

Investigating the strategic position of Khorramshahr

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, many developed and industrialized countries of the world owe their economic growth and prosperity to international trade and ports as the centers of this trade. Due to its special geographical, political and economic position, Iran is considered as one of the transit hubs of the region and the world in the field of international transportation. The short connecting route between Central Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, it provides access to open waters for twelve of the world's thirty landlocked countries. This is a subject of research as the most important transit advantage of Iran. Khorramshahr and its port are very important in the national and regional security studies due to their sensitive and unique position in the political, economic and strategic geographical areas of Iran. This research examines the strategic role of Khorramshahr in southwestern Iran. We organized the rest of the article as follows: The first section deals with the introduction; in the second section, we outlined the history of Khorramshahr. The third section examines the characteristics of Khorramshahr port and the fourth section studies in detail the potentials of the Shalamcheh border in Khorramshahr. Finally, we presented the conclusion.

Key Words: Khorramshahr, Position, Strategic

Introduction

After World War II, issues and theories related to economic, social and political development were discussed more seriously in international economic, social and political forums and think tanks. This led to the formation of the United Nations, the World Bank, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), regional development banks, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and dozens of other international conferences in the field of economic and social development. These measures made the underdeveloped or less developed countries aware of their political, economic and social weakness and backwardness. The subject of economic development in the post-1960s took on a particularly acute political aspect and was considered an important political issue for the people and policymakers. Thus, the economic development was considered necessary and vital for governments and policymakers, and the continuity of governments is a function of their economic success.

According to the results of the opinions of economists and development experts, free trade and free market play an important role in the economic and social growth and development of a country. In addition, the creation and development of free trade and industrial zones is a good approach to estimating the objectives such as foreign exchange earnings, capital attraction, employment, economic and social growth and development; because by creating free zones, exports and imports will prosper, and consequently, the added value of commercial transactions will go to the country. In this way, by creating employment and

strengthening the economic sectors, it increases production capacity and ultimately strengthens the country's trade and commerce ties with other countries. Economic growth and development lead to the transition of a limited and closed economy to the open international economy. In other words, it drives the economy from the local to the regional and from the national to the international position.

Short History of Khorramshahr

Khorramshahr is the last city of Khuzestan province and the center of township Khorramshahr. The neighbors of this township in the directions of west, south, east and north are Iraq, Abadan, Shadegan and Ahvaz, respectively. According to the latest divisions of the country, this township has 2 districts, 3 cities and 4 villages. This city is located at the intersection of Arvandrud and Karun rivers and in a swampy and lowland area in the delta of river Arvandrud and has an area of 23 square kilometers. Due to its proximity to the Persian Gulf and Iraq, Khorramshahr has a special strategic economic, commercial and political position.

Khorramshahr is located in the desert region of Khuzestan province with a height of 3 meters above sea level. It has an average annual rainfall of less than 200 mm (the lowest rainfall in the province). This city is also located along the Arvand border river and has very hot and humid summers and cool and pleasant winters. The Karun River passes through this city, part of which flows into Bahmanshir and the other part flows into the Arvand River. The people of this city are mainly engaged in services, agriculture, shipping, handicrafts and cultivation of date and citrus.

Khorramshahr is located 125 km away from Ahvaz. The city is connected to Ahvaz through three freeway routes and first-class roads; the road distance of this city with Tehran is about 994 km. The length of the air route from Khorramshahr to Tehran is 660 km. Khorramshahr strategic port, as one of the important economic and strategic ports of the country, is connected with Ahvaz, Tehran and many cities of the country by rail lines and railway, and by water with many domestic and foreign ports.

Historical sources have mentioned Khorramshahr by names such as Bandar Kharaks, Kharaks Spasini and Mohammareh; but this city is a rest of which one of the historic cities of Nagino, Egines and Pian, it is not clear exactly. The founding of these cities is attributed to the Elamites and the Achaemenids. Lesterling, with great skepticism, describes the current location of the city of Khorramshahr (Port Mohammareh) next to the Hafar creek in the former location of the city. After the end of the historical life of those cities, during the rise of the Bani Ka'b tribe, the name "Mohammareh" was chosen for the city, which is an Arabic word meaning red-making. Among the reasons mentioned for this naming, the redness of Karun water in this region seems more justified. In 1936, with the approval of the then cabinet and due to the policy of Persianization of the names of cities and regions of the country, the name of Mohammareh was changed to Khorramshahr. With the construction of communication roads, the discovery and construction of oil refineries and various urban facilities, it became an important strategic port attracting population.

