

In this episode, **China vs. IMEC: The Minilateral Movement in the Middle East**, Jean-Loup Samaan from the Middle East Institute of the National University of Singapore joins us to dissect the rise of the new minilateral movement in the Middle East, IMEC, the groundbreaking corridor, and its impact on the region compared to Chinese initiatives. Explore the ongoing significance of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the uncertainties surrounding it, including financial concerns. Dive deeper into:

- **Shifting Alliances:** How is the post-Gaza war landscape impacting Israel's role in minilateral movements, especially US-led, potentially boosting China's influence?
- **The Abraham Accords Ripple Effect:** How did the Accords kickstart and pave the way for a new era of cooperation in the Middle East?
- **IMEC's Impact and France's Role:** Will it become a game-changer for India-MENA trade, and what is France's strategic engagement in the grouping?

This episode offers a deep dive into the evolving power dynamics of the Middle East, with China, India, and the US vying for influence. Tune in to understand how these minilateral groupings, like IMEC, might reshape the region's future!

### Takeaways:

- India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the Current Geopolitical Context
- France's Strategic Involvement in IMEC
- Uncertainties Surrounding IMEC

### Quotes

*"The benefit of minilaterals is creating new discussion mechanisms among countries, crucial in regions like the Middle East lacking strong security frameworks."-Jean-Loup Samaan*

*"The introduction of new methods brings hope and progress in the absence of a strong security structure.."-Jean-Loup Samaan*

### Featured in the Episode

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**Transcript:**

**Jonathan Fulton:**

Welcome to the China Munich Podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Fulton, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlanta Council and a political scientist at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Minilateralism is one of the many buzzwords we've been hearing a lot of in the Middle East in the past few years. Smaller groupings of states working together on specific issues where their interests converge seems to be a growing trend, bringing countries together in partnerships that would have been unusual even just a few years ago. These mini laterals are typically region or country specific, but it's also easy to see how some of them are responses to shifting geopolitics as well. To talk us through these Middle East mini laterals, I'm happy to be joined today by doctor Jean Louis Saman, who is a senior research fellow at the Middle East Institute of the National University of Singapore, as well as a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. His research covers Middle Eastern security affairs, in particular, the reforms of Gulf Armed Forces, Israel's evolving military strategy, and the evolution of non-state warfare in the region. He wrote a great report for the Atlantic Council last summer on the spread of mini laterals in the region that I recommend to anyone who's thinking through these configurations.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

Jean Louis, welcome to the show.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Thank you very much, Jonathan. It's a pleasure to shift from the position of listener to guest. So thank you very much for that honor.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

Great to have you here. So let's just start with a brief overview of many laterals. You know, we've done projects together, and it keeps coming up. And in the beginning, I was a bit of a skeptic. And, you know, I think other people might as well. So what are they, and why are we seeing so many of them these days?

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Well, I mean, the first challenge when we talk about mini laterals is, both the definition, and the history, when that started and when can you say that this is a mini lateral arrangement or not? The expression itself is quite old. We can find it, like 20 years ago with discussions even in the nineties or in the early 2000s where there were a lot of discussions on the laterals. At the time, it was mostly governance, let's say, non security related, governance. But more recently, I would say that in the last 10 years, the discussion on mini laterals grew in earnest, and that started mostly in Asia where we

saw, mostly through US initiatives, mini laterals between the US, Japan, South Korea. And maybe the most emblematic, mini lateral, would be AUKUS, the US, UK, Australia, arrangement or alliance that was announced in 2020 1. Now this is, let's say, more or less the history of the last 2 decades. The problem is how do you define it? And so far, the way you look at the scholarship, people assume that this is either something between 3 members and up to 7 or 8 members. So it's actually quite approximate.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

You could argue that the concept of Europe, the way Europe was, defined by alliances against each other during the 19th century, was just a competition of mini laterals. So that's the problem, the challenge of definition. Having said that, in the Middle East, this is much more recent, in a way. You could argue that what we call today the minilaterals started after the Abraham Accords between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain. And this is mostly about what we call I to U 2. So this new arrangement includes India, Israel, US, and United Arab Emirates. But, again, you could argue that a lot of previous initiatives, previous arrangements, could also qualify, for many laterals. And for instance, the so-called quartet of tech against terror, which was composed of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, in 2017 against Qatar, this smallest qualify also, as a mini lateral.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

