The Middle East and IMEC: Intersubjectivity and the Lexicon of Regional Order

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Introduction

The dominant view tends to reduce a corridor to a mere line on a map, a route. In the Middle East, corridors are never neutral. Their viability is immediately priced through regional risk: maritime insecurity in the Red Sea, the insurance and reinsurance market's reaction to attacks on shipping, sanctions compliance, and the political volatility of border crossings. In practice, what "may pass" is not decided only by engineering capacity but by war-risk premiums, port reliability, customs predictability, and the credibility of security guarantees. This is why IMEC cannot be assessed as a universal infrastructure template: it is a regional project embedded in a specific geography of choke points, rival hubs, and contested sovereignties Gulf ports, Jordanian transit, Israeli Mediterranean gateways, and the European end of the chain. Yet IMEC is, before anything else, a form of decision: a decision about what may pass, what must be halted, and what will not even be recognized as passable in the first place. It is here that the discussion shifts from transport to a politics of possibilities, and "land" moves from being the inert backdrop of politics to becoming a field of forces in which possibilities are produced and distributed.

Nature, too, is not a collection of fixed objects, but a fluid configuration of capacities: where forces converge, they open new pathways; where they knot, they articulate and re-joint possibility. From this perspective, a corridor is not simply a "road." It is a line of articulation of forces, a dispositif that synchronizes flows of goods, energy, data, insurance, law, and security, and from that synchronization brings forth a new possible world: a world in which some actions become thinkable and calculable, while others suddenly appear costly, fragile, or impossible.

In this article, I seek to approach the IMEC project from a fresh perspective. I will examine it as a political grammar and show how it can reconfigure the logic of regional politics: from reshaping the vocabulary of power and security, to building shared horizons, intersubjective habits, new temporal narratives, and the neutralization of ideological games. I will also address the potential risks of this emerging order, including the formation of hidden boundaries and forms of technical exclusion, and underscore the need for just network design, so that the corridor can genuinely become a language of peace and durable cooperation.

IMEC as the New Language of Regional Order

To grasp this shift, we must treat the IMEC not only as infrastructure, but as a regional language, one that reshapes what counts as rational action, credible security, and feasible cooperation. As noted in the introduction, the IMEC should not be understood

merely as a transit route because doing so reduces it to a register concerned only with speed, capacity, and cost. In today's world, major corridors are less "routes" than configurations of possibility. They do not only move goods, they stabilize the rules through which regional actors recognize themselves and others, estimate the future, and ultimately decide, and for this reason, IMEC is best approached as the region's new language a lexicon that determines what will count as rational, feasible, and sustainable, and, conversely, what will appear costly, fragile, or impossible. Concretely, I will illustrate this grammar through three empirical layers: (i) how IMEC risk is priced (insurance, disruption costs, and contractual reliability), (ii) how standards and dispute-resolution mechanisms reframe political conflict into governable technical-legal disputes, and (iii) how routine cooperation among port authorities, customs agencies, and firms gradually reshapes public expectations across the region. And just as any language has its own vocabulary and grammar, its words as well as the rules that govern how words combine, the IMEC, too, carries a distinctive grammar of its own. To understand why the IMEC functions as a new regional lexicon, we must begin with the Middle East's inherited political language, which has largely been organized around hard ground and geographic borders: terms such as border, territory, red line, blockade, strategic depth, deterrence, friend, and enemy. The region has repeatedly acted through the logic of "cutting": closure of borders, suspension of diplomatic channels, blockade politics, and the securitization of trade routes. This is not merely rhetorical, it is an inherited repertoire of statecraft in which leverage is produced by interrupting circulation. The IMEC question therefore enters an already militarized landscape of chokepoints and veto players, where disruption has historically been treated as a legitimate political instrument.

This vocabulary presupposes a world in which power is measured by control over territory, security is achieved by removing or pushing back the other, and the future is little more than the reproduction of a durable confrontation. Within such a language, political action often takes the form of cutting: cutting routes, cutting relations, cutting communications. Exclusion then becomes the primary mechanism through which identity and security are secured.

