

MP-IDSA *Issue Brief*

The Iran War and Türkiye's Emerging Role in Corridor Dynamics in West Asia

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Summary

The US–Israel war on Iran has accelerated the reconfiguration of West Asia's geopolitical and connectivity landscape, heightening the importance of alternative land-based transport corridors. Türkiye has positioned itself as a critical logistics and energy hub linking Asia, the Gulf and Europe. These developments challenge some strategic assumptions underpinning the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and create possibilities for new regional alignments.

Since the emergence of world markets in the modern era, regional and transcontinental infrastructure corridors have served as tools of economic statecraft, especially by great powers. During a period of accelerating globalisation in the post-Cold War era, infrastructure, economic and energy corridors were primarily driven by the market logic of efficiency. Uninterrupted, streamlined flows, especially with container shipments, helped reduce logistics costs between production centres and consumer markets and, over time, redistributed production chains from West to East and from North to South.

Over the last decade, China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has a declared aim of establishing new international transport corridors purportedly aligned with the national development strategies of other states, has introduced a new dynamic of competitive corridors in Eurasia. In West Asia, key Gulf States, Israel, Iran and Türkiye have sought to leverage their geographic location, economic and financial resources, and diversified foreign policies to enhance their role in the Eurasian connectivity landscape. These connectivity dynamics are being shaped by strategic competition between global and regional powers and by their objectives to diversify and de-risk supply chains and transport routes.

The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), unveiled in 2023, envisaged a new vision for Europe–Asia connectivity that sought to advance Israel’s integration with its Arab neighbours. At the same time, it proposed circumventing maritime ‘chokepoints’ at the Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Strait of Hormuz by creating new land routes through the Arabian Peninsula. Israel’s war in Gaza following Hamas’s attack in October 2023, which entangled the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon, precipitated a regime change in Syria and eventually led to two wars with Iran. These conflicts have upended the regional balance of power and perceptions of threat, thereby reshaping the strategic priorities driving connectivity projects.

Most Gulf States are alarmed by Israel’s hegemonic doctrine of achieving security through regional dominance and will therefore be willing to seek alternatives to the IMEC, especially if it entails structural dependence on Israel for access to the Mediterranean.¹ Iran’s disruption of shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and its bid to formalise its leverage over the strait by changing its legal status of ‘international transit’ underscore the perils of dependence on a single export route and the importance of developing land-based transport corridors in West Asia.

The war has also given rise to a new regional configuration comprising Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Türkiye and Egypt, with shared objectives of reducing the risk of

¹ Cinzia Bianco and Arturo Varvelli, “[Bypassing The Straits: The India-Middle East-Europe Corridor Needs A Wartime Redesign](#)”, European Council on Foreign Relations, 22 May 2026.

miscalculation and supporting de-escalation. It could emerge as a more durable partnership to coordinate on post-war security and geopolitics. Türkiye, which was bypassed in IMEC, is likely to consolidate its position as a regional logistics and energy hub between Asia and Europe. The war in Iran has led Ankara to inject new momentum into its flagship projects, the ‘Middle Corridor’ and ‘Development Road’. Most importantly, the revival of the historic Hejaz Railway with Saudi Arabia will strengthen Türkiye’s regional position in Gulf–Europe connectivity while countering the rival vision of the IMEC, which was predicated on integrating Israel into its Arab environment.

Growing Importance of the Middle Corridor

Amid unprecedented disruptions in the maritime trade, Türkiye’s corridor politics has gained prominence, with Ankara mobilising concerted diplomacy to advance new transport lines as instruments of resilience and stability, while strengthening its own regional positioning. Türkiye’s broader approach is to turn geography into a transit power by linking Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Levant and the Gulf through a mix of rail, road, energy and port infrastructure. The core of this strategy is the multimodal Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, or ‘Middle Corridor’, which is being promoted as a reliable long-term alternative to the Northern Corridor via Russia. Its overland segment extends from China through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; a trans-Caspian leg connects the Aktau/Kuryk and Turkmenbashi ports with Baku/Alat in Azerbaijan; and the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway links the Caspian Sea transport network with Türkiye and Europe.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Union’s Global Gateway connectivity initiative has prioritised strengthening cross-regional connectivity between the EU and Central Asia via the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region, across transport, trade, and the energy and digital sectors. While over 85 per cent of China–Europe trade passed through Russia before 2022, cargo along the Middle Corridor has grown fourfold between 2022 and 2025, with both Europe and Beijing emerging as influential investors in developing the corridor’s infrastructure. China formally incorporated it into the BRI in 2023. Amid disruptions to the Southern Eurasian Corridor through the Persian Gulf, Türkiye seeks to enhance the Middle Corridor’s operational capacity as a key Eurasian trade artery and a cornerstone of its Central Asia strategy.²

