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## **The Indo-Mediterranean Nexus:**

### ***India, the EU, and U.S. Tariff Missteps in a Multipolar World***

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#### **Introduction: A Shifting Geostrategic Landscape**

The early decades of the twenty-first century are witnessing a profound restructuring of global power dynamics. The Indo-Pacific, the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean are increasingly interconnected arenas where economic corridors, maritime security, and great power competition intersect. India, Europe, and the United States find themselves in a strategic triad, where decisions regarding trade, defense, and diplomatic alignment carry consequences not only for bilateral relations but for the broader international order (Kaplan, 2010; Mearsheimer, 2014).

The launch of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) at the 2023 G20 summit represents a geo-economics effort to link Asia and Europe while bypassing traditional Chinese and Turkish trade routes (Tsailas, 2024). Simultaneously, U.S. policies, including the imposition of punitive tariffs on Indian exports and pressure on New Delhi to curtail Russian energy ties, have strained

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Washington's credibility in Asia, risking a strategic realignment that may favor China and Russia (Price, 2023). This analysis examines these intersecting trends through the lens of international relations theory, situating economic corridors, maritime strategy, and tariff policy within realist, liberal, and constructivist frameworks.

## **Syria, the Middle East, and the Red Sea: Geopolitics in Flux**

### ***The Post-Assad Realignment***

The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in late 2024 marked a sharp inflection point in Levantine politics. The Trump administration's swift removal of U.S. sanctions on Syria signaled a pivot toward reinforcing regional partners such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom while marginalizing traditional adversaries, primarily Russia and Iran (Tsailas, 2025). This recalibration, however, departed from earlier Western strategies that emphasized democratization and minority rights, instead privileging geopolitical stability and counterterrorism cooperation. Critics have noted that while this move secures short-term U.S. interests, it introduces long-term uncertainties regarding Syria's domestic political stability and the potential for renewed corruption and ethnic conflict (Tsailas, 2025; Lister, 2023).

From a **realist perspective**, this aligns with Mearsheimer's assertion that "states prioritize survival over ideology, seeking to maximize relative power in an anarchic system" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 35). By repositioning itself as an arbiter of Syria's post-conflict order, the United States seeks to maintain strategic leverage, yet the absence of robust enforcement mechanisms highlights the limits of coercive realism in a multipolar Middle East.

### **Tartus and Maritime Strategy**

The future of Russia's naval base at Tartus underscores the geostrategic stakes in the Eastern Mediterranean. Tartus, a linchpin in Moscow's regional naval projection, offers NATO and U.S. allies a potential platform to extend maritime reach while

constraining Russian and Turkish maneuverability (Rieas, 2025). Greece, as a key regional actor, stands to benefit from alignment with Western strategies in Tartus, elevating Athens' strategic profile while counterbalancing Ankara's assertiveness in the Aegean and Libya.

However, realist logic also predicts the potential for conflict escalation. As Waltz (1979) emphasizes, "in an anarchic international system, even defensive measures can be perceived as offensive, generating security dilemmas" (p. 118). The proposed incorporation of Tartus into NATO-aligned operations exemplifies this dynamic: enhancing Western influence may provoke Russian retaliation and complicate Turkish diplomacy.

### **Red Sea and Houthi Disruptions**

The ongoing Israel–Hammas conflict has further destabilized global maritime trade, particularly in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (Tsailas, 2025). Houthi attacks on commercial vessels—supported and enabled by Iran—have disrupted shipping lanes critical for global energy and containerized trade (Indian Ocean Rim Association, 2024). Approximately 12% of global maritime trade transits the Red Sea, making these disruptions a matter of international concern (UNCTAD, 2024).

The United States' Operation Prosperity Guardian, a coalition naval effort to secure shipping lanes, demonstrates a liberal-institutionalist approach: multilateral cooperation to uphold freedom of navigation and economic interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Yet the limited participation of key actors, such as India and some EU states, illustrates the constraints of institutional mechanisms in a region shaped by overlapping strategic, ideological, and economic interests.

