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Analysis of Key Drivers of Trans-regional Threats to Iran with a Futures Studies Approach[1]

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ABSTRACT

Extra-regional threats refer to military, security, political, and economic measures or pressures exerted by countries or coalitions from outside a specific geographical region against the interests and security of a target country. These threats typically exploit geographical distance, modern warfare tools, comprehensive sanctions, and the establishment of influence in neighboring countries to undermine stability and limit the regional power of the target. This research aims to identify and analyze the key drivers of trans-regional threats to Iran using a future studies approach. Its purpose is to analyze the systemic structure of these threats and outline the most probable future scenario. This research employs a mixed-methods approach (quantitative-qualitative). Initial indicators were extracted through multi-stage interviews with a panel of 15 experts and then screened using the Delphi method. Subsequently, a cross-impact analysis questionnaire was administered to 15 specialists and experts, and the data were structurally analyzed using MICMAC software. The distribution of variables on the influence-dependence map indicates the instability of Iran's trans-regional threat system. Among the 49 variables examined across five dimensions—political, economic, socio-cultural, defense-security, and natural-environmental—three were identified as key drivers and dual-risk/target variables: new regional coalitions in Iran's periphery involving global powers (P3), pressure on countries party to agreements with Iran to terminate cooperation (P7), and new trans-regional political coalitions against Iran's political positions (P1). Furthermore, the variable "keeping the minds of the country's decision-makers occupied with domestic issues" (P8) ranked first in terms of direct influence. The research results indicate that the future of trans-regional threats to Iran can be depicted as an "Intelligent Siege" scenario. In this scenario, trans-regional powers, through regional and trans-regional coalition-building and severing Iran's contractual ties with the world, drive the country toward strategic passivity and reduced room for maneuver without a full-scale military war. The most important characteristic of the future of these threats is the paradigm shift from a purely military nature to political, cognitive, and intelligent threats.

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Introduction

In an era in which the velocity of change, the complexity of interconnections, and the depth of uncertainties have reached their highest levels in human history, looking toward the future is no longer a choice but an undeniable imperative for survival, the preservation of national interests, and the effective exercise of agency in international equations. The future, much like the past, is not a linear continuation of prevailing trends; rather, it is a domain of possibilities, plausibilities, and diverse probabilities, shaped by the actions and reactions of various forces.

Transregional threats against the Islamic Republic of Iran have undergone a fundamental and substantive transformation over the past four decades. What were, in the immediate aftermath of the Islamic Revolution (1979) and during the Imposed War (1980–1988), primarily classical military threats of a "direct and hard" nature have today evolved into a complex, multi-layered, and "networked" assemblage of economic, political, cultural, informational, and environmental instruments—instruments that have eroded the boundaries between war and peace, domestic and foreign, and overt and covert. To comprehend this evolutionary trajectory is not a mere academic exercise but a strategic imperative for the continued survival and advancement of the Islamic Republic within the persistently turbulent geopolitical arena of West Asia.

First Period) Classical and Direct Threats (1979–1988): In the first decade following the Revolution, the predominant nature of threats confronting Iran was unequivocally "military and full-scale." The comprehensive Iraqi invasion (financially backed by Arab states of the Persian Gulf littoral and militarily supplied by both Western and Eastern blocs) on 22 September 1980 constituted a direct existential threat aimed at the overthrow of the nascent Islamic Republic. During this phase, threats were primarily "border-centric," and their principal instruments comprised conventional ground forces, combat aircraft, tanks, and, asymmetrically, chemical weapons deployed by the Ba'athist regime in Iraq.

Second Period) The Rise of Sanctions and Proxy Threats (1988–2005): Following the cessation of hostilities and throughout the reconstruction and consolidation phases, the threat pattern shifted from "direct aggression" to "economic containment and the restoration of regional equilibrium through proxy mechanisms." The foremost instrument of Western containment during this period was not United Nations Security Council resolutions, but rather unilateral legislative measures, such as the Iran Sanctions Act, which targeted foreign investment in Iran's petroleum industry. Regionally, Iran found itself effectively encircled by U.S. military installations with the emergence of the Taliban in the east and the American military presence in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). It was during this period that the Zionist regime emerged as an endogenous transregional threat. The defining feature of this period was the "proxy evolution of threats": direct warfare had ceased, yet the adversary pursued "regime change through escalating costs of sanctions and induced domestic insecurity".

Third Period) Hybrid Warfare and International Consensus (2005–2021): From the initiation of nuclear negotiations (2003) and, more notably, following the assumption of office by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005), threats against Iran underwent a qualitative leap. The Security Council adopted six sanctions resolutions (from 1696 to 1929), placing Iran

under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. These resolutions, deliberate and targeted, struck at the petroleum industry, the central banking system, maritime transportation, and access to dual-use and advanced technologies (such as aluminum and steel). This period marked the first time that the international community achieved an "operational consensus" against Iran. Concurrently, the Stuxnet cyber operation (2010), attributed to the United States and Israel, fundamentally altered the nature of threats: the adversary was no longer solely pursuing physical explosions and assassinations but sought remote infiltration and disruption of critical infrastructure (Natanz nuclear facilities) through software means. In this same period, the Axis of Resistance emerged as an effective threat against U.S. interests in Iraq and Syria, establishing a measure of "threat equilibrium" between Iran and the West.

Fourth Period) The 2025–2026 Wars and the Peak of Threat Intelligence (2025–2026): The principal turning point comprises the 12-day war (June 2025) and the 40-day war (February–April 2026), during which transregional adversaries leveraged an unprecedented transatlantic convergence, comprising military-intelligence coordination among the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, and an effective coalition with six Arab states of the Arabian Peninsula (including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan), to destroy Iran's nuclear and space facilities, cripple its economic infrastructure, and assassinate its political and military leaders. In response, Iran, by directly targeting Israel's nuclear facilities (Dimona) and the energy infrastructure of U.S. allies, shattered the established rules of deterrence.

Consequently, within such a geopolitical milieu, the Islamic Republic of Iran, by virtue of its unique geostrategic, geoeconomic, and geocultural position, has persistently been exposed to a diverse array of threats emanating from transregional actors. The imperative for this research lies in the fact that studying the evolutionary trajectory of transregional threats against Iran is not a ceremonial academic project but a strategic compulsion for the future of the political system.

Futures studies, as the scholarly discipline of intelligently analyzing, designing, and shaping the future, teaches us how to confront such uncertainties and to plan for possible, probable, and preferable futures. Unlike historical inquiry, which seeks to describe past events, this field of knowledge aims to grasp the latent forces within the present and the potentialities embedded in the future. Its ultimate objective is the preservation and enhancement of welfare and security through future-oriented thinking and the identification of alternative futures. On this basis, and in recognition of this imperative, the present article endeavours, by employing an exploratory futures-studies approach and utilizing structural analysis software, to identify the key variables of transregional threats against Iran and to analyse how these variables interact within a complex and unstable system. This introduction does not aim merely to describe the current state of affairs; rather, it seeks to lay the groundwork for uncovering critical drivers and delineating alternative futures, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the challenges ahead and the strategies for confronting them. The significance of this research lies in the fact that, by

identifying these transregional threats, it may open a window for planning aimed at transforming threats into opportunities in the future for the country's security institutions.

Literature Review

In the present study, an attempt has been made to briefly review the sources and references that are closely related to the subject matter of the research project, so as to make optimal use of their contents.

Abedi et al. (2022), in their article entitled "Environmental Monitoring of Drivers and Trends Affecting Future Threats from a Knowledge-Based Perspective" (published in the Quarterly Journal of Strategic Defense Studies of the National Defense University, Issue No. 87), argue that by leveraging the capabilities and capacities of knowledge-based defense components, it is possible to provide a greater understanding of future threats and to prepare a more suitable platform for facilitating and accelerating the examination and analysis of threats for the country's defense system.

Abbasian et al. (2022), in their article entitled "Identification, Explanation, and Prioritization of the Novel Approaches of the AJA (Islamic Republic of Iran Army) against Future Threats with Due Regard to the Document of the Second Step of the Revolution" (published in the Quarterly Journal of Strategic Defense Policy), state that the prioritization of the 19 identified approaches of the AJA, with respect to future threats and with the aim of realizing the visions articulated in the Second Step Declaration, falls within the "high-priority" category.

