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## The Strategic Logic of IMEC: Greece, Israel, and the Future of Connectivity<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is frequently analyzed through the lens of trade volumes, transit times, and economic integration. However, to view IMEC solely as an economic endeavor is to misunderstand its fundamental nature. IMEC is, at its core, a security architecture disguised as a trade route. It is a strategic realignment designed to secure the flow of energy, data, and goods in an increasingly volatile multipolar world. When examining the European terminus of this corridor, Greece emerges not merely as a geographic entry point, but as the indispensable strategic anchor.

From an Israeli strategic perspective, Greece's role within IMEC extends beyond infrastructure and logistics. In an era defined by regional instability, contested maritime domains, and the growing importance of resilient supply chains, Greece increasingly functions as a stabilizing partner within the Eastern Mediterranean. This paper examines Greece's strategic transformation, the evolution of the Israel-Greece-Cyprus partnership, the implications of Turkish regional policy, and the broader relationship between infrastructure, deterrence, and regional integration in the context of IMEC.

## Beyond Economics

The announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) at the G20 Summit in New Delhi on September 9, 2023, marked a watershed moment in global geopolitics. On paper, it is a multimodal transportation network comprising shipping lanes, railway networks, and energy pipelines designed to connect India to Europe via the Arabian Peninsula and Israel. In reality, it is a profound geopolitical maneuver aimed at countering the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and establishing a resilient, US-backed supply chain architecture for the 21st century.

The coming decades will be decisive for securing the global transition toward new energy paradigms and digitally integrated economies. By 2050, the strategic value of traditional chokepoints like the Suez Canal or the Strait of Hormuz will be augmented, and potentially bypassed, by integrated overland and maritime corridors. In this emerging architecture, the European entry point is of paramount importance. While Italy and France offer significant port infrastructure, Greece's geographic positioning makes it the natural bridgehead. However, geography alone does not dictate strategy. Greece's true value to IMEC lies in its strategic metamorphosis over the past decade, transforming from a nation preoccupied with internal economic crises into a proactive security provider in the Eastern Mediterranean. This transformation is deeply intertwined with its evolving alliance with the State of Israel.

## The Strategic Metamorphosis of Greece

Historically, Greece was often viewed within the European Union more through the lens of economic crises than strategic importance. During the sovereign debt crisis, many in Northern Europe perceived Greece as a liability rather than as a state with long-term geopolitical value. However, the geopolitical landscape gradually shifted. The war in Ukraine, Europe's urgent need to reduce its dependence on Russian energy, and the growing assertiveness of regional actors forced a broader strategic reassessment. In this new environment, Greece's geography no longer appeared peripheral, but instead emerged as one of Europe's most important strategic gateways at the crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Europe. This transformation was not accidental, but rather the outcome of deliberate strategic positioning by Athens, reinforced by the gradual deepening of its partnership with Jerusalem. The Israel-Greece-Cyprus trilateral relationship has evolved from diplomatic alignment into a robust security partnership.

### The Israeli Perspective: Greece as Israel's Strategic Depth

From an Israeli strategic perspective, the alliance with Greece provides something Israel inherently lacks- strategic depth. Israel's narrow geography and congested airspace severely limit its ability to conduct large-scale, complex military exercises. Greece, with its vast archipelago, varied topography, and expansive airspace, offers an unparalleled training environment for the Israeli Air Force (IAF) and Navy. These joint exercises, such as the "Iniochos" aerial exercise<sup>2</sup> and various naval drills are not merely symbolic displays of friendship, but operational necessities that allow Israeli forces to train in unfamiliar territories while simulating long-range operations and complex threat scenarios. In return, Greece benefits from exposure to Israeli combat experience, advanced technological integration, and the implicit deterrence that comes from partnering with the region's most capable military power.

### Military Diplomacy as Strategic Integration

Beyond their operational military dimension, these exercises also carry significant geopolitical and strategic signaling value. The deepening cooperation between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus increasingly functions as a broader regional framework aimed at strengthening stability in the Eastern Mediterranean amid rising geopolitical competition and evolving security threats. This cooperation is widely perceived as a stabilizing force against Turkish assertiveness in the region, as well as against threats posed by Iran and its proxies. At the same time, the partnership has gradually expanded beyond the security sphere into the fields of energy, infrastructure, and regional connectivity. Projects such as the "Great Sea Interconnector," designed to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.haf.gr/en/structure/htaf/air-tactics-center/iniochos/>

connect the electricity networks of Israel, Cyprus, and Europe, reflect this broader strategic logic.

Within the broader framework of IMEC, the strategic importance of this trilateral relationship becomes even more pronounced. Together, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus form a defensive shield over the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. This framework is not only about defending national borders, but also about securing the critical infrastructure and maritime connectivity that could ultimately allow IMEC to function and endure. Undersea data cables, proposed energy interconnectors, and maritime shipping routes linking Haifa with Piraeus all depend on the security umbrella generated by this partnership. From this perspective, the trilateral alliance operates not merely as a diplomatic alignment, but as a foundational pillar for the long-term resilience and viability of regional geoeconomic integration.

