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NOA Mocks

(Current Affairs).

Question no 4. (KSA-Iran Rapprochement)

1. Introduction.

The recent rapprochement between Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran is a significant development happened after continuous efforts of Beijing. Both countries agreed to sit on dialogue table and resumed diplomatic and socio economic engagement. This development has potential positive implication for neutralising regional conflicts in Middle East as well as massive impacts on Pakistan.

2. KSA- Iran Agreement :

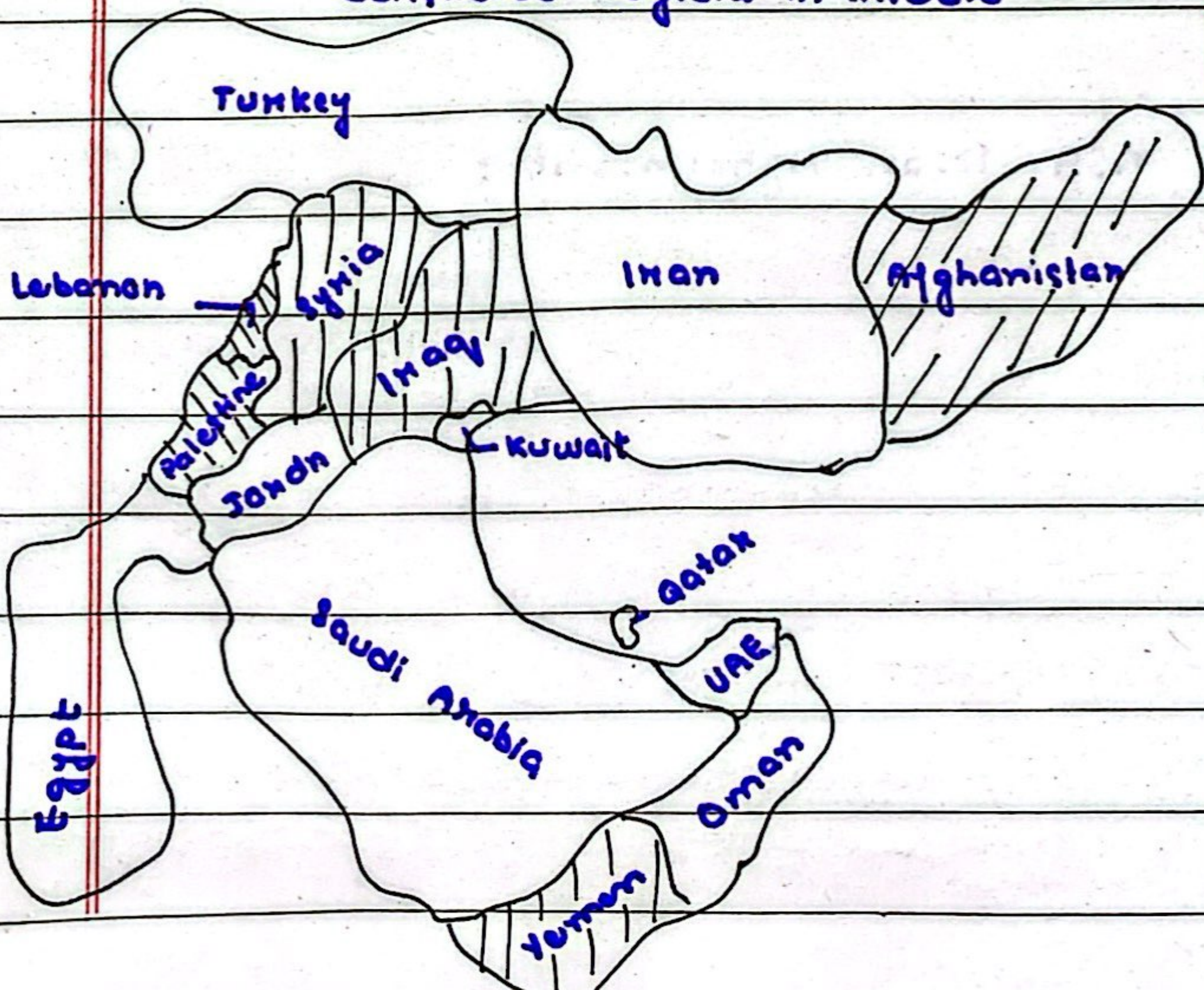
Both KSA and Iran agreed on resuming diplomatic relations. Initially foreign ministers reportedly met in Beijing and signed agreement in which both agreed on reopening embassies in each other capital. Both countries invited each other for visit

and relaxed visa regime. They also agreed to resume trade relations. This was an unprecedented development that resumed socio economic relations including bilateral relations.

