

Current Affairs

QNO: 2

Reason and beneficiaries of Pak-Iran tensions & ways to de-escalate tensions to attain normalcy

Introduction :-

In an unprecedented move, Iran launched air strikes in Pakistan. Pakistan, notwithstanding attack on its sovereignty and territorial integrity retaliated. Later, brotherly gestures were exchanged and both states seemingly solved issues naturally. However, it must be noted that all of it happened in the middle of a major middle-eastern conflict. On one hand, the states were exchanging missiles, and on the other hand, the FM and caretaker PM of Pakistan were holding a meeting. Also, a joint naval exercise was being carried out in the background.

According to Iran, it attacked militant group in Pakistan which resulted in the death of two minors. Similarly Pakistan attacked the terrorist-separatist organisation, BLA in Iran. There could be another aspect of unfinished Iran-Pakistan gas-pipeline or to draw Pakistan into the middle-eastern conflict. Terror groups and their funding states must have benefitted from this rift. So, there is a need to de-escalate tensions through trade and diplomacy.

Reasons of Pak-Iran tensions:

~~Reasons of Iranian attack~~

- Presence of militant groups on both sides of the border.
- Indian presence in Iran
- To drag Pakistan in wider middle-eastern conflict
- To revive relations
- To revive Iran's pariah status
- force Pakistan to re-think its relations with the West.
- Pakistan retaliation

~~Reason~~

1- To neutralize militant group:-

~~Reason~~

Iran attacked Pakistan due to presence of anti-Shia militant group in Pakistan. This was the official stance of Iran. Iran targetted the hideouts of the militant group. On January 16, Iran carried out missile attacks in Baluchistan. It hit on two strongholds of the militant group Jaish al-Ahli. Reportedly, it was involved in terror attacks

in Iran.

2- Increasing terrorist attacks in Iran :-

Iran had increasingly faced terrorist attacks, including assassination attempts. Interestingly, Iran suffered from two major bombings - the same month in Kerman, Iran resulting in more than 90 casualties. However, IS took the responsibility. Even though they were carried out by IS, Iran attacked another terrorist group in Pakistan.