So the main lesson from that is that this is a volatile notion, that is it's usually the problem with this type of buzzword. But that doesn't mean that we should dismiss it or ignore it because this is more and more, an instrument or a mechanism that diplomats and military officers in the region like to use.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

Okay. Thanks. That was a really great overview. So we've mentioned a couple. You mentioned I two U two. You mentioned the anti terror quartet. We have seen a lot of these configurations in the Middle East in recent years. In the report you published with the Atlantic Council last summer, you went into quite a bit of detail in 3 or 4 of them.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

So can you give us an overview? What are the main mini laterals in the Middle East, and what are they expected to achieve?

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Yes. So let's say that the first or the most important one these days is I2U2. As mentioned earlier, this one, which includes not just Middle Eastern countries such as the UAE and Israel, but maybe more importantly also India. This is a US led initiative. And, when that was announced the first time in late 2021, it was quickly coined as the

Middle East quad. So you can already see the connection, or the, let's say, the movement of Asian miniatures, being imported to the Middle East. So, initially, as I said, I mean, the speculation about ITU2 was that this would be more or less the Middle East branch of the quad that the US had built, in Asia, and that include, also India, Japan, and Australia. However, we saw very quickly with the I to you to, arrangement that the agenda is more about economic, trade relations, and less about security security affairs.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

We could maybe discuss that later, but, you could argue that 2 countries, from that mini lateral, were more cautious, about or were, let's say, not really comfortable with the idea of being part of a Middle East quad that implicitly targets China. That would be the UAE and Israel. The US and India were much more comfortable because they don't have any issue with an arrangement such as this one, especially because they are also part of the Asian quad. So that's, I would say the first, mini lateral arrangement, that comes to mind in the Middle East. There is another one which, at the moment, I would say is in limbo, which is the Negev Forum. I I I said earlier that a lot of those mini lateral talks started or were triggered by the wave of normalization between Israel and, Arab, Arab countries and in particular, 2 gulf states, UAE and Bahrain. What we saw after that is, Israel raising its diplomatic ambitions, in creating this new conference, which was the Negev Forum. This Negev Forum, which was initially taking place, obviously, in Israel in 2022, that we only saw one edition so far.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

This was to include Israel, Morocco, Egypt, UAE, Bahrain, the US. Interestingly, at the time, Jordan was invited but refused to join the Negev Forum. In retrospect, it's quite interesting because Jordan was complaining that the Nega forum, which was supposed to discuss security issues, did not discuss the Palestinian issue enough. That was the Jordanian position at the time. So the nega form was supposed also to be that type of mini lateral arrangement. And, finally, another interesting example of mini laterals, might be the recent trilateral arrangement between France, the UAE, and India. I mentioned this one because it's one that doesn't include the US and which specifically, does not want to antagonize China. If you ask French officials, Emirati officials, or Indian officials, they are very, very cautious to say that this trilateral arrangement has nothing to do with China.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

And in a way, it's also used by those countries as a way to distance themselves from other US led mini laterals. So that will be another example. Maybe we'll have time to discuss IMEC, which is also something a bit different. The India, Middle East, Europe corridor, which arguably is not exactly a mini lateral. This is more like an extension or an

escalation of mini laterals. But that's, at the moment, the biggest initiatives, I would mention. There are other more, ad hoc, mini lateral discussions, but I didn't go further than just informal talks between some of those countries. So I don't think there's enough to say on those.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

But, again, I2U2 and the NEGATIVE Forum or the French, India, UAE, trilateral would be some of the most relevant cases here.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

Yeah. That's really great. You know, while you're listing them off, Israel is really central to a lot of these projects, except the last one you discussed, France, India, UAE. But, of course, Israel is working, like you said, with I2, U2, and and and so many other things. So, how does current events, you know, the war in Gaza and, you know, the reluctance among some states to work with Israel, how does this affect Israel's role in these going forward?

