

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Abbas Al-Zein

12.05.2025

IMEC interrupted:

The resistance that's buying Beijing time

As Tel Aviv and Washington redraw the region's economic map, China quietly benefits from the resistance's disruption of rival US-led trade corridors and maritime control.

The war on Gaza has revealed a profound contradiction between China's strategic interests in West Asia and the gains pursued by Israel, backed by the US. While Beijing works to safeguard its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Washington and Tel Aviv are actively reshaping the region to marginalize Chinese influence politically, economically, and logistically.

At the center of this tug-of-war is the Indo-Middle East-European Economic Corridor ([IMEC](#)), announced during the 2023 G20 summit in New Delhi. With India, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the UAE, and key European states on board, IMEC aims to bypass traditional Chinese trade routes – linking India to Europe via West Asia. The occupation state's port of Haifa is a cornerstone of this project.

Gaza: Gateway to a geopolitical showdown

Tel Aviv's bid to impose full control over Gaza – just kilometers from the corridor's route – is not merely a military objective, but a prerequisite for securing this western-aligned trade pipeline. According to [The Diplomat](#), the war on Gaza has already “destroyed IMEC before it began,” while a [Carnegie report](#) notes the corridor's viability is in limbo following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and the pause in Saudi-Israeli normalization.

A subdued Gaza would offer Israel economic leverage, regional integration, and a new geopolitical function, undermining China's central position in global trade. But as long as the resistance holds out in Gaza and southern Lebanon, the corridor remains vulnerable, thereby buying Beijing time to reinforce its own strategic alternatives.

In this context, Palestinian and regional resistance inadvertently serve Chinese interests by keeping Israel's infrastructure under threat and delaying US-led integration projects. Haifa and other Israeli ports face persistent insecurity, deterring investors and complicating long-term infrastructure planning.

Unlike Washington and Tel Aviv, Beijing benefits from a multipolar delay – and the survival of the resistance tilts the regional balance in its favor.

China's quiet gains from the resistance

Even though China is not a direct party to the war, the erosion of Palestinian resistance would bolster competing western-aligned networks and shrink Beijing's maneuvering space. Maintaining a state of indecisiveness in the Gaza and Lebanon theaters offers China valuable time to fortify its BRI assets through safer corridors.

A parallel front in this confrontation is unfolding in the Red Sea. US and Israeli military activity near Bab al-Mandab signals an effort to monopolize control of this strategic chokepoint. While these operations are framed as countering “threats to navigation,” they are, in fact, designed to consolidate western dominance over a key global trade artery.

China, which set up its first overseas naval base in Djibouti in 2017 to protect its BRI sea lanes, views this militarization as a direct challenge. According to the [Defense Post](#), the US aims to “counter China's growing influence in the region,” citing Sino–Russian–Iranian joint naval drills and Chinese surveillance support to allied vessels.

In April, the US accused China's Chang Guang Satellite Technology Co. of [providing satellite imagery](#) to Yemen's Ansarallah-aligned armed forces to help target American and allied naval assets in the Red Sea. While the company [denied](#) the claim as “malicious slander,” Washington sees it as evidence that Beijing is leveraging private firms to wage a [proxy intelligence war](#).

This arrangement allows China to preserve plausible deniability while benefiting from disruptions to US maritime operations. Beijing's refusal to condemn Yemeni strikes and its insistence on ending the war on Gaza as a condition for regional stability aligns with its broader strategy of avoiding direct confrontation while undercutting American control.

According to the [Israeli National Security Institute](#), China is “ready to bear the economic damage caused by the crisis” in the Red Sea, in exchange for not taking a position consistent with Israeli–American goals.

Iran, sanctions, and energy pressure points

Iran, China's closest partner in the region, plays an equally pivotal role. Nearly 50 percent of China's oil imports come from West Asia, and Iran supplies a significant share at preferential

prices – a relationship shaped by sanctions and strategic necessity. For Beijing, this energy corridor is essential for hedging against US market manipulation and securing autonomy in energy pricing.

However, Washington has made Iran a central target of its containment strategy. From nuclear deal sabotage to proxy pressure and economic strangulation, US policy seeks to isolate Tehran and force its partners – especially China – into new dependencies. On 1 May, US President Donald Trump announced the imposition of secondary sanctions on any entity that buys oil or petrochemical products from the Islamic Republic.

This escalation is designed to hit China where it hurts. By weakening Tehran's export capacity, Washington limits Beijing's options and forces it into greater reliance on Persian Gulf states aligned with the US. China's goal to de-Americanize energy flows is thereby undermined, and its long-term vision for economic sovereignty is put at risk.

In this light, Israel's role in [regional destabilization](#) – including through fostering sectarianism in Syria and cyber operations targeting Iranian infrastructure – serves US objectives by making Iran a less reliable node in China's BRI network.

Strategic decoupling or direct collision?

The broader implication of all these trends is that West Asia is no longer a background theater in US-China rivalry – it is the front line. The US is not retreating from the region to pivot toward East Asia. Instead, it is weaponizing West Asia itself in order to corner China globally. Projects like IMEC, naval patrols in the Red Sea, and anti-Iranian sanctions are all extensions of this strategic logic.

Meanwhile, China continues to walk a diplomatic tightrope – maintaining neutrality, avoiding military engagement, and calling vaguely for de-escalation. But the gap between its economic interests and political posture is becoming unsustainable. As Israel pushes to militarily secure a trade regime designed to displace the BRI, Beijing must decide whether its passive posture can hold – or whether it will be compelled to defend its interests more assertively.

A delicate balance tilted by the resistance

Despite the mounting pressure, resistance forces across West Asia continue to play an outsized role in shaping this geopolitical battlefield. From Gaza to Lebanon, from Iraq to Yemen, their ability to impose insecurity on rival infrastructure – whether [airports](#), pipelines, or maritime lanes – creates friction that benefits China without requiring Beijing to act directly.

Sanaa's [hypersonic ballistic missiles](#), the remnants of Hezbollah's arsenal, or potential cross-border strikes by the Iraqi resistance, all contribute to an environment where American designs struggle to stabilize. Crucially, these actors have refrained from targeting Chinese interests, reinforcing Beijing's image as a neutral trade partner rather than a military hegemon.

This equilibrium – where resistance keeps the region unstable enough to delay US integration projects, but not so chaotic as to damage Chinese investments – has so far worked in Beijing's favor. But as Israel seeks to expand its role as a western economic hub, and as US sanctions aim to cut China off from alternative energy sources, the margin for Chinese inaction is narrowing.

MAY 7, 2025