But the IMEC concept is grounded in a network logic, one that introduces a different kind of vocabulary into the regional field: connectivity, standards, risk, trust, synchronization, nodes and hubs, reliability. Consider how quickly regional insecurity becomes a financial variable. When maritime risks rise, insurers and reinsurers adjust war-risk premiums, shipping companies reroute, and delivery windows become uncertain. In an IMEC logic, political violence is translated into measurable disruption costs: delayed cargo, contractual penalties, and higher financing costs. This is precisely

what I mean by a new “lexicon”: security is no longer only deterrence; it is operational reliability that can be audited and priced.

Similarly, standards are not technical footnotes, they are geopolitical instruments. Customs interoperability, digital documentation, arbitration clauses, and compliance protocols can turn a conflictual environment into a field of rule-governed interaction. Disputes shift from existential narratives (“enemy/traitor”) to governable questions (“Which standard applies?”, “Which forum arbitrates?”, “Who bears liability for delay?”). Here, corridor politics becomes rule-design politics. These terms shift politics from hard ground to a flexible, regulable network, and in this new language, power is no longer defined simply by control over territory. It takes shape in the capacity to build and sustain connections, and in the ability to keep flows stable, minimize disruptions, price and manage risk (for instance through insurance premiums, corridor tariffs, or reliability-based contracting), binding others to shared rules. Security, too, is measured less by the display of force than by reliability. Even the style of questioning changes within this lexical network: Does the route work? Are contracts enforced? Are standards predictable? Can disruptions be contained?

This shift in the geopolitical and geoeconomics lexicon is not merely a change of words; it reconstructs reality. Political reality is, to a significant extent, shaped by what can be named and calculated. When the region begins to speak in the language of “connectivity,” many notions that previously circulated only as slogans or threats are drawn into the realm of measurement and regulation: risk indicators, reliability metrics, dispute-resolution protocols, shared timelines, and the mechanisms of insurance and guarantees. In practice, this means translating political claims into auditable indicators (uptime, delivery windows, compliance checks) and enforceable procedures (insurance clauses, arbitration, and standardized contracts). From that point on, politics is no longer only a stage for signaling positions; it becomes a field for designing rules. It is precisely here that IMEC takes on the character of a grammar: a set of rules that teaches its actors how to “form sentences” together even when they remain divided over meanings.

The primary effect of this grammar can be seen in the kinds of actions it makes possible. Confrontational politics typically operates through decisive moves: severing relations, blocking routes, eliminating the other, enforcing a single narrative, and so on. Network-based politics, by contrast, pushes action toward linking and regulating. Within the network logic on which IMEC is built, the complete removal of the other is rarely possible or cost-effective because ejecting any node can destabilize the entire structure. As a result, even hostilities are compelled to be translated into forms that can be managed: disputes over route safety, transit rights, standards, data, and

energy. This translatability does not mean that conflict disappears; it means that the kind of conflict changes from existential, open-ended antagonisms to disputes that at least lend themselves to institutional formulation and to technical-legal settlement.

Still, we need to be precise. Just as a new language can enable richer forms of dialogue, it can also generate new rules of exclusion. Even networks draw boundaries, though not necessarily by geographic lines, but often through technical and legal distinctions: reliable and unreliable, standards-compliant and non-compliant, insurable and uninsurable. In the Middle East, "technical exclusion" maps onto very concrete fault lines: sanctions regimes, contested recognition, divergent regulatory cultures, and asymmetric access to capital and technology. An actor can be labeled "non-compliant" not only for technical reasons but due to geopolitical alignment, data-governance disputes, or security vetting. The corridor can therefore reproduce a new hierarchy of legitimacy: who is insurable, financeable, and contractable, and who is permanently treated as a disruption risk. This is why "just network design" must include transparent criteria, grievance mechanisms, and distributive benefits that reach beyond elite nodes.

The IMEC's grammar, therefore, has two faces: it can help the region move beyond the crude friend–enemy binary, yet at the same time it may produce a new order of inclusion and deprivation. This is where real politics begins. The IMEC must not function merely as a device of connection, it must become a device of just connection. Links should not serve only a handful of powerful nodes, they must also be translated into the lived experience of ordinary people. Otherwise, the gap between connectivity and justice becomes a dangerous fault line and any network that builds connections while neglecting justice will sooner or later become raw material for a new war of narratives.