### **India's Maritime Strategy and the IMEC Vision**

#### ***Strategic and Economic Imperatives***

India's maritime posture is central to both national security and global trade. With a 7,500 km coastline and critical chokepoints in the Indian Ocean, New Delhi oversees

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95% of its trade by volume and 70% by value via maritime routes (Kapoor, 2023). The IMEC corridor—linking India, the Gulf, and Europe via Greece and Italy—represents an ambitious attempt to establish alternative trade routes, diversify energy transit, and counterbalance China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023).

Historically, India’s position has been shaped by a non-aligned posture, balancing relations with the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. Today, this approach evolves into “**multi-alignment**”, wherein India simultaneously engages with Western-led initiatives such as IMEC while maintaining independent ties with China, Russia, and the broader Global South (Pant, 2022). Constructivist theory illuminates this evolution: national identity, historical experience, and normative preferences shape India’s strategic autonomy, rather than mere material calculations (Wendt, 1999).

### **Chabahar, Gwadar, and Corridor Competition**

India’s operational control of Chabahar Port in Iran exemplifies dual-track geoeconomic strategy: IMEC complements regional alternatives, providing access to Central Asia while countering Chinese influence via Gwadar in Pakistan. This highlights a broader **multipolar dynamic**, wherein India hedges its bets across overlapping corridors to preserve strategic leverage (Scott, 2021).

The exclusion of Turkey from IMEC reflects political as well as logistical considerations. Turkey’s ongoing disputes with Greece and Israel, coupled with its BRI engagements, underscore the interdependence of economic infrastructure and geopolitical alignment.

### **U.S. Tariff Missteps: Economic Statecraft and Strategic Consequences**

#### ***Tariffs as Coercive Instruments***

The United States’ imposition of reciprocal tariffs on Indian exports, compounded by duties linked to Russian oil purchases, constitutes a striking case of economic

statecraft with unintended geopolitical consequences (Bown, 2022). Traditional liberal-institutionalist theory suggests that interdependence should mitigate conflict, yet coercive tariffs operate under realist assumptions of material leverage and power projection. As Gilpin (1987) argues, “economic instruments are often used to restructure international hierarchies, but miscalculation can accelerate shifts in alignment” (p. 89).

Ed Price, a senior fellow at NYU, warns that “If the Chinese, the Russians, and the Indians get together in any form of alliance that is economic and around the edges military, there’s no way that the Americans can compete in the 21st century” (Price, 2023). Indeed, U.S. missteps risk reinforcing multipolarity rather than containing it, potentially empowering a strategic bloc that challenges Washington’s Indo-Pacific strategy.

### **The India–China–Russia Signaling**

India’s attendance at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Tianjin, alongside Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, signals an unwillingness to acquiesce to coercive diplomacy (Pant, 2022). Despite ongoing border tensions with China and historical caution toward Russia, India demonstrates strategic autonomy, leveraging opportunities presented by alternative energy and trade arrangements.

The realist interpretation emphasizes structural incentives: facing coercive pressure from a hegemon, states may form tactical alignments to maximize survival and relative power (Mearsheimer, 2001). Constructivist analysis adds that India’s historical experience with colonialism, non-alignment, and sovereign self-conception informs its resistance to coercion (Wendt, 1999; Acharya, 2014).

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### **Setting the Stage for the Indo-European Maritime Pivot**

Part I establishes the intertwined nature of Middle Eastern instability, maritime corridors, and U.S.-India economic tensions. Realist, liberal, and constructivist perspectives provide complementary lenses: The United States seeks to secure relative power, multilateral institutions attempt to preserve global trade, and India exercises identity-driven autonomy in shaping geoeconomic alignments.

The next installment will analyze **India–EU trade dynamics, the IMEC corridor’s European node, and Greece’s strategic role** in the Indo-Mediterranean system, situating these developments within broader IR theoretical debates on alliance formation, economic interdependence, and multipolar governance.

### **India–EU Trade, Greece, and the Indo-Mediterranean Geo-economics’ Pivot**

#### *Historical Context and Contemporary Significance*

India’s engagement with Europe has deep historical roots, from early trade interactions following Vasco da Gama’s 1498 voyage to contemporary multilateral frameworks (Sengupta, 2021). The 1994 India–EU Cooperation Agreement and the 2004 Strategic Partnership underscored shared interests, yet lacked an integrated strategic vision. Today, the EU is India’s largest trading partner, accounting for €124 billion in goods trade and nearly €60 billion in services in 2023, with digital services constituting a significant portion (European Commission, 2024).