## The Turkish Challenge to Eastern Mediterranean Connectivity

To understand the strategic necessity of the Greek anchor within IMEC, it is essential to examine Turkey's broader strategy. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey has increasingly pursued a vision of itself as an indispensable regional power and geopolitical gatekeeper through which major flows of energy, trade, and connectivity between East and West should transit. Turkey's geographic position between Europe and Asia has historically granted it this leverage, which Ankara has frequently utilized in its dealings with the European Union and NATO.

IMEC represents a significant strategic challenge to this vision. By routing trade from the UAE and Saudi Arabia through Jordan and Israel, and then across the Mediterranean to Greece, IMEC effectively bypasses Turkey. In doing so, IMEC has the potential to limit the geopolitical leverage that Ankara has historically derived from its geographic position between Europe and the Middle East. Following the announcement of IMEC, President Erdoğan reacted swiftly and unequivocally, stating that "There can be no corridor without Turkey"<sup>3</sup>.

## The Geopolitics of the "Blue Homeland" Doctrine

Turkey's opposition to IMEC should therefore be understood less as a matter of economic competition and more as a response to perceived strategic marginalization. Turkey's assertive posture in the Eastern Mediterranean, reflected in the "Mavi Vatan"<sup>4</sup> (Blue Homeland) doctrine, advances expansive maritime claims that directly intersect with the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Greece and Cyprus. Turkish interventions in regional conflicts, its controversial maritime boundary agreement with Libya, and its

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-erdogan-opposes-india-middle-east-corridor>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/maps/en/map8.pdf>

continuous challenging of Greek airspace are all mechanisms designed to disrupt alternative corridors and force reliance on Turkish transit routes. Ankara's goal is to make any infrastructure project that bypasses Turkey, whether it be the East Med pipeline or the maritime leg of IMEC, appear too risky, too expensive, and too militarily vulnerable to pursue.

## The Counter-Deterrence Architecture

Within this environment, the Israel–Greece–Cyprus partnership increasingly functions as an important stabilizing framework in the Eastern Mediterranean. Expanded naval coordination, intelligence-sharing, and defense cooperation among the three states reflect a broader effort to secure maritime infrastructure, energy networks, and strategic trade routes against regional instability and hybrid threats.

From an Israeli strategic perspective, cooperation with Greece and Cyprus contributes to a wider deterrence framework aimed at preserving operational freedom and reducing vulnerabilities across the Eastern Mediterranean maritime domain. While Israel continues to maintain complex and pragmatic relations with Turkey, its strategic cooperation with Athens and Nicosia has expanded steadily over the past decade independently of fluctuations in Israeli–Turkish relations. Joint military exercises, maritime surveillance coordination, and the integration of advanced defense technologies have strengthened trilateral interoperability and reinforced the resilience of critical infrastructure linking Israel with Europe through the Mediterranean basin.

## Tourism and Economic Interdependence: The Civilian Dimension of Security

The deepening security relationship has also translated into growing economic and societal confidence among the three countries. Over the past decade, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have increasingly viewed Greece and Cyprus not only as tourism destinations, but as familiar and trusted environments for investment, real estate acquisition, and long-term economic engagement. This expanding civilian dimension has strengthened the broader trilateral relationship and created a tangible public interest in maintaining stability and close cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

As a result, this alliance has gradually evolved from a pragmatic alignment into a much deeper strategic relationship<sup>5</sup>. Greece and Cyprus increasingly view Israel as a key technological, security, and innovation partner, while Israel sees Greece and Cyprus as stable, predictable, and strategically important allies in Europe. Beyond the military dimension, this evolving relationship reflects a broader regional understanding that long-term stability in the Eastern Mediterranean cannot rely exclusively on deterrence,

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<sup>5</sup><https://ornosnews.gr/en/featured/greece-israel-strong-message-of-strategic-convergence-from-athens-for-imec-and-t.html>

but must also be reinforced through economic interdependence, infrastructure connectivity, and shared strategic interests. It is precisely within this context that the broader strategic logic of IMEC becomes particularly significant.

## Peace through Infrastructure

The strategic logic behind IMEC closely reflects the regional dynamics that emerged after the Abraham Accords: the understanding that long-term stability in the Middle East can be strengthened through economic connectivity, infrastructure cooperation, and shared strategic interests. The Abraham Accords showed that normalization between Israel and several Arab states was driven not only by political agreements, but also by growing economic cooperation, technological collaboration, and common security concerns, particularly regarding Iran and regional instability. In many respects, IMEC extends this logic to a wider geoeconomic framework. By linking the economic interests of India, the Gulf states, Israel, and Europe, the corridor generates a strong collective incentive for regional stability and the protection of critical trade routes. As economic interdependence deepens, participating states acquire a growing strategic interest in preserving the security and continuity of the infrastructure upon which these networks depend. However, as Israeli military doctrine dictates, infrastructure without security remains inherently vulnerable. The success of IMEC over the coming decades will therefore depend on the ability of its participating states to protect the corridor against both state and non-state threats alike.

