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Eurasia and the Redefinition of Global Influence in the Post-American Era: The Role of the North–South Corridor and the Belt and Road Initiative

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Extended Abstract

Over the past two decades, the international system has undergone profound structural transformations, marked notably by the relative decline of United States hegemony and the rise of emerging economic and geopolitical actors. These shifts have necessitated a critical reassessment of power balance theories and regional analytical frameworks, emphasizing the increasing complexity of global governance and the emergence of a multipolar international order. Eurasia, due to its central geographical location, vast energy resources, and extensive transit networks, has emerged as a strategic hub that plays a decisive role in redefining global influence and facilitating the redistribution of power among regional and extraregional actors. This region, therefore, is no longer merely a passive conduit for international trade and energy

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flows but has become a key arena for strategic maneuvering and geopolitical competition.

Historically, international transport infrastructure in the Global South was predominantly designed to serve Western powers, prioritizing resource extraction and the export of raw materials to industrial centers in Europe and North America over the economic and social needs of local populations. Railways and maritime routes in regions such as India, Africa, and the Middle East were constructed to integrate local economies into global value chains controlled by Western actors, often reinforcing dependency and limiting the strategic autonomy of the host states. However, in recent decades, a new wave of infrastructure projects in Eurasia has challenged this paradigm, demonstrating that large-scale transport networks can simultaneously serve economic, political, and strategic purposes, enhancing the capabilities of regional powers while constraining traditional U.S. influence.

Among the most significant initiatives are the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The INSTC, developed since 2000 with the participation of Iran, Russia, and India, integrates multimodal transport routes—combining maritime and overland pathways—to reduce the transit time for goods between Europe and India by approximately 15 to 20 days, while lowering transportation costs by roughly 30 percent. Beyond its economic benefits, the corridor functions as a strategic instrument, allowing Russia and Iran to enhance their autonomy from Western-controlled routes and exert greater influence in regional logistics and energy flows. This initiative exemplifies how infrastructure development can be leveraged as a tool of regional power, altering the balance of influence in Eurasia.

The Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013, similarly represents a transformative approach to regional connectivity. Encompassing over 130 countries, the BRI has facilitated massive investments in transport, logistics, and energy infrastructure, establishing a dense network of strategic corridors that strengthen China's influence in a multipolar international system. These projects not only increase China's direct foreign investment in participating countries but also encourage engagement by major global investors, including Western actors, reshaping the patterns of global capital flow and economic interdependence.

Rail and road connections between China and Iran, for example, have reduced maritime transit times from 20 days to approximately 15 days over land, creating new economic arteries that can significantly affect regional power dynamics and the strategic autonomy of participating states.

This study's theoretical framework is anchored in three complementary perspectives: hard and soft power, balance of power, and the theory of emerging multipolar order. From a power perspective, large-scale infrastructure projects such as the INSTC and BRI are considered instruments of structural power. By lowering transportation costs and reducing transit times, these corridors enhance the economic and logistical capacities of Eurasian actors, while associated institutional and financial mechanisms reinforce their political and economic autonomy. The integration of hard and soft power elements in these projects increases the strategic leverage of China, Russia, Iran, and India, establishing a direct link between infrastructural capabilities and geopolitical influence.

Within the balance of power framework, structural realism underscores that security and survival in an anarchic international system depend on the creation of equilibrium among major actors. New Eurasian transit corridors, by providing independent alternatives to Western-dominated routes, strengthen regional capabilities and facilitate the redistribution of power at both regional and global levels. These developments, therefore, not only generate tangible economic benefits but also reshape the strategic environment, limiting the influence of the United States and enabling a more diversified and resilient global order.

The study finds that both the INSTC and the BRI operate simultaneously as economic drivers and strategic tools. The INSTC has created significant economic and geopolitical opportunities for India, Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan, allowing these states to play a more proactive role in regional power redistribution and reinforcing their strategic positions. The BRI, through extensive investment in transit and logistical infrastructure, not only enhances economic capacities but also strengthens political leverage, fosters institutional independence, and creates parallel financial mechanisms. Together, these initiatives facilitate the emergence of a more balanced multipolar architecture in Eurasia and accelerate the transition away from unipolar dominance.

Overall, the research demonstrates that contemporary Eurasian infrastruc-

ture projects, by establishing transport networks independent of Western control, have the potential to shift the global economic and political center of gravity toward this continent. Eurasia is no longer solely a transit region; it functions as a strategic and geopolitical lever capable of redefining global governance and power relations. These initiatives exemplify how infrastructure can transcend conventional economic roles to become instruments of smart power, increasing the strategic autonomy of regional actors and shaping the architecture of a multipolar world order. The ongoing expansion of these corridors suggests that Eurasia will increasingly serve as a decisive center of gravity in global politics, with implications for trade, energy, and security across multiple regions.

In conclusion, the study highlights the transformative impact of large-scale transport infrastructure on the global balance of power. By enabling regional actors to circumvent traditional Western-controlled routes, the INSTC and BRI enhance regional autonomy, facilitate economic growth, and provide the strategic means to influence global governance. These projects underscore the interplay between economic infrastructure and geopolitical power, demonstrating how Eurasia's emerging network of corridors is reshaping the international system. The findings suggest that the strategic centrality of Eurasia is set to increase, with infrastructure serving as both an enabler of economic development and a decisive instrument of geopolitical strategy, ultimately contributing to the emergence of a multipolar global order.

Key words: Eurasian geopolitics, North–South Corridor, global balance of power, U.S. hegemony decline, Belt and Road Initiative.

Conflict of Interest

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