Now we can better grasp the metaphor of the IMEC as a grammar of movement. Within this grammar, entry into dialogue is enabled not merely through symbolic agreements, but through learning shared rules that make it possible for disagreements to be articulated. Once the region is compelled to speak in the vocabulary of connectivity, politics shifts from blanket negation and enemy-making to the regulation of particulars, from the affect of exclusion to the rationality of linkage, and from homogenizing wars of narrative to a form of dialogue that does not erase difference but makes it livable and governable. It is precisely at this point that, if the corridor is properly designed and its benefits are distributed justly, it can deliver more than trade: it can yield a measure of calm. Not a calm achieved by silencing divergent voices, but one produced by transforming disagreements into durable mechanisms of coexistence.

IMEC as a “Shared Horizon” in the Lifeworld

Meaning in politics and economics does not arise from a vacuum; it emerges from within a lifeworld. The lifeworld is a constellation of habits, expectations, temporalities, and taken-for-granted assumptions that make action intelligible and behavior predictable. At this level, the world is not merely a geography, and the IMEC should not be reduced either to a purely geopolitical issue or to a purely technical project. It is a shared horizon within which we come to understand what is feasible, what is costly, and what counts as rational; and as it settles into the everyday routines of actors and becomes institutionalized. As a result, those actors begin to experience and calculate the future in common.

As a shared horizon, the IMEC’s first function is to draw the future out of its dispersed ambiguity and give it a framework. Categories such as investment volume, scheduling, and the costs of stoppage are lifted from the level of each actor’s isolated decisions and relocated into a common field. When a corridor route is underwritten by a network of capital, regulation, security protection, insurance, and standards, the future ceases to be a set of separate guesses and becomes a planning horizon. Actors, from states to private firms, from port managers to insurance institutions, begin to build a kind of shared time: project time, maintenance time, delivery time, risk-assessment time. This synchronization and coordination gradually replace the fragmented, event-driven temporality on which regional politics, particularly in the Middle East, has fed for decades.

IMEC produces “shared time” through concrete instruments: synchronized port slots, rail timetables, standardized inspection cycles, unified documentation deadlines, and cross-border incident-response protocols. Once these calendars exist, political shocks are immediately experienced as schedule-ruptures with measurable costs. This is how a future becomes “common”: it is no longer imagined separately, it is administered jointly.

Thus, this shared temporality helps consolidate a set of standards, and the behavior of actors becomes more standardized and, therefore, more predictable. As a result, actors are not forced to begin from suspicion each time; they can rely on a shared structure that has already absorbed part of the uncertainty in advance. It is precisely here that we avoid reducing IMEC to a merely geopolitical issue or a purely technical project: it renders the ways of speaking and doing things more uniform and comparable, and it shifts disagreements from the level of accusation and sweeping narratives to the level of specific criteria and determinate judgments.

Yet the most consequential layer in building a shared horizon is the emergence of what can be called mutual expectation. Mutual expectation means that I do not only see you now; I can also anticipate what your tomorrow will look like, not through political mind-reading, but on the basis of the shared costs and commitments we have accepted. Mutual expectation becomes real when disruption is self-harming. If a transit state or a key hub politicizes blockage, it does not merely "signal"; it triggers insurance repricing, financing delays, and reputational downgrade of reliability. In IMEC politics, credibility is capital: once lost, it is expensive to rebuild. This is a distinct mechanism of restraint less heroic than military deterrence, but often more continuous.

When actors have invested in a corridor network such as the IMEC, the incentive to keep the route stable becomes reciprocal and real. This is where trust among members becomes an institutional fact grounded in a rational calculation. I expect you to keep the route stable because if you disrupt it, you will harm yourself as well by undermining the insurance, standards, credibility, and capital bound up in the network. This mutual expectation gradually produces a kind of soft security a security that does not rely on fear of external punishment, but on the internal costs of disruption.

In this way, the realization of the IMEC project ultimately tends toward producing a form of being-in-common among the parties: a shared time, a shared language, and shared expectations. Such commonality emerges from a shared horizon that generates intersubjective relations—relations that render actions and decisions intelligible to the other. In this article, "intersubjectivity" is not treated as a purely psychological or abstract philosophical concept; in the strict sense, it concerns social life. Intersubjectivity names the fact that meaning, trust, enmity, hope, suffering, and the very possibility of cooperation are not formed within an isolated mind but take shape in an in-between space and acquire solidity through a common language, institutions, collective memories, historical experience, and more.

