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Revolutionary Iran's Africa Policy

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Abstract

Iran has built piecemeal influence in Africa through frequent diplomatic, political, security, maritime, commercial and cultural exchanges. Its policy towards the continent was historically driven by expediency and aspirations to export its revolutionary worldview; however, its adoption of an Africa pivot policy was also in response to the need to fight sanctions and isolation – by building partnerships with state, sub-state and non-state actors on the continent. Iran's Africa policy has led to a host of policies both constructive and divisive; the purpose of this report is to investigate how the continent views its ties with the Islamic republic and identify challenges that impede strong Iran-Africa relations. It is the first comprehensive study of bilateral relations between Iran and the fifty-four African states, and Iran's major policy initiatives in Africa – in the diplomatic, political, security, naval, maritime, economic, and cultural arenas. It is the culmination of research based on primary sources in Iran, and is supported by the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies as part of a larger project series on Africa. The report examines multiple phases of Iran's Africa policy since the 1979 Islamic Revolution to the present time and offers details of Iran's cultural, religious, scientific and technological activities in Africa – which involve key institutions, including the Bonyad-e Mostazafan, Jihad-e-Sazandegi, Danesh Bonyan, the Iranian Red Crescent Society, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly, and branches of the Al-Mustafa University. It examines Iran's economic and commercial operations in Africa, including trade and investment volumes, banking, insurance, transportation, and port activities. Iran's strategic interests and geopolitical maneuvering in Africa, including on the issue of terrorism, are explored at length. The republic's key security operations are led by a realist defensive strategy to project power, and include a borderless naval force, blue water missions, and a long-arm strategy of distant defense. A host of actors advance these operations, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, the Iran Army's Navy Engineering and Preemptive Defense, the naval fleet of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and the Quds Force.

Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran's influence in Africa has evolved through multiple phases since the revolution of 1979. This report reviews revolutionary Iran's bilateral ties with the fifty-four African states. It provides a comprehensive resource on Iran's Africa policy and highlights key observations in sections following the introduction. These sections are designed to describe Iran's diplomatic, political, security, maritime, economic, commercial, and cultural policies in Africa and how these policies work in tandem in the exercise of Iranian influence across the continent.

Revolutionary aspirations and expediency—more than an overarching strategic vision—drive Iran's policies in Africa. Combined with Iran's insufficient understanding of Africa, it often results in piecemeal and experimental approaches to building influence there. In the first decade, Africa did not factor significantly in revolutionary Iran's strategic calculations to project power abroad. Iran frequently ignored most African states. Cultural differences, conflicts, and political transitions in Iran and Africa, the absence of direct flights between Tehran and the African capitals, and the geographic distance between Iran and the continent impeded Iran's ready access to Africa. But Iran's revolutionary foreign policy called for the protection of the oppressed masses and the rejection of Western influence in global politics. As a result, Iran exported its revolution to Africa—mostly its Muslim and underserved communities—through soft power influence. Simultaneously, Iran worked with African leaders fighting to end Western colonialism across the continent.

After the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), Iran's policy in Africa sought to limit the influence of rival Middle Eastern powers, including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Within a decade, Iran built political capital in Africa by encouraging conversions across the continent to Shi'i Islam and supporting Africa's anti-apartheid movement. Simultaneously, Iran implemented construction and development projects in the continent through the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi (Jihad for Construction), an organization established after the revolution to help “oppressed” communities worldwide.

Trade remained a key component of Iran's Africa outreach policy. Although trade volumes with the continent were low, Iran was able to meet some of its wartime needs. In the second decade of

the revolution, Iran explored more sustainable trade models by seeking returns on its investments in Africa. The post-war period coincided with Iran's drive to develop its military and defense capabilities and saw it pursue security alliances with Africa. Iran's Africa penetration policy revealed an effort to contain the influence of rival foreign powers. The approach allowed Iran—at least in part—to circumvent international sanctions spearheaded chiefly by the United States. As a result, Tehran sought to limit rival states' opportunities to restrict Iranian commercial activities in Africa.

The conclusion of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal—otherwise known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—encouraged Africa's leaders to seek better opportunities to engage with Iran. Tehran promoted engagement with Africa and simultaneously sought to build “strategic depth” across the continent to bolster Iranian influence. But Iran scrambled to sustain relations with the African states after President Donald J. Trump withdrew the United States from the nuclear deal and reinstated the sanctions regime against Iran in 2018. In response, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for a pivot in Africa policy to circumvent sanctions.

Over the years, Pew Research Center polls have shown a relatively favorable disposition toward Iran in Africa when cracks in the continent's relations with other world powers have emerged. Africa's leaders have frequently turned to Iran in these times to help address the continent's significant challenges. But Iran's influence in Africa has remained limited partly because of vigorous efforts by the United States, other Western powers, Israel, and the Gulf Arab states to box Tehran in. Western diplomacy and Israeli intelligence, and after 2015 the new Saudi-led military and counter-terrorism coalitions—as well as targeted foreign investments across the continent—have succeeded in containing Iranian influence.

Nevertheless, this geopolitical maneuvering designed to contain Iran in Africa—combined with the cyclical nature of Iranian engagement—has concealed the extent and dimensions of Iranian power on the continent. Along the way, African leaders have opted to engage selectively with Iran while securing stronger relations with other world powers rivaling Iran on the continent.

The Evolution of Iran's Policy Initiatives in Africa

The present section of the report offers a summary of Iran's policies in Africa, focusing in turn on the diplomatic–political, security, maritime, economic–commercial, and cultural domains. The discussion also analyzes how these policies have worked in tandem in Iran's efforts to exercise influence across the continent.