Kazempour and Bahrami (2021), in an article entitled "Investigating the Dimensions of Evaluating Future Intelligent Threats" (published in the Quarterly Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies of Strategic Knowledge, Year 11, Issue No. 45), have identified eight distinct dimensions of threats: (1) magnitude of the threat, (2) scope of the threat, (3) timing of the threat, (4) depth of the threat, (5) frequency of the threat, (6) duration of the threat, (7) location of the threat, and (8) type of the threat.

Koosha and Nozari (2021), in an article entitled "Explaining the Principles of the Military-Security Strategic Roadmap of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran" (published in the Quarterly Journal of Strategic Defense Studies of the National Defense University, Issue No. 85), delineate thirteen principles as the foundational tenets of this strategic roadmap: (1) the principle of situational awareness, (2) the principle of prevention, (3) the principle of resource mobilization, (4) the principle of command, (5) the principle of readiness, (6) the principle of defense-security deepening, (7) the principle of people-based sustainable security and defense, (8) the principle of creativity and innovation, (9) the principle of unity of effort, (10) the principle of agility, (11) the principle of self-reliance, (12) the principle of 'Alawi (valiant) warfare, and (13) the principle of asymmetry.

Akbarnejad and Cheshk (2020), in an article entitled "Prioritization of Influential Components on the Defense-Security Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran" (published in the Quarterly Journal of Strategic Defense Studies of the National Defense University, Issue No. 80), contend that defense policy must serve as a mechanism for generating coordination and unity of political practice within its defined temporal framework; failure to do so would result in a fragmentation of behavioral patterns among the actors involved. Accordingly, defense policy is typically formulated and promulgated by leaders, rulers, statesmen, and upstream strategic documents.

Bakhtiari and Ali Salehnia (2018), in their article entitled "Prioritization of National Security Threats against the Islamic Republic of Iran Using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)," report that the military-intelligence criterion ranks highest among the main criteria, while espionage and intelligence infiltration exhibit the highest priority among the sub-options.

The novelty of the present research, in comparison with previous works, lies in its utilization of futures studies and the structural analysis model. The formulation of this model can significantly influence the perspective of decision-makers and officials in the macro-level defense planning of the country in the years ahead.

Theoretical Framework of the Research

Threat Studies

In policymaking and security studies, "threat" is employed both as a "political term" and as a "scientific concept," yet it has remained largely undefined in many social science dictionaries. Robertson utilized the concept of "threat assessment" as an analysis of the "reasons behind an adversary's armament programs," often conducted during the Cold War under a "worst-case scenario," wherein, "in addition to personnel and hardware," the totality of the adversary's strategic doctrine was also taken into account (Brauch, 2011: 62). Today, one of the principal concerns of powerful states worldwide is moving towards the identification and prioritization of national security threats. Indeed, this prioritization must be carried out with a systemic and comprehensive perspective, grounded in a scientific methodology, in order to be effective in the optimal allocation of resources (Bakhtiari & Salehnia, 2018: 257).

A) Security Threats: Security threats in any country are a function of its political, social, and economic conditions (Takyeyh, 2006: 115). Security threats are dangers that expose the vital goals and values of a country and a nation to such a degree of risk that there is constant apprehension regarding the potential for fundamental changes to those goals and values (National Security Research Institute, 2020: 9). Barry Buzan4, centering the state as the referent object, categorizes security threats into three types: (1) threats directed against the idea of the state (nationalism); (2) threats directed against the physical and material existence of the state (population and resources); and (3) threats targeting the organization of the state (political institutions) (Taheri Mehr, 2012: 29).

B) Defensive-Military Threats: Defensive-military threats constitute the most overt category of threats, possessing a long historical lineage within the evolution of human societies. The salient feature of this class of threats lies in the application of "force," which is academically addressed under the rubrics of "conflict" and "war" (National Security Research Institute, 2020: 6–8).

Threats on a Transregional Scale

The emergence of numerous issues over the past decade has conveyed to national actors the understanding that the security of any given actor is contingent upon achieving a certain level of security for all actors. This perception provided the groundwork for the formation of international organizations, premised upon the mission of managing and

4. Barry Buzan

controlling issues and problems in the interest of the international community. Accordingly, it becomes evident that international threats, whether directly or indirectly, constitute a major concern, or, at a more specific level, at least a primary concern of the great powers (Sajjadpour, 2002: 194). Hence, from the perspective of classical analysts, the international level represents the highest echelon for the examination of security issues, leading to the greater involvement of actors in security threats (Arshian, 2016: 22).

International actors have consistently been regarded as a security threat to states positioned at a lower tier of national power within a regional context. This approach has persistently been framed within realist and neorealist analytical frameworks. Strategic rationality in the political and security conduct of great powers indicates that these actors engage in cooperation, competition, and rivalry with one another to distribute their spheres of influence across geopolitical regions (Nasr & Gheissari, 2006: 138). Consequently, one may emphasize that security threats at the transregional level pertain to the measures undertaken by great powers to counter, constrain, and erode the power of other states (Moghimi, 2010: 9). Therefore, transregional threats constitute an integral part of the strategic reality of great-power conduct vis-à-vis the objectives of numerous states, wherein the process of countering these threats gives rise to a manifestation of strategic resistance, which has supplanted crisis and threat management. Ultimately, transregional threats directed at a country can challenge its vital interests, since such threats emanate from both international actors (e.g., corporations, non-governmental organizations, criminal organizations, and terrorist groups) as well as transnational phenomena that may operate in a calculated or inept manner (e.g., HIV/AIDS and other diseases, pollution, global markets, and technology) (Pourshasb & Heydari, 2020: 433).

Theory of Threat Balancing

Stephen Walt, a pioneer of defensive neorealism, shifts the focal point of his realist analysis from Kenneth Waltz's concept of "balance of power" toward a new conceptualization termed "balance of threat." Contrary to prevailing assumptions, Walt maintains that states operate not on the basis of the balance of power but on the basis of the balance of threat, that is, they balance not against power per se, but against threat. Consequently, regional equilibrium is achieved exclusively through the balance of threat. On this basis, the threat arising from the actions of a revisionist (centrifugal) actor can be considered the primary condition for alliance formation and threat balancing. In other words, what is of importance in inter-state relations is states' mutual perceptions of one another as threats, rather than merely the aggregate power of each. Hence, states balance against those states that threaten their existence or interests (Moshirzadeh, 2012: 135). According to Walt, threat, rather than power, lies at the core of states' security concerns. Accordingly, states are not necessarily fearful of the most powerful state, but rather of the state that appears more threatening than others (Walt, 1988: 21–27). From Walt's perspective, in the formation or non-formation of balancing against power or hegemonic powers, in addition to the variable of "aggregated power (capability)," three other variables exert influence: "geographic proximity," "offensive capabilities," and "offensive intentions." These components constitute independent variables, such that a change in any

one of them is highly likely to induce other states toward feelings and perceptions of threat, and consequently toward balancing actions (Little, 2019: 31–33). Accordingly, the greater the weight of the aforementioned four variables, the more states that perceive themselves to be at imminent risk, more than others will incline toward establishing a balance of threat and will strive to counterbalance the threatening power through coalition-building with other states (Ekhtiary Amiri et al., 2015: 107). Under such circumstances, even if the formation of alliances and coalitions to balance the threatening power proves infeasible, the threatened states endeavor to confront the threat-generating power through alternative means, such as direct military aggression or economic leverage (Zakaria, 2003: 69). Walt applies his theory to the formation of alliances in West Asia, concluding that balancing against power is not a universal or common phenomenon; however, balancing against threat is considerably more prevalent within this regional subsystem (Paul et al., 2004: 8). As the balance-of-threat theory emphasizes the distribution of threat within an international system (global or regional), states facing a common threat or threats tend to unite against it. Therefore, in the study of alliances, one must seek a common adversary (Haji Yousefi, 2003: 92).