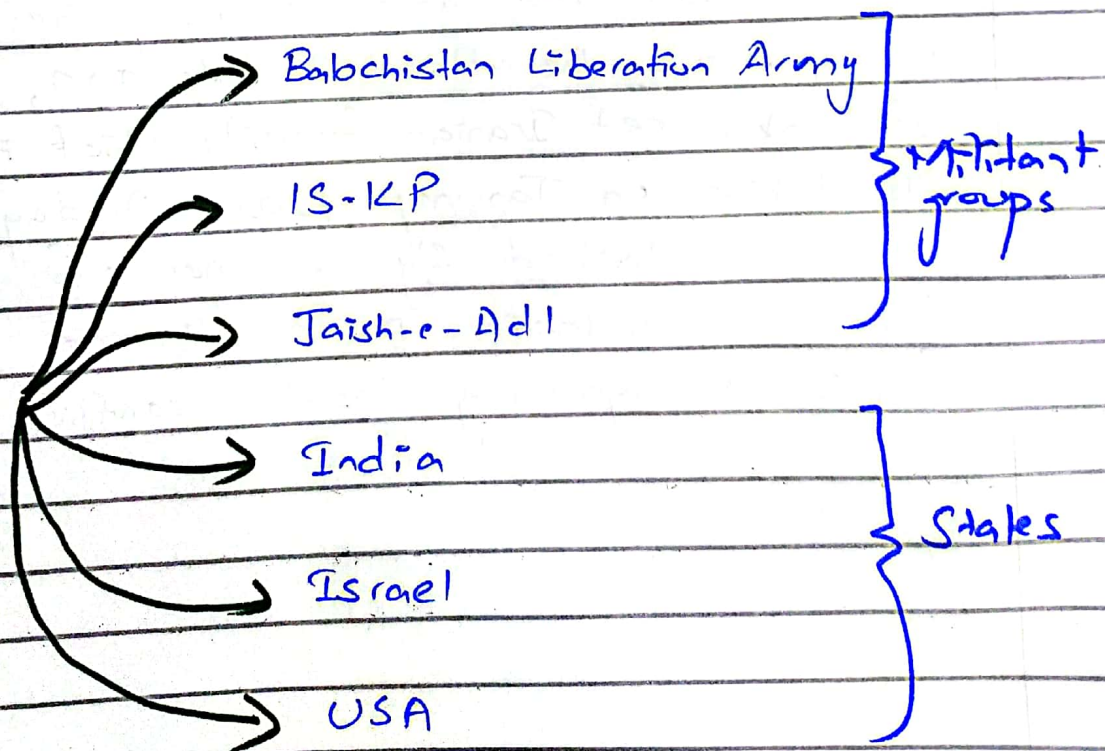
3- Indian presence in Iran :-

One of the major aspects of this conflict is that the Foreign Minister of India had met Iranian Security Chief a day before the attack. India's FM, Jaishankar met Iranian Security Chief FM, Abdollahian on January 15, 2024. A day later Iran attacked Syria, Yemen and Pakistan. Thus, Indian presence in the Iran is conflagrating Pak-Iran conflict.

Q. To drag Pakistan into the middle-eastern conflict:-

Although Pakistan supports Palestine in the current Middle-eastern war, the support is diplomatic in nature. On the other hand, Iran continuously threaten Israel for consequences. It might be possible that Israel Iran wants to enhance the Axis of Resistance against Iran. Iran might be seeking to "broaden the ongoing regional conflict and decided to draw Pakistan into the mix" (Asfandiyar Mir, Making sense of Iran-Pakistan cross-Border Strikes, 2024).

Beneficiaries of Iran-Pakistan tensions:-



Militant groups as benefitting from the cross-border attacks

The militant and terrorist groups on both sides of the border benefitted from the cross-border attacks. Dwindling relations between the countries would benefit such groups the most. As in the absence of relations, the militant groups will carry out their nefarious operations easily. Terrorism has increased in both countries.

Pakistan saw a surge of 81% in terrorist attacks from the previous year (CIPS Security Report; 2023). Similarly, Iran has faced major terrorist attacks. Most ~~upsurge in~~ attacks in Pakistan were carried out by BLA and ISK-P.

India as a beneficiary of Pak-Iran tensions:-

Pakistan

India has a long history of de-stabilising Pakistan through Iran and Afghanistan. The Indian-financed terrorists cross the porous Pak-Iran border to carry out terrorist attacks.

The ^{arrest} presence of Kulbhushan Yadav, an Indian Intelligence officer is a major example of India using Iranian soil to target Pakistan. Furthermore, it is also an attempt to isolate Pakistan. Indian

officials have time again repeated their aim to isolate Pakistan from the rest of the world. ~~It is also~~ This attempt was exactly that. It was clear from Indian statement on Pak-Iran rift. It stated that, we have zero-tolerance towards terrorism and underkind actions that countries take in their self-defence. While others urged to show restraint, India gave an encouraging statement.

Israel & USA as beneficiaries:-

USA is increasing its presence in middle-east, specifically through Israel and directly in the Red Sea. Iran support Houthi rebels who are attacking trading vessels in the Red Sea in support of Palestine. Consequently, Iran's attack on Pakistan and retaliation may prove to detract Iran from the Middle East and focus on its own border security. Similarly, Israel wants both Pakistan and Iran away so it can continue its genocidal regime in Palestine.

Ways to deescalate tensions: -

- Diplomacy
- Trade as a peace constituency
- Trilateral arrangements
- Reviving OIC
- ~~For~~ Enhancing intelligence ^{sharing} operation
- Establishing a multi-lateral anti-terrorist organisation
- Pakistan to mediate Iran-West JCPOA 2.0 agreement.

1- A mature use of diplomacy: -

Pakistan and Iran have shown a mature display of diplomacy in dialling down the conflict. Iran they have went further and warned other states who benefitted from it. In official statements both countries have agreed to respect each other's sovereignty and indicated foreign elements as 'third countries' who benefitted from the conflict.

Trilateral arrangements to sustain peace :-

Even though the situation is relatively peaceful, there is a need to sustain it.

Both countries can make trilateral peace agreements by bringing China closer. This will also be a win-win for regional peace and security.

Enhancing intelligence sharing :-

Both countries need to enhance intelligence sharing and inform each other about terrorist hideouts. Consequently, the terror element will cease to exist paving a peaceful region in the future.