Iran's Diplomatic and Political Initiatives in Africa

The Iran–Iraq War propelled revolutionary Iran to initiate measures to contain Baghdad's superior diplomatic ties in Africa. Across the continent, Iranian diplomatic initiatives challenged the viability of the Carter Doctrine to which countries like Somalia and Kenya subscribed and that sought to boost Iraq's power to contain Tehran throughout the war. Iran tactically expanded contacts with and opened embassies in the African states to secure votes to condemn Iraq for initiating the war in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).⁽¹⁾ By 1982, Iran had achieved several battleground victories, and Tehran's diplomatic offensive in North and southern Africa was in full swing. Iran insisted on building a united diplomatic front with the African states to condemn and isolate Iraq in regional and international forums such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC, known as the Organization of the Islamic Conference until 2011), and the African Union (AU, known as the Organization of African Unity until 1999).

The African bloc in the OIC constituted nearly half the organization's membership, and in exchange for the bloc's support, Iran offered to back its proposed policies on South–South cooperation. In this context, Iran's revolution was projected as a liberating political force opposed to colonialism, apartheid, racism, world imperialism, Western powers, the Saudi Arabian-backed version of Islam, and the Iraqi Ba'ath ideology, which had followers in North Africa. Iran cultivated ties around these themes with African countries in the Group of 77 (G-77) for South–South cooperation and in the context of political discussions in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).⁽²⁾

(1) Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, "A New Scramble for Africa? The Role of Great and Emerging Powers," *Insight Turkey* 21(1) (Winter 2019): 139–141; "South Africa's President to Visit Iran," *IRDiplomacy*, Khordad 25, 1393, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1934387/آید-می-آید-جنوبی-به-تهران-می-آید>.

(2) "South Africa's President to Visit Iran."

In addition, Iran supported Palestinian groups, including Hamas, and encouraged their activities in Africa. The policy was designed to contain Israel's influence across the continent and dampen the popularity of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in North Africa. The PLO leader Yasser Arafat supported Iraq in the war. Tehran undermined influential North African leaders who supported Arafat's anti-Iranian positions, including the Libyan leader Muammar el Qaddafi and Egypt's president, Hosni Mubarak. It also convened regular conferences to gather African resistance groups supporting the Palestinian cause and distributed anti-Iraqi propaganda and literature across the continent.⁽³⁾

As Africa experienced frequent power transitions of its own, Iran developed a selective policy on the question of regime change. It viewed some transitions with suspicion and did not support them, believing that they were velvet-type revolutions backed by Western powers to replace Africa's anti-colonial leaders. But when the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings occurred in North Africa, Iran sought opportunities to renew its influence in the continent if the uprisings promised to weaken North Africa's traditional pro-Western and pro-Arab political alliances. Believing that the uprisings needed time to develop before they became fulfilled revolutions like Iran's, Tehran opted to work pragmatically with the leading forces in the uprisings to build gradual influence among communities in North Africa that held a modestly favorable disposition toward Iran and its revolution. In so doing, Tehran hoped that those African leaders and communities that had traditionally welcomed U.S. and European policies to contain Iran, or supported the Gulf Arab states against it, would seek Iranian support when cracks in their relations with the West or the Gulf monarchies emerged. As a result, while Iranian diplomacy in Africa remained partially conditional to real progress in its ties with African capitals, Tehran remained persistent in its outreach to at least derail efforts by rival powers to contain Iran.

Iran's Security Initiatives in Africa

The United States' dual containment policy against Iran and Iraq in the mid-1990s prompted Iran to build broader security partnerships in Africa. Tehran cultivated ties with African Islamic parties, exported arms to the continent, and expanded contacts with the African bloc in the

(3) CIA Research Paper, *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*, (January 26, 2011), 17, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85S00317R000300110005-1.pdf>.

NAM and the OIC. In exchange for implementing hundreds of development and trade projects, Iran sought Africa's support for its nuclear program. Iran specifically advanced South–South cooperation to promote the concept of “nuclear unity” in the developing world. The initiative was designed to open Africa's uranium markets to Tehran and derail international sanctions seeking to forestall the development of Iran's nuclear program. It further helped Iran challenge rival countries—including France, Iraq, Israel, and international brokers—reach the African arms and uranium markets. But the flow of uranium from Africa to Iran was monitored by the United States and was subject to UN sanctions, which restricted the sale of radioactive material to Tehran.⁽⁴⁾

The 1998 al-Qaeda-led bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania renewed Iran's interest in monitoring the rising terrorist trends in Africa so as to prevent terrorism from adversely influencing Iranian interests across the continent. The US-led global war on terrorism launched after 9/11, and operations to degrade violent extremist organizations by the United States' Africa Command (FRICOM), which became operational in 2008, pushed Tehran to safeguard its security influence in Africa. Revelations of covert security operations in Africa involving Iran reported by African states to the United Nations pointed to Tehran's assertive security policies. The 2015 launch of the Saudi-led Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), which focused closely on links with Africa, encouraged Iran to offer the continent's leaders options to cooperate with Tehran to promote counter-terrorism policies.