Material and Methods

Over the past few decades, the identification of trends that shape the future has been significantly advanced through futures studies, which encompass a broad spectrum of methods and techniques capable of uncovering what lies ahead within a systematic, precise, and comprehensive methodological framework. Moreover, a more accurate understanding of the future state of affairs is contingent upon the application of an appropriate method for futures exploration (Safaiepour & Shanbehpour Madoun, 2020: 4). On this basis, futures studies constitutes the scholarly discipline of intelligently analyzing, designing, and constructing the future, teaching us how to engage with the non-existent phenomenon we call "the future." Futures studies is, in essence, the knowledge and awareness of actively, consciously, and proactively shaping the future characterized by attributes such as a focus on long-term issues, commitment to outcomes, and systematic rigour. Just as historical inquiry (past studies) seeks to describe past events and uncover their causal explanations, futures studies endeavours to comprehend the latent and dormant forces of the present and the potentialities of future occurrences (Babagheibi Azghandi, 2010: 83).

Furthermore, futures scholars employ two principal approaches to the study of the future: exploratory futures studies[5], which addresses questions such as "what futures lie ahead, given the forces currently at play?" The output of exploratory futures studies, as its name suggests, is the discovery of futures possible, plausible, and probable futures[6]. Normative futures studies, which complements the exploratory approach and is regarded as a significant and noteworthy perspective within the field, refers to the desirable future and seeks to provide favourable and ideal images of the future grounded in shared values,

[5]. Explorative Futures Studied
[6]. Possible, Plausible and Probable Futures

ideals, and beliefs. Exploratory futures studies emerge in response to the question "what could the future be?", while normative futures studies contemplate "what should the future be?" (Fakhraei & Keyghobadi, 2017: 11–12).

The ultimate objective of futures studies is the preservation and enhancement of human welfare and the expansion of capacities for sustainable life on Earth. This goal is pursued through future-oriented thinking. Within this field of inquiry, efforts are made to better recognize alternative futures specifically, (1) possible futures, (2) probable futures, and (3) preferable futures. In this manner, possible futures that lead to greater human prosperity or deeper human misery are identified, the most probable futures are discerned, and ultimately, a future is introduced in which humanity attains greater well-being and prosperity. Hence, futures studies is deeply intertwined with values, norms, and conceptions of greater well-being. On the other hand, futures studies is also linked to the identification of drivers and agents of change (Hajiani, 2012: 41–42).

Type of Method:

This article employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research. Accordingly, in order to address the research question, the relevant indicators were extracted through a multi-stage interview process involving 15 elites and subject-matter experts, as well as an expert panel, and were subsequently refined through structural analysis. The mapping of future scenarios was conducted based on these indicators. To screen and validate these indicators, the Delphi method was utilized**.**

Statistical Population:

Accordingly, the statistical population of this research comprises 15 expert specialists and scholars well-versed in the subject matter under investigation**.**

Table 1: Descriptive Information of the Statistical Population

Frequency	Field of Study	Frequency	Degree	Frequency	Gender	Frequency	Age
8	Political Geography and Geopolitics	8	Ph.D. Candidate	9	Male	5	**20–30**
2	Economics	6	Ph.D.	6	Female	6	**30–40**
3	Political Science	1	Postdoctoral	-	-	1	**40–50**
2	Management	-	-	-	-	3	**50–60**
15	Total	15	-	15	-	15	**Total**

Source: Authors' findings, 2025

Statistical Analysis Software

For the purpose of refining indicators and variables in line with futures-oriented foresight, structural analysis was conducted using MicMac software. The resulting future scenarios are exploratory in terms of typology. Following the identification and extraction of relevant components and the selection of panel members based on their areas of expertise, those components that failed to obtain the requisite scores were eliminated from the questionnaire. The final questionnaire was then administered to respondents, who were

asked to rate each component on a four-point Likert-type scale: (0) no effect, (1) low effect, (2) moderate effect, and (3) high effect.

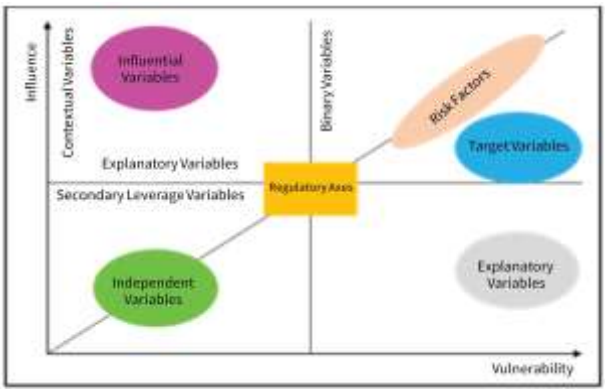

Figure 1: Variable Influence/Dependence in Cross-Impact Analysis. Source: Godet, 2008:189

The distribution pattern of factors on this diagram indicates the prevailing condition of the system specifically, whether the system is stable or unstable. This preliminary understanding of the system's state serves as a foundational basis for the analysis of influential factors. In stable systems, the distribution of factors follows an "L-shaped" pattern, wherein some factors exhibit high influence, while others display high dependence. Accordingly, in stable systems, three general categories of factors are observed: influential factors, dependent factors, and independent factors .In contrast, unstable systems present a more complex configuration than their stable counterparts. In such systems, factors are dispersed across the entire plane, oriented around the diagonal axis, and in most cases occupy an intermediate status. The analysis of these systems is considerably more intricate than that of stable systems, owing to the greater number of factors involved. These factors are categorized into five distinct groups**:** 1) Determinant (Influential) Factors–variables that exert strong influence with low dependence**.** 2) Bidirectional (Two-dimensional) Factors–which are further subdivided into**:** Risk Factors (high influence and high dependence), and Target Factors (moderate influence and moderate dependence). 3) Dependent Factors (Output/Result Factors)– variables that are strongly influenced with low influence**.** 4) Independent Factors–which are subdivided into**:** Discrete (Excluded) Factors, and Secondary Leverage Factors**.** 5) Regulatory Factors – variables that serve to adjust and balance the system dynamics**.**

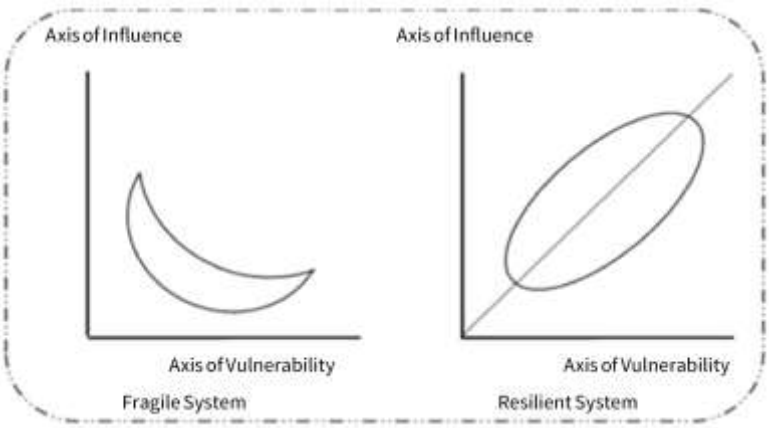

Figure 2: System Stability and Instability. Source: Godet et al, 2003:22

Research Findings

In this research, following the identification of transregional threat variables through MICMAC software, the cross-impact matrix was constructed based on the perspectives of elites and executive managers. Scores were assigned to the relevant components according to their degree of influence and dependence, on a scale ranging from 0 to 3.