Reorganizing OIC to solve the non-state threat

Organisation of Islamic States (OIC) needs a major overhaul. It needs to tackle every problem faced by the Muslim countries. It needs to be more than a talk shop. There is an increasing need to establish an anti-terrorist sub-organisation to tackle the threat of terrorism in the Muslim world. All Muslim Ummah needs to be in agreement in this regard.

Conclusion:-

The world is increasingly unstable due to plethora of conflicts. Pak-Iran cross-border attacks occurred due to non-cooperation, militant groups and even Indian presence in the region. Many terrorist organisations and states benefitted from the attacked. However, the conflict has subsided owing to superb diplomacy. ~~While~~ There is a need to sustain peace and normalcy through dialogue, trilateral as well as multi-lateral.

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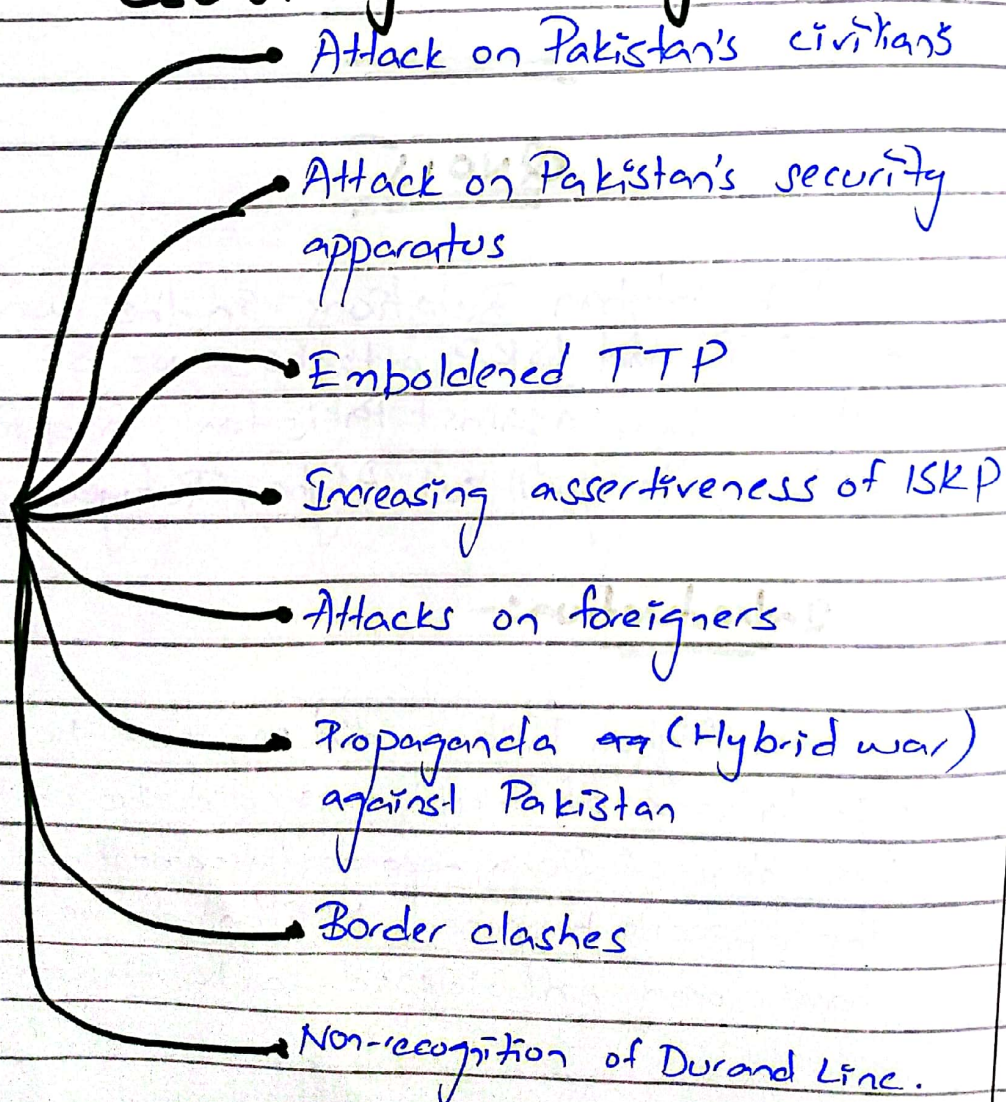
Pak-Afghan Relations in the wake of TTP and ISKP attacks, use of Afghan land against Pakistan, and Pakistan's decision to pull out Afghan Refugees.