Notably, the trilateral cooperation among Türkiye, Azerbaijan and Georgia has been driven by their shared strategic priority of enhancing their role in East–West land

² Ulas Birkan Cakilci, “[Strategic Integration: How the Development Road Project Reinforces the Middle Corridor](#)”, *TRT World*, 16 July 2025.

freight. On 8 June 2026, the Foreign Ministers of Türkiye, Azerbaijan and Georgia held their 10th trilateral meeting in Istanbul. The joint declaration³ called for expanding and diversifying transport and energy links across the South Caucasus, especially the ongoing modernisation of the BTK railway.

Türkiye also seeks to strengthen the South Caucasus segment of the Middle Corridor by supporting the Azerbaijan–Armenia peace process and capitalising on Armenia’s westward tilt. Ankara views the reopening of the land border with Armenia as part of efforts to open a more direct overland trade route to Central Asia. For Armenia, the war in Iran exposed its reliance on a single trade corridor through Iranian territory and strengthened the case for furthering normalisation and opening land borders with Türkiye.

Since Yerevan and Baku initiated a ‘peace treaty’ in a joint declaration in Washington in August 2025, and the intergovernmental agreement between the US and Armenia on the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), announced during US Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s visit to Armenia in May 2026, the connectivity landscape in the South Caucasus has undergone dramatic changes, raising concerns in Moscow and Tehran.⁴ The growing influence of Türkiye and the United States in shaping the regional trade and transport corridor is seen in Moscow and Tehran as part of a longstanding strategy to weaken their traditional influence in the region. When Iranian-origin drones landed in the Azerbaijani region of Nakhchivan in March 2026, the spillover of insecurity from Iran raised concerns about vulnerability and Iran’s leverage over trade and transit corridors in the South Caucasus.

Revival of the Hejaz Railway Project

Türkiye’s multi-corridor strategy is also increasingly focused on integrating East–West corridors with North–South corridors. The IMEC, announced in 2023 as a strategic investment under the European Union’s Global Gateway, was driven by the need to reduce vulnerabilities, including Ankara’s leverage over the EU as the major ‘gateway’, the growing Chinese role in the development of connectivity infrastructure, and the broader objectives of de-risking and strategic autonomy.⁵ Erdogan explicitly

³ [“Istanbul Declaration of the Tenth Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, Republic of Azerbaijan, and Georgia”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Türkiye, 8 June 2026.

⁴ [“The United States and Armenia Announce the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity \(TRIPP\) Framework Agreement and Sign the Strategic Partnership Charter and Critical Minerals Memorandum of Understanding”](#), Press Release, U.S. Department of State, 26 May 2026.

⁵ Owen Au and Tin-Ching Leung, [“China’s Growing Interest in the Middle Corridor Presents a Dilemma for Europe”](#), China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE), 10 December 2025.

opposed the exclusion of Türkiye from IMEC in September 2023 and stated that there can be no corridor without Türkiye, as it is “an important production and trade base and the most convenient line for traffic from East to West has to pass through Türkiye”.⁶

Türkiye’s response is not to reject the idea of interconnection, but to argue implicitly that any durable Eurasian trade architecture still needs an Anatolian land bridge. Subsequently, Ankara announced the ‘Development Road’ project, designed to facilitate the transport of goods from the Gulf to Europe via the Grand Faw Port in Basra, southern Iraq, and Türkiye. This 1200-kilometre rail and highway network is pitched as a direct overland line from the Persian Gulf to Türkiye’s Mediterranean and European gateways. Its integration with the Middle Corridor could further strengthen Asia–Europe trade connectivity by creating a multimodal route that could cut transit times by 30–40 per cent compared with the traditional Suez Canal route.⁷

While political instability in Iraq and the presence of Iran-aligned groups are cited as structural constraints on the revival of the Development Road project, backed by Türkiye, Qatar and the UAE, the revival of the Hejaz Railway is being presented as part of a dual-corridor strategy to diversify options for connecting the Gulf to Europe.⁸ Furthermore, the Hejaz Railway project also benefits from greater coordination, if not alignment, between Ankara and Riyadh, and from Saudi plans to strengthen its position as a regional logistics hub.