Table 2: Key Variables of Transregional Threats against Iran

Variables/Codes	Dimension	Row
P1: Formation of new transregional political coalitions against Iran's political stances; P2: Imposition of new political sanctions against key state officials and the country's foreign policy apparatus; P3: Formation of new regional coalitions in Iran's peripheral environment with the involvement of global powers; P4: Prevention of Iran's membership in regional and transregional coalitions; P5: Hindrance of Iran's political initiative to construct regional and transregional coalitions; P6: Infiltration of Western intelligence agents into intellectual circles and decision-making bodies to disrupt public order and security; P7: Pressure on countries with agreements with Iran to cease cooperation; P8: Preoccupying state managers with domestic issues and diverting their attention from pursuing the global objectives of the Islamic Revolution; P9: Creating and expanding rifts among various factions of the establishment, as well as between the establishment and the populace.	**Political Transregional Threats against Iran**	**1**
E1: Further intensification, expansion, and smartening of international economic sanctions against Iran; E2: Infiltration into major economic institutions of regional and transregional countries to prevent the development and severance of Iran's economic relations at both regional and transregional levels; E3: Smartening of sanctions to obstruct investment in critical and vital economic infrastructure projects; E4: Expansion and acceleration of energy sanctions across various sectors of oil, gas, and related industries; E5: Expansion and infiltration into macro-economic structures to disrupt and weaken the national economic system; E6: Preventing the establishment of an energy pipeline through Iran to Europe for energy supply; E7: Prohibition of money transfers and freezing of the Islamic Republic of Iran's bank accounts in various countries; E8: Restrictions on establishing branches for Iranian companies and banks in other countries; E9: Confiscation and deprivation of ownership of other non-monetary assets of the I.R.Iran abroad; E10: Suspension or cancellation of joint economic projects.	**Economic Transregional Threats against Iran**	**2**
C1: Expansion of negative propaganda against the efficacy of the system across various cultural and social dimensions; C2: Comprehensive development and support for opposition institutions, parties, and individuals both abroad and domestically; C3: Expansion and consolidation of social anomalies and the valorization of anti-values in the public mindset (through linguistic, identity-based, ethnic rifts, as well as religious and national ceremonies); C4: Inducing pessimism and disseminating disinformation regarding the future of the state and the country through global and virtual media networks; C5: Repeated promotion and encouragement of inappropriate dress codes for Iranian women via global and virtual media; C6: Cancellation or suspension of cultural exchanges, scientific cooperation, educational relations, sports contacts, and tourism; C7: Prohibiting or restricting Iranian students from studying in specific fields at top-tier global universities; C8: Establishment of multiple radio and television networks targeting Iranians, utilizing the latest technologies (Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and digital platforms).	**Cultural-Social Transregional Threats against Iran**	**3**
D1: NATO expansion toward Iran's borders; D2: Expanded support for armed separatist militant groups in the country's border regions; D3: Provision of advanced and superior weaponry technologies to adversarial states surrounding the Islamic Republic of Iran; D4: Preventing Iran's access to future superior technologies across various domains, including nuclear, military, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); D5:	**Defense-Security Transregional Threats against Iran**	**4**

Preventing Iran's military presence in outer space; D6: Formation of security-defense coalitions involving adversarial and rival states of the Islamic Republic of Iran in its peripheral environments; D7: Expansion of advanced arms smuggling into the country to better arm domestic opposition groups; D8: Development of novel espionage and intelligence-gathering methods utilizing advanced technologies (satellites, UAVs, Artificial Intelligence); D9: Deployment of novel methods and tools (electronic warfare, micro-UAVs, and Artificial Intelligence) in the assassination of officials, scientists, and key state figures; D10: Expansion of bioterrorism to damage human infrastructure and personnel within the country's armed forces; D11: United Nations Security Council sanctions against the I.R.Iran (arms embargoes, political sanctions, import-export restrictions, freezing of banking assets, etc.); D12: Short-term and long-term wars (cooperation between the Zionist regime and the United States and the West); D13: Kidnapping of state and governmental officials by Western intelligence and security services.		
N1: Incitement of neighboring countries to block their water resources flowing into Iran through dam construction and other methods; N2: Facilitation of Iran's access to unhealthy pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, and industrial goods with high damage coefficients; N3: Bioterrorism—development, proliferation, and outbreak of dangerous emerging diseases of natural origin within the country; N4: Extraterritorial farming (offshore agriculture), reduced domestic production incentives, and threats to public health; N5: Climate change, global temperature rise, and melting of polar glaciers; N6: Greenhouse gas emissions; N7: High seas and oceans threats (including piracy, naval mines, and ship seizures, etc.); N8: Global warming and drought (loss of agricultural lands and reduction of global strategic crops); N9: Dispersion of nanoparticles and toxic gases (chemtrail spraying) in the country's atmosphere aimed at instigating climate warfare by Western states.	**Natural and Environmental Transregional Threats against Iran**	**5**

Source: Authors' findings, 2025

Accordingly, in the conducted analysis, the matrix dimensions in the MICMAC software were set at 49 × 49, with the number of iterations considered to be 2. Furthermore, the influence of each variable in the vertical column (influential variables) on the horizontal row (dependent variables) was examined. The matrix fill rate was calculated as 38.27572%, indicating that over 38% of the cells exhibited mutual influence. Out of the total 2,401 possible relationships (49 × 49), 1,482 displayed no cross-impact (score 0). Among the remaining 919 influential relationships, 362 were assigned a cross-impact score of 1, 331 received a score of 2, and 226 obtained a score of 3. These findings suggest that the number of high-intensity influential relationships exceeds that of other categories, while low-intensity influences constitute a relatively small proportion of the total relationships.

Table 3: Preliminary Analysis of the Cross-Impact Matrix Data

Fill Rate (%)	Sum	P	Three (3)	Two (2)	One (1)	Zero (0)	Number of Iterations	Matrix Dimensions	Indicator
%38.27572	919	0	226	331	362	1482	2	49 × 49	**Value**

Source: Authors' findings, 2025

Based on the statistical indicators and following two iterations, the research matrix achieved a desirability and optimization rate of 98% in terms of influence and 99% in terms of dependence, which is indicative of the high validity of the questionnaire and its corresponding responses.

Table 4: Matrix Desirability and Optimization Degree

Iteration	Influence	Dependence	Scope/Area
1	%99	%100	**Transregional Threats against Iran**
2	%98	%99	

Source: Authors' findings, 2025

In the structural analysis matrix, the sum of the row values for each variable indicates the degree of dependence (influenceability), while the sum of the column values for each variable represents its degree of influence. Based on the analytical results derived from this matrix, the political, defense-security, and economic variables exerted the greatest influence on transregional threats against Iran, whereas the socio-cultural and natural-environmental variables demonstrated the least influence. Furthermore, in descending order, the defense-security, political, economic, natural-environmental, and socio-cultural variables exhibited the highest degrees of dependence (influenceability). In the subsequent stage, in order to identify the key driving forces (drivers), an analysis of system stability and instability is undertaken. At this stage, as previously elucidated, the dispersion pattern of the variables determines the system's state of stability or instability.

Table 5: Influence and Dependence of Direct and Indirect Factors

Indirect Effects		Direct Effects		Variables/ Code		Dimension	Row
Influence	Dependence	Influence	Dependence				
66407	105591	53	80	P1	Formation of new transregional political coalitions against Iran's political stances	Political	1
79762	35243	60	27	P2	Imposition of new political sanctions against key state officials and the country's foreign policy apparatus		2
74710	105372	56	70	P3	Formation of new regional coalitions in Iran's peripheral environment with the involvement of global powers		3
71056	74186	52	46	P4	Prevention of Iran's membership in regional and transregional coalitions		4
76047	37641	56	29	P5	Hindrance of Iran's political initiative to construct regional and transregional coalitions		5
57843	25341	43	29	P6	Infiltration of Western intelligence agents into intellectual circles and decision-making bodies to disrupt public order and security		6

73710	74159	56	58	P7	Pressure on countries with agreements with Iran to cease cooperation		7
79287	28723	70	26	P8	Preoccupying state managers with domestic issues and diverting their attention from pursuing the global objectives of the Islamic Revolution		8
41819	12545	33	17	P9	Creating and expanding rifts among various factions of the establishment, as well as between the establishment and the populace		۹
620641	498801	479	382		Political Subtotal		-
61814	69373	49	50	E1	Further intensification, expansion, and smartening of international economic sanctions against Iran		10
60627	34518	45	28	E2	Infiltration into major economic institutions of regional and transregional countries to prevent the development and severance of Iran's economic relations at both regional and transregional levels		11
50057	44315	38	39	E3	Smartening of sanctions to obstruct investment in critical and vital economic infrastructure projects		12
52940	33155	38	22	E4	Expansion and acceleration of energy sanctions across various sectors of oil, gas, and related industries	Economic ۱	13
50951	29768	38	24	E5	Expansion and infiltration into macro-economic structures to disrupt and weaken the national economic system		14
48381	34766	35	23	E6	Preventing the establishment of an energy pipeline through Iran to Europe for energy supply		15
42219	33700	32	26	E7	Prohibition of money transfers and freezing of the Islamic Republic of		16