From this perspective, the states participating in the IMEC cannot be regarded as a single "person" or a unitary "agent" that simply decides and implements. Each member state is the institutional form of a society, the legal and administrative embodiment of a social order. This is precisely where intersubjectivity ceases to be a pleasing word and becomes a hard political concept. The state, as an institutional form, is a network of habits, fears, hopes, institutions, everyday economies, bodies, and languages; and every decision reaches down into individual bodies and everyday life. So when we speak about the IMEC, if we reduce it to the level of "negotiations among

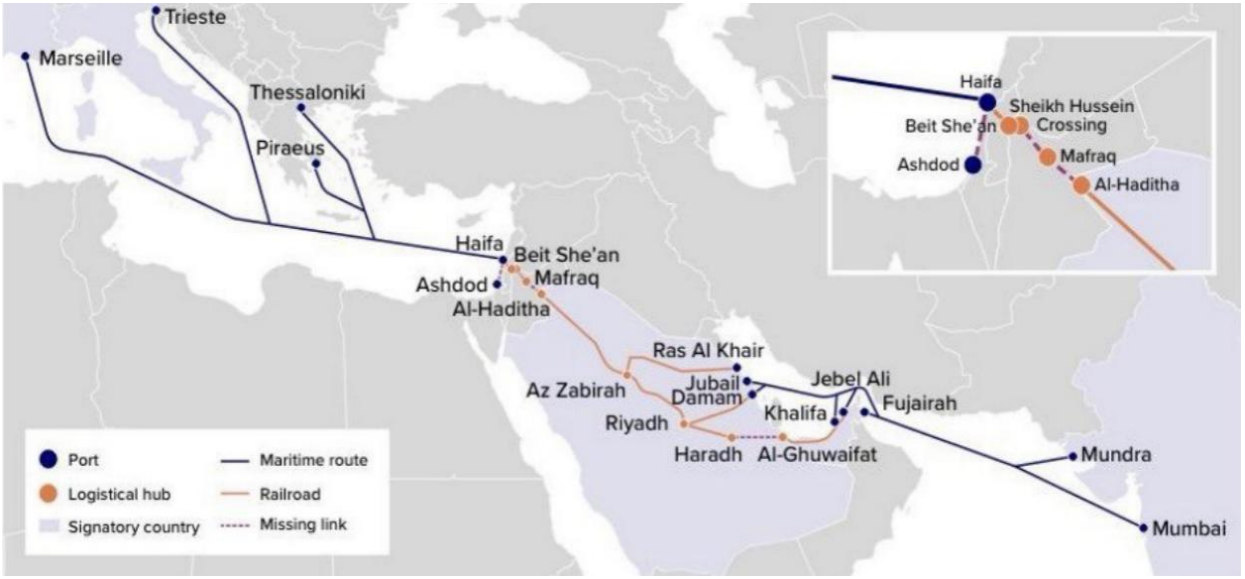
states," we remove the primary mediator of politics: the very social life through which infrastructures pass and upon which they settle.

IMEC, therefore, is not merely a line on a map or a "natural" route. It is a field of forces and possibilities. It enters the networks of work, pricing, insurance, security, migration, technology, and urban development; it becomes part of the arena in which meanings are produced and reproduced or redefined and even in which dignity is contested and re-articulated. In this sense, intersubjectivity here means the following: a project like the IMEC, inevitably, enters the field of the production and reproduction of meaning within society.

Before this intersubjective space fully takes shape, it can already begin to clarify the politics of the participating states, gradually bringing them closer to what might be called a calculable partner. By "calculable partner," I do not mean a friend or an ally; I mean that the other is drawn into a domain of predictability. Even if hostility persists, it is compelled to be translated into forms that do not shatter the shared horizon, because if an actor chooses to destroy that horizon, the cost will no longer be merely political or symbolic, but will also entail economic, legal, and network losses.

In an intersubjective condition, the relationship shifts from "I against you" to "we within a horizon" even if that is initially fragile, instrumental, or limited. Regional politics, rather than remaining only a battlefield of competing narratives and ideologies, yields part of itself to a field of technical regulation and coordination. The result of such a space, ultimately, is an inter-civilizational dialogue.