Introduction:-

Afghan Taliban did not meet the expectations of Pakistan. nor did they kept their deal of Doha Accords. Agreement. In fact, the opposite happened. Militant factions have been emboldened in the Afghan-ruled

Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Ever since Taliban came to power, terrorist attacks have increased. Consequently, Pak-Afghan relations have deteriorated as the Afghanistan land have been used against Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan decided to deport Afghan refugees. to display their anger and give a tit-for-tat reply to Taliban for non-cooperation.

Pak-Afghan Relations in the wake of terrorist attacks & Use of Afghan soil against Pak.



1- Emboldened TTP under Taliban Rule:-

TTP has increased its foothold in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Greatly emboldened by an insurgent group's rule in Afghanistan, TTP is optimistic in taking control of Pakistan's North-western regions. TTP has benefitted -the most of all foreign extremist groups from Taliban take over (UNSC's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, 2020). Hence, TTP is remobilised in Afghanistan under Taliban's shadow.

2- Increased presence of ISKP in Pakistan:-

ISKP has established itself as a major non-state terror group in Pakistan. It is involved in many attacks against Pakistan. It is doing so by attacking Shia group -thereby giving rise to sectarian strife. They get support from TTP factions (Interior Ministry, 2023)

3- Use of sophisticated weaponry by terror groups:-

Terrorist groups are using sophisticated weaponry to carry out attacks inside Pakistan. This indicates support from other enemy states. US

weapons were left in Afghanistan as they left in haste. Pakistan took this matter to UN. Pakistan demanded "investigation into how TTP acquired sophisticated weapons" either from illicit arms market or from entities that wants to destabilise Pakistan (Usman Jadoon, Pak's Permanent Representative, 2023).

4. Strong state response:-

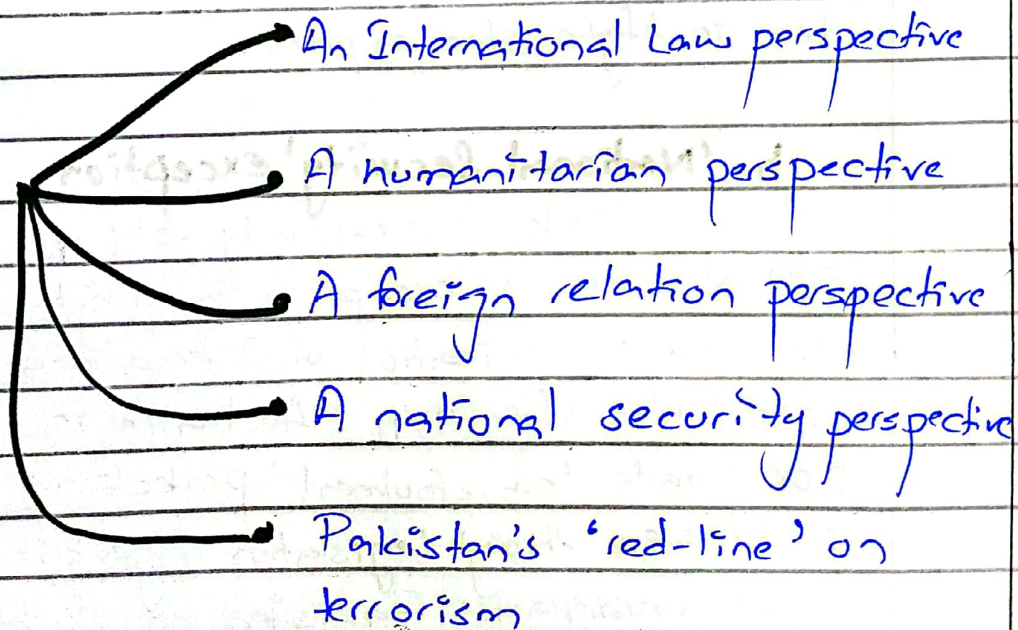
Pat Amidst growing insecurity in Pakistan, Pakistan has issued strong statements against Afghan Taliban. "We can act on International law to defend ourselves" (former FM, Bilawal Bhutto) Similarly COAS Asim Munir condemned "involvement of Afghan nationals" in conducting attacks on Pakistan's soil. For Bajaur attack.