3. Positive Implications on Conflicts in Middle East.

KSA and Iran rapprochement would help downsizing regional conflicts in countries including Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq etc and would enhance cooperation among regional countries.

Conflicted Regions in Middle East.



i. KSA-Iran Cooperation has reduced tensions in Syria.

Syria has been involved in 12 years of civil war. This Syrian conflict was battleground for KSA and Iran where Iran wanted Shia dominant government and KSA supported Sunni dominant Free Syrian Army and Al Nusra Rebels.

However normalization has far reaching positive implications. FSA and Al Nusra rebels and Basharul Assad govt announced ceasefire. Basharul Assad was welcomed back into Arab League 12 years later. This symbolism of Syrian readmission is a big step.

ii. Normalization of relations has huge implications for Yemen.

Yemen has been a sectarian battleground since 2014. Where Iran back Shia dominant Houthis rebels and KSA back Masood Hadidis government. The Houthi-Saudi Arabian conflict is an ongoing conflict taken place in

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Arabian peninsula. According to UN estimates war has killed around 400,000 people where 70 percent are children.

A UN backed ceasefire took place between warring parties in 2022. The KSA-Iran rapprochement could play crucial role in solidifying and expanding the existing ceasefire

iii - KSA-Iran cooperation could reduce rivalry in Iraq.

KSA-Iran rivalry has further complicated security situation in Iraq, where Iranian influence remains significant. A thaw in relations could encourage both countries to support the Iraqi government in consolidating its authority.

iv - Conflict de-escalation can rise the global clout of Middle East.

Gulf states constitute around 14 percent of population and 60 percent of GDP. They are among the richest economies and are