					Iran's bank accounts in various countries		
38372	36280	27	25	E8	Restrictions on establishing branches for Iranian companies and banks in other countries		17
38784	15841	28	12	E9	Confiscation and deprivation of ownership of other non-monetary assets of the I.R.Iran abroad		18
44864	44188	32	34	E10	Suspension or cancellation of joint economic projects		19
489009	375904	362	283		Economic Subtotal		-
66626	13523	54	19	C1	Expansion of negative propaganda against the efficacy of the system across various cultural and social dimensions	Cultural-Social	20
51452	13199	39	23	C2	Comprehensive development and support for opposition institutions, parties, and individuals both abroad and domestically		21
49811	6178	39	14	C3	Expansion and consolidation of social anomalies and the valorization of anti-values in the public mindset (through linguistic, identity-based, and ethnic rifts, as well as religious and national ceremonies(		22
49388	5303	40	11	C4	Inducing pessimism and disseminating disinformation regarding the future of the state and the country through global and virtual media networks		23
33833	5665	25	13	C5	Repeated promotion and encouragement of inappropriate dress codes for Iranian women via global and virtual media		24
23928	7704	18	15	C6	Cancellation or suspension of cultural exchanges, scientific cooperation, educational relations, sports contacts, and tourism		25
21693	6469	16	11	C7	Prohibiting or restricting Iranian students from		26

					studying in specific fields at top-tier global universities		
38341	11921	26	20	C8	Establishment of multiple radio and television networks targeting Iranians, utilizing the latest technologies (Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and digital platforms(		27
335072	69962	257	126		Cultural-Social Subtotal		-
30130	104641	25	65	D1	NATO expansion toward Iran's borders	Defense-Security	28
41040	46050	33	41	D2	Expanded support for armed separatist militant groups in the country's border regions		29
28469	66589	26	40	D3	Provision of advanced and superior weaponry technologies to adversarial states surrounding the Islamic Republic of Iran		30
24309	88447	22	53	D4	Preventing Iran's access to future superior technologies across various domains, including nuclear, military, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs(		31
27722	71543	22	43	D5	Preventing Iran's military presence in outer space		32
36689	112479	30	78	D6	Formation of security-defense coalitions involving adversarial and rival states of the Islamic Republic of Iran in its peripheral environments		33
34871	47382	29	39	D7	Expansion of advanced arms smuggling into the country to better arm domestic opposition groups		34
37185	79903	32	63	D8	Development of novel espionage and intelligence-gathering methods utilizing advanced technologies (satellites, UAVs, Artificial Intelligence(		35
42562	11469	38	10	D9	Deployment of novel methods and tools		٣٦

					(electronic warfare, micro-UAVs, and Artificial Intelligence) in the assassination of officials, scientists, and key state figures		
30702	11753	28	9	D10	Expansion of bioterrorism to damage human infrastructure and personnel within the country's armed forces		37
20556	123832	15	100	D11	United Nations Security Council sanctions against the I.R.Iran (arms embargoes, political sanctions, import-export restrictions, freezing of banking assets, etc(.		38
45372	114857	33	78	D12	Short-term and long-term wars (cooperation between the Zionist regime and the United States and the West(		39
80439	61412	56	46	D13	Kidnapping of state and governmental officials by Western intelligence and security services		40
480046	940357	389	665	Defense-Security Subtotal			-
73082	41166	62	33	N1	Incitement of neighboring countries to block their water resources flowing into Iran through dam construction and other methods	Natural-Environmental	41
41975	18640	39	22	N2	Facilitation of Iran's access to unhealthy pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, and industrial goods with high damage coefficients		42
30754	27047	25	20	N3	Bioterrorism: development, proliferation, and outbreak of dangerous emerging diseases of natural origin within the country		43
23570	28946	23	29	N4	Extraterritorial farming (offshore agriculture), reduced domestic production incentives, and threats to public health		44
8609	14778	10	17	N5	Climate change, global temperature rise, and		45

					melting of polar glaciers	
14690	20674	15	21	N6	Greenhouse gas emissions	46
22249	71390	17	50	N7	High seas and oceans threats (including piracy, naval mines, and ship seizures, etc(.	47
8754	20626	11	25	N8	Global warming and drought (loss of agricultural lands and reduction of global strategic crops(	48
12691	32851	13	29	N9	Dispersion of nanoparticles and toxic gases (chemtrail spraying) in the country's atmosphere aimed at instigating climate warfare by Western states	49
236374	276118	215	246		Natural-Environmental Subtotal	-
1702	1702	1702	1702		GRAND TOTAL	

Source: Authors' findings, 2025

What can be inferred from the dispersion plot of the variables affecting transregional threats against Iran is the unstable state of the system. Most variables are scattered around the diagonal axis of the plot. Apart from a limited number of factors that exhibit high influence within the system, the remaining variables display a roughly similar status relative to one another. As previously elucidated, given the unstable state of the system, five categories of variables can be identified: (1) determinant (influential) variables, (2) bidirectional (two-dimensional) variables, (3) regulatory variables, (4) dependent (output/result) variables, and (5) independent variables.

Determinant (Influential) Variables – As input variables, these constitute the primary influential factors, whose degree of dependence is considerably lower than their influence. They are situated in the north-western quadrant of the dispersion plot, and the system's stability is heavily contingent upon them. These variables are considered key determinants of the system's behaviour. Among the 49 factors under study, a total of 10 variables from various groups were identified as influential variables. These factors include: the imposition of new political sanctions against key state officials and the country's foreign policy apparatus (P2); prevention of Iran's membership in regional and transregional coalitions (P4); hindrance of Iran's political initiative to construct regional and transregional coalitions (P5); infiltration of Western intelligence agents into intellectual circles and decision-making bodies to disrupt public order and security (P6); preoccupying state managers with domestic issues and diverting their attention from pursuing the global objectives of the Islamic Revolution (P8); further intensification, expansion, and smartening of international economic sanctions against Iran (E1); infiltration into major economic institutions of regional and transregional countries to prevent the development

and severance of Iran's economic relations at both regional and transregional levels (E2); expansion of negative propaganda against the efficacy of the system across various cultural and social dimensions (C1); kidnapping of state and governmental officials by Western intelligence and security services (D13); and incitement of neighbouring countries to block their water resources flowing into Iran through dam construction and other methods (N1).

Bidirectional (Two-Dimensional) Variables – The next category of variables in the influence–dependence graph comprises the bidirectional variables. These variables possess both high influence and high dependence, such that any action taken upon them will trigger reactions from other variables. These variables can be subdivided into two groups: risk variables and target variables. Among the factors examined, a total of three variables were identified as bidirectional, of which two were classified as risk variables and one as a target variable. The risk factors include: the formation of new regional coalitions in Iran's peripheral environment with the involvement of global powers (P3), and pressure on countries with agreements with Iran to cease cooperation (P7). The target factor was identified as: the formation of new transregional political coalitions against Iran's political stances (P1).

Regulatory Variables – These variables are positioned around the centre of gravity of the plot and may, on certain occasions, function as secondary leverage variables (weak target variables and weak risk variables). In the influence–dependence graph, none of the variables were identified as regulatory variables.

Dependent (Output/Result) Variables – The next category of identified variables consists of the dependent, influenceable, or result variables. These are located in the south-eastern quadrant of the influence–dependence plane. They exhibit very low influence and very high dependence. In the present research, the following were identified as dependent (result) variables: NATO expansion toward Iran's borders (D1); formation of security-defence coalitions involving adversarial and rival states of the Islamic Republic of Iran in its peripheral environments (D6); development of novel espionage and intelligence-gathering methods utilizing advanced technologies (satellites, UAVs, Artificial Intelligence) (D8); United Nations Security Council sanctions against the I.R.Iran (arms embargoes, political sanctions, import-export restrictions, freezing of banking assets, etc.) (D11); and short-term and long-term wars (cooperation between the Zionist regime and the United States and the West) (D12).

