

# From War Management to Strategic Integration?

## The IMEC Moment

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### Introduction: War, Uncertainty, and the Question of Regional Order

The Middle East might be entering one of its most consequential geopolitical moments in decades. The military escalation of February 28, 2026, when the United States and Israel carried out coordinated strikes against Iranian strategic capabilities, marked a dramatic intensification of a conflict that had already been unfolding across the region. What had long remained a shadow war between Israel and Iran suddenly moved closer to direct confrontation, raising fundamental questions about the future structure of the regional order.

This escalation did not emerge in a vacuum. It followed the brutal attack carried out by Hamas against Israel on October 7, 2023, in which more than a thousand civilians were killed and many others were abducted. Israel's military response in Gaza rapidly expanded into a wider regional confrontation involving multiple actors aligned with Iran, including Hezbollah along the Lebanese border, militia groups operating in Iraq and Syria, and Houthi forces targeting international shipping in the Red Sea. The result was a cascading regional crisis that produced immense human suffering and further destabilized an already fragile geopolitical environment.

Yet the war itself is only part of the story. For more than a decade prior to these events, the Middle East operated within what might be described as a system of war management rather than a system of conflict resolution. Conflicts were rarely settled but were instead contained through a combination of deterrence, external mediation, and limited military escalation. Ceasefires were fragile but functional, political institutions remained weak yet operational, and regional rivalries were largely mediated through proxy networks rather than direct interstate confrontation. The region, therefore, entered the current crisis already burdened by a long accumulation of suspended political decisions, unresolved conflicts, and fragile governance structures.

The February 2026 escalation has disrupted this already fragile equilibrium. Yet disruption alone does not produce a new regional order. The central question raised by the current war is therefore whether the Middle East is entering a period of structural transformation or will once again revert to the familiar pattern of fragmentation, proxy competition, and postponed political settlements.

At this point, a well-known observation by the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel becomes relevant. Hegel famously noted that "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk." In his formulation, historical understanding becomes possible only after events have unfolded and their meaning becomes clear. Strategic analysis, however, rarely has the luxury of waiting for dusk. Policymakers and analysts must attempt

to interpret unfolding crises while their outcomes remain uncertain. The Middle East today appears to be entering precisely such a moment. Even while the war continues, it is already necessary to consider the possible political and strategic trajectories that may follow it.

The central argument of this paper is that the region currently stands between two broad trajectories. One possibility is the continuation of the existing pattern of war management, in which conflicts remain contained but unresolved. The alternative possibility is the gradual emergence of a new framework of strategic regional integration, driven in part by expanding systems of economic connectivity, infrastructure corridors, and technological networks linking the Middle East to broader Eurasian economic systems.

Connectivity initiatives such as the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) illustrate this emerging dynamic. By linking transportation systems, energy networks, logistics platforms, and digital infrastructure, such corridors may gradually reshape the incentives of regional actors and create new forms of economic interdependence. Whether these initiatives can translate military disruption into long-term political and economic transformation remains an open question.

To explore these possibilities, the paper proceeds in several steps. It first examines the regional landscape prior to the February 2026 escalation, highlighting the persistence of fragmentation and suspended political decisions. It then situates the regional crisis within the broader context of global geopolitical transformation and competing connectivity architectures. The following section analyses the recalibration of regional power, including the evolving roles of Iran, the Gulf states, Turkey, Israel, and external powers.

Building on this diagnostic analysis, the paper then develops several strategic scenarios for the region's future trajectory. Finally, it examines the possibility that the Middle East may gradually evolve from a system dominated by proxy confrontation toward one increasingly shaped by economic connectivity and infrastructure cooperation. In this context, initiatives such as IMEC and the proposed Al-Arish–Gaza–Sderot corridor are explored as potential mechanisms linking local stabilization, regional cooperation, and transcontinental connectivity.

The outcome of the current war remains uncertain. But even before dusk arrives and history renders its final judgment, it may already be possible to identify the strategic choices that will shape the region's future.