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

That's a great question and maybe the most obvious one. As you said at the beginning, the report I wrote for the Atlantic Council was published, maybe 2 months before the war in Gaza started. So I experienced the nightmare that any researcher in the Middle East faces when you have a topic and suddenly everything is basically changing overnight and challenging the findings. I think there are several aspects that have to be discussed, if we want to, address the issue of mini laterals, after the Gaza war. But first of all, I don't think the topic is going away. If you ask officials, these days either in Washington or elsewhere, they are still very interested in the topic. But, definitely, this cannot be as this can no longer be designed, as it was before. I think the biggest, the biggest, issue with, the mini lateral approach and in particular for I to u two and the negative forum, maybe even more, for the negative forum than for I to u two.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Was that the narrative behind those mini laterals was let's build economic ties, let's prioritize trade, and put security aside. That was the main narrative if you ask. I remember asking golf, commentators or officials at the time, especially about IT YouTube, and they were very, very, vocal on the fact that this is about business. We don't want to discuss security. This is and you could almost sound like you were a hawk, asking about security issues. So the main assumption was it's business first and that will eventually lead to the stabilization of the region. And the other maybe even more, perilous or risky, the riskier assumption was that there's no need to discuss the Israel Palestine issue. To be fair, this was not just an issue with the mini laterals.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

This was, I would say, regional diplomacy as a whole. We, for many years, felt like the Israel Palestine issue was frozen. The Abraham Accords started with this idea that you need to change the logic of Israel's normalization with the Arab world. It needs to be disconnected from the, Palestinian issue because the Palestinian issue is no longer, it is actually, a dead in a deadlock. So the assumption was let's build those mini lateral. This will improve regional governance. And, eventually, at a certain point, this will lead to progress on the Palestinian issue. And this was not shared by everyone.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Some countries in particular in the region, and I mentioned earlier, Jordan. Jordan maybe was from the beginning the most critical country on those issues, on those initiatives because Jordan felt, no. The Palestinian issue is still at the center. The belief was, you cannot build all those ties without discussing first the Palestinian issue. So I would say that for a while, until October, this vision of many laterals that prioritize economic ties and put the Palestinian issue in, in the background, seemed to work. And that explains why the Biden administration was quite optimistic about the Middle East. I mean, that's, the that's, in a way, the reason why Jake Sullivan, a few days before, October 7, was bragging about the idea that, the Middle East is more stable today than 20 years ago because you have these different initiatives, and that that looked like, something unprecedented for the Middle East to have all those new, formats of discussion. And discussion again that we're not looking at military, security issues, but more about business, trade.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

So it felt like the Middle East was no longer this area of conflict, but a potential area of prosperity. So, again, I think this is, this narrative is no longer sustainable, but that doesn't mean that the mini laterals are gone. I think the challenge is to change the logic and to use those arrangements, especially, for instance, the negative forum. I think, after the war in Gaza ends, there is definitely a need, for greater consultations, between the regional actors and without dismissing the Palestinian issue. It's no longer the way I would imagine the negative forum, but actually putting the Palestinian issue, the reconstruction of Gaza, the, the peace process at the center of a forum like this. So you can already imagine the mini laterals being even more relevant than they were in the first place.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

Yeah. I couldn't agree more. I mean, I absolutely take your point about the way folks in the region are recalibrating. But I don't think the underlying spirit of, you know, this de-

escalation and let's try to find developmental solutions and economic solutions to the region's problems. I mean, that that animating spirit seemed to be driving a lot of this stuff prior to October 7th. And I don't think that's gone away. I think leaders and and, you know, business leaders and political actors all still feel the same way that if you're going to solve the region's problems, it's probably not gonna be through geopolitical competition like it has been for a long time or through interference in each other's countries. But trying to build, you know, supply chains and business clusters and invest in each other and make the region just a place where people want to invest and set up businesses and trade with each other.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Yes. I mean, the maybe the the the other thing that has to be discussed is the China factor, because as as mentioned earlier, the some of these initiatives and in particular to you too, it's less the case for the NEGA Forum or the the French India, UAE, arrangement. But in particular, for I to you too, the the big assumption was that this is about, China. And it's gonna be interesting to see how the change in regional diplomacy and the need to re-discuss the Palestinian issue, may force this China factor to be less important. That's that's one way to look at it. The other the other, possible scenario is to see, some of the regional actors, looking for more engagement with China, through this type of similar arrangements. So far, we don't see any similar arrangement between China and either Israel or any of the Arab partners. But I'm I I wouldn't be surprised if in coming months, we see more and more interest, especially in the gulf to have the same type of engagement, with, China.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Maybe I'm just speculating, but one of the other consequences of the Gaza war, I think, is frustration, towards the US and towards the west, in general. So this may actually also bring those countries to reconsider those arrangements and think let's keep the template, the mini lateral template, but let's do that with other countries, because so far, it's mostly US led initiatives. Let's try to have something like this, with China or, with India, but without the US. So this, again, this is pure speculation at this point. But if we try to imagine the future of those arrangements, this may also come into play. And this might be a big challenge also for the US. How do you react? How do you position yourself, with any other arrangement that excludes Washington?

