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The potential of science and technology diplomacy in the neighborhood policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

In the present era, science and technology are recognized as one of the most important soft power tools in the field of international relations. Science and technology diplomacy, by utilizing scientific, research, and technological capacities, can act as a bridge to strengthen international cooperation and build mutual trust between countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran, given its unique geopolitical location and its neighborhood with diverse countries in terms of culture, economy, and politics, has significant capacities in the field of science and technology diplomacy. These capacities can be used in line with the goals of Iran's neighborhood policy, as one of the key priorities of the country's foreign policy. Iran's neighborhood policy is based on developing friendly relations, strengthening regional cooperation, and reducing tensions with neighboring countries. In the meantime, science and technology diplomacy can help

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strengthen Iran's relations with its neighbors by creating common grounds for scientific, educational, and technological cooperation. On the other hand, this type of diplomacy can be used as a tool to introduce Iran's scientific and technological achievements, improve the country's international image, and attract regional and global partnerships in scientific and technological projects. With the growth of globalization, regionalism has become more visible in various forms in geopolitical and geostrategic regions. Regional organizations, which were created in the second half of the 20th century for economic, political, and military convergence, have become one of the important tools of international interactions. Despite efforts to strengthen economic and political interactions, some believe that regionalism is an obstacle to globalization. In this regard, the creation of joint banking networks and bank switches can help reduce barriers to financial exchanges and improve economic trust between countries. Developing a neighborhood policy by focusing on this type of financial infrastructure can help strengthen economic convergence among neighboring countries. This article aims to examine the capacities of science and technology diplomacy in the neighborhood policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and analyzes the role and position of this type of diplomacy in strengthening Iran's relations with neighboring countries. In this regard, first, the concept of science and technology diplomacy is defined and explained, and then Iran's capacities in this area are examined. Next, the role of science and technology diplomacy in achieving the goals of Iran's neighborhood policy is analyzed and solutions are presented for making the most of these capacities. It is hoped that this article can be a step towards better understanding the capacities of science and technology diplomacy and its role in Iran's foreign policy. The present study examines the role of science and technology diplomacy in Iran's neighborhood policy and presents effective strategies for utilizing scientific and technological capacities to improve relations with neighboring countries.

Science and technology diplomacy, as one of the new and effective tools in the field of international relations, has significant potential to strengthen regional cooperation and achieve the goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran's neighborhood policy. Given Iran's geopolitical location and its neighborhood with countries that are culturally, economically, and politically diverse, utilizing these capabilities can lead to building mutual trust, reducing tensions, and developing sustainable relations with neighbors. With its scientific and technological infrastructure, advanced research centers, and specialized human resources, Iran has the ability to use science and technology diplomacy as a tool to introduce its achievements, attract regional and global partnerships, and improve its in-

ternational image. Joint cooperation in the fields of energy, environment, health, new technologies, and higher education can be considered as the main axes of scientific and technological interactions with neighboring countries. However, effective use of science and technology diplomacy in Iran's neighborhood policy requires the development of macro strategies, strengthening relevant institutions, increasing research budgets, and establishing regional scientific networks. Coordination between the country's scientific, diplomatic, and economic institutions also seems essential for the successful implementation of this type of diplomacy. In this context, the use of modern financial instruments such as joint banking switches can be one of the practical solutions to strengthen economic convergence among Islamic countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran can play a leadership role in this area by proposing the creation of independent and joint banking and financial networks, and thereby help strengthen neighborhood policy and expand economic relations with regional countries. The use of modern financial technologies and the development of technological infrastructure can, in addition to strengthening economic convergence, help increase trust among Islamic countries and reduce dependence on international financial systems. This article suggests that the development of the neighborhood policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran should use the capacities of science and technology diplomacy to expand economic and political relations with regional countries and thereby help strengthen convergence and trust-building among Islamic countries. Regarding the neighborhood policy, it should be said that this policy is one of the most efficient strategies for stabilizing the peripheral environment. The neighborhood policy is an efficient strategy for building trust and increasing regional cooperation within the framework of regionalism, as well as an efficient strategy for playing an active role in the developments of the peripheral environment and its engineering. The neighborhood policy is a decisive strategy for determining and changing the perceptions of governments towards each other, creating a favorable environment for the growth and development of each regional unit, and ultimately a strategy for strengthening and developing political and economic relations with peripheral countries.

In a case study of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, it seems that the factors and components that can be a basis for convergence in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation also contain a basis for divergence. One of the main axes of formation and convergence in this organization is the factor of the common Islamic religion. Having a significant Muslim population of every sect and group is considered the main basis for the formation of this organization. Creating Islamic unity and the Islamic nation is considered one of the central provisions of

the organization's charter. However, at the same time, very different and sometimes conflicting interpretations of the true religion of Islam are the factor of divergence and distance of member countries from each other's policies. Within the framework of the functionalist theory, the desire for convergence should first begin from the independent economic, commercial and industrial sectors and spread to the political sphere, which seems very unlikely in the economies of Islamic countries, since they are often state-based.

Key words: Science and technology diplomacy, technology cooperation, neighborhood policy, regional cooperation.