Independent Variables – The final category of identified variables in the influence–dependence graph comprises the independent variables. These variables possess both low influence and low dependence and are situated in the south-western quadrant of the dispersion plot. In this research, the following were identified as independent variables: facilitating Iran's access to unhealthy pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, and industrial goods with high damage coefficients (N2); bioterrorism development, proliferation, and outbreak of dangerous emerging diseases of natural origin within the country (N3); extraterritorial farming (offshore agriculture), reduced domestic production incentives, and threats to public health (N4); climate change, global temperature rise, and melting of polar glaciers (N5); greenhouse gas emissions (N6); high seas and oceans threats (including

piracy, naval mines, and ship seizures, etc.) (N7); global warming and drought (loss of agricultural lands and reduction of global strategic crops) (N8); dispersion of nanoparticles and toxic gases (chemtrail spraying) in the country's atmosphere aimed at instigating climate warfare by Western states (N9); expanded support for armed separatist militant groups in the country's border regions (D2); provision of advanced and superior weaponry technologies to adversarial states surrounding the Islamic Republic of Iran (D3); preventing Iran's access to future superior technologies across various domains, including nuclear, military, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) (D4); preventing Iran's military presence in outer space (D5); expansion of advanced arms smuggling into the country to better arm domestic opposition groups (D7); deployment of novel methods and tools (electronic warfare, micro-UAVs, and Artificial Intelligence) in the assassination of officials, scientists, and key state figures (D9); expansion of bioterrorism to damage human infrastructure and personnel within the country's armed forces (D10); comprehensive development and support for opposition institutions, parties, and individuals both abroad and domestically (C2); expansion and consolidation of social anomalies and the valorization of anti-values in the public mindset (through linguistic, identity-based, and ethnic rifts, as well as religious and national ceremonies) (C3); inducing pessimism and disseminating disinformation regarding the future of the state and the country through global and virtual media networks (C4); repeated promotion and encouragement of inappropriate dress codes for Iranian women via global and virtual media (C5); cancellation or suspension of cultural exchanges, scientific cooperation, educational relations, sports contacts, and tourism (C6); prohibiting or restricting Iranian students from studying in specific fields at top-tier global universities (C7); establishment of multiple radio and television networks targeting Iranians, utilizing the latest technologies (Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and digital platforms) (C8); smartening of sanctions to obstruct investment in critical and vital economic infrastructure projects (E3); expansion and acceleration of energy sanctions across various sectors of oil, gas, and related industries (E4); expansion and infiltration into macro-economic structures to disrupt and weaken the national economic system (E5); preventing the establishment of an energy pipeline through Iran to Europe for energy supply (E6); prohibition of money transfers and freezing of the Islamic Republic of Iran's bank accounts in various countries (E7); restrictions on establishing branches for Iranian companies and banks in other countries (E8); confiscation and deprivation of ownership of other non-monetary assets of the I.R.Iran abroad (E9); suspension or cancellation of joint economic projects (E10); and creating and expanding rifts among various factions of the establishment, as well as between the establishment and the populace (P9). These variables do not generate any reactive effects on other variables.

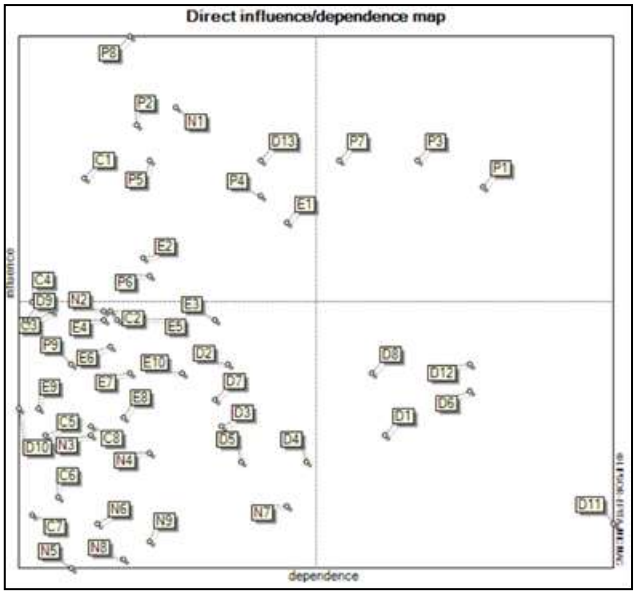

Figure 3: Dispersion of Variables in the Influence–Dependence Plane (Direct)Source: Authors' findings, 2025

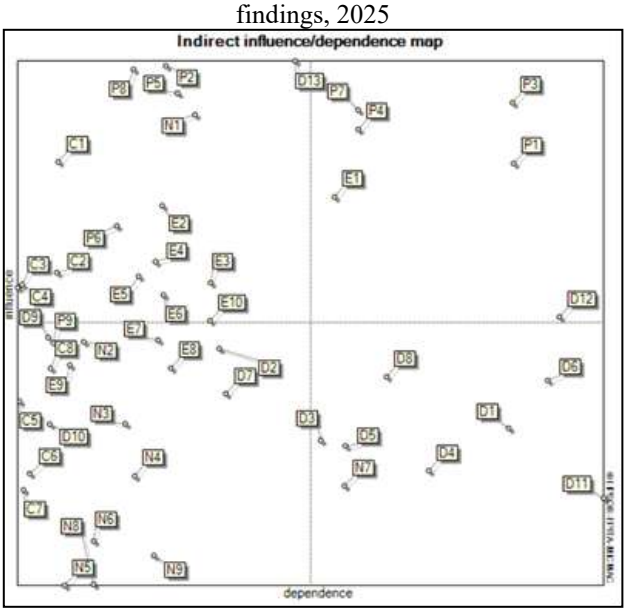

Figure 4: Dispersion of Variables in the Influence–Dependence Plane (Indirect). Source: Authors' findings, 2025

The nature and structure of both direct and indirect relationships among each of the identified variables were analysed within the MICMAC software at the 100% coverage threshold. Each of these coverage levels illustrates the weak, moderate, and strong relationships between the variables. Since the 100% coverage threshold captures all effects ranging from very strong to very weak the influence graph of the factors is presented here at the 100% coverage level.

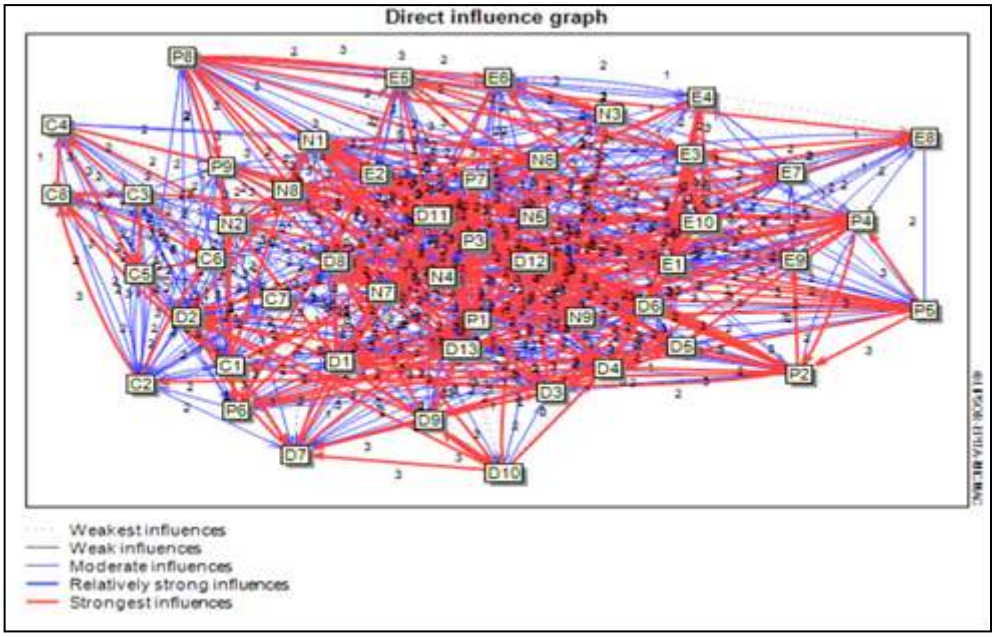

Figure 5: Graph of the Direct Influence Cycle with 100% Coverage of Factors. Source: Authors' findings, 2025