**Jonathan Fulton:**

That's a great segue. Thanks for doing that because I was trying to find a way to bring us back to the China part of the China MENA podcast here. And, I agree. I mean, then I think if you read a lot of the commentary, you'll hear, you know, talk of, China, Russia, Iran, mini lateral as well. Right? That is, these countries are acting in concert on certain



issues. And I think one thing we should all be worried about, China has very, very real interest in the region, and China does have a role to play in a lot of the especially, certainly, the developmental issues, the economic issues. The more you push it away, the more you're driving it into countries, partnerships that you may not want. Right? If China's opportunities with some of these more status quo oriented countries start to diminish through, you know, these US India centered configurations, then it forces China to work with countries that are less supportive of the status quo.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

And that could be just as problematic. So, yeah, I'm glad you brought that up. I mean, when i2u2 was announced, I was asked to write a report for the Middle East Council in Doha about how I would imagine Beijing responding to this type of thing. And my take was how could Beijing see that this is anything but the Middle East quad. And like you said, I think for India and the US because obviously they're in a quad. So it's it's it's there. But you're right. I think at the time, Israel was less inclined to want to be seen as confrontational towards China or or or less welcoming to China.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

And the UAE certainly didn't seem very interested in that. So we saw the narrative change a bit. How do you see that? I mean, what we've talked about mostly is about these many laterals as responses to regional pressures. But in your report, you also talked about how there's this ambiguity at the international systemic level. You know, this US China competition could be driving this as well. How do these change the strategic environment for external actors who come into the Middle East?

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Well, there's I mean, first of all, you could say that the the mini lateral phenomenon at the the systematic, the systemic level is one of diff different consequences of this new transition of power or this type of, uncertainty that is, brought about by the US China competition and the fact that regional actors such as Israel, Gulf States, want to either diversify or to to change their, their foreign policy and have to reconsider, their exclusive alignment or reliance on, the US. So the same way we discuss and you discussed many times in the podcast to the, the relations of those countries with China at the bilateral level, you could argue that the mini laterals are also, a consequence of this, this ambiguity and this more volatile, regional environment. Having set up I mean, just on the on the Israeli, I to YouTube because, as we were talking about it, I may I may change or I may revise the, idea that Israel, today would be still cautious, about the China, factor because clearly, after October 7, and you have discussions on that, in the podcast, I think the Israelis have, come to the realization, and they have already, come to that realization. But maybe that was the final step to consider, China is not a strategic

partner. That, it is at best just a trade partner, but that's it. And I think, probably, after the gas war, they will, they won't have any issue with the US narrative on China. And I think that's a major development, with regards to Israel. With regards to the UAE, clearly, the the Gaza war in a way, confirms a lot of their assumptions about the need to have, not a rebalancing of their, of their policy from the US, towards China, but more diversification and, to add as many, options as possible, and many laterals contribute to that.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Now the problem I mean, the positive view on mini lateral is that it brings about new mechanisms, processes to discuss, among all of those countries. It is useful for regions like the Middle East where historically there has never been a strong security architecture. There isn't a European Union or NATO, for the Middle East. The Gulf Cooperation Council was unable to solve any of its own issues either with external actors such as Iran or Iraq, but even within its own organization, the GCC was completely irrelevant, during the blockade of Qatar, in 2017. Same thing for the Arab League. I mean, the Arab League has never been able to solve any issue, and we can see right now that there is no role, basically for the Arab League, on the Palestinian, tragedy. So the positive view is that mini laterals are a first step. It actually compensates for that absence of security architecture.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