Soon after Turkish-backed rebels overthrew the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Turkish Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Abdulkadir Uraloglu noted Ankara’s plans to repair and rebuild the country’s transport infrastructure, including the approximately 1,750-kilometre Hejaz Railway, built by Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II to connect Istanbul, Mecca, Medina, Yemen and Damascus. Syria is central to that southern imagination because it serves as Türkiye’s gateway to the Arabian Peninsula.

Therefore, the reopening or rehabilitation of Syrian rail and road links carries strategic weight for Ankara’s regional standing and for stabilising Syria. A transit country along international transport corridors can attract foreign investment in its transport and logistics infrastructure as well as in its manufacturing and energy sectors, while securing access to diversified markets. For Türkiye, the future of any

⁶ Ragip Soylu, “[Turkey's Erdogan Opposes India-Middle East Transport Project](#)”, *Middle East Eye*, 11 September 2023.

⁷ Burak Elmalı, “[How Development Road Can Anchor the Future of Global Connectivity](#)”, *Daily Sabah*, 2 April 2026.

⁸ Sinem Cengiz, “[Regional Tensions Highlight Need For Türkiye-Gulf Corridor](#)”, *Arab News*, 1 May 2026.

Arab-facing transit strategy depends heavily on whether Syrian territory can again support secure movement of goods, energy and people.

Amid disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, Ankara made concerted diplomatic efforts, signing agreements with regional countries to fast-track the revival of the rail link to transport goods, oil and natural gas between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Jordan, Syria and Europe. On 7 April 2026, Türkiye, Jordan and Syria signed a trilateral memorandum of understanding on transport cooperation, pitching it as a shared commitment to regional development and stability.⁹ On 9 June 2026, Abdulkadir Uraloğlu, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure of Türkiye, and his Saudi counterpart, Saleh bin Nasser Al-Jasser, signed a similar MoU to enhance railway cooperation and agreed to develop a financial plan for the rail project, which is expected to be completed in a few years.¹⁰

Pointing out that the Saudi national rail network currently extends to the Jordanian border at the Al-Haditha crossing, Uraloğlu noted that the Turkish railway link had been extended from Islahiye to Kilis and Gaziantep, near the border with Syria. That leaves a gap of some 400 kilometres between Syria and Jordan, he said.¹¹ Ankara aims to complete the first phase by upgrading the Türkiye–Syria–Jordan line, which will serve as the backbone of the proposed project.¹² Saudi officials described the project as a step towards deeper regional integration, expanded trade, and a more sustainable land transport system, highlighting the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia’s rail connections to the Jordanian border and its integrated port-corridor infrastructure.¹³

The conflict-driven disruptions are prompting Riyadh to diversify its transportation routes and strengthen its own role as an alternative regional logistics hub. On 10 April 2026, Saudi Arabia Railways launched five new freight logistics corridors to strengthen supply chain integration, improve cargo efficiency, and reinforce the Kingdom’s role as a global logistics hub under Vision 2030 and the National Transport and Logistics Strategy.¹⁴ The corridors form an integrated logistics system linking the Persian Gulf ports of Dammam, Jubail and Ras Al-Khair with key logistics nodes such as Riyadh Dry Port and Qurayyat near the Jordan border, to reduce cargo

⁹ Turgut Alp Boyraz and Muhammed Semiz, [**“Türkiye, Jordan, Syria Sign Trilateral Deal on Transport to Boost Regional Trade”**](#), *Anadolu Agency*, 7 April 2026.

¹⁰ [**“Saudi Arabia, Türkiye Sign MoU to Strengthen Railway Cooperation”**](#), *Saudi Press Agency*, 9 June 2026.

¹¹ [**“COP31 in Türkiye Seen as Critical Point for Advancing Energy Transition”**](#), *Daily Sabah*, 17 June 2026.

¹² Sinem Cengiz, [**“Regional Tensions Highlight Need For Türkiye-Gulf Corridor”**](#), no. 8.

¹³ [**“Studies for Railway to Türkiye to be Completed Soon: Saudi Minister”**](#), *Daily Sabah*, 23 April 2026.

¹⁴ [**“Saudi Arabia Railways Launches 5 New Logistics Corridors to Boost International Trade”**](#), *Arab News*, 10 April 2026.

transit time, enhance operational reliability, improve regional and international connectivity, lower carbon emissions, and position Saudi Arabia as a strategic trade passage between East and West.

