first passing through the strait.

This would strengthen the UAE by connecting its Gulf ports and facilities outside Hormuz to the same network. Oman could likewise become an additional gateway rather than the starting point of a rival corridor. The objective should be several ports feeding one interoperable overland system, not disconnected projects competing for exclusive access to Europe.

Saudi Arabia would remain the geographical centre. Its railways, logistics zones and industrial investments are indispensable to any land connection between the Indian Ocean, the Gulf and the Mediterranean. Riyadh is therefore entitled to cultivate several routes. The decisive question is whether they reinforce a common architecture or help avoid the political commitments associated with IMEC. Saudi flexibility strengthens the corridor when it adds redundancy; it weakens it when it postpones the Jordanian-Israeli connection while financing alternatives built around Israel's exclusion.

Jordan is the critical junction between the Arabian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean, yet it remains one of IMEC's least developed components. Its railways, border infrastructure, customs facilities and logistics hubs require major investment before they can handle intercontinental freight. Strengthening Jordan should therefore be a European priority. A viable Jordanian platform could serve both the Israeli route and future branches toward Syria, turning the kingdom into a

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on rather than a territory crossed by competing corridors.

The principal western route should continue through Israel to Haifa and Ashdod. It offers direct Mediterranean access without dependence on Turkish territory. Completing it will require new rail links, expanded border crossings, larger logistics centres and substantial port investment. These gaps are serious, but coordinated public and private financing can close them. They do not require Europe to stake its supply-chain resilience on the reconstruction of an entire state.

From Israel, IMEC should connect to several European gateways. Greece and Cyprus have obvious roles, but IMEC should not terminate at a single port. Links to Italy and France would distribute capacity and reduce the impact of disruption at any one terminal. France's Mumbai–Marseille concept can remain part of this network, provided it reinforces rather than bypasses the Eastern Mediterranean architecture linking Israel, Cyprus and Greece.

Egypt should also serve as a complementary node. Its ports, energy infrastructure and control of Suez give it a natural role. An Egyptian branch could provide additional Mediterranean access and absorb traffic during congestion elsewhere. But expanding Egypt's role should add resilience, not become another reason to leave the Jordanian-Israeli segment unbuilt.

Syria may eventually form a northern branch connecting Jordan to Syrian ports and Turkey. Its inclusion could support reconstruction and create incentives for stable governance. European investment, however, should proceed gradually and depend on territorial security, credible customs administration, enforceable contracts, protection against terrorism and transport systems capable of surviving political transitions. Financing Syrian connectivity before these conditions are met would transfer political risk to European investors and insurers.

Any Syrian branch must also avoid monopolistic Turkish control. Turkey's transport links into Europe would make it an important participant, but Ankara should not become the sole gatekeeper between Gulf commerce and European markets. Turkey as one outlet among several could enhance resilience. A system in which

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route converges on its territory would create a new dependency and a powerful instrument of leverage.

The same logic applies to digital and energy infrastructure. IMEC was never merely a railway; it was also intended to include data cables, electricity interconnections and potentially hydrogen and other energy links. These systems should follow several routes wherever feasible. A fibre-optic cable through Syria may add capacity, but it should not replace parallel connections through Israel, Egypt or the Gulf. Networked resilience requires diversity across freight, data and energy, not merely several railway lines on a map.

Building this system will require more than capital. Participating states must agree on common technical, commercial and security standards. Freight cannot move efficiently if each border imposes incompatible customs procedures or digital systems. Railways and ports must share tracking platforms, cargo-security protocols and contingency plans, while insurance and customs arrangements must permit rapid rerouting during emergencies.

A permanent IMEC coordination mechanism is essential. The founding participants should create a body responsible for interoperability, infrastructure planning, cyber protection, crisis management and investment priorities. It would prevent national projects from developing in isolation, assess proposed branches by their contribution to the wider network and make unilateral redefinition of the corridor more difficult.

European financing should follow the same principles. Projects should be judged not only by commercial viability but also by whether they add capacity, preserve route diversity and avoid new strategic monopolies. Public guarantees should favour infrastructure open to several participants and interoperable with the wider system. Projects designed to exclude Israel or concentrate control in Turkey should not receive the same support as investments that create genuine redundancy.

Hormuz has shown that resilience does not come from replacing one route with another, but from ensuring that no single closure, conflict or government can interrupt the system. Europe should therefore develop IMEC as a network: several

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gateways, Saudi Arabia as the overland centre, Jordan as the principal junction, Israel as the main Mediterranean anchor, and additional branches through Egypt, Oman and, when conditions permit, Syria and Turkey.

Such an architecture would give regional states the flexibility they seek while preserving IMEC's strategic logic. Additional routes would make IMEC more resilient; replacing its Israeli anchor would undermine the strategic architecture that gives the corridor its meaning.

Conclusion

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has shown that connectivity is not merely a technical matter. The routes carrying goods, energy and data are instruments of power. Dependence on a single passage creates vulnerability not only to war and terrorism but also to political coercion. Europe must therefore treat alternative routes between India, the Gulf and the Mediterranean as a strategic priority.

The crisis has vindicated IMEC while exposing the limits of its original design. A corridor whose eastern maritime leg enters the Arabian Gulf cannot fully answer the closure of Hormuz. IMEC must add gateways with direct access to the Indian Ocean and reliable connections to the Saudi overland network. Its resilience will depend on multiple entrances, branches and Mediterranean outlets able to function when one part of the system is disrupted.

Diversification, however, does not justify replacing the Israeli route with a Syrian-Turkish alternative. Israel requires major investment in railways, ports, border crossings and logistics, but these projects would be built within a functioning state offering institutional continuity, legal predictability and established security capabilities. Syria is still rebuilding the authority, infrastructure and administrative systems on which dependable transit rests. It may eventually join a wider network, but it cannot yet anchor European supply-chain resilience.

Route selection also shapes the political order that infrastructure reinforces. IMEC was intended to connect India, the Gulf, Israel and Europe, give economic

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logic, showing that integration can proceed through circumvention rather than reconciliation.

It would also increase Turkish leverage. Concentrating Gulf-European connectivity through Turkey would give Ankara greater influence over trade, energy and data flows despite profound strategic disagreements with Europe. Hormuz should not teach Europe to exchange dependence on a maritime chokepoint for dependence on a terrestrial gatekeeper.

France has a particular responsibility to prevent that outcome. Its support for Syrian reconstruction and pursuit of commercial opportunities are legitimate. But Paris must state clearly that this engagement complements rather than supplants the IMEC it helped launch. Otherwise, French investment could accelerate a rival architecture while the original corridor remains underfunded.

Europe should therefore pursue an expanded IMEC network: Indian Ocean gateways outside Hormuz, Saudi Arabia as the overland platform, Jordan as the principal junction, Israel as the main Mediterranean anchor, and complementary branches through Oman, Egypt and, when conditions permit, Syria and Turkey. Common customs, technical, security and digital standards should be backed by a permanent coordination and crisis-management mechanism.

The goal is not to preserve the 2023 map unchanged, but to preserve IMEC’s political and institutional logic while adapting it to a more dangerous environment. More routes will strengthen the corridor. Replacing its most stable anchor will not.

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