## **The Middle East before February 28, 2026: Fragmentation, War Management, and Suspended Decisions**

To understand the significance of the February 2026 escalation, it is necessary to examine the regional landscape that preceded it. Prior to the strike against Iran, the Middle East was already characterized by a complex combination of fragmentation, strategic rivalry, and unresolved political questions. Although large-scale interstate wars had largely been avoided in recent years, the region remained deeply unstable, operating within what might be described as a system of war management rather than conflict resolution.

Within this system, conflicts were rarely settled but instead contained through a mixture of deterrence, external mediation, and limited military escalation. Regional powers competed through proxy networks and indirect confrontation, while fragile ceasefires and partial diplomatic arrangements prevented crises from evolving into direct interstate wars. This uneasy equilibrium allowed the region to avoid systemic collapse, yet it also left the underlying political conflicts unresolved and periodically prone to violent eruption.

The limits of this model became dramatically visible on October 7, 2023, when Hamas carried out a large-scale attack against Israel, killing more than a thousand civilians and abducting many others. Israel's subsequent military campaign in Gaza rapidly expanded into a broader regional confrontation. Armed actors aligned with Iran became involved across multiple arenas, including Hezbollah along the Lebanese border, militia groups in Iraq and Syria, and Houthi forces in Yemen, targeting international shipping routes in the Red Sea. The resulting escalation produced a devastating human toll and revealed the fragility of the mechanisms that had previously contained regional conflict.

At the same time, the broader geopolitical landscape of the Middle East remained deeply fragmented. Lebanon faced economic collapse and political paralysis. Syria remained territorially divided after more than a decade of civil war. Iraq struggled with persistent governance challenges and the continued influence of armed militias operating alongside state institutions. Yemen remained trapped in an unresolved conflict despite intermittent ceasefire arrangements, while Libya continued to experience political division and fragile governance.

Regional rivalries further complicated this environment. The confrontation between Israel and Iran intensified through a prolonged shadow war extending across Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, cyberspace, and maritime domains. Relations between Israel and Turkey fluctuated between diplomatic engagement and strategic tension. Meanwhile, the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, pursued ambitious economic diversification strategies while navigating shifting regional alignments and ongoing security concerns about Iran.

Another defining feature of the regional landscape was the persistence of suspended political decisions, particularly regarding the future governance and reconstruction of Gaza. Multiple proposals were advanced by regional and international actors, including Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, the United States, and several Gulf states, to rebuild Gaza following repeated rounds of conflict. Among these initiatives were proposals to establish an international or regional coordination mechanism, sometimes described as a "Peace Board" or reconstruction authority, intended to oversee governance reform, reconstruction funding, and institutional stabilization.

Despite the diplomatic attention devoted to these proposals, none succeeded in producing a durable political framework. Reconstruction plans repeatedly stalled amid disagreements over governance arrangements, security control, and the broader political future of Gaza. As a result, humanitarian reconstruction efforts remained disconnected from a viable political settlement, reinforcing the broader regional pattern in which temporary arrangements substituted for long-term political solutions.

By the time the February 2026 regional conflict started, the Middle East had entered a period of heightened tension in which the existing system of war management was increasingly strained. The escalation against Iran did not occur in a vacuum; it emerged from a regional environment already shaped by conflict, fragmentation, and unresolved political questions. The war thus represents not simply another episode of regional confrontation but a potential inflection point that may either reinforce the familiar pattern of suspended decisions or open the possibility, however uncertain, of a deeper strategic transformation.

## **Global Disorder and Corridor Geopolitics**

The regional fragmentation described in the previous section did not evolve in isolation. The dynamics of the Middle East increasingly unfold within a broader transformation of the

international system marked by the erosion of the post-Cold War rules-based order and the re-emergence of great-power competition. As global power balances shift, major states are seeking to expand their strategic influence through new economic, technological, and infrastructural networks that increasingly shape patterns of geopolitical alignment.