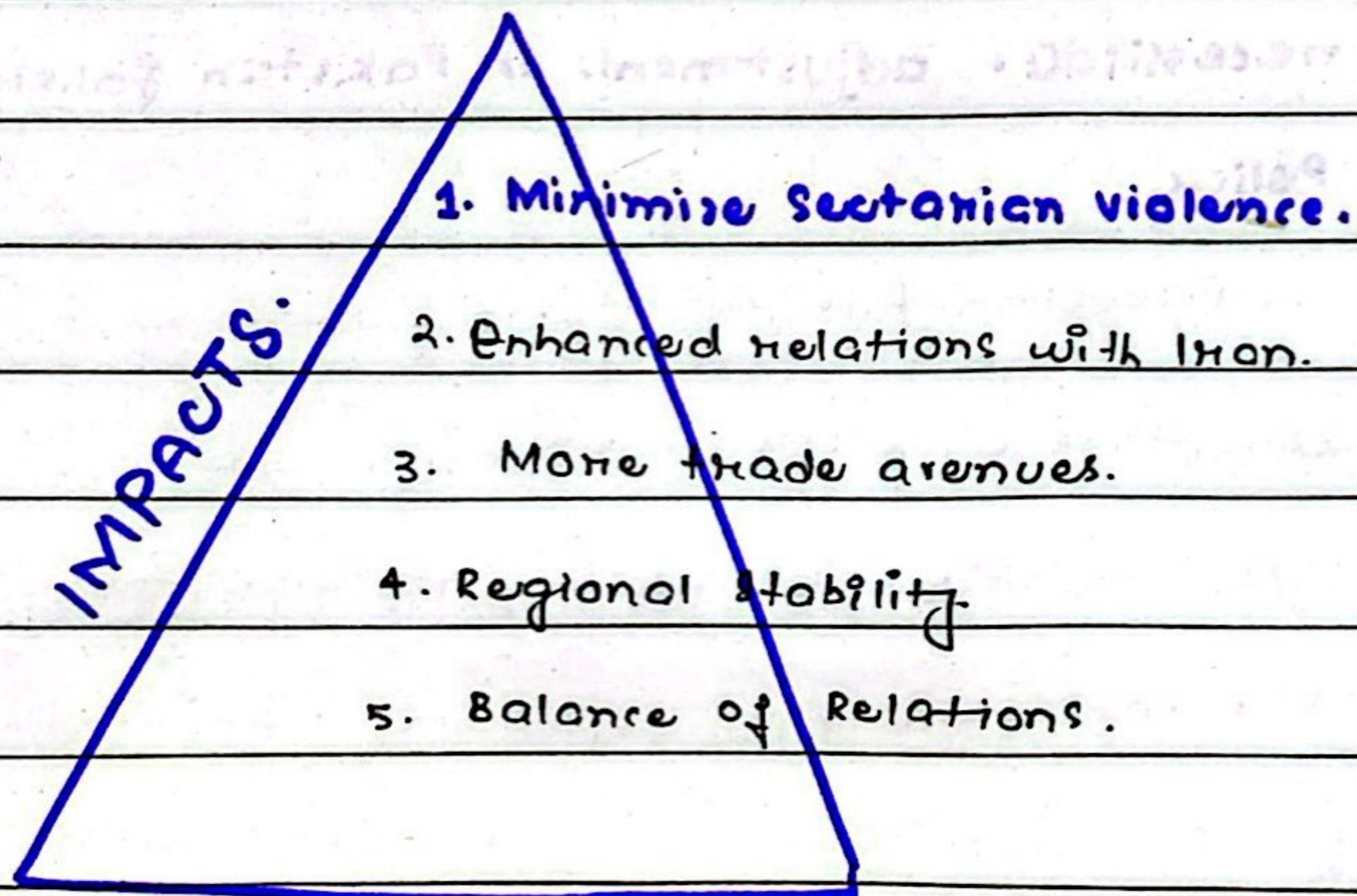
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sitting on edge of energy transition. KSA-Iran negotiations have de-escalated conflicts in Middle East especially in Syria and Yemen. This is the chance for middle east to transform from war torn region to hub of technology and advancement. Countries have joined BRICS and they are spending on home grown AI Model and shiny new cities in deserts. This economic cooperation can further enhanced by de-escalating conflicts

4. Potential Impact on Pakistan.

KSA and Iran normalization has many potential impacts on Pakistan as well.



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i. KSA-Iran Cooperation could reduce sectarian violence in Pakistan.

KSA-Iran rivalry influenced sectarian divides in Pakistan. Both countries provided funds to their religious seminaries and promoted sectarian hate literature. This fueled Shia-Sunni war within Pakistan and was more vicious than general terrorism.

KSA-Iran rapprochement can bring more chances of peace in Pakistan. Careful political navigation will be crucial in minimising sectarian hate & violence.

ii. Closer KSA-Iran relationship could necessitate adjustments in Pakistan foreign Policy.

Pakistan has traditionally maintained close ties with KSA and hasn't been able to strike balance in its foreign policy. KSA had immense diplomatic importance for Pakistan and tilt has always been

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towards them. Now Pak has an opportunity to enhance relations with Iran. Both can build strategic and economic partnership.

iii - Pakistan can significantly explore trade avenues with both Iran and KSA.

KSA-Iran normalisation would provide an opportunity for Pakistan to strike a balance in its relations with both countries. KSA has already been declared as CPEC part. Iran could also be given official partner status. chances of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline would also increase.

iv - A stable Middle East brings regional stability

A more stable and cooperative Middle East fostered by KSA-Iran rapprochement could benefit Pakistan indirectly. Improved regional security and a more conducive environment for economic development are potential windfalls for Pakistan.

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5.

Conclusion.

By proactively adapting to these shifting dynamics, regional conflicts in Middle East can reduce. Also Pakistan can leverage the opportunities and mitigate the risks presented by evolving Middle Eastern landscape.