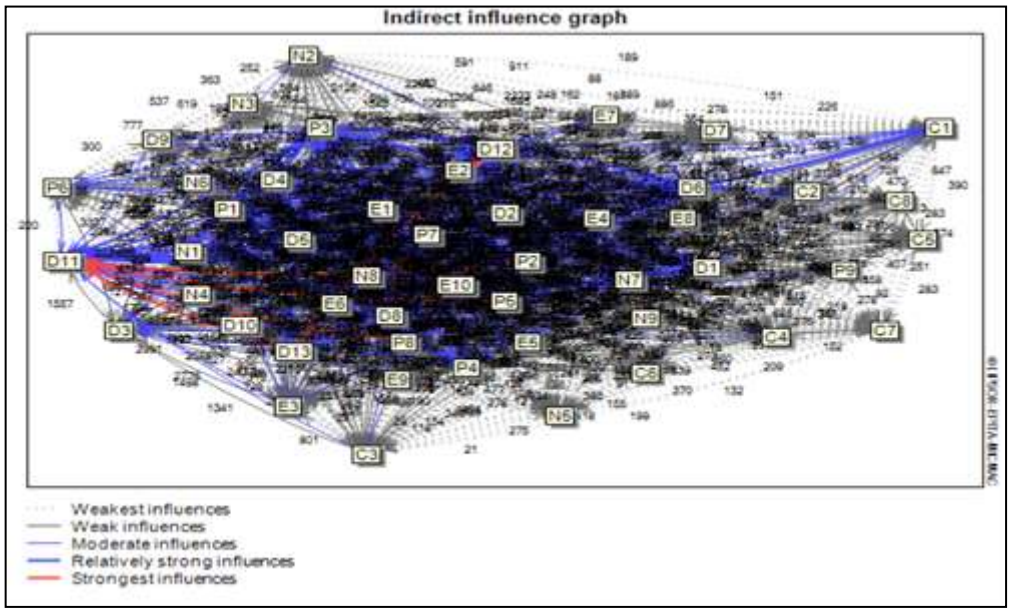

Figure 6: Graph of the Indirect Influence Cycle with 100% Coverage of Factors. Source: Authors' findings, 2025

As can be observed in the graph of the direct influence cycle, there exists a remarkably high degree of strong interconnection among the variables pertaining to transregional threats against Iran. Accordingly, drawing upon the findings presented in Tables 2 through 5 and Figures 3 through 6, the key driving forces both in terms of direct and indirect influence can be presented as summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Ranking of Key Influential Variables of Transregional Threats against Iran Adopting a Futures Studies Approach

Rank Obtained		**Final Score Obtained**		**Variables / Code**	
Indirect Influence	Direct Influence	Indirect Influence	Direct Influence		
3	1	366	411	P8	Preoccupying state managers with domestic issues and diverting their attention from pursuing the global objectives of the Islamic Revolution
7	2	338	364	N1	Incitement of neighbouring countries to block their water resources flowing into Iran through dam construction and other methods
2	3	369	352	P2	Imposition of new political sanctions against key state officials and the country's foreign policy apparatus
5	4	345	329	P3	Formation of new regional coalitions in Iran's peripheral environment with the involvement of global powers
4	5	351	329	P5	Hindrance of Iran's political initiative to construct regional and transregional coalitions
6	6	341	329	P7	Pressure on countries with agreements with Iran to cease cooperation
1	7	372	329	D13	Kidnapping of state and governmental officials by Western intelligence and security services
9	8	308	317	C1	Expansion of negative propaganda against the efficacy of the system across various cultural and social dimensions
10	9	307	311	P1	Formation of new transregional political coalitions against Iran's political stances
8	10	328	305	P4	Prevention of Iran's membership in regional and transregional coalitions
11	11	286	287	E1	Further intensification, expansion, and smartening of international economic sanctions against Iran
12	12	280	264	E2	Infiltration into major economic institutions of regional and transregional countries to prevent the development and severance of Iran's economic relations at both regional and transregional levels
13	13	267	252	P6	Infiltration of Western intelligence agents into intellectual circles and decision-making bodies to disrupt public order and security
19	14	228	235	C4	Inducing pessimism and disseminating disinformation

					regarding the future of the state and the country through global and virtual media networks
15	15	238	229	C2	Comprehensive development and support for opposition institutions, parties, and individuals both abroad and domestically
18	16	230	229	C3	Expansion and consolidation of social anomalies and the valorization of anti-values in the public mindset (through linguistic, identity-based, and ethnic rifts, as well as religious and national ceremonies(
25	17	194	229	N2	Facilitation of Iran's access to unhealthy pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, and industrial goods with high damage coefficients
17	18	231	223	E3	Smartening of sanctions to obstruct investment in critical and vital economic infrastructure projects
14	19	244	223	E4	Expansion and acceleration of energy sanctions across various sectors of oil, gas, and related industries
16	20	235	223	E5	Expansion and infiltration into macro-economic structures to disrupt and weaken the national economic system
23	21	196	223	D9	Deployment of novel methods and tools (electronic warfare, micro-UAVs, and Artificial Intelligence) in the assassination of officials, scientists, and key state figures
20	22	223	205	E6	Preventing the establishment of an energy pipeline through Iran to Europe for energy supply
26	23	193	193	P9	Creating and expanding rifts among various factions of the establishment, as well as between the establishment and the populace
27	24	189	193	D2	Expanded support for armed separatist militant groups in the country's border regions
21	25	209	193	D12	Short-term and long-term wars (cooperation between the Zionist regime and the United States and the West(
24	26	195	188	E7	Prohibition of money transfers and freezing of the Islamic Republic of Iran's bank accounts in various countries
22	27	207	188	E10	Suspension or cancellation of joint economic projects
31	28	172	188	D8	Development of novel espionage and intelligence-gathering methods utilizing advanced technologies

					(satellites, UAVs, Artificial Intelligence(
32	29	169	176	D6	Formation of security-defense coalitions involving adversarial and rival states of the Islamic Republic of Iran in its peripheral environments
33	30	161	170	D7	Expansion of advanced arms smuggling into the country to better arm domestic opposition groups
28	31	179	164	E9	Confiscation and deprivation of ownership of other non-monetary assets of the I.R.Iran abroad
36	32	142	164	D10	Expansion of bioterrorism to damage human infrastructure and personnel within the country's armed forces
29	33	177	158	E8	Restrictions on establishing branches for Iranian companies and banks in other countries
30	34	177	152	C8	Establishment of multiple radio and television networks targeting Iranians, utilizing the latest technologies (Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and digital platforms(
38	35	131	152	D3	Provision of advanced and superior weaponry technologies to adversarial states surrounding the Islamic Republic of Iran
34	36	156	146	C5	Repeated promotion and encouragement of inappropriate dress codes for Iranian women via global and virtual media
37	37	139	146	D1	NATO expansion toward Iran's borders
35	38	142	146	N3	Bioterrorism development, proliferation, and outbreak of dangerous emerging diseases of natural origin within the country
42	39	109	135	N4	Extraterritorial farming (offshore agriculture), reduced domestic production incentives, and threats to public health
40	40	112	129	D4	Preventing Iran's access to future superior technologies across various domains, including nuclear, military, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs(
39	41	128	129	D5	Preventing Iran's military presence in outer space
41	42	110	105	C6	Cancellation or suspension of cultural exchanges, scientific cooperation, educational relations, sports contacts, and tourism
43	43	102	99	N7	High seas and oceans threats (including piracy, naval mines, and

					ship seizures, etc(
44	44	100	94	C7	Prohibiting or restricting Iranian students from studying in specific fields at top-tier global universities
45	45	95	88	D11	United Nations Security Council sanctions against the I.R.Iran (arms embargoes, political sanctions, import-export restrictions, freezing of banking assets, etc(
46	46	67	88	N6	Greenhouse gas emissions
47	47	58	76	N9	Dispersion of nanoparticles and toxic gases (chemtrail spraying) in the country's atmosphere aimed at instigating climate warfare by Western states
48	48	40	64	N8	Global warming and drought (loss of agricultural lands and reduction of global strategic crops)
49	49	39	58	N5	Climate change, global temperature rise, and melting of polar glaciers

(Source: Authors' findings, 2025)

Based on the matrix of direct and indirect influence, it can be stated that indicator P8 (Preoccupying state managers with domestic issues and diverting their attention from pursuing the global objectives of the Islamic Revolution) ranks first in terms of direct influence. Indicator N1 (Incitement of neighbouring countries to block their water resources flowing into Iran through dam construction and other methods) ranks second in direct influence. Indicator P2 (Imposition of new political sanctions against key state officials and the country's foreign policy apparatus) ranks third in direct influence. Indicator P3 (Formation of new regional coalitions in Iran's peripheral environment with the involvement of global powers) ranks fourth in direct influence. Indicator P5 (Hindrance of Iran's political initiative to construct regional and transregional coalitions) ranks fifth in direct influence.