As extremist groups, including the Islamic State (IS), fortified their positions across Africa after experiencing military setbacks in Iraq and Syria in 2018, Iran led outreach policies in the continent designed to contain potential terrorist threats. The policies factored in the reality of the presence of U.S. forces in Africa. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Defense designated two areas for its special operations in Africa by 2018—namely, the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. Aided by the scattered nature of the continent's conflicts and the diversity of foreign actors involved, Iran promoted

(4) “Why Iran's Nuclear Program Would Not Exist Without South Africa,” *Asia By Africa*, January 29, 2018, <https://www.asiabyafrica.com/point-a-to-a/how-iran-nuclear-program-start>; Reza Tagizadeh, “Iran's Infiltration Diplomacy in Africa Stalling in Movement,” *Radio Farda*, Farvardin 27, 1399, https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f3_iran_diplomacy_africa/24959915.html.

its security dialog with the continent. The operational mobility of Iran's Quds Force, and its ability to build contacts with government, sub-state, and non-state actors, as well as with civic and religious groups and the business community in Africa, helped Iran build "strategic depth" against all odds.⁽⁵⁾

Iran did not share a common ideological view with Africa's multiple movements and groups, including those that it explicitly supported. But the U.S. killing of the Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani in Iraq in early 2020 pivoted Iran toward building a stronger presence in Africa with help from some of these groups. Iran's Africa pivot policy aimed to expand the country's geographic sphere of influence across the continent. The Quds Force branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) was tasked with carrying out the cross-border operations. The force subsequently identified a half-dozen emerging terrorist hotspots in Africa.⁽⁶⁾ Its new commander, Esmail Qaani, had experience leading operations to mobilize movements and build so-called "resistance forces" in Africa to advance what Iran calls "resistance geography," with the intention to rebuff hostile powers in the continent. Iran's Supreme Leader ordered Qaani to develop the country's strategic depth beyond West Asia into Africa.⁽⁷⁾

The IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency subsequently reported that Iran and a number of Africa's movements and groups shared an enmity toward Washington that could potentially validate any temporary joint missions they might undertake to keep the United States and its allies at bay across the continent. More specifically, Tehran aimed to discourage U.S. operations designed to contain Iranian power and influence and prevent the formation of anti-Iran security blocs led by rival powers or terrorist groups across the continent.

By the end of 2020, the Iranian media was claiming that the Quds Force had expanded its intelligence and counter-intelligence operations in Africa to deal with the continent's rising security challenges. Specifically, Iran was said to be exercising a so-called "realist defense"

(5) "Developing Iran's Strategic Depth to Africa," *Tasnim News Agency*, Dei 18, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3cZ22Nz>.

(6) "2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism," *Tasnim News Agency*, Bahman 31, 1398, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/11/21/2185967/چشم-انداز-2020-تروریزم-4-آفریقا-کانون-جدید-تروریزم-جهانی>.

(7) "U.S. Fear of Capabilities of New Quds Force Commander/Qaani is Haj Qasem's Shadow in the Region," *Islamic Azad University News Agency*, Dei 14, 1398, <https://ana.press/fa/news/17/464165/های-فرمانده-جدید-سپاه-قدس-قائنی-سایه-حاج-قاسم-در-منطقه-است-80٪E2٪80٪8Cترس-آمریکا-از-توانایی>.

doctrine designed to stretch its military capabilities beyond its borders to the African continent. The doctrine reflects a “security versus power” paradigm in which Iranian security interests, rather than a desire to accumulate power, are prioritized. Here, the role of power projection is limited to confronting adversity—namely, reacting to or deterring threats—or preserving a balance of power favorable to Iran in the region.⁽⁸⁾

Iran could contemplate selling arms to Africa once the 2007 restrictions on its arms sales were eased in October 2020 under UNSC Resolution 2231. The resolution endorsed the nuclear deal, and modified previous UN sanctions, but it fell short of preventing the U.S. from imposing arms sanctions of its own on Iran.⁽⁹⁾ Still, Iranian weapons and alleged facilities to manufacture armaments were spotted in conflict zones across Africa prior to this period. But Africa’s complex conflicts barred high levels of external security engagements in those conflicts by Iran, as did Western security involvement across the continent. Tehran remained a distant player in Africa’s security landscape, and it was not immediately affected by the widespread insecurity across the continent. As a result, Iran’s security options in Africa leaned toward advancing Iranian influence in Africa’s preexisting conflicts, especially when rival powers faced challenges in containing those conflicts. Iranian support for sub-state or non-state actors in Africa was not straightforward in this process, nor was it always readily verifiable. While plans were uncovered pointing to the use of various groups to advance its influence in Africa, Iran’s willingness and ability to work with these groups fluctuated depending on its security needs. More specifically, Iran aimed to understand how these groups operate to retain the upper hand in dealing with them and rival external powers.

Iran’s efforts to build security partnerships and combat terrorism in Africa enabled it to build influence with the continent’s Shi‘i and Sunni communities. But Iran’s allies in Africa remained susceptible to security tensions with groups that opposed Iranian influence. As a result, Iran’s measures to convince its African interlocutors that it was helping to contain the surge of radicalism in the continent often drew mixed results. African countries enjoyed closer security ties with

(8) “Developing Iran’s Strategic Depth to Africa.”

(9) Kelsey Davenport and Julia Masterson, “UN Restrictions on Iran’s Arms Trade Expire,” *Arms Control Association*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2020-10/p4-1-iran-nuclear-deal-alert>.

states other than Iran and questioned the Iranian revolutionary model given its potential to stir local conflicts in Africa's multi-faith communities. In response, Iran attempted to convince the African countries that its revolution was born from an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle and that Tehran was seeking to moderate radical religious influences across the continent.