Question 2.

India Middle East Economic Corridor Vs. Belt and Road Initiative of China.

1.

Introduction:

Both India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are ambitious infrastructure projects envisioned to reshape global trade and connectivity. However they differ significantly in scope focus and potential challenges.

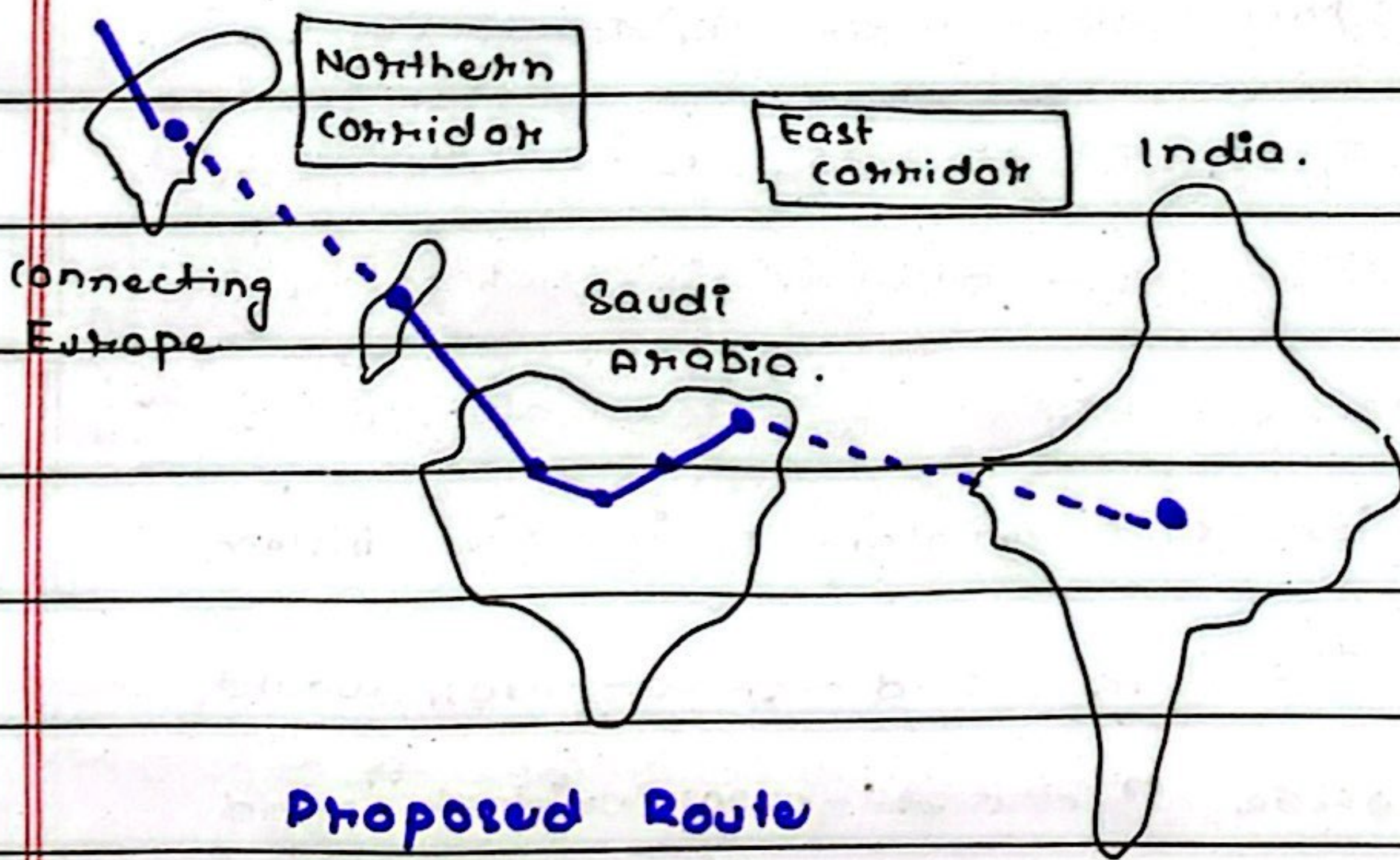
2. India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor.