The negative view would be that mini laterals do not create any robust mechanism, any strong, process or any institution. I mean, most of those, minilateralism we are discussing do not have, like, a permanent bureaucracy. So this is basically relying on, the the resolve, the motivation, and the resources of those countries on their own, but not with a, like, a organization, secretary general for, ITU2 or for the NEge forum. So this means that this is just ad hoc. This may just, extend in a way the absence of, security architecture. Or even worse, you could you could speculate that this deepens the fragmentation of, of, regional, regional cooperation, regional diplomacy. I heard, from UN officials. For instance, I was talking about the topic of minilateralism with UN officials involved in the Middle East.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

And their view was interesting because I didn't have that view in mind. They were quite skeptical and negative about it. They were saying, well, this is another way to undermine the role of international institutions, wherein you have small, small meetings, small formats like this. They were concerned that this would only create fragmentation and, eventually, possible, alliances and counter alliances. I mean, at the moment, we don't see that. But, if we look at the history, the recent history of the Middle East, that wouldn't be completely unlikely to, to see that happening through this mechanism of,

mini laterals. So that's also something that could happen, in terms of, the regional regional dynamics.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

No. I take that point very, very seriously because when you look at things like well, I guess where I want to go with this, with the IMEC, the India Middle East corridor, you kind of see how this kind of regional fragmentation is really firming up. You know, I remember thinking this just before the Saudi Iran rapprochement was announced, Because the week before that, all of the stories in the newspaper were the Saudi Israel normalization. And it seemed to me that at the time, if Saudi had announced that it was normalizing ties with Israel, then that would be another big piece in that kind of block politics in the Middle East where the lines would be very clearly drawn. You know, here's a group of countries that are on one side, and here's a group of countries on the other, and that seemed quite combustible. So when Saudi and Iran announced that they were going to have that rapprochement and normalized relations or diplomatic engagement, I took that as pretty good statesmanship to kind of lower the temperatures in the region. When you talk about IMEC, I mean, one of the things a couple of the things that I was thinking about while you're talking, one of them was as the China watcher in the the from this region, you keep seeing whenever the Abraham Accords were announced was what's what's Beijing gonna think? This looks like a response to the Belt and Road. And then I two u two, this is a response to the Belt and Road.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

And then IMEC, which very clearly does seem to be a response to the Belt and Road. So it does seem to draw in, on the one hand, these geopolitical responses to a kind of great power competition. On the other hand, you think if your Chinese state-owned company is operating in the region and you see, you know, better infrastructure getting you from one port to another port, then, hey. That's a public good. Right? That's good for everybody. But just, you know, you did make the point. Imac isn't a mini lateral, but it does show us how these things could operationalize in the future. Right? That cooperation on different issues creates momentum for bigger stuff that connects these countries and markets and, you know, infrastructure.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

How do you see it working? I mean, we were both in Washington recently. When I was talking to people, despite the issues in Gaza, there seemed to be a lot of momentum behind the scenes for Imac and a lot of enthusiasm. And I hear the same thing here. What's your take?

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Well, I mean, the IEMIC project was initially supposed to be the cherry on the top of all those mini lateral initiatives. I think even before we discuss the, the, the operational dimension, the, the investments and the, the ports, the maritime corridor, the rail project that was supposed to or that is supposed to derive from IMEI. I think at first, it's about a narrative. It's about this big narrative that the Biden administration wanted to sell, not just for domestic consumption, but also for the region. This was, again, based on the same assumptions we discussed earlier, the idea that, let's prioritize business. Let's prioritize prosperity, and this will stabilize the Middle East. So this was I mean, this and this is I should not use past tense. This is a very ambitious project.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

I must say and as you mentioned that we were recently in the US, I was initially thinking, honestly, after October 7 that IMEC was gone, that nobody would be interested either to work with Israel or with the Biden administration, frankly. But you're right that there is still a strong appetite. I think this relates to different reasons, and some are good for US interest, some others less. I think first, it's the fact that probably, on this topic, you would see continuity between the Biden administration and possibly another Trump presidency if we see that in November, because a lot of those topics, a lot of those initiatives started already in the Trump administration. And on those topics, you can see some similarities clearly in the assumptions driving both administrations. So you could see a rebranding, if we have a Trump presidency, a rebranding of that initiative, maybe not IMEC anymore, but probably the same actors, the same, the same format. Because there is also this idea of building prosperity, focusing on trade instead of security issues. There is still an appetite from other actors.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