Iran's Naval and Maritime Initiatives in Africa

Tehran dispatched naval vessels to the Gulf of Aden after November 2008, when Somali pirates took an Iranian ship and held its crew hostage; the ships from Bandar Abbas and Chabahar, two ports that reportedly service Iran's submarine fleet.⁽¹⁰⁾ Iran's navy announced plans to deploy in the Atlantic Ocean in 2011. The same year, the country confirmed its naval activity in the Red Sea after it first dispatched warships through the waterway to Syria. Iranian ships engaged in intelligence gathering in the Gulf of Aden, intending to ensure that foreign warships would not threaten Iran's navy. In the process, the navy escorted 2,900 Iranian ships, had 180 armed confrontations with pirates, and provided military assistance to twenty-five foreign vessels.⁽¹¹⁾ By 2016, Iran said that it had escorted 3,800 ships in the Gulf of Aden and sent a convoy of warships to the region and the Red Sea.⁽¹²⁾ It further unveiled IRGC naval "underground cities" where it kept missiles and small rapid deployment high-speed vessels.⁽¹³⁾ In November 2016, Iran announced that another naval convoy—consisting of the Alvand destroyer and the Bushehr logistic vessel—had circled the African continent and entered the Atlantic Ocean for the first time after making a port call in South Africa.⁽¹⁴⁾

In 2017, Iran's "realist defensive" strategy resulted in a piecemeal approach to projecting its power in Africa and the major waterways surrounding it, mindful that Iranian provocations in

(10) "Iran's 5th Fleet to Head for Gulf of Aden," *Tehran Times*, January 21, 2010, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/212669/Iran-s-5th-fleet-to-head-for-Gulf-of-Aden>; James Fargher, "This Presence Will Continue Forever: An Assessment of Iranian Naval Capabilities in the Red Sea," *Center for International Maritime Security*, April 5, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3mAL4se>.

(11) "Iran Warns Off U.S. Destroyer, Spy Planes in Gulf of Aden," *The Iran Project*, May 5, 2015, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2015/05/05/iran-warns-off-us-destroyer-spy-planes-in-gulf-of-aden/>.

(12) "Iran Escorted Over 3,800 Ships in Gulf of Aden," *The Iran Project*, November 26, 2016, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2016/11/26/iran-escorted-3800-ships-gulf-aden-navy-chief/>; "Iran's New Naval Flotilla Dispatched to Gulf of Aden: Commander," *The Iran Project*, April 2, 2016, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2016/04/02/irans-new-naval-flotilla-dispatched-gulf-aden-commander/>.

(13) "Underground Cities; Forever Safe Home for Missile and Vessels Specific to Sepah Naval Force," *Mashreq*, Bahman 7, 13, <https://bit.ly/3s2SPbi>.

(14) "Iran Escorted Over 3,800 Ships in Gulf of Aden."

open waters could be met with strong international reaction. By 2019, the strategy was combined with Iranian efforts to expand influence in the predominantly Muslim communities of the coastal countries in North Africa. The objectives were to contain potential threats emerging from the Mediterranean region, build security for Iran's naval forces in the Red Sea, and protect Iranian ships and tankers against hostile attacks in the southern Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. The strategy further aimed to prevent the rise of hostile forces in the Horn region and in countries such as Kenya, where U.S. forces were stationed. It was advanced in part through the deployment of submarines on patrol in the Red Sea.⁽¹⁵⁾ Finally, it expanded Iran's defense ties in West Africa to contain Israel's influence in the region and allow Iran to build up its naval presence in the Atlantic Ocean.⁽¹⁶⁾

Simultaneously, Iran built a larger naval fleet, including parts needed for heavy- and semi-heavy-lift ships and maneuverable destroyers to reach international waters. New vessels were equipped with missile launching capabilities, including cruise missiles, to secure Iran's ships in the Gulf of Aden. Iran looked to foreign acquisition of coastal defense cruise missiles, ships, and submarines, with a wide array of weapon systems from countries such as Russia, expanded its subsurface fleet armed with torpedoes and mine-laying capability, and directed the use of nuclear propulsion technology to advance its naval fleet. Iran's ballistic missile systems—the Shahab-3, -4, -5, and -6, the Ghadr-101 and -110, IRIS, SAJIL, and the Emad, have sufficient range to strike targets in the Red Sea where Iran also possesses mine-laying capacity. Iran asserted that its naval missiles were highly accurate and could target any warship or vessel, possibly referring to a 300 km-range rocket based on the Fateh-110 missile model.⁽¹⁷⁾

(15) "Harsh Statements by an African Official Against Iran," *IRDiplomacy*, Khordad 26, 1395, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1960008/>؛ اظهارات تندمقام آفریقایی-علیه ایران.

(16) "Development of Iran's Strategic Depth in Africa," *Tasnim News Agency*, Dei 18, 1398, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/10/18/2177692/>؛ توسعه عمق راهبردی ایران-تأ-آفریقا؛ "Eastern Africa: A Battleground for Israel and Iran," *Stratfor*, October 29, 2012, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/eastern-africa-battleground-israel-and-iran>.

(17) "Iran to Develop Nuclear Ship Propulsion Systems," *The Maritime Executive*, December 13, 2016, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/iran-to-research-nuclear-ship-propulsion-systems>; "Iranian Naval Capabilities in the Red Sea," *The Maritime Executive*, April 6, 2017, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/iranian-naval-capabilities-in-the-red-sea>; James Fargher, "This Presence Will Continue Forever: An Assessment of Iranian Naval Capabilities in the Red Sea;" Abdullah Toukan and Anthony H. Cordesman, "GCC-Iran: Operational Analysis of Air, SAM and TBM Forces," Centre for Strategic & International Studies (Washington: CSIS, 2009), 37, 127; "Acting IRGC Chief: We Have a Ballistic Missile that Even the U.S. and Russia do not Have," *Radio Farda*, Bahman 16, 1396, <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-revolutionary-guards-commander-salami-ballistic-misile/29021012.html>.