5. Emergence of new terrorist groups:-

A recently emerged militant outfit, Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP) has emerged. It is responsible for carrying out a number of attacks on Pakistan. It carried out suicide attack on a military checkpoint in DI Khan that led to 23 casualties.

of Pakistan's security forces (ISPR, Dec 2023). It is collectively TTP is responsible for 7 deadliest attacks resulting in 66 casualties. It is a globally recognised terrorist group having sanctuaries on Afghan soil. (Ayaz Gul, Pakistan Presses Taliban, 2023). Hence a number of terror groups are appearing that use Afghan's soil to launch attacks inside Pakistan.

Pakistan's decision to pull out Afghan Refugees



International law perspective :-

Pakistan did not violate international law as it expelled out the refugees. This is because Pakistan is not a signatory to 1951 convention relating to status of refugees. However, certain parts of the convention are of customary law which are instructive to non-parties. According to

a. Lawful expulsion :-

The 1951 convention states that countries should not expel if refugees have 'credible' threat of persecution. The cumulative reports by UN in 2023, Afghan refugees can return as there is no serious threat to them in Afghanistan anymore.

b. 'National Security' exception

States increasingly rely on national security exception to limit the broader application of international law, specifically after 9/11. Australia in 2004 made 'non-refoulement' protection ineffective through legislation regarding illegal immigrants. Pakistan can do the same. COAS Asim Munir also revealed involvement of Afghan nationals in terrorist attacks.

b. Responsibility of Refugees:

After Taliban takeover, Taliban's government restored 1964 Afghan constitution. According to the document, Afghan government is fully responsible for providing security to its citizens.

2- A humanitarian perspective:-

Pakistan carried out expulsion operations deportation drive against illegal immigrants. They deported thousands of immigrants who had spent their lives in Pakistan. Pakistan expelled more than 375,000 Afghans (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Although, Pakistan had the right to expel them, it left a bitter taste for Pakistan.

3- A foreign relation perspective:-

Foreign relations deteriorated between the countries as a result of mass expulsion. Taliban government did not welcome this move. Similarly, people-to-people contact also faced a set-back. Afghanistan after winning cricket match against Pakistan in ICC World cup, dedicated his win

to -the Afghan refugees sent back to Afghanistan by from Pakistan (Ibrahim Zardari, Oct 2023). Diplomatic relations in all facets following immigrant deportation.

4- Pakistan's 'red-line' on terrorism:-

Pakistan engraved red-line on terrorism by expelling illegal immigrants. Pakistan had repeatedly asked Taliban government to take action on terrorist group which it did not do. Pakistan showed its assertiveness on terrorist issue. It was also imminent on national security fronts. While it may seem inhuman, it was important for Pakistan to set its boundaries.

Conclusion:-

Afghan Taliban have deviated from its commitment of weeding out terrorist organisations. As a result, its relations with Pakistan, region and the world are suffering. Pak-Afghanistan relations have experienced a nose-dive as a result of increasing terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Illegal immigrants were expelled out as a result and the future of these relations are in limbo.

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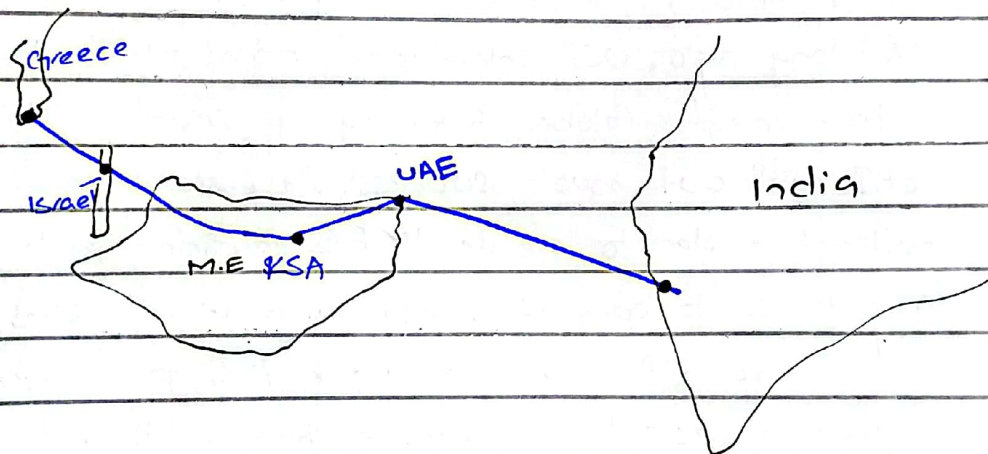
India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor as a competitor to Belt and Road Initiative of China, Their potential and Future Aspects.