Due to its economic and strategic position in the border region between Iran and Iraq, Khorramshahr has seen devastating events in a short period of its life. In the first stages of its growth and development, this city has always been attacked by influential rulers and personalities of Baghdad and Basra, so that Khorramshahr cannot compete with Basra and its commercial port. For this reason, it became known as "Kut al-Muhammarah" by building a fence around it.

The city was not spared from aggression during the First and Second World Wars, and even during the nationalization of Iran's oil industry during the prime ministership of Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, the British threatened repeatedly it with occupation. Finally, in the tragic Iran-Iraq war, the invading Iraqi forces occupied it for about 22 months, which turned the city into a ruin. After the end of the war, Khorramshahr, as a sign of stability and resistance of the Iranian people, entered a new phase of development, so that the very small population of the city in the census of 1986, to a population of 105,636 people in the census of 1996. According to the census conducted in 2016, the population of this city is 133097 people.

• **Economy of Khorramshahr**

Some of the most important economic activities and features of Khorramshahr are as follows

- ✓ Agriculture in the field of cultivating dates and summer crops.
- ✓ Port and customs affairs.
- ✓ Khorramshahr Port Special Economic Zone and its industrial town.
- ✓ Neighborhood with Arvand Free Zone, in the southern part of Khorramshahr.
- ✓ Connecting Khorramshahr to the national railway.
- ✓ Proximity and access to Abadan International Airport.
- ✓ Existence of the second largest container port in the country (Khorramshahr port).
- ✓ Ability to use multimodal transport simultaneously.
- ✓ Existence of commercial warehouses and transportation and operational port area.
- ✓ Existence of the largest passenger terminal in the south of the country in this region.
- ✓ Closest free zone in the south of the country to the capital.
- ✓ Adjacent to one of the most important oil and gas resources in the country and the world.
- ✓ Abundance of energy based on oil and hydropower in the region, which is a prerequisite for industrial and commercial development.
- ✓ Existence of abundant energy resources and surface water in the region is an advantage for the establishment of water and energy industries and facilitates agriculture in the region.
- ✓ Located in the center of natural resources and fertile agricultural lands.
- ✓ The surrounding area of Arvand Free Zone has rich and diverse resources of water, soil, oil and rich mines for industrial production based on natural resources and the formation of industrial clusters based on upstream and downstream oil industries in this region.
- ✓ Enjoyment and benefit of Arvand Free Zone from commercial transportation infrastructure in Khorramshahr and Abadan ports.
- ✓ With the design of the Khorramshahr-Basra railway in the implementation phase and the Khorramshahr-Imam Khomeini Port railway in the design phase, a global passage connected to the country's railway network will be provided for the growth and development of the region.
- ✓ The strategic position of the region for industrial and trade exchanges with East and Southeast Asia and the countries of the Persian Gulf region on the one hand and the continents of Europe and Central Asia on the other.
- ✓ Proximity to the strategic port of Basra and the existence of the Shalamchek export zone in the border of Iraq as a gateway to the Iraqi market.
- ✓ Appropriate structure of lands in the region, for the establishment of industrial units.
- ✓ Industrial and commercial activity of 67 different production and industrial units within the Arvand Free Zone.

In addition to these cases, we will examine in detail the organizations and institutions that have been effective in creating the strategic position of Khorramshahr in the following sections.

Khorramshahr port

The port of Khorramshahr is of special strategic economic, commercial and political importance due to its proximity to the Persian Gulf and Iraq. The piers of this city are located on the banks of the Arvand River. The first pier of Khorramshahr was exploited in 1929. A better equipped concrete pier with a height of 360 meters and a width of 32.8 meters was built in Khorramshahr after the end of World War II. The building of this port was constructed in 1955. The first cargo ships left this port for Kuwait in 1992 with 85 tons of cargo. In the same year, the first merchant ship from the United Arab Emirates entered the port of Khorramshahr with 160 tons of cargo. At present, the port has 20 large berths and ships with a height of 6 meters dock at it. Khorramshahr port has the ability to unload 4000 to 6000 tons of cargo per day.

Khorramshahr port is the second container port in the country. Due to easy access to rail, land (road) communication lines, international airport and the short distance of this port compared to other ports in the Persian Gulf to Tehran, it is a suitable place for traders and merchants to access the capital.

In addition, the existence of shipbuilding industries and regular shipping lines in the field of cargo, passenger and container transportation, having appropriate port and sea equipment and facilities for safe work at sea and port areas, the existence of sufficient space and structural facilities for unloading and loading operations, free zone facilities and 20% discount on commercial profits are some factors affecting the growth and development of transportation in Khorramshahr port.