Conclusion

The present research was conducted with the aim of identifying influential variables adopting a futures studies approach to the identification of transregional threats against Iran. Given that the identification and determination of key driving forces affecting the identification of transregional threats against Iran like other approaches requires scientific and logical tools, the MICMAC software was selected for the analysis of the findings in this research. Based on the results obtained from the structural analysis conducted through MICMAC, three factors were selected as key variables for the identification of transregional threats against Iran. These variables, in order, are: the formation of new regional coalitions in Iran's peripheral environment with the involvement of global powers (P3), pressure on countries with agreements with Iran to cease cooperation (P7), and the formation of new transregional political coalitions against Iran's political stances (P1) identified as the most influential variables shaping the future of transregional threats

against Iran. These three variables constitute the central core shaping the future of Iran's national security.

Accordingly, the findings of this research delineate a clear yet cautionary picture of the security dynamics surrounding Iran in the prospective horizon, which are summarised below in key points:

a) The Nature of the Threat System: Strategic Instability The most significant structural finding of this research is the instability of the system of transregional threats against Iran. This instability implies that: The relationships among variables are not linear or simple, but rather complex and non-linear.

A change in one variable generates a cascade of chain reactions throughout the entire system.

National security cannot be guaranteed through piecemeal and ad hoc measures; a macro-level and systemic perspective is required.

The future of these threats is plural, fluid, and not linearly predictable.

b) Key Driving Forces: The Core Triad of Future Threats

In-depth data analysis reveals that although variables such as "preoccupying state managers with domestic issues" (P8) rank highest in direct influence, the hard core and principal drivers shaping the future of threats are the following three bidirectional (risk/target) variables:

Risk: Formation of new regional coalitions in Iran's peripheral environment with the involvement of global powers (P3).

Risk: Pressure on countries with agreements with Iran to cease cooperation (P7).

Target: Formation of new transregional political coalitions against Iran's political stances (P1).

These three variables possess unique characteristics:

Simultaneous influence and dependence: They are both influenced by and exert influence upon other variables.

Leverage role: Even the slightest change in these variables transforms the entire threat system.

Central core: These three variables constitute the central and hard-core infrastructure of the adversary's strategy vis-à-vis Iran.

c) Paradigm Shift in the Nature of Threats: From Hardware to Software and Smart Threats

The findings indicate a paradigm shift in the nature of transregional threats:

Purely military threats have been transformed into dependent (output/result) variables. Political, cognitive, and perceptual threats have become influential (causal) variables. Smart and hybrid threats combining diplomacy, smart sanctions, cognitive warfare, and emerging technologies have supplanted classical threats.

Coalition-building against Iran constitutes the most important instrument of this new strategy.

d) Latent Threats: Natural and Environmental

A noteworthy point is the current low ranking of natural and environmental variables. Nevertheless, two points merit attention:

The water threat, ranked second in direct influence, constitutes an exception and a serious warning.

The low ranking of other environmental variables, such as climate change and global warming, does not signify their insignificance; rather, it indicates a potential strategic surprise in the future. These silent threats will gradually transform into major crises.

The Future of Threats: Smart Encirclement

Drawing upon the three pivotal variables, the most probable future facing Iran can be delineated as a smart encirclement. Its coordinates are as follows:

Phase One: Regional Encircling – Transregional powers (particularly the United States and the West), employing diplomatic, economic, and security instruments, construct a network of regional coalitions around Iran. Neighbouring countries, individually or in groups, join this encirclement ring, progressively constricting Iran's space. These coalitions encompass military, security, and economic cooperation directed against Iran's interests.

Phase Two: Contractual Isolation – Pressure on Iran's trade, political, and security partners intensifies. Major international corporations, banks, and even friendly states are gradually compelled to sever or reduce cooperation with Iran. Joint economic projects are cancelled, and credit lines are blocked. Iran experiences gradual yet persistent isolation.

Phase Three: Transregional Initiative Capture – Simultaneously, at the transregional level, new political coalitions against Iran's positions take shape. Resolutions and statements against Iran multiply in international organisations. Political initiative is wrested from Iran, which is perpetually placed in a defensive and reactive posture. Iran's image in global public opinion becomes entrenched as a threat rather than an opportunity.

Consequences:

Iran gradually loses its strategic manoeuvring capability.

The focus of managers and elites shifts from expansionism and global role-playing toward domestic issues and mere survival.

Economic threats and sanctions gain enhanced efficacy as instruments of this overarching strategy.

The country is driven toward a form of gradual suffocation where no war has occurred and no borders have been shifted, yet Iran's power and influence have been reduced to a minimum.

The principal threat to Iran's future is not a full-scale military war, but rather a smart, multi-layered, and gradual encirclement achieved through the construction of regional and transregional coalitions against Iran and the severance of the country's contractual ties with the outside world ultimately leading to Iran's strategic suffocation and progressive passivity. In this scenario, the adversary does not seek to conquer territory; rather, it seeks to conquer Iran's future. This scenario constitutes not a hard war, but a hybrid and smart war aimed at diminishing Iran's manoeuvring capability and regional influence.

Strategic Recommendations

In light of the research findings and the conclusions drawn therefrom, the following strategic recommendations are proposed for proactively confronting the future of transregional threats against Iran:

1. Proactive and Pre-emptive Alliance-Building Strategy: In response to transregional coalition-building against Iran, the country's foreign policy apparatus must adopt a fully active and pre-emptive strategy, seeking to establish and deepen regional and transregional coalitions with emerging powers particularly in the East and South. Emphasis should be placed on geo-economic commonalities, such as energy and transport corridors, as well as security commonalities, including counter-terrorism and counter-extremism, so as to consolidate Iran's image as an essential and constructive actor in the international system.
2. Economic and Commercial Resilience Strategy: To counter pressure on partners and the severance of cooperation, it is imperative to place "resilient economic diplomacy" on the agenda, centred on diversifying trading partners, reducing dependence on specific economies, and strengthening alternative financial and commercial mechanisms (such as barter systems and digital currencies). The establishment of regional common markets and the reinforcement of parallel corridors (such as the North-South Corridor) can reduce the country's reliance on routes influenced by the West.
3. Strategy of Deepening Internal Unity and Elite Cohesion: Given the top ranking of the variable "preoccupying state managers with domestic issues," the most crucial measure to neutralise this threat is the strengthening of internal cohesion and elite consensus around the axis of national interests and the overarching objectives of the Islamic Revolution. Intelligent management of internal disagreements, avoidance of exacerbating divisions, promotion of transparency and accountability, and the articulation of a clear and hopeful vision of the future by elites can transform this focal point of threat into an opportunity for national cohesion.
4. Water and Environmental Diplomacy Strategy: The threat of inciting neighbours to block water resources ranked as the second most influential variable necessitates an active and multilateral diplomacy strategy in the water domain. Engaging in technical and legal negotiations with neighbouring countries, utilising the capacity of international organisations for the resolution of water disputes, and making joint investments in transboundary water projects can transform this threat into a ground for regional convergence.
5. Foresight and Continuous Monitoring Strategy: Given the instability of the system, strategies must be dynamic and flexible. The establishment and reinforcement of "strategic and security observatories" for continuous monitoring of key variables particularly the three core variables and the regular updating of scenarios represent an undeniable imperative. These observatories, leveraging artificial intelligence and big data analytics, should identify early warning signals and promptly inform the country's decision-makers.

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