Introduction: -

India has established for itself a special position in the Indian Ocean Region. (Henry Kissinger, World Order). India is increasing its role in Asia in an attempt to prevail over China. Not long ago, USA introduced B3W while Europe introduced Global Gateway to counter China's BRI. without much success. At present, India has outlined a plan to create IMEC corridor with a potential to connect India with Middle East and Europe. A map It has a potential to create a parallel corridor. However, there will be a number of challenges. ~~A map~~ ^{is} shared by UAE while BRI connects existing road-networks, such networks will not be present for IMEC. Similarly, financial and regulation hurdles will be faced by IMC. ~~If looked as a~~ Both projects can however bring advantage by engaging to consolidate economic wealth and complimenting one another.

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

IMEC aims to connect India to UAE, then over the Saudi and Jordanian land to Israeli port of Haifa, and then through the Mediterranean Sea to Greek port of Piraeus. This plan was first floated by Michael Tanchum, in a paper, India's Arab-Mediterranean Corridor: A Paradigm Shift in Strategic Connectivity to Europe in 2021. Later a plan was created in sidelines of G 20 in 2023.



Purpose of IMEC :

The 4800km proposed corridor will establish a ship and rail-network to facilitate seamless movement of goods and services throughout the corridor. Its long-term impact is anticipated to decrease transportation time and cost, stimulate job creation and enhance trade efficiency.

IMEC as a competitor to BRI :-

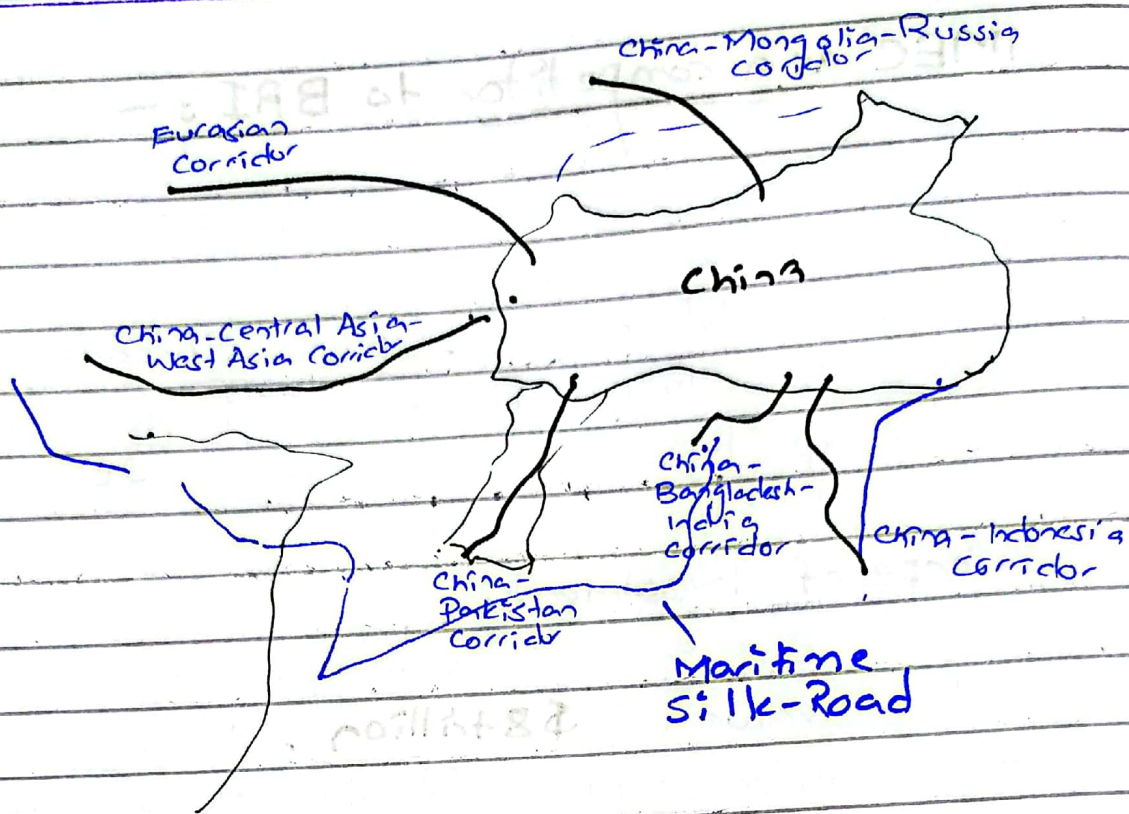
China's economic corridor, BRI was initiated in 2013. It aims to connect China to the world markets. It has a broader scope than IMEC. However, ^{IMEC} it is seen by many experts as an alternative to BRI.