## The Coming Decades

### Greece's Dual Imperative

Looking toward the coming decades, the long-term viability of the IMEC will depend not solely on the efficiency of its transportation infrastructure or the capacity of its ports, but equally on the resilience of the broader security architecture underpinning it. Within this evolving geoeconomic framework, Greece occupies a dual strategic role. On the economic level, Greece must continue the modernization and integration of its critical infrastructure into a wider logistical network capable of facilitating the movement of goods, energy, and digital connectivity from the Eastern Mediterranean toward the Balkans and Central Europe. In this regard, the ports of Piraeus, Thessaloniki, and Alexandroupolis are expected to assume increasing strategic importance, despite the geopolitical complexities associated with foreign ownership structures and competing external interests surrounding certain infrastructure assets.

The strategic importance of the port of Alexandroupolis<sup>6</sup> lies primarily in its ability to function as a land-based alternative to the Turkish-controlled Straits of the Dardanelles

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.frstrategie.org/en/publications/notes/port-alexandroupolis-strategic-and-geopolitical-assessment-2024>

and the Bosphorus. In the event of a tension with Turkey, NATO and its allies can transfer military equipment, fuel, and supplies through this port directly to Bulgaria, Romania, and from there to Eastern Europe, without being dependent on Turkish approval.

### The Security Dimension of Alexandroupolis

The strategic importance of Alexandroupolis extends beyond logistics and energy connectivity into the broader security architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean. The wider region has increasingly been incorporated into military training activities, including aspects of the “Iniochos” exercise, where the area’s geography allows participating air forces to simulate complex operational scenarios near border zones and integrated air defense environments. At the same time, parts of the security infrastructure protecting strategic facilities in Greece increasingly rely on advanced Israeli defense technologies, particularly in the fields of radar, surveillance, and electronic warfare. Discussions regarding the establishment of a joint rapid response framework have further elevated the role of Alexandroupolis as a potential hub for protecting critical supply routes, energy infrastructure, and maritime connectivity. In this context, the Israel–Greece partnership has evolved beyond symbolic military cooperation. As infrastructure and connectivity become increasingly linked to regional stability and European energy security, their protection requires growing operational coordination and security cooperation among Greece, Israel, Cyprus, and their partners.

Operational cooperation between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus has deepened significantly in recent years, particularly in the fields of maritime security, critical infrastructure protection, and cyber defense. Joint naval coordination and exercises such as *Noble Dina*<sup>7</sup> increasingly focus on safeguarding energy infrastructure, undersea cables, and major maritime routes in the Eastern Mediterranean, including scenarios involving sabotage attempts, offshore attacks, or broader regional escalation. As the strategic importance of regional connectivity continues to grow, the trilateral partnership has evolved beyond traditional military coordination toward a more integrated framework for maritime defense and infrastructure resilience.

#### Key areas of cooperation include:

**Joint Naval Coordination:** Israeli and Greek naval forces increasingly coordinate maritime security activities around critical infrastructure, including energy interconnectors and undersea cables.

**Infrastructure Protection Exercises:** Exercises such as *Noble Dina* simulate sabotage attempts, attacks on offshore platforms, and threats against maritime infrastructure, requiring coordinated operational responses.

**Cyber and Intelligence Cooperation:** Cooperation increasingly focuses on protecting the Eastern Mediterranean’s energy and data infrastructure from

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<sup>7</sup> <https://greekreporter.com/2023/03/15/greece-us-israel-cyprus-military-drill-med/>

cyber intrusions and digital sabotage through intelligence-sharing and joint monitoring mechanisms.

**Advanced Maritime Defense Systems:** Israeli naval assets, including the Sa'ar 6 "Magen" class vessels equipped with C-Dome and Barak MX systems, contribute to the protection of strategic maritime infrastructure against missiles, drones, and asymmetric threats.

**Underwater and Anti-Sabotage Capabilities:** Israel and Greece have expanded cooperation in seabed monitoring, anti-submarine warfare, and maritime surveillance to protect cables, pipelines, and other critical infrastructure.

Strategically, Greece must, in partnership with Israel and Cyprus, maintain the maritime dominance necessary to deter disruption. This requires sustained investment in naval capabilities, continuous joint training, and the hardening of critical infrastructure against cyber and kinetic threats.

## Conclusion

For Israel, Greece is increasingly viewed not as Europe's southeastern periphery, but as a critical gateway within the emerging architecture of global connectivity. The long-term viability of IMEC will depend not only on infrastructure investment and economic coordination, but equally on the ability of participating states to secure the Eastern Mediterranean against geopolitical instability, maritime disruption, and hybrid threats.

Within this framework, the deepening partnership between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus has evolved into an increasingly important strategic pillar linking Europe with the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider Indo-Pacific connectivity environment. By strengthening maritime coordination, infrastructure resilience, and regional deterrence capabilities, the trilateral framework contributes not only to the protection of national interests, but also to the long-term stability of emerging East–West trade and energy networks.