Iran insisted that its naval fleet would boost security in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Bab-el-Mandeb, and it offered countries such as Turkey the option to cooperate to achieve the goal. But Iran was accused of supplying arms to Yemen and using its naval convoys—including small warships and tankers—to activate maritime routes through the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to reach friendly countries such as Syria and Venezuela. In these operations, the Iranian naval fleet of the IRGC (known as IRGCN or NEDSA)—which emphasizes an asymmetric defense and offense doctrine—mobilized faster and smaller platforms for deployment operations in larger, “blue water” geographic areas that extend to Africa as well as the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The regular Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) functioned under the supervision of the army. It employed a more conventional doctrine of establishing forward presence and promoting naval diplomacy through IRIN “peace and friendship groups” working in mission areas of the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz. This navy managed several out-of-area missions, including counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. In addition, it carried out other marine operations in the Red Sea region and friendly African ports, including in Tanzania, South Africa, Djibouti, and Sudan.⁽¹⁸⁾

Tehran rejected U.S. claims of Yemen-bound Iranian weapons in the Gulf of Aden. But by 2018, over fifty Iranian naval squadrons were operating in the Gulf of Aden and the Bab-el-Mandeb as part of the Iranian army’s Navy Engineering and Preemptive Defense Department missions to escort Iranian vessels and oil tankers.⁽¹⁹⁾ The missions were accompanied by frequent statements from Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani that the country could block the Strait of Hormuz if sanctions prevented it from exporting oil and came against a backdrop of measures by the littoral states in the Gulf of Aden to obstruct Iran’s naval presence.⁽²⁰⁾ By 2018, the Horn countries had joined Saudi Arabia and Egypt to launch the Red Sea Security

(18) “Iranian Flotilla to Arrive in Red Sea: Commander,” *Islamic Republic News Agency*, April 29, 2015, <https://en.irna.ir/news/81589689/Iranian-flotilla-to-arrive-in-Red-Sea-Commander>; Office of Naval Intelligence, *Iranian Naval Forces: A Tale of Two Navies*, (February 2017), 5, 30, 39–42, <https://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/iran/Iran%20022217SP.pdf>; “Iran to Develop Nuclear Ship Propulsion Systems.”

(19) “Navy Official Says 53 Iranian Squadrons Present in Aden Gulf, Bab-el-Mandeb,” *The Iran Project*, November 18, 2018, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2018/11/30/navy-official-says-53-iranian-squadrons-present-in-aden-gulf-bab-el-mandeb/>.

(20) “Gulf of Aden States Seeking to Obstruct Iran’s Naval Presence: Commander,” *The Iran Project*, June 12, 2017, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2017/06/12/gulf-aden-states-seeking-obstruct-irans-naval-presence-commander/>.

Council for the Arab and African countries and consolidate a 2019 Red Sea Forum initiative. The council and the forum were designed partly to build security and contain Iranian power across the strategic waterway.

By 2020, Tehran was confronting increased tensions with the United States in the Strait of Hormuz and international isolation under the Trump administration. Against this backdrop, Iran announced a “long-arm strategy” of distant defense seeking to advance its naval influence in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. Africa’s eastern shores on the Red Sea and the continent’s western shores on the Atlantic Ocean make it central to realizing this “long-arm” naval strategy.

The new naval defense doctrine rests on the operation of discreet underground naval cities in three naval zones in Gulf waters on Iran’s shores—including the strategically important coastal region of Makran—and the use of drones for maritime operations. The strategy rests on new naval capabilities for “blue water” operations. The goal is a “borderless naval force” for Iran, including a permanent naval military base in the Indian Ocean, expanded military and maritime operations on the high seas, and a permanent military naval presence in any location where the U.S. navy operates.⁽²¹⁾ Simultaneously, Iran operationalized the warship ocean liner Shahid Roudaki, a multifunctional vessel and helicopter and missile carrier designed to reach beyond the Strait of Hormuz into the high seas. The strategy was partly intended to expand Iran’s counter-terrorism operations abroad to thwart potential security threats against the country. It also aimed to build Iran’s military and maritime capabilities to circumvent sanctions and ensure Iran’s security in the face of external threats.⁽²²⁾

In early 2021, Iran confirmed that the Army Strategic Naval Forces would uphold the country’s interests beyond its borders by renewing naval operations, including amphibious reconnaissance in the Red Sea. The step was designed to protect Iran’s safe navigation in the high seas, fight piracy and terrorism, and prevent hostile powers from challenging Iran in the strategic waterway, aided in part by a new generation of missile launching fleets. Iran further asserted that the steps

(21) “IRGC New Mission Under Orders by Ayatollah Khamenei: Establishing ‘Permanent Base’ in Indian Ocean,” *BBC Farsi*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-53138431>; “Underground Cities of Naval Forces Expanded in All Southern Shores,” *Mashreq*, Tir 15, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3t3cUQh>.

(22) “2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism,” “U.S. Fear of Capabilities of New Quds Force Commander/Qaani is Haj Qasem’s Shadow in the Region.”

ensured safe Iranian navigation in the high seas in other regions, including South America and the Caribbean.⁽²³⁾ To reach these goals, Tehran convened regular talks with the African capitals to facilitate its access to the continent's ports.

