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Investment Return: The Role of Syria's Geo-Economy on Iran's Strategic Situation in the West of Asia Region, with a Special Focus on the Port of Latakia (2018-2023)

*Mehdi Hedayati Shahidani¹, Sedigheh Azin²

1. Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Gilan, Rasht, Gilan

2. PhD student of International Relations, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Gilan, Rasht, Gilan

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Abstract

Given the realities of the international system within the current arena of war and its resulting damages, actors persistently focus on each other's economic advantages. In this context, the West Asia region, characterized by tension and volatility, specifically highlights Syria—a country that has endured a decade of conflict—for its favorable economic traits. These attributes stem from Syria's access to open waters and its proximity to European and African nations. Notably, Iran has maintained positive relations with Syria for many years, dating back to the era of Hafez Assad. During the eight-year defense against Iraq, Syria supported Iran, fostering strong ties. Considering Iran's continued presence in Syria, prioritizing economic components to advance national macro strategies becomes a constructive governmental response. Both re-

Mehdi Hedayati Shahidani, Ph.D.

Address: Associate Professor of International Relations, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

E-mail: mehdi.hedayati@guilan.ac.ir

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gional and global powers actively seek to enhance their influence and economic standing in other countries. Since the end of the Cold War, regionalism and power dynamics have gained prominence, prompting large governments across geographical regions to assert their roles in economic and political spheres. Consequently, the power struggle among actors in Syria extends beyond its borders, projecting an external image.

But despite the efforts of some powers to change the power dynamics in Syria, the ISIS caliphate came to an end, and the conflict zone was confined to the north and northwest of Syria. Meanwhile, Bashar al-Assad remained at the helm of power, and relentless attempts were made to overthrow him. This situation opened up opportunities for other governments to establish a presence in Syria, particularly in its economic sector.

Over the past decade, Iran has gained greater importance and status in the eyes of Damascus, especially within the context of the fight against ISIS in Syria. A notable example of Iran's significance to the Assad government is the administration of the Latakia port, which was granted to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran has also engaged in favorable economic activities within Syria.

In light of these developments, the Iranian government has transitioned from military spending and the fight against ISIS to a focus on soft power and economic influence in Syria. It now occupies a unique position in the country's economic geography.

Based on this fact and Iran's presence in the Syrian war against opposition forces and ISIS, as well as its support of the central government, this article analyzes the impact of Syria's geo-economic position on Iran's strategic situation in the Middle East region between 2018 and 2023. The hypothesis of the article posits that Syria's geo-economy, following the fall of ISIS, has solidified Iran's influence within Syria and enhanced its regional role in both political and economic dimensions.

This article has collected data and analyzed it based on geoeconomics theory. According to this theory, controlling and influencing global and regional markets, as well as having access to the economic highways of many countries worldwide, ranks among the most crucial objectives. Achieving these goals necessitates tools such as attractive foreign investments and long-term, low-inter-

est loans.

In light of this, concepts that hold significance in the economic sector—such as trade, investment, financial policies, economic aid, and sanctions—have gained prominence in the field of geo-economics. These components, once less critical before the collapse of the Soviet Union, now play pivotal roles in the competition among major powers since the 1990s.

These economic tools can spark competition between nations across various domains, particularly within different geographical areas. According to the principles proposed by the theory of geo-economics, Syria possesses a favorable economic geography for other states. Given the challenges faced by the Syrian government over the past decade, revitalizing both the political and economic aspects of the country necessitates attracting foreign capital and engaging in trade with other governments while distancing itself from security-related discussions.

This article analyzes the data using a documentary and statistical approach, employing the descriptive-analytical method with the assistance of geo-economics theory.

Based on the obtained data, Iran's presence in Syria stands as one of the most critical levers within the West Asian region. According to available information, Iran has consistently expanded its cultural and economic footprint in Syria, particularly during the presence of ISIS and even more so afterward. This proactive approach by Iran underscores its recognition of Syria's unique situation, especially following Ebrahim Raisi's visit, and its strategic intent to enhance its position in West Asia.

Investing in Syria promises significant economic success for the country and contributes to bolstering regional prestige. Consequently, Iran's presence in Syria, coupled with the creation of economic incentives for domestic investors, will further strengthen its influence in the country and facilitate the return of capital to Iran. From a political perspective, this presence aligns Iran more closely with its allies and strategically positions Syria within the depths of West Asia. As a result, Iran finds itself in the closest proximity to other regional competitors, poised to play an even greater role in shaping the future of regional dynamics compared to the past decade.

Therefore, based on the data, the following results have been obtained:

1- With its presence in Syria, especially after the fall of the self-proclaimed ISIS government, Iran has demonstrated its intention to leverage the country's economic interests.

2- Iran has firmly established its presence in areas like Latakia, strategically exploiting Syria's economic potential.

3- Following the liberation of Bokmal by Iranian forces and under their directives, the Al-Tanf route—previously controlled by the US—has been significantly neutralized. This has ensured the continuity of an economic route connecting Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

4- By establishing a transit route between the resistance forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran facilitates connections across multiple corridors, including the North-South corridor, the China-Pakistan corridor, the China-Central Asia-Iran corridor, and the West Asia corridor. This network enables seamless access for Iran to the Mediterranean Sea via Latakia.

As a result, Iran's presence in Syria has deepened the country's strategic significance within the region and the global context. Syria, particularly Latakia, has emerged as a pivotal gateway to other lands.

Key words: Iran, Syria, Latakia port, Post-ISIS, Geoeconomy.