Implications for India

As the US–Israel war on Iran pushed Tehran to weaponise its geographical leverage at the Strait of Hormuz, Türkiye was well positioned to build on its rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, its geopolitical gains in Syria and renewed efforts to establish balance in ties with Europe and Asia. As the US–Israel war on Iran transforms regional alignments, connectivity map and economic partnerships, both Ankara and New Delhi have taken cautious steps towards reviving dialogue and confidence-building, which could lead to the revival of economic ties.

India–Türkiye bilateral trade, which reached US\$ 13.82 billion in 2022–23, has contracted by almost 50 per cent to US\$ 6.89 billion in 2025–26. In the aftermath of a Pakistan-backed terror attack in Pahalgam, India launched counter-terror military strikes under ‘Operation SINDOOR’. Pakistan deployed Turkish-supplied drones against Indian targets. New Delhi then revoked the security clearances of the Indian subsidiaries of Turkish airport services company Celebi Aviation. The move wiped out an estimated US\$ 400–500 million in business value. It ended nearly two decades of investment and operations in India,¹⁵ emerging as one of the most significant economic consequences of the diplomatic tensions in India–Türkiye bilateral relations.

The 12th India–Türkiye Foreign Office Consultations were held in New Delhi on 8 April 2026, marking the first such dialogue since June 2022.¹⁶ While reviewing the full spectrum of bilateral relations, including trade and investment, tourism, technology, energy, education, culture and people-to-people exchanges, the discussions also covered cooperation against cross-border terrorism and regional and global issues of mutual interest. New Delhi’s approach towards relations with Türkiye will seek to balance pragmatic economic engagement with security-driven concerns. New Delhi remains well-positioned to engage diverse players based on convergent interests without being entangled in exclusive alignments.

Even as alternative transport corridors gain prominence, India, a key anchor of the IMEC, remains committed to the project. India’s rising trade volumes with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Europe, the other anchor of the corridor, and the substantial

¹⁵ Ajay Joseph, “[“\\$500 Million Erased Overnight’: Turkey’s Celebi Breaks Silence on Post-Operation Sindoore India Ouster”](#)”, *Financial Express*, 17 June 2026.

¹⁶ “[12th India-Turkiye Foreign Office Consultations](#)”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 8 April 2026.

potential for trade with other transit countries such as Jordan and Israel, provide a strong economic and geopolitical rationale for the corridor. During India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Jordan in December 2025, both sides reaffirmed the importance of strengthening transport and logistics connectivity, including the regional integration of Jordan’s transit and logistics infrastructure, as a strategic opportunity to advance shared economic interests and private-sector collaboration.¹⁷

On 15 April, the UAE and Jordan signed a US\$ 2.3 billion agreement to build a 360-kilometre railway linking Jordan’s mining hubs to the Port of Aqaba, as part of a US\$ 5.5 billion investment framework agreed in 2023. The Emirati Minister of Energy and Infrastructure noted that the project supports the broader UAE–Jordan transport partnership, strengthening Jordan’s role in global trade flows and improving connectivity through Aqaba.¹⁸ As the economic and security architecture in West Asia remains in a prolonged transition, New Delhi will need not only to maintain a long-term strategic commitment to projects such as the IMEC but also to adopt an adaptive, pragmatic approach to diversifying ties and contributing to economic resilience and stability in the region.

Conclusion

The war-induced disruptions to the vital trade artery, the Strait of Hormuz, have led states in West Asia to prioritise developing reliable land-based alternatives. This diversification drive is being led by key Gulf States, which possess substantial financial resources and are committed to realising their ambitious economic diversification plans. As regional states take the lead in creating new corridors, they are driven not only by objectives of economic resilience and stability but also by a broader vision of building a region-led order. Türkiye benefits not only from its favourable geographical location and a dynamic G20 economy but is also pursuing a proactive strategy that links its rise as a major connectivity hub to key geostrategic goals, including rivalry with Israel. India’s West Asia policy remains pragmatic and adaptive, driven by shared objectives of economic resilience and the diversification of transport corridors in the region.

¹⁷ [“Joint Statement on the Visit of Hon’ble Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Shri Narendra Modi to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”](#), Press Information Bureau, Prime Minister’s Office, Government of India, 16 December 2025.

¹⁸ Nivetha Dayanand, [“UAE, Jordan Sign \\$2.3 Billion Rail Deal to Move 16m Tonnes to Aqaba”](#), *Gulf News*, 15 April 2026.

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