Iran's Economic Initiatives in Africa

Following the revolution, Iran engaged in ad hoc international development projects by waging a so-called “construction and development crusade” (*jihad-e-sāzandegi*) in Africa. The projects advanced Iranian influence beyond its borders and won converts to promote its revolutionary policies. To this end, the head of the Foundation for the Oppressed (Bonyad-e Mostazafan), Mohsen Rafighdoost, initiated a program of welfare distribution across Sub-Saharan Africa by traveling on land with convoys of trucks to distribute farming equipment, coolers, building supplies, and household appliances to rural communities most in need.⁽²⁴⁾

Iran's post-revolutionary leaders seldom viewed Africa as a trade destination. Frequently, they lamented the delays across the continent in acknowledging its potential in the spread of Iran's global commercial influence. Not surprisingly, in the 1980s, some of the projects introduced by the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi in Africa did not follow sustainable economic models for growth or returns on investments. Instead, they aimed to win popularity and influence for Iran.⁽²⁵⁾

In the 1990s, the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi introduced a larger number of projects in Africa, intending to ensure a return on Iranian investments. By the mid-1990s, Africa presented Iran with modest but important economic opportunities as the country faced increased isolation due to U.S.-led sanctions. This encouraged Iran's presidents to travel to the continent on more than one occasion. In 1991 and 1996, President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani traveled to Africa to consolidate Iran's post-war economic partnerships. This came as Iran's ties with Europe deteriorated following the Mykonos affair involving the assassination of Iranian Kurdish dissidents in Germany. While lamenting his trip to Africa as head of state as a late policy, the

(23) “Red Sea is Once More to be Placed in Area of Amphibious Reconnaissance/Will Not Allow No Enemy to Show Off its Might,” *Borna News*, Dei 24, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3uF5gM3>.

(24) “Examination of 30 Years of Ties Between Iran and Africa,” *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=1420>; author's discussions with an anonymous source and member of the Iranian group distributing aid in Africa, The Hague, May 26, 2001.

(25) “Examination of 30 Years of Ties Between Iran and Africa.”

Iranian president made the effort to visit Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Tanzania. The visits encouraged Tehran to increase the number of Iran's embassies from nine to twenty in Africa and establish branches of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, Export Development Funds, medical clinics, and cultural and Islamic centers across the continent.

In 2005, President Mohammad Khatami traveled to seven African states toward the end of his tenure in office while also lamenting his administration's policy of negligence toward Africa. He visited Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mali, Benin, Zimbabwe, and Uganda. Falling oil prices led to the closure of a number of Iran's embassies in Africa during Khatami's tenure in office. In 2006, the president traveled to Sudan. Faced with the rapid imposition of sanctions on Iran, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attempted to launch a robust South–South cooperation model with African states, which failed to fully materialize due to many competing interests between Iran and Africa's leaders. Still, Ahmadinejad's encouragement of creating clusters of indigenous-based Danesh Bonyan (science foundation) initiatives to fight sanctions, a policy that continued under Rouhani, played an important role in implementing projects in Africa.

Furthermore, Ahmadinejad ordered his government to prioritize relations with Africa at every organizational level within Iran's multiple ministries and government agencies. He then traveled to the Gambia on his first foreign trip abroad to participate at the AU summit, during which the Iranian president was sidelined by Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, who harbored his own leadership ambitions in Africa, and dismissed Ahmadinejad's bid to see Iran lead AU policy. But the visit helped consolidate Iran's ties with the Gambia and accelerated the setup of branches of the Imam Khomeini Relief Aid program across the continent. Ahmadinejad then visited Algeria in 2007. In 2009, he traveled to the Comoro Islands, Djibouti, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Senegal. In 2010, he visited Zimbabwe and Uganda, and Iran subsequently set up seven additional embassies in Africa. In 2011, Ahmadinejad traveled to Sudan.⁽²⁶⁾

(26) "Iran's Relations with Africa in Conversation with Dr. Bakhshi," Book Room, Bahman 21, 1389, <https://bookroom.ir/news/8242/>; روابط-ایران-و-آفریقا-در-گفتگو-با-دکتر-بخشی; Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamedi, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique* (Tehran: Economic Diplomacy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mordad 10, 1398), <https://economic.mfa.ir/portal/newsview/43727/>; همکاریه‌های-اقتصادی-جمهوری-اسلامی-ایران-و-موزامبیک; Author's discussions with an anonymous source who accompanied the jihad-e-sazandeghi on the Sub-Sahara Africa trip, The Hague, May 16, 2008.

Despite Iran's outreach efforts, many seemingly promising Iranian-led development and economic projects failed to materialize or were implemented slowly due to Tehran's shifting economic priorities, lack of funds, and overall disinclination to commit to investing in Africa. Indeed, Iran remained more interested in Africa's potential as an intermediary center to promote trade with Europe or South America through commercial hubs on the continent. President Rouhani's commitment to reviving Iran's poor relations with world powers briefly distracted Tehran from pursuing an assertive policy toward Africa. But in 2015, after Iran finalized the nuclear deal with world powers, many African countries welcomed renewed commercial and trade ties with Iran. In the process, Iran addressed the need to connect to African countries by sea, air, or land routes, by encouraging African capitals to set up direct flights or maritime transportation routes with Iran and connect with the country through alternative land and railway transit routes via third countries.