To see the logic more clearly, a historical example helps: in "The Golden Road", William Dalrymple shows how the monsoon winds, with their predictable rhythms, produced a network of maritime routes in which the sea "did not divide; it connected." Routes were not merely routes; they generated a maritime–cultural unit that enabled movement, exchange, and even cultural transformations. In this account, power derives not from conquering territory, but from the repeatability of rhythm from the ability to turn distance into connectivity(That is, once monsoon seasons make the suitable windows for departure and return largely predictable, maritime travel is no longer a matter of one-off luck or chance, but becomes a regular, plan-able circulation: ports and merchants can incorporate these sailing windows in advance into their commercial calendars.). the IMEC can be understood at a similar level. Rather than viewing it as a linear transport project, we should treat it as a dispositive that generates new rhythms of scheduling, standards, trust, and risk management, something like an institutional monsoon from which a new form of shared horizontality and predictability can emerge.



Core IMEC transportation corridor linking GCC ports to the Eastern Mediterranean.

What is striking here is that the IMEC, too, can bring distinct spaces into a shared horizon, much as monsoon winds in antiquity and the medieval world transformed distance from an obstacle into an enabling condition. The IMEC should be read in continuity with this logic: its route like the sea unites before it divides, forming a cultural unit built not through territorial conquest, but through the possibility of sustained circulation and the movement of ideas. In this sense, IMEC is not only a corridor; it is an inter-civilizational unit, a connective space that links the narratives, religions, societies, and cultures of East and West.

It must be stressed that a shared horizon is not, in itself, an absolute good. Every new horizon renders certain things visible and accessible. A horizon of connectivity may define some actors as "connectable" and others as "non-standardizable"; a network may produce new boundaries. And yet one fundamental point remains: the IMEC, if implemented, can make the world intelligible through a new set of rules. That very intelligibility is the raw material of durable peace: a peace achieved not by eliminating differences, but by building a shared horizon and a shared intersubjectivity that make disagreement governable and transform the other from an absolute threat into a co-horizonal other.

IMEC's Anti-Ideological Logic and the "Ethics of the Other"

Ideological games often begin with a simple trick: turning the encountered other into a consumable image. This image-making is effective precisely because it removes complexity: the other becomes an enemy, an infidel, a traitor, or an agent of conspiracy. Once the other has been reduced to an image, there is no need to

understand them; all that is required is an effective stance against them. Politics is then emptied of genuine dialogue and becomes a competition among absolutizing narratives—narratives that, to survive, require a steady supply of hatred, contempt, or fear. Against this mechanism, an ethics of encountering the other begins at the moment the other regains a face: when they are seen as a present, vulnerable, answerable, and addressable human being rather than as a generic symbol that can be substituted at will.

IMEC, in itself, is not inherently ethical: no railway line or port is ethical as such. But if IMEC is taken seriously and institutionalized, it can provide a condition of possibility for ethics because it creates a space in which the relation to the other descends from the level of abstract images to the level of concrete contact and practical responsibility. This “ordinary contact” is visible in the mundane cooperation of customs officials, port operators, logistics firms, standards bodies, and insurers. These actors coordinate documentation, inspection requirements, liability frameworks, and incident reporting forms of interaction that rarely appear in nationalist speeches yet quietly shape what is politically feasible. The other is encountered not as a myth but as a counterpart in a workflow.

The first mechanism is real, repeated contact: contact that is neither heroic nor performative or media-driven, but administrative, technical, professional, and everyday. In these quotidian encounters, the other appears not as a myth or a threat, but as someone with whom schedules must be coordinated, standards aligned, disputes resolved, and work carried forward. The very ordinariness and non-heroic character of these contacts is the point. Through repetition, network relations generate a kind of practical obviousness, by which I mean the predictability of actors’ behavior. And it is precisely here that the network stands against ideology: ideology typically feeds on explosive, dramatic moments, whereas everyday contact gradually wears ideology down and renders it less effective.