Potentials of Shalamcheh border in Khorramshahr

Iraq's dire need for a variety of goods and services and their imports provide a special opportunity for Iraq's neighbors, including Iran, to manage and plan, with the aim of recognizing the current state of Iran's exports to Iraq, identifying barriers, problems, and analyzing them have created a possibility of definition and planning for these projects in the short term; we give below its results.

- **Area of 55 hectares**

Arvand Free Zone Organization has provided a suitable platform for the growth and development of foreign trade in this region and the country by creating infrastructure, equipment and facilities to provide services for the daily entry and exit of hundreds of transit and export trucks and the movement of thousands of containers through this passage. We expected that with the growth of investment in this region and the proper bedrock that is being created and developed in Shalamcheh by the Arvand Free Zone Organization, it will provide a great leap forward in achieving the goals and policies of trade and foreign trade of the region, province and country.

- **Shalamcheh Logistic Park**

The concept of a logistic park is derived from railways that are directly connected to intermediate transportation terminals. In these terminals, the containers are transported in exactly the same way and manner as they are transported in seaports. The results obtained from various researches and studies show that the concept of logistic park can lead to the recognition of different ways of transporting the volume of products from the roads with more effective methods of transportation. This is in terms of energy consumption and minimal damage to the environment so that it reduces the workload in seaports and improves the organization of work, and is effective in finding solutions to provide better and more efficient supplies to cargo ships in the coastal areas of seaports.

Shalamcheh border in Arvand Free Zone is known also as one of the entry points and gates of the country for commercial and transit activities. Due to its privileged geographical location and the possibility of using road, rail, sea and air transport, it makes possible the easy and fast trade with Iraq, the Persian Gulf countries, Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Mediterranean and Europe. In this regard, a 700-hectare plot of land has been created for the construction of a "logistic park" in the border area of Shalamcheh, and parts are being handed over to eligible investors and traders for logistics, transportation, transit, etc.

- **Advantage of Khorramshahr railway**

The plan to connect the Khorramshahr railway to Shalamcheh and continue it to the port city of Basra and the connection to the Iraqi national railway with a length of 17 km in Iran has been completed and its continuation to the port city of Basra in Iraq is underway. With the completion of this project, the country's railways will be connected to Iraq and the Eastern Mediterranean countries through Khorramshahr; it is a great change in the field of trade, transit and exchange of goods and passengers. The project and program of connecting the railway of Imam Khomeini port to Khorramshahr is under evaluation. This project promises to form suitable trade and transit routes from the Arvand Free Zone to Iraq.

- **Arvand Free Zone**

Economic growth and development requires investment in various sectors and institutions and various economic activities. Without investment and injection of financial resources in infrastructure and superstructure projects, we cannot expect the expansion of employment, production and economic prosperity in this region and country. In this regard, many countries in the world have a strong desire to

attract foreign capital and financial resources for economic growth and development. For this purpose, one of the useful and appropriate ways is to create free trade and industrial zones.

Considering the existing capacities in Khorramshahr, the free zone has been approved in the second half of 2003. Trade and transit is an undeniable and strategic advantage for the Arvand Free Zone. According to international estimates and standards, 10% of the total value of goods is calculated as the cost of transportation and transit of goods. Therefore, Arvand Free Zone can become one of the most important and strategic international transit routes by being active in the route of trade and transit corridors. In addition to increasing the strategic importance of this region in national and international trade and economic exchanges, this can lead to foreign exchange earnings from transportation services, job creation and activation of transportation service systems.

Conclusion

Khorramshahr has good commercial, geographical, climatic and strategic capacities and potentials. It has a large commercial and transit port with world-class technology and free zone activities. But it is witnessing a severe weakness in the management, planning and efficient and effective use of existing facilities to alleviate poverty and unemployment, rebuild and eliminate worn-out urban infrastructure, as well as strengthen the international transit sector. Khorramshahr port can play an important role in trade and transit development from the countries of South and Southeast Asia and Iran itself until the countries of West Asia, Central Asia, the Mediterranean and Europe. With proper infrastructure, equipped and multi-purpose warehouses, various general cargo and container terminals and benefiting from the most modern equipment and technology of unloading and loading, especially in the field of container equipment, Khorramshahr port is one of the equipped ports and the second container port in the country. Due to the rail connection with Iraq through Shalamcheh and its location in the Arvand Free Zone, as well as access to the Shalamcheh Combined Terminal, it can be successful in trade, commerce and transit of goods to the CIS countries in Central Asia and the countries of the Persian Gulf region.

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