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Analyzing the Quality of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Role in the War of Corridors; Active Engagement or Geopolitical Isolation

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Extended Abstract

In the contemporary international system, trade and transit corridors have become a critical arena for economic competition, enhancing political influence, and ensuring national security. Iran's unparalleled geographical position at the crossroads of three continents—Asia, Europe, and Africa—has historically established it as a “communication bridge” and the “corridor heartland” of the world, to the extent that some researchers refer to Iran as the “geopolitical center of the world.” However, developments over the past decade reveal a concerning paradox: while geographically situated at the nexus of the most vital transit routes, Iran is, in practice, being excluded or bypassed from the main regional corridor channels such as China's “Belt and Road,” the “Middle Corridor,” and the “India-Middle

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East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).” This research seeks to answer the central question of what Iran’s performance in regional corridor initiatives has been and what consequences it has entailed.

To analyze this issue, the research employs the theoretical framework of “Geopolinomics.” Developed by Demko, Wood, and Kazi, this theory posits that in the 21st century, the power game is not solely reliant on geography and politics (geopolitics) or geography and economy (geo-economics), but rather is shaped by the tripartite and dynamic interaction of geography, politics, and economy. From this perspective, factors such as transportation corridors, energy routes, and ports function as the “arteries” and “nodes” of power in the “New Great Game.” Consequently, a country’s success in the “war of corridors” depends not merely on its geographical location, but also on its capacity for economic diplomacy, creating efficient infrastructure, and attracting investment into these integrated projects.

This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, relying on library and documentary sources. The researchers collected, classified, and analyzed data from existing books, scientific articles, research projects, and reports from reputable domestic and foreign institutions (such as the Iran Chamber Research Center and the *Rahnegare* journal) to scrutinize Iran’s performance in various corridors. The primary focus has been on examining seven major regional corridors, including: the Belt and Road Initiative (China), the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the North-South Corridor, the Lapis Lazuli Corridor, the Development Road Corridor, and the Resistance Corridor.

The findings of the research clearly indicate that Iran has failed to capitalize on its geographical advantage to play a pivotal role in the corridors. This failure can be traced back to two categories of factors: domestic and external. Domestic factors include weaknesses in both hard and soft infrastructure (such as delays in completing critical railways like Chabahar-Zahedan and Rasht-Astara), inefficient economic governance and cumbersome bureaucracy, the prioritization of security-political considerations over economic interests in foreign policy, and ambiguity regarding political and economic stability for foreign investors. External factors encompass inter-

national sanctions, which have both disrupted investment within Iran and increased the risk of cooperation with it for other countries; competition among major powers (such as U.S. efforts to replace Iran with alternative corridors like IMEC); and intense regional competition (particularly with Turkey and Azerbaijan within the framework of the Middle Corridor and the Zangezur project).

As a result of these factors, Iran is losing its position in most corridors. For example, within China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Middle Corridor through the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus is being developed instead of passing through Iranian territory. The North-South Corridor project is also facing severe delays due to domestic infrastructure problems and sanctions. Simultaneously, regional competitors such as Turkey, through active diplomacy and investment in infrastructure, are increasingly becoming transit hubs.

Ultimately, the research arrives at the key conclusion that the main hypothesis of the study is confirmed: the Islamic Republic of Iran, despite possessing unique geopolitical advantages, has failed to secure a deserving share of regional corridors due to a combination of domestic challenges and external pressures. The consequence of this situation will be nothing less than "geopolitical isolation." This isolation manifests itself in the weakening of the national economy (loss of transit revenues and job creation opportunities), a reduction in the security coefficient (strengthening of competitors' positions and regional encirclement), and the gradual erosion of Iran's soft power and regional influence.

The research warns that geographical advantages are not permanent and can be eroded if neglected. The authors emphasize that escaping this impasse requires a paradigm shift in national strategy: transitioning from a foreign policy based solely on security-political priorities to an active and pragmatic economic diplomacy, increasing transparency in the business environment, accelerating the completion of critical infrastructure projects, and striving for de-escalation in international relations. Otherwise, if the current trend continues, the risk of Iran's complete removal from the future communicative and economic map of Eurasia and its transformation into a

“geopolitical island” will not be far-fetched.

Key words: War of Corridors, Geopolitics, Geopolinomics, Iran, Geopolitical Strangulation.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.