This wider transformation provides an important context for understanding the strategic environment in which the Middle East's conflicts now unfold. The region's persistent pattern of war management and suspended political decisions coincides with a global moment in which states are reorganizing economic geography through competing connectivity systems.

One of the most visible manifestations of this transformation is the growing importance of large-scale infrastructure architectures linking markets, energy systems, transport routes, and digital networks across continents. These initiatives are often organized around major transregional corridors that integrate ports, railways, pipelines, and digital infrastructure. While frequently presented as economic development projects, such corridors also function as strategic instruments through which states seek to shape regional influence and the geography of global trade.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents the most ambitious example of this emerging form of connectivity geopolitics, linking Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East through a vast network of infrastructure investments and logistics systems. At the same time, other connectivity initiatives have emerged, reflecting different geopolitical alignments. The International North-South Transport Corridor, linking Russia, Iran, and South Asia, represents an effort by Moscow and Tehran to develop alternative trade routes that reduce dependence on Western-controlled systems. More recently, the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) has been proposed as a strategic initiative connecting India to Europe through the Gulf states, Israel, and Mediterranean ports.

These initiatives illustrate the emergence of what might cautiously be described as corridor geopolitics, in which infrastructure networks become increasingly important instruments of strategic influence. Control over ports, railways, energy pipelines, logistics platforms, and digital infrastructure can shape patterns of economic integration and geopolitical alignment across entire regions.

At the same time, corridor geopolitics does not replace traditional forms of power competition. Military alliances, territorial disputes, and ideological rivalries remain central features of international politics. Rather than replacing existing geopolitical dynamics, connectivity architectures increasingly intersect with them. In many cases, infrastructure corridors develop precisely within environments characterized by strategic rivalry and political uncertainty.

The Middle East occupies a particularly pivotal position within these emerging connectivity architectures. Situated at the intersection of Asia, Europe, and Africa, the region functions as a critical gateway linking global trade routes, energy flows, and digital networks. Maritime chokepoints such as the Suez Canal, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Strait of Hormuz remain central to global commerce, while emerging overland infrastructure projects seek to reshape trade routes across the Eurasian landmass.

This strategic geography explains the continuing engagement of global powers in the region. Despite earlier discussions of a strategic "pivot to Asia," the escalation involving Iran demonstrates that the United States continues to view the Middle East as a critical arena for maintaining geopolitical stability and protecting key trade and energy corridors. At the same time, China has expanded its economic presence across the region through

infrastructure investment and trade partnerships, while Russia seeks to strengthen alternative connectivity routes linking Eurasia with the Persian Gulf.

Seen from this perspective, the Middle East is no longer only a theatre of ideological confrontation or proxy warfare. It is increasingly becoming a strategic crossroads of competing connectivity systems, where infrastructure corridors, energy networks, and digital platforms intersect with longstanding regional rivalries.

These global transformations shape the strategic environment in which regional actors operate. As competing connectivity architectures intersect with unresolved conflicts and fragile political arrangements, the evolving balance of power within the Middle East itself becomes a critical factor in determining whether the region moves toward renewed fragmentation or toward more cooperative forms of economic integration.

The following section, therefore, examines how the current war and the wider geopolitical context are reshaping the strategic calculations of the region's principal actors.

## **War and the Recalibration of Regional Power**

Against the backdrop of the current war, the balance of power within the Middle East is undergoing a significant recalibration. The February 2026 escalation involving Iran did not simply alter the military landscape; it has accelerated a broader strategic reassessment among regional actors. States across the region are reconsidering their security doctrines, economic partnerships, and geopolitical alignments in response to a rapidly shifting environment shaped simultaneously by military confrontation, technological change, and the growing importance of global connectivity networks.

The emerging regional order is therefore not defined by a new equilibrium but by a period of strategic fluidity, in which traditional security dynamics coexist with the expanding importance of infrastructure systems linking the Middle East to wider Eurasian economic networks.