This corridor was proposed on sidelines of G20 summit and backed by US and European union.

Proposed Corridor.

- New ship and rail corridor
- Undersea cable and energy transport infrastructure
- pipeline for electricity and hydrogen.

IMEC is a proposed multimodal corridor connecting India with Europe through Middle East



Proposed Route of IMEC.

i- Potential Advantages of IMEC.

a). Strategic Location.

IMEC bypasses the congested Suez Canal, potentially offering faster and more cost-effective transport options. Suez Canal experience congestion and security concerns leading to delayed shipping.

This corridor offers to bypass this by providing alternative route.

b) counter Chinese influence in Arab States.

This corridor link Middle East to Europe and India. This is an attempt to counter Chinese influence in Arab states. It offers us a chance to refocus attention on region and maintain its influence. Biden U.S President, said that corridor would provide "endless opportunities" and would contribute "to a more stable and prosperous Middle East".

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c) Provide trade and investment opportunities.

This corridor focus on diversification and promote collaboration among several regional players. Especially it offers Europe an opportunity to deepen its trade and investment ties with Gulf countries especially in response to Russia's war against Ukraine. Muhammad Bin Salman said,
"they want to achieve common interests of our countries by strengthening economic interdependence"

ii-

Potential Challenges to IMEC.

a) Criticised as another B3W.

Build Back Better (B3W) was another trade corridor proposed by west but hasn't been implemented. IMEC is also criticised as another B3W since it's only an MOU, an idea. It's easier to envisage than implement.

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b) Geopolitical instability is also a challenge.

The corridor traverses regions with ongoing conflicts and political tensions. This pose security risks for its development and operation.

c) IMEC lacks financial resources.

Proposed cost for the corridor is 20 billion \$. However it is not known that is this cost enough and who will fund this cost. These financial constraints hinders its implementation and progress.

3.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

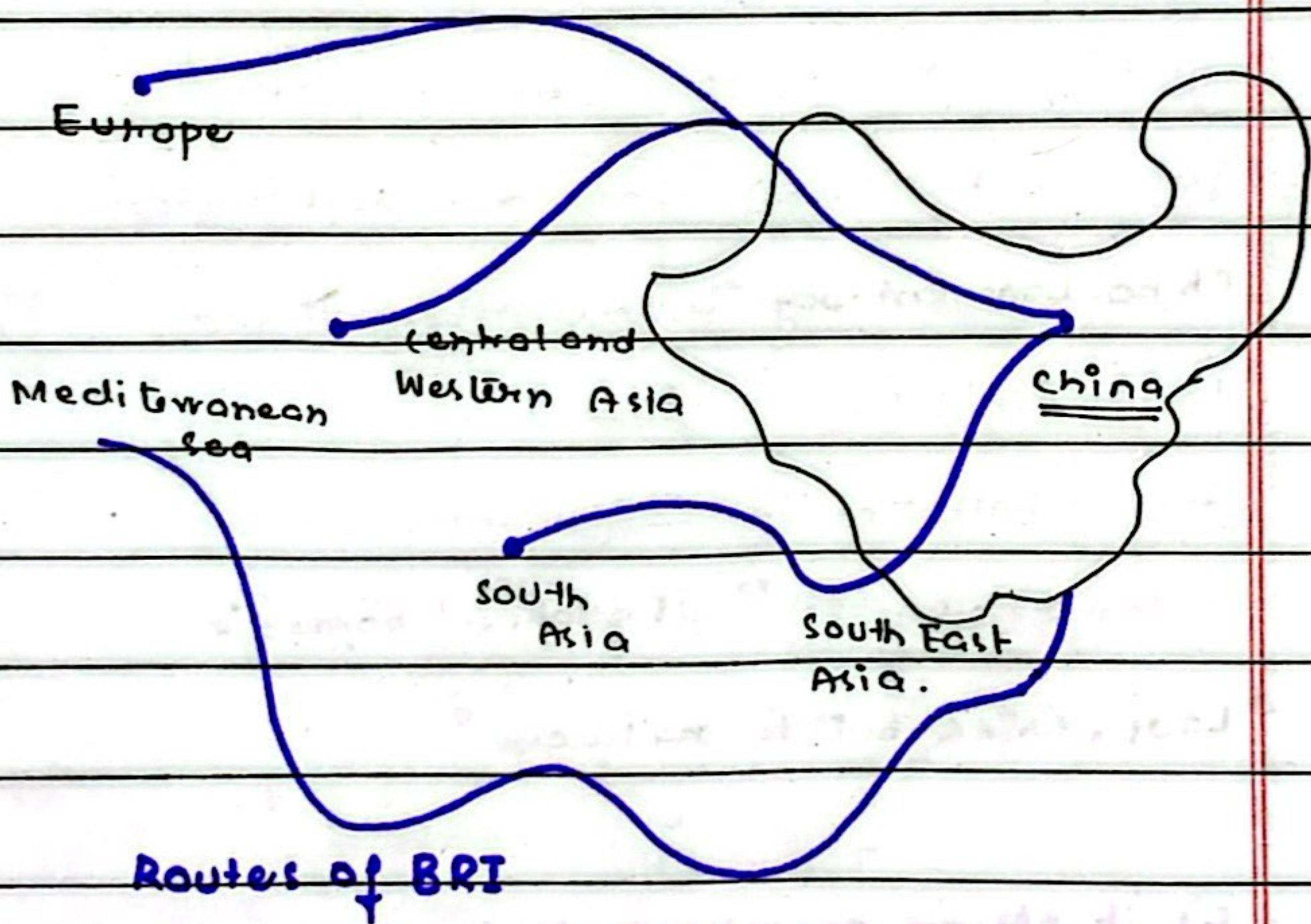
BRI is a global infrastructure development strategy launched by China in 2013. It encompasses land and sea routes connecting Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond aiming to boost Chinese economic influence and trade.