Scope of Investment:

BRI is an extensive project with a total value of \$8 trillion. It has a much wider scope as it aims to construct various land, rail and sea-routes throughout the world. On the other hand, IMEC's value, although not currently estimated, will be amounting to a few billion dollars. A smaller-scale economic corridor cannot counter a trillion-dollar project which is already under-way.

Geographical Scope:

BRI is an ambitious infrastructure will connect China with ~~are~~ 151 countries and seven regions. It includes road, rail and sea-links.



Projects:-

BRI has multi-dimensional projects from infrastructure (roads, railways, seaports) to energy projects, agriculture and industrial zones. IMEC, however, focuses mainly on shipping lines and rail infrastructure.

Financial Viability :-

IMEC has an advantage over BRI as IMEC projects involve wealthy-countries as participating nations are India, GCC states and European nations. While the financial burden of BRI lies only ^{mainly} China.

Potential of IMEC and BRI :-

Current Progress of the projects:

BRI is an extensive and multi-sectoral project and will take decades to be complete. However, many energy projects, road networks and ports, and special economic zones are complete and operational.

IMEC has a unique advantage that most of the project includes sea route which are already operational. Also, the European part is already connected to rail road network. Most of the construction in Saudi Arabia is remaining where BRI is already under way.

Financial potential of the projects:

BRI is expected to generate trillions of dollars. According to World Bank, by 2030, BRI will make \$1.6 trillion in revenue. There is an immense potential to enhance trade, improve infrastructure and quality of life of countless developing nations.

IMEC will also generate billions of dollars in revenue by connecting the travel time by forty-percent.

Fostering globalization :-

BRI is forging a community with shared future from conceptualization to concrete action. In the contemporary world, where states are increasingly aim to become independent, BRI is a fresh realignment with the rest of the world.

Similarly IMEC also aims to connect the three regions, India, Middle-East and Europe. It might be followed by increase in trade, free trade agreements and an overall increase in trade relations.

Welfare of the people :-

BRI has formed an unprecedented bond between China and developing nations. It indicates Chinese role in the welfare of global community. According to World Bank, BRI, if fully implemented, could increase real income between 0.7 to 2.9 %.

IMEC will also improve employment opportunities, revenues and trade by establishing a direct link with Middle East and Europe. However, its impact will be lower than that to BRI.

Potential competition ^{between} of the projects: -

While IMEC is a significant project, it cannot outcompete BRI. Countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia and Jordan are already engaged in BRI. They are most unlikely to leave one for the other. In fact, it is an opportunity to consolidate both projects and get dual benefit from both projects. Both will present complementary future advantages by connectivity.

Future Security Concerns: -

A major risk in future will be the security concern for both projects. Middle-East is currently ~~enfacing~~ facing a major conflict and violence. Ships are taking alternative route to Red Sea. According to **BBC**, 1 in 4 vessels is changing its route from Red Sea owing to the Houthis - Israel / USA standoff in the Red Sea. Such conflicts, if not managed, will hinder future of infrastructure projects.

Energy Security Prospects: -

The Middle East is a major source of energy resources. IMEC and BRI

will benefit from it. IMEC would strengthen energy security for India and Europe while BRI will strengthen energy security for China and other 150 countries associated with BRI. Diversifying and shortening routes will reduce vulnerability to disruptions and price hikes.

Integration of BRI and IMEC:-

There is a possibility that BRI and IMEC will integrate themselves and position themselves as global crossroads. Both can mutually get benefit from one another and consolidate advantage from one another. This will enable efficient coordination and rapid execution of projects.

Conclusion:-

IMEC and BRI represents global connectivity. While both are deemed as competitors whereas there is not much room for competition. They can together foster economic growth, enhance trade and promote cooperation among international community.