## **Iran: Resilience, Adaptation, and Uncertain Transition**

Iran enters the current period weakened but far from strategically irrelevant. Although parts of its regional proxy network have been degraded by military pressure and regional countermeasures, Iran retains significant internal coercive capacity, institutional resilience, and strategic adaptability. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), together with the broader security apparatus of the regime, continues to constitute a powerful pillar of political control.

At the same time, the current war may open a period of political uncertainty within Iran itself. Several trajectories remain possible, each carrying different implications for the future regional order and for emerging connectivity initiatives across the Middle East.

One possibility is the continuation of the existing theocratic system, with the regime attempting to rebuild elements of its proxy architecture and restore deterrence through asymmetric strategies. Under this scenario, Iran would likely remain sceptical of regional economic integration projects perceived as aligned with Western strategic interests, including initiatives such as IMEC.

A second trajectory involves a reconfiguration of power within the regime, potentially shifting greater authority from the senior religious leadership toward the security establishment, particularly the IRGC. In such a scenario, Iran could evolve toward a more centralized security state in which military and intelligence institutions play an even more dominant role in shaping regional policy. While this model might retain confrontational elements of Iranian foreign policy, it could also lead to pragmatic adjustments in economic strategy if the leadership seeks to alleviate the pressures of prolonged confrontation.

A third possibility involves internal political fragmentation within the ruling elite, including tensions between clerical authorities, military institutions, technocratic elites, and competing political factions. Such internal competition could generate a period of political volatility in which Iranian foreign policy becomes less predictable and more reactive.

A fourth trajectory, though uncertain, involves the emergence of a more pragmatic political leadership seeking partial reintegration into regional and global economic systems. In this scenario, Iran might pursue renewed diplomatic agreements or selective economic cooperation in order to reduce isolation and stabilize its economy. Such a shift could eventually open limited opportunities for Iran to engage with regional connectivity initiatives rather than oppose them.

Finally, one cannot entirely rule out the possibility, however uncertain, of more profound political transformation, including a weakening or collapse of the existing regime following prolonged internal unrest or elite fragmentation. While such an outcome remains speculative, the pressures generated by war, sanctions, and economic crisis could create conditions for political change whose direction and consequences would be difficult to predict.

At present, it is impossible to determine which of these trajectories is most likely. What is clear, however, is that Iran will remain a central strategic actor whose internal evolution will significantly influence the geopolitical environment of the Middle East. Whether Iran continues to anchor a system of proxy confrontation, enters a phase of internal recalibration, or gradually moves toward a more pragmatic posture will have important consequences for the future of regional security and for the viability of emerging connectivity initiatives linking South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

## **The Gulf States: Security Recalibration and Economic Strategy**

The Gulf states are simultaneously recalibrating their strategic positions in response to the evolving regional environment. For decades, their security strategy relied heavily on external protection, primarily from the United States, combined with diplomatic balancing toward regional rivals. The current conflict, however, has highlighted the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, including energy production facilities, shipping routes, and urban economic hubs.

In response, Gulf governments are increasingly pursuing a dual strategy combining enhanced security cooperation with long-term economic transformation. On the security front, this includes expanding missile defence capabilities, strengthening maritime protection systems, and increasing coordination among Gulf States and external partners.

At the same time, Gulf capitals remain committed to ambitious economic diversification programs aimed at reducing dependence on hydrocarbon revenues. These strategies emphasize technological development, renewable energy investments, logistics infrastructure, and digital innovation. Connectivity initiatives linking the Gulf to global trade

and technological networks play an important role within this broader development agenda.

This dual approach, combining security resilience with economic modernization, positions the Gulf States as potential central nodes in emerging regional connectivity systems.

### **Israel: Security Strength and Strategic Choice**

Israel retains significant military and technological advantages within the region, particularly in military and intelligence capabilities, cyber technologies, and advanced defence systems. Yet the current conflict also highlights the strategic choices facing Israel regarding its long-term regional role.