From this perspective, the IMEC can generate an anti-ideological logic. Ideologies feed on ruptured connections and the persistence of unresolved crises and they also thrive on harsh generalizations and the forced homogenization of the other. Shared routines, by contrast, produce particulars rather than sweeping generalities; instead of reducing the world to black and white, they generate gradations and ranges; instead of absolute negation, they offer practical mechanisms. Once cooperation settles into routine and habit, wars of narrative are compelled to confront everyday reality: delivery schedules, insurance procedures, technical standards, the costs of stoppage and delay, in other words, the language of linkage and connectivity. This

does not mean that grand narratives and ideological propaganda disappear entirely, but it does mean that their ability to ride on reality becomes far more limited.

In such a setting, the “other” also acquires a new position. In narrative wars, the face of rivals is typically reduced to a fixed and unchanging image: the eternal enemy, the inherent threat, a one-dimensional and uniform figure. Such homogenization is a motor of ideological mobilization, because it erases real differences in order to make hatred and fear easier to circulate. Networks, however, through repeated contact, ongoing cooperation, and mutual interdependence, draw the other down from the level of ideological image to the level of predictable agency. At this level, the other is not a mythical monster, but a high-risk or low-risk partner an actor whose behavior can be adjusted to, or anticipated. This shift neutralizes a significant part of ideological games: ideology feeds on crisis and disconnection, whereas the network draws its strength from continuity and the maintenance of connection.

For this reason, we can say that the IMEC functions like a “school of habits.” It teaches the craft of peace not through sweeping slogans, but as a practical skill, above all, the skill of coordination. Peace here is not a romantic or emotional moment; it becomes an institutional habit. If the Middle East has spoken for decades in a language of confrontation and conflict, IMEC as a school of habits teaches a new language.

Still, one decisive condition remains: the network must not become faceless. A faceless network is a structure that produces benefits only for political and economic elites while disregarding the lives of ordinary people. In such a scenario, IMEC would not undermine ideology; it would become fresh fuel for it because the gap between “connectivity” and “justice” is easily translated into narratives of anger and hatred. If people feel that the IMEC has passed over their heads and left them with no share passing above them rather than alongside them the other will again revert, in their eyes, to the old hateful image, and politics will slide back into a war of narratives perhaps with greater intensity this time, because a sense of humiliation and exclusion will have been added to the mix.

In the Middle East, exclusion is quickly narrativized. If IMEC is perceived as an elite-only architecture benefiting a narrow coalition of hubs while bypassing communities and peripheral economies, it will be interpreted through familiar idioms of humiliation, dispossession, and foreign alignment. Under those conditions, the corridor does not neutralize ideology; it becomes an ideological object. “Justice” here is not a moral decoration: it is a stability requirement.

Conclusion

What this article has sketched is a view of the corridor as a new grammar of regional politics. Today's major corridors are not merely economic highways for moving goods; they are political architectures capable of redefining the language of interaction among states. As we have seen, an institutionalized corridor generates a set of rules, temporal horizons, and shared habits that shift decision-making away from existential antagonisms and zero-sum games toward regulation, synchronization, and reciprocal benefit.

By reshaping the vocabulary and syntax of politics, a corridor can reframe security through cooperation, challenge war-driven narratives by imposing the imperatives of continuity and performance, build trust through the repetition of everyday contact, and transform the demonic image of the "other" into the face of a predictable partner. In this way, the conditions for a gradual and durable peace begin to emerge: a peace, grounded in linkages and translations, rather than in the elimination or denial of the other.

Yet the full realization of this horizon does not occur automatically, nor does it follow simply from building infrastructure. Throughout the discussion, we have emphasized that to unlock a corridor's peace-building potential, just and inclusive design is vital. The corridor network must be connected to people's lives and must respect public rights and interests.

Only then can economic connectivity be translated into social solidarity and political trust. Put differently, a corridor truly functions as a language of peace only when justice is embedded in the rules of the game and when new boundaries of exclusion and inequality are not allowed to crystallize. If these conditions are met, the corridor, as a grammar of movement, can turn differences into forms of understanding; it can convert disputes from a battlefield of narrative war into regulated valves within a shared order; and it can make a common future that allows different societies to remain diverse while making everyday life more predictable, economically stable, and practically livable for the people of the region.

This is the valuable legacy the IMEC can leave beyond its economic role: an architecture of hope for a durable peace, built not on silencing divergent voices, but on bringing them into resonance within a framework of shared rules.

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