The volume of Iran's trade with Africa increased 23 percent two years after the conclusion of the nuclear deal. Tehran offered export incentives to thirty African countries and increased its exports to the continent by almost 100 percent. It established maritime transportation routes to African ports and offered maritime transportation facilities to these countries to promote several large-scale trade deals. Specifically, Iran increased exports of methanol, liquified petroleum gas (LPG), iron, steel, carbon char, and cement to Africa. Simultaneously, Tehran sought to resolve insurance and banking hurdles to facilitate trade and encouraged African countries to promote barter agreements to avoid sanctions. By 2018, the volume of Iran's direct and indirect exports to Africa reached US\$1.7 billion, half of which was carried out through third countries in the southern Gulf region, including Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).⁽²⁷⁾

In 2018, Iran recognized the sanctions regime against it could remain in place despite the conclusion of the nuclear deal. As a result, it renewed its Africa outreach policy to build a "resistance economy," an idea promoted by the Supreme Leader to circumvent the sanctions regime. This led to a renewed attempt by Iran to open more embassies in Africa. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif—who made five trips to the continent in 2015–2019—reached out to

(27) "Barter; A Path to Expand Trade Ties with African Continent," *Eghtesad Online*, Azar 5, 1398, <https://www.eghtesadonline.com/بخش-اقتصاد-کلان-3/تهاتر-راهی-برای-توسعه-روابط-تجاری-با-قاره-آفریقا/>.

Tunisia, Uganda, Algeria, Rwanda, Botswana, Congo, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and Mauritania.⁽²⁸⁾ In two major visits to Africa made in less than six months, Iran's foreign minister also reached out to Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Namibia. Iran believed that the relative stability of these African countries meant they were ripe with economic opportunities. After the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Iran lobbied African leaders to expand bilateral cooperation to fight the coronavirus and help Tehran meet its medical needs under sanctions.⁽²⁹⁾ Iran hoped to leverage its previous efforts in building health clinics and hospitals across Africa to prevail on African leaders in its time of need.

Iran increased opportunities to trade with Africa in the non-oil sector and petrochemicals, given international restrictions on Iranian oil exports.⁽³⁰⁾ In 2017–2018, Iran exported US\$693 million worth of non-oil sector goods to forty-two African countries. Key markets in order of priority were Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, South Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Djibouti, Ghana, Tunisia, Somalia, and Mozambique.⁽³¹⁾ Other Iranian non-oil exports and imports to and from Africa included food items such as rice, grains, cocoa, oil, canned food, processed food, as well as

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- (28) "The Country of Senegal on Path to Becoming a Newly Emerging Economy," *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting*, Esfand 5, 1397, <https://www.iribnews.ir/fa/news/2363449/>; "Presidency: Iran Wills to Advance Ties with Congo," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Esfand 18, 1397, <https://www.irna.ir/news/83236704/>; "Iran and Cameroon Will to Advance and Consolidate Ties," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Ordibehesht 19, 1396, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82523411/>; "Rwanda President Stressed His Country's Will to Expand Ties with Iran," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Dei 28, 1396, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82800426/>; "Iran Welcomes Expansion of Ties with Zimbabwe More than Ever," *Iran's Presidential Informational Staff*, Aban 28, 1398, <http://www.president.ir/fa/112411/>; "Iran and Algeria Must Expand Trade and Economic Ties as Two Friendly Governments," *Iran's Presidential Informational Staff*, Aban 3, 1398, <http://www.president.ir/fa/111991/>; "Iran and Ethiopia Stressed Expanding Trade Ties," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Mehr 18, 1396, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82691330/>; "Ready to Develop and Deepen Relations with Uganda," *Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Ordibehesht 2, 1399, <https://mfa.gov.ir/portal/newsview/592280/>; "آمادگی ایران برای توسعه و تعمیق روابط با اوگاندا ضرورت اتخاذ موضع واحد همه کشور های جهان- در مقابل اقدامات غیر انسانی آمریکا"; "Meeting of Ambassadors and Representatives of Foreign Offices in Iran with Zarif's Deputies," *IRDiplomacy*, Esfand 25, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3d5aE5w>; "Phone Conversation of Foreign Ministers of South Africa, Sweden, and Uzbekistan with Zarif," *Fars News Agency*, Esfand 27, 1398, <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/13981227001143/>; "Zarif Lobbying with Kenyan Counterpart on Corona Virus Global Spread and U.S. Sanctions," *Fars News Agency*, Esfand 29, 1398, <https://bit.ly/2QcCEe9>; "Mauritania's Solidarity and Support for Government and People of Iran in Fighting Corona," *Fars News Agency*, Farvardin 11, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3cZ338l>; "23 Percent Growth in Iran Exports to African Continent," *Eximnews*, Esfand 22, 1396, <http://eximnews.ir/print/23906>.
- (29) "Guinea Bissau Seeks Cooperation with Iran in Car Manufacturing and Steel Industry," *Khaneh Mellat*, Bahman 3, 1396, <https://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/367238/>; "گینه-بیسائو-خواستار همکاری با ایران در حوزه صنایع خودرو سازی و صنایع فولاد"; see also Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 146.
- (31) "Iran's Share of \$523 billion African Market is Less Than Half Percent," *Farhikhtegan Daily*, Khordad 3, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3fVe0d9>.

tiles, handicrafts, rugs, gold, minerals, and oil by-products.⁽³²⁾ But as Africa gradually turned into a central hub for economic growth and development, the continent invited investments from countries more powerful and economically influential than Iran, including Russia, China, the Gulf Arab states, and Turkey. As a result, Iran's overall trade volume with the individual African countries remained modest, and at its peak, reached roughly US\$100 million annually with friendlier states such as South Africa, discounting major joint ventures in the oil sector and the telecommunication industry between the two countries.⁽³³⁾