One strategic path emphasizes continued reliance on military deterrence and security alliances as the primary framework for regional stability. Another path emphasizes deeper integration into emerging regional economic and technological networks. Infrastructure initiatives linking transportation systems, energy networks, and digital platforms could provide mechanisms for Israel to become more deeply embedded in regional development frameworks.

These alternatives are not mutually exclusive. In practice, Israel may pursue a hybrid strategy combining military deterrence with selective economic integration.

### **Turkey: Strategic Autonomy and Corridor Ambitions**

Turkey occupies a distinctive position within the evolving regional landscape. Its geographic location at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia gives Ankara considerable leverage within emerging connectivity systems. Turkish policymakers have long sought to position the country as a major logistics and energy hub, linking multiple regions.

At the same time, Turkey continues to pursue a strategy of strategic autonomy, maintaining flexible relationships with NATO allies, regional partners, and emerging global powers. In this environment, Ankara may attempt to leverage infrastructure initiatives, both regional and transcontinental, to strengthen its geopolitical influence.

### **External Powers and Strategic Competition**

The recalibration of regional power also reflects the continuing influence of external actors. The United States remains the dominant security provider in the region, maintaining extensive military alliances and forward deployments. However, the sustainability of American influence increasingly depends on its ability to complement military commitments with economic and infrastructural initiatives that support regional development and connectivity.

China and Russia also play growing roles within the regional strategic landscape. China's economic presence continues to expand through infrastructure investments and technological partnerships, while Russia maintains strategic ties with several regional actors. These dynamics reinforce the Middle East's role as a hinge region connecting multiple geopolitical spheres.

## Strategic Fluidity and the Emerging Regional Landscape

The regional landscape emerging from the current war is characterized less by a stable balance of power than by a condition of strategic fluidity. Middle powers across the Middle East increasingly navigate between global rivalries while advancing their own national agendas through shifting combinations of competition, cooperation, and selective alignment. Rather than forming rigid blocs, regional actors are adapting to a more flexible and uncertain geopolitical environment.

Within this evolving context, the Middle East is also gaining renewed importance as a crossroads of Eurasian connectivity. Competing infrastructure initiatives, linking Asia, Europe, and Africa through transportation corridors, energy networks, and digital systems, are increasingly intersecting across the region. The way regional actors position themselves within these emerging connectivity architectures will significantly influence both the future balance of power and the prospects for regional economic integration.

These developments do not imply the disappearance of the proxy dynamics that have long shaped regional competition. Security rivalries and indirect confrontations remain embedded in the political landscape. What is emerging instead is a more complex strategic environment in which traditional security competition coexists with the growing geopolitical importance of infrastructure systems and economic connectivity.

Yet this transformation is far from predetermined. The war has created a moment of strategic disruption that opens several possible trajectories for the regional order. The Middle East could return to deeper fragmentation and renewed proxy confrontation. It could evolve into competing connectivity blocs aligned with different global powers. Alternatively, the current disruption may create opportunities for gradual economic integration built around shared infrastructure systems.

Which trajectory ultimately prevails will depend on several interacting factors: the internal evolution of Iran, the strategic choices of the Gulf States, the policies of external powers, and the ability of regional actors to translate military disruption into new frameworks of economic cooperation and institutional coordination. Understanding these possible trajectories requires examining several alternative strategic scenarios that may shape the region's evolution in the coming years.

## Strategic Scenarios: Possible Regional Trajectories after the War

Four broad scenarios can therefore be envisioned.

### Scenario 1: Fragmented Stability

In this scenario, the current war gradually subsides without producing a decisive political transformation. Iran emerges weakened but still intact. The Islamic Republic maintains internal stability through its institutional structures while continuing to exercise influence through surviving regional networks. The Gulf States strengthen defensive cooperation but avoid deeper political realignment.

Under these conditions, the Middle East remains characterized by a pattern of “managed instability.” Conflicts are contained but not resolved, and geopolitical rivalries continue to shape regional politics. The region experiences intermittent crises but avoids full-scale systemic war.