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6 International Economic Corridors

- New Eurasia Land Bridge Economic Corridor
- China - Mongolia - Russia Economic Corridor
- China - Central Asia - West Asia.
- China - Indochina - Peninsula
- China - Pakistan
- Bangladesh - China - India - Myanmar.



1. Potential Advantages of BRI.

a) Massive financial backing by China.

China's significant financial resources have facilitated rapid infrastructure

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development along BRI routes. According to official sources investment by Chinese companies under BRI had already succeeded 8 trillion dollars. Only in CPEC, China has managed to spend 60 billion \$.

b) Global trade and connectivity

BRI has potential to improve global trade and connectivity, particularly for landlocked and underdeveloped regions. China-Laos Railway finished in 2021. It has transformed day long ride to 3.5 hour ride. Recent headline in Global Times (a Beijing Tabloid) read "US dropped bombs in Laos, China builds railways".

c) It offers an alternate land route.

Conventional sea routes have challenges especially chokepoints can be sabotaged due to conflict or disputes. BRI offers an alternative land route to surpass those challenges.

d) BRI has plenty of life left in it.

In 2021 Xi Jinping called for New Phase in BRI. He referred them as 'small but beautiful' projects with better returns. These new ideas proposed by Xi are;

- Global development initiative
- Global security initiative
- Global civilization initiative.

ii. Challenges to BRI

a) Referred as a debt trap.

BRI projects have raised transparency about unsustainable debt burdens for participating countries.

b) Lack of transparency

Critics point to BRI as lack of transparency and potential for corruption in project financing & implementation.

c) Geopolitical tensions.

BRI's alignment with china's

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strategic interest has raised concerns about its potential for debt-trap diplomacy and geopolitical power play. West see BRI as a 'political tool at stippling Mr Xi's iron fist rule'.

4. Conclusion

IMEC and BRI offers many opportunities for global trade and connectivity. However the success of both IMEC and BRI will depend on overcoming their respective challenges. Various future prospects like geopolitical tensions, economic conditions and ability to address internal challenges influence the success of both projects.