The trends pointed to a dearth in Iran's long-term economic planning to increase investments and trade opportunities in Africa. Furthermore, besides South Africa, most African countries lacked interest or the required infrastructure to turn into major trade hubs for Iran. As a result, Iran remained relatively content to meet its basic trade needs with Africa when it could not export oil and other products to Europe or its neighboring Gulf Arab states.⁽³⁴⁾ Sanctions and Iran's generally weak political ties with most African states barred significant trade and commerce with the continent.⁽³⁵⁾

But over a long period, Iran's oil exports to Africa offered the country a crucial economic lifeline under sanctions. Africa's need for oil made poorer countries in the continent vulnerable to Iran's offers of trade in the energy sector. As a result, Iran exported oil to countries across Africa, used local Lebanese intermediaries residing in Africa to trade oil on Iran's behalf in the continent, and offered crude oil to local refineries in the continent and at discounted prices. As an OPEC member, Iran lobbied with major oil producers in Africa like Nigeria and Angola to keep oil prices high.⁽³⁶⁾

Given its small export volume of 0.13 percent to the continent, which boasted a total global market of imported goods to Africa worth US\$523 billion by 2017–2018, Iran explored Africa's inter- and intra- continental trade potential. To avoid sanctions, Iran encouraged African states

(32) See for example "Muslim Traders in Ivory Coast Declare Readiness to Cooperate with Iran," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Azar 10, 1397, <https://www.irna.ir/news/83118026/تجار-مسلمان-ساحل-عاج-برای-همکاری-با-ایران-اعلام-آمادگی-کردند>.

(33) "Trade Exchange Volume between Iran, South Africa at Below \$100mn," *Mehr News Agency*, December 7, 2019, <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/153113/Trade-exchange-volume-between-Iran-S-Africa-at-below-100mn>.

(34) Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamed, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

(35) "Trade and Economic Relations Between Iran and Ghana Need to be Consolidated," *Tasnim News Agency*, Aban 10, 1397, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1397/08/01/1860146/روابط-تجاری-و-اقتصادی-ایران-و-غنا-نیاز-مند-تقویت-است>.

(36) Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 138–141.

to apply for international bank loans to advance projects using Iranian technical assistance, set up direct banking routes with Tehran, or consider expanding trade with Iran through Iraq, a country which was not under U.S. sanctions and worked closely with Iran. Simultaneously, Iran kept its eyes on Africa's future markets by seeking opportunities to work with a host of organizations and financial institutions, including the African Continental Free Trade Area, the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa, the East African Community, Southern African Development Community, the East Africa Tea Trade Association, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic Community of the Great Lakes States (CEPGL), Central Bank of West African States, Central African Economic and Monetary Community, West African Monetary Union, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).⁽³⁷⁾ Iran concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with other groups such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an eight-country trade bloc in Africa, to promote anti-piracy and anti-terrorism measures that enhance trade, combat illicit drugs, and build opportunities in the health and water resource management sectors. Furthermore, Iran's "resistance economy" called for the expansion of ties with the non-oil-producing countries of Africa.⁽³⁸⁾

To reach these markets, Iran convened regular meetings in Africa to condemn the sanctions regime against it, discussed ways to strengthen central bank ties with state-run African banks, and renewed talks with Rwanda, which hosted the launch of AfCFTA, to expand continental railway construction projects to facilitate trade with Iran. Simultaneously, Iran addressed ways to remove hurdles for trade purposes, including the revision of existing laws and regulations, the standardization of livestock management to enable Iran to import animals from Africa, the establishment of micro banking facilities and institutions, and the promotion of joint economic commissions. In addition, as Iran's Central Bank sought to expand relations with state-run African banks, Tehran engaged with the coastal states of Africa that offered good markets for

(37) "Head of Friendship Society of Iran and Ivory Coast: Transportation Costs Major Issue in Expanding Ties with Africa," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Aban 20, 1399, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82711876/> رنيس-انجمن-دوستي-ايران-و-ساحل-عاج-هزينه-حمل-و-نقل-مشكل-اصلي.

(38) "Signing of Memorandum of Understanding Between Iran and the IGAD Organization," *Mehr News Agency*, Dei 10, 1393, <https://bit.ly/39ZgWBI>; "Zarif in Uganda Declared: Cooperation Between Iran and Africa to Fight Terrorism," *Magiran*, Bahman 15, 1393, <https://www.magiran.com/article/3107044>; "Iran's Share of \$523 billion African Market is Less Than Half Percent."

trade and commerce and better strategic and geopolitical opportunities for Iranian access to the high seas and Africa's heartland.

By October 2020, the barter of goods and the implementation of agricultural, technical, and engineering projects accounted for the bulk of Iran's economic activities in Africa. Iran exported US\$160 million in goods to Africa, despite U.S. sanctions and the pandemic. This figure marked a decrease in trade compared to 2019, when Iran exported goods worth US\$366 million to the continent. The top ten importers of Iranian products in order of priority were Ghana, Cameroon, South Africa, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, the Ivory Coast, and Algeria. Iran imported US\$20 million in goods from Africa. Iran's main exports to Africa included yogurt drinks, milk, cream, dairies, dates, food pastes, chalk, cement, carbon, metal sheets, construction material, glass, iron sticks, aluminum, acids, pistachio, perfume-making flowers, licorice juice, and extract, medical equipment, seeds, and oily fruits. It also exported paraffin, motor oil, raisins, tar, biscuits, chemical products, and