**Implications** for **IMEC:**  
Under this scenario, IMEC develops slowly and selectively. Infrastructure cooperation proceeds primarily among states that already maintain stable relations, such as India, the Gulf States, Israel, and parts of Europe. However, the corridor remains geographically and politically incomplete, functioning more as a partial logistics network than as a fully integrated regional system.

### Scenario 2: Regional Realignment and Gradual Integration

A second scenario envisions a more transformative outcome. The weakening of Iran's regional proxy networks and the recalibration of Gulf security strategies create space for deeper cooperation among several regional actors. Israel and the Gulf states expand security and technological coordination, while regional governments increasingly prioritize economic modernization and infrastructure development.

In this context, connectivity initiatives such as IMEC gain strategic momentum. Economic cooperation becomes a mechanism for stabilizing the region and reducing incentives for confrontation. Infrastructure networks linking transportation systems, energy grids, and digital platforms are gradually deepening economic interdependence.

This scenario does not eliminate political disagreements but embeds them within expanding frameworks of cooperation and economic coordination.

**Implications** for **IMEC:**  
In this scenario, IMEC evolves into a major pillar of regional integration. The corridor expands beyond transport infrastructure to include energy connectivity, digital infrastructure, logistics systems, and cross-border industrial cooperation. The corridor becomes both an economic engine and an institutional framework supporting a new regional order.

### Scenario 3: Great Power Competition and Competing Corridors

A third scenario involves the intensification of global geopolitical competition within the region. As the war reshapes the balance of power, external actors such as China, Russia, the United States, and the European Union increase their strategic engagement in the Middle East.

Under these conditions, competing connectivity initiatives may emerge. Chinese-led infrastructure networks, Russian-Iranian logistical corridors, and Western-backed projects such as IMEC could develop in parallel but with limited coordination. Instead of producing regional integration, infrastructure development becomes another arena of geopolitical rivalry. In this scenario, the Middle East becomes a strategic crossroads for global power competition.

**Implications** for **IMEC:**  
IMEC continues to develop but within a fragmented geopolitical environment. The corridor becomes part of a broader competition among global infrastructure systems rather than a unifying regional framework. Its success depends heavily on the political cohesion of participating states and the sustained support of international partners.

#### Scenario 4: Security Corridors and Strategic Containment

A fourth scenario reflects the possibility that the war produces a more militarized regional order. Iran may respond to military pressure by consolidating a more security-oriented political system and maintaining a confrontational regional posture. Regional states strengthen military alliances and invest heavily in defence technologies.

In such an environment, infrastructure networks are designed primarily for strategic resilience rather than economic integration. Energy pipelines, transportation routes, and digital networks are developed as secure corridors designed to protect supply chains and maintain strategic autonomy. Connectivity exists, but it is shaped primarily by security concerns rather than by broader regional cooperation.

**Implications for IMEC:** Under this scenario, IMEC continues to develop but takes on a more strategic character. The corridor functions primarily as a secure infrastructure system that links trusted partners and protects critical supply chains. Its economic potential remains significant, but its geographic reach and political inclusiveness are more limited.

Although these scenarios differ in their political trajectories, they share one important structural feature: in all of them, infrastructure systems, transportation networks, energy grids, and digital platforms play an increasingly central role in shaping regional power and economic development. Whether the region moves toward integration, fragmentation, or strategic competition, connectivity infrastructure will become a key instrument through which states organize cooperation, secure supply chains, and project influence. For this reason, understanding the digital dimension of emerging corridors is essential for evaluating the long-term strategic significance of initiatives such as IMEC.

#### From War Management to Strategic Integration

Moving beyond the long-standing pattern of war management requires embedding security shifts within broader economic and infrastructural frameworks. Military disruption alone does not produce a new regional order. What it can do, however, is open a strategic window in which new architectures of cooperation may gradually emerge.

In this evolving landscape, infrastructure corridors linking energy systems, transportation networks, and digital infrastructures may play an increasingly important role in reshaping the incentives of regional actors. Such systems create practical mechanisms through which states can pursue economic cooperation even in the absence of full political reconciliation.