India’s “multi-alignment” strategy has created an opportunity for the EU to deepen economic ties, particularly as Europe confronts great power competition with China and questions about U.S. reliability (Mohan, 2022). A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the EU could serve as the largest economic alliance globally, both in terms of population coverage and combined GDP, potentially surpassing the scale of traditional Western-led agreements.

From a **liberal-institutionalist perspective**, such a trade agreement reinforces interdependence, reducing the likelihood of conflict by creating shared economic stakes (Keohane & Nye, 2012). As Ruggie (1982) argues, institutionalized economic

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relations embed norms that shape state behavior, promoting cooperation even amid geopolitical rivalry.

### **Economic Security and Strategic Technology**

Beyond trade volumes, the EU–India partnership addresses strategic industrial sectors. India’s semiconductor initiatives under the India Semiconductor Mission align with Europe’s ambition to double its chip production by 2030, presenting an opportunity for coordinated investment and supply chain governance (European Commission, 2024). Similarly, electric vehicle (EV) production in India, exemplified by Tata Motors’ expansion and acquisition of Jaguar Land Rover, offers avenues for industrial synergy with Europe, where domestic EV markets face overproduction and stagnating growth (Mohan, 2022).

Here, **realist and economic statecraft theories** intersect: states seek to secure technological and industrial advantages critical to power projection (Gilpin, 1987). Aligning India’s industrial policy with European standards allows Brussels to manage technological diffusion while simultaneously countering Chinese overreach in strategic sectors.

### **The Indo-Mediterranean Node: Greece as a Strategic Gateway**

#### ***Greece and IMEC***

The IMEC corridor links India with Europe through the Middle East, culminating in Mediterranean nodes in Greece and Italy. Greece, geographically positioned at the crossroads of the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, plays a critical role in securing maritime and overland trade routes (Raptis, 2023). The port of Piraeus, operated in part by China’s COSCO Shipping but integrated into broader European transport networks, exemplifies how Greece serves as a logistical and strategic hinge for both commercial and geostrategic flows (Papadopoulos, 2021; Tsailas, 2024).

From a **realist perspective**, controlling or influencing Mediterranean nodes confers tangible power: maritime chokepoints and port infrastructure serve as levers of state



influence, projecting both economic and military capacity (Mearsheimer, 2001). Greece's cooperation with India under IMEC not only diversifies European energy and trade routes but also strengthens its bilateral relationship with Washington, counterbalancing Turkey's assertiveness in the region.

### **Maritime Security and Multipolar Coordination**

Greece's strategic role extends to maritime security. The Eastern Mediterranean remains a theater of complex naval competition involving the U.S., NATO, Russia, Turkey, and regional actors. IMEC's success depends on secure shipping lanes linking the Red Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Adriatic, as disruptions—such as Houthi attacks or Russian naval assertiveness—can cascade through global trade networks (UNCTAD, 2024; Rieas, 2025).

**Liberal-institutionalist theory** emphasizes the role of alliances and multilateral institutions in mitigating such risks. Greece, as an EU and NATO member, provides a platform for coordinated maritime governance, supporting both trade and security objectives. Simultaneously, **constructivist insights** highlight the role of shared norms and identity: Greece, India, and Europe construct a narrative of maritime stewardship and economic connectivity, legitimizing cooperative action (Wendt, 1999).

### **U.S. Tariff Missteps and Strategic Fallout in the Indo-European Corridor**

#### ***Economic Coercion and Multipolar Repercussions***

As detailed in Part I, U.S. tariffs on Indian exports, compounded by punitive measures linked to Russian energy purchases, risk undermining American influence in both the Indo-Pacific and the Indo-Mediterranean corridor (Price, 2023; Bown, 2022). In the context of IMEC, these missteps have geopolitical consequences: they incentivize India to pursue independent multilateral engagements with Europe, Russia, and China, creating a corridor that is partially insulated from U.S. leverage.

Gilpin (1987) notes that economic coercion, while intended to restructure hierarchies, may accelerate realignments when targets pursue alternative coalitions. Realist theory



predicts that such punitive measures trigger balancing behavior: India strengthens ties with other powers to preserve autonomy and strategic options (Waltz, 1979). As Mearsheimer (2014) observes, “states will hedge against perceived threats, forming temporary alignments even with ideologically distant partners when survival demands it” (p. 67).

