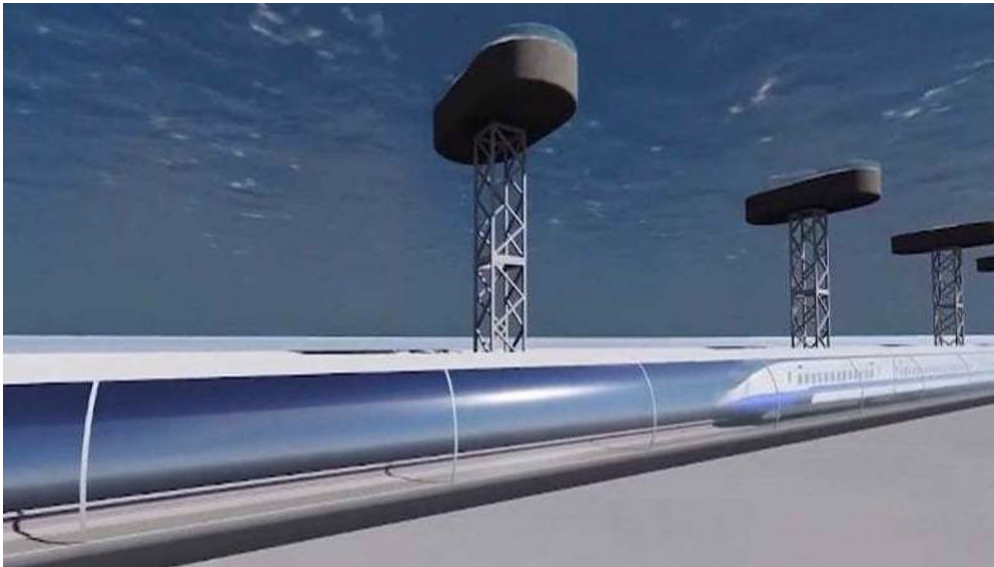


Qatar and Iran Announce Ambitious Undersea Tunnel Project, Reshaping Regional Connectivity

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Qatar and Iran have unveiled plans for a groundbreaking undersea tunnel project beneath the Persian Gulf, poised to revolutionize regional connectivity and trade. Announced during a recent visit by Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani to Tehran, the proposed tunnel will establish a direct link between the two nations, extending access from West Asia and the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean.

This ambitious project, initially discussed during Iranian President Raeisi's visit to Qatar in 2022, will be overseen by a joint Qatari-Iranian committee, which, according to the Emir, will be activated shortly, signaling a firm commitment to its realization.

The planned 190-kilometer tunnel, stretching from the northern tip of the Qatari peninsula to Dayyer, Iran, will dwarf existing undersea and land-based tunnels in both length and scale. Its projected length significantly exceeds that of the world's longest existing transport tunnel in China and the Channel Tunnel connecting France and the UK.

While the project's cost will be substantial, Qatar's robust annual gas revenues of approximately \$200 billion position it to manage the investment, even amidst Iran's current economic challenges.

For Qatar, the tunnel offers a strategic alternative to reliance on land routes through Saudi Arabia, with whom it has experienced periods of strained relations. The tunnel will provide direct access to Eurasian markets via Iran, mitigating the impact of past regional disputes.

The project also aligns with Qatar's diversified portfolio, including ownership in Russian energy giant Rosneft and significant investments in Russia, highlighting its strategic partnerships and ambitions.

From Iran's perspective, the tunnel project reinforces its "neighborhood policy," strengthening economic and political ties with Gulf states. It also offers a crucial trade route, bypassing current regional chokepoints and providing access to African, Mediterranean, and European markets. Crucially, it opens a path to the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean without traversing other regional nations.

The tunnel has the potential to foster regional convergence, streamlining trade and potentially easing long-standing tensions. It also presents an opportunity for Iran and Saudi Arabia, both major regional powers and oil producers, to leverage trade agreements for long-term relationship building. The tunnel can serve as a conduit for increased bilateral trade between these key players.

Analysts suggest the project represents a strategic approach within the Arab world towards engagement with Iran, offering a regional solution in the context of fluctuating US policies and security commitments, as well as Russian influence.

The successful completion of the Iran-Qatar tunnel project promises transformative economic, political, and security implications for both nations and the broader region, reshaping trade dynamics and potentially fostering greater cooperation.