You can see that already with the UAE and India that are going forward on some aspects in terms of infrastructure. Now the thing is that, for instance, on the specific topic of UAE and India, that have started investing in infrastructure and talking about those projects as IMEC projects, you could tell that this is a rebranding of bilateral corporations that was going to happen anyway. The UAE announced many years ago that it would invest in the engine infrastructures. I think it was back in 2000, 16 or 17 when Mohammed bin Zayed was invited to the National Day of India, as a guest of honor, that they announced investment in Indian infrastructure. So I'm not sure if the India, UAE investment projects that we see right now are an indication that Imec is going forward. It is, at least, an indication that some actors involved in IMEC are going to deepen their relations no matter what happens, with regards to Israel. Interestingly, one country also announced the appointment of a special envoy. I was surprised, to, to hear that my country, France, announced the creation of a special envoy for IAMBIC.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

So this is Gerard Mestrallet, who's a former CEO of one of the major gas companies in France. It is an interesting development because, you could wonder why a European country would be so active on an initiative that in many ways is a US initiative. As I said earlier, I think it's first and foremost, a narrative from the Biden administration. So, in recent conversations with French officials, I asked them about why Paris suddenly is embracing US initiatives in the Middle East. That sounds against the DNA of French diplomacy. And, actually, the answer was, well, we support IMEC because that's for us a mechanism that allows us to deepen our engagement with UAE and India. So we're going back actually to the other mini lateral I was mentioning earlier, this French UAE India, arrangement. So France is actually trying to use the IMAIC arrangement as a way to promote its own initiative.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

So you can already anticipate that, if any, if all the different actors involved in IMEC use that format, for their own benefits without considering a common, common agenda, this may eventually create some, some issues. But, overall, yes, I agree with you that the initiative is clearly still in the air, but there are things that will need to be considered, and some were already, bigger known before, the Gaza war. The financing, I don't think we have any clear idea yet on the funding of, this, of this or those projects, that will, that will be part of IMEC. You could argue that a lot of the projects with the Belt and Road initiative are also made of unclear and opaque, financing issues. But on this IMEC project, we don't even know exactly what would be the share of funding between the US and other countries or between governments and private entities. So it's hard to really assess the way this can be implemented. I mean, as I remember when the project was announced in September, one of the first meetings was supposed to clarify all of those financial issues. As far as I know, that didn't yet lead to any public statements, either from the Biden administration or from other countries regarding the specificities of the financing.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

There are other big unknowns. The role of Israel, the role of Israel and probably also of Palestine in that, in that, initiative. The role of Israel was already unclear, before, the before the war. Because if you look at the statement, the first memorandum of understanding, that was signed in September, Israel is not mentioned. Israel is not even a signatory, of the, the first MOU between the members of IMEC. There is this widely, widely, or this this, this view, that Israel is part of the project. But officially, there isn't any clear indication on how Israel would be part of it. For instance, when we talk about port infrastructures, would this be through Haifa port? Like, this seemed to be the most likely

scenario, but these days, you can hear, gulf states and in particular, Emirati, Emirati views, Emirati commentators saying, well, we could do that with other countries.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

We could do that, with Lebanon. We could do that, and I even heard, with Gaza. I mean, obviously, this would need to, to invest in the reconstruction of a Gaza port. But this also brings about the issue of the Israel Palestine conflict. As we discussed earlier, I don't think that the future of IMAC can be discussed without considering that again at the center. There's no way you can discuss infrastructure projects like those, without considering just the security of the infrastructures in Israel, but also the the diplomatic aspects, because a lot of the countries will be, mindful of how, they are perceived, if they start investing in projects that sideline the reconstruction of, Gaza and more generally the the the Palestinian, territories.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

That was really interesting. I'm a little disappointed that you didn't refer to IMEC as the Biden Road Initiative as I've heard you use before, which I think is great. Jean Louis, thanks a lot for this, man. It was really, really interesting. Really cool stuff. I always enjoy talking with you about this stuff, and I think it was really, really helpful for the audience as well.

**Jean-Loup Samaan:**

Well, thank you very much. It was a great pleasure to contribute.

**Jonathan Fulton:**

Cool. Well, we'll, we'll have to do it again real soon. To our audience, we'll be back in a couple of weeks with another very interesting episode. Thanks for joining us. And, do all the podcast stuff like and listen, subscribe and rate, and tell us what you like about us or about the show or what we could be doing better. Thanks, everybody. See you soon.

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