The IMEC corridor illustrates this balancing: by deepening India–EU integration, Washington’s missteps indirectly empower a counterweight to U.S.-dominated trade networks, demonstrating the limits of coercive diplomacy.

### **Theoretical Integration: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism**

#### ***Realism: Balancing and Power Projection***

Realist theory provides insight into the strategic motivations underlying the IMEC initiative. Control over trade routes, ports, and chokepoints aligns with Mearsheimer’s conception of power-maximizing behavior (Mearsheimer, 2001). Greece’s Mediterranean nodes, India’s Chabahar Port, and the Gulf terminals of the corridor are instruments of influence, enabling actors to project both military and economic power.

Moreover, U.S. tariff policies illustrate classic security dilemma dynamics. Efforts to coerce India economically provoke balancing behavior, inadvertently empowering alternative alignments with China and Russia—a quintessential realist outcome (Waltz, 1979).

#### ***Liberalism: Interdependence and Multilateral Cooperation***

IMEC’s success relies on economic interdependence, institutional coordination, and shared norms among participants. Liberal theory suggests that multilateral frameworks—including the EU–India FTA, NATO maritime coordination, and IORA participation—enhance stability by embedding repeated interactions and mutual stakes (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Economic corridors are not merely infrastructure

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projects; they are mechanisms to institutionalize cooperation and reduce the likelihood of conflict in contested regions (Ruggie, 1982).

### ***Constructivism: Identity, Norms, and Strategic Autonomy***

Constructivist analysis emphasizes India's identity-driven autonomy and the normative dimensions of corridor-building. India's historical non-alignment and contemporary "multi-alignment" strategy shape its responses to U.S. pressure, European overtures, and Chinese entreaties (Acharya, 2014; Wendt, 1999). IMEC represents not only a geo-economics initiative but a symbolic assertion of India's role as a sovereign actor capable of shaping regional infrastructure and alliances without subordination to any hegemon.

### **Policy Implications: Toward a Stable Indo-Mediterranean Order**

#### ***Europe's Strategic Opportunity***

For the EU, IMEC offers a pathway to secure economic relevance amid multipolar competition. By aligning with India, Brussels can diversify trade, secure strategic technologies, and reduce dependence on China. Coordinated investment in ports, digital infrastructure, and industrial sectors strengthens Europe's influence in the Indo-Mediterranean and enhances resilience against regional disruptions (Mohan, 2022).

#### ***U.S. Strategic Recalibration***

Washington must reconsider its coercive tariff approach. By prioritizing punitive economic measures, the United States risks alienating India, undermining the Quad, and inadvertently strengthening Eurasian multipolar alignments (Price, 2023). A recalibrated strategy emphasizing incentives, recognition of India's strategic autonomy, and multilateral cooperation could preserve U.S. influence while supporting corridor stability.

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### *Greece as a Nexus State*

Greece occupies a pivotal position in IMEC. Effective coordination with Athens ensures secure maritime routes, energy transit, and port development, while reinforcing EU cohesion and NATO alignment in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greek strategic engagement exemplifies how small but geographically critical states can shape multipolar infrastructure and trade networks (Papadopoulos, 2021; Raptis, 2023; Tsailas, 2025).

### **Conclusion:** *Strategic Stakes and the 21st-Century Geo-economics Order*

The convergence of India–EU trade, Mediterranean geopolitics, and U.S. tariff missteps illustrates the complexity of contemporary international relations. IMEC exemplifies a multipolar geo-economics initiative that combines realism’s power considerations, liberalism’s institutional logic, and constructivism’s identity-driven agency.

Economic corridors are not merely commercial routes; they are instruments of statecraft, arenas of competition, and platforms for asserting strategic autonomy. Misguided economic coercion—such as U.S. tariffs on India—can produce counterproductive realignments, underscoring the importance of nuanced, multilateral engagement.

Ultimately, the Indo-Mediterranean corridor, with Greece as a strategic hub, demonstrates that the 21st-century balance of power will be shaped not only by military capacity but by economic integration, infrastructure diplomacy, and the capacity of middle powers to navigate between great powers.

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