Regional integration is unlikely to emerge through a single dominant initiative. Instead, it is more likely to develop through a network of partially overlapping connectivity projects linking South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. IMEC represents one important element of this emerging architecture, but it will coexist with other regional transport, energy, and digital corridors.

The effectiveness of such connectivity systems will depend not only on governments but also on the active participation of the private sector. Ports, logistics companies, energy providers, telecommunications firms, and digital platforms will play a critical role in transforming infrastructure corridors from geopolitical concepts into functioning economic ecosystems.

At the same time, infrastructure alone cannot produce durable integration. Three additional conditions are essential. First, corridor development must be anchored in legitimacy and internationally recognized legal frameworks in order to ensure broad political acceptance. Second, domestic political coalitions must support regional cooperation and sustain integration over time. Third, corridor planning must incorporate emerging structural priorities, including the energy transition, digital governance, and climate resilience, which increasingly shape the economic and technological landscape of regional development.

Seen from this perspective, initiatives that connect local reconstruction with regional and transcontinental connectivity can play an important catalytic role. By embedding local recovery efforts within broader infrastructure systems, such initiatives can help translate stabilization into sustainable economic development.

### The Al-Arish–Gaza–Sderot Corridor

The reconstruction of Gaza illustrates the importance of linking local recovery initiatives with broader regional and transnational frameworks of connectivity. Numerous proposals for Gaza's reconstruction have been advanced by international and regional actors, including Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, the United States, and several Gulf states. While these initiatives address critical humanitarian and infrastructural needs, they often remain focused on the local scale, leaving the broader question of how Gaza can be integrated into regional economic and infrastructure systems unresolved.

The proposed *Al-Arish-Gaza-Sderot (AGS) corridor* seeks to address this gap by linking local reconstruction with regional connectivity. Geographically positioned between Egypt, Israel, and the Palestinian territories, the corridor could function as a strategic interface connecting Gaza's recovery to broader networks of energy, transport, and digital infrastructure. By integrating Gaza into regional supply chains and logistics systems, the corridor could help transform reconstruction from a purely humanitarian initiative into a sustainable economic development strategy.

The AGS initiative illustrates the importance of multi-scale integration. At the local level, reconstruction would focus on rebuilding housing, infrastructure, and economic activity within Gaza. At the regional level, cross-border connectivity could link Gaza with Egyptian territory, Israeli infrastructure, and Mediterranean logistics routes. At the transnational level, the corridor could eventually connect to wider infrastructure architectures such as the IMEC, linking the Eastern Mediterranean with global trade and energy networks.

In this sense, the AGS corridor represents more than a reconstruction project. It illustrates how local stabilization, regional cooperation, and transcontinental connectivity can reinforce one another. By embedding reconstruction within broader infrastructure networks, such initiatives could help shift the region's political economy away from cycles of isolation and conflict toward systems of interdependence and shared development.

From the perspective of the strategic scenarios discussed earlier, projects such as the AGS corridor could play an important role in shaping the trajectory toward regional realignment and connectivity-based cooperation. Conversely, the absence of such initiatives would likely reinforce fragmentation and the continuation of the region's long-standing pattern of suspended political settlements.

## Conclusion: The Strategic Window before Dusk

If Hegel was right that the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only at dusk, the Middle East may now be approaching such a twilight moment. The strategic structures that shaped the region for decades, proxy networks, fragmented conflicts, and suspended political settlements, are being shaken by the current war.

Yet dusk is also the moment when new outlines begin to emerge. Whether the region moves toward renewed fragmentation or toward gradual integration will depend not only on military outcomes but also on policymakers' capacity to imagine the architecture of cooperation that might follow the conflict. Connectivity initiatives such as the IMEC may provide one framework through which such a transformation could gradually unfold.

The task for policymakers today is therefore not merely to manage the present conflict but to begin designing the foundations of the regional order that may follow it, so that when dusk finally settles over the war, the pathways toward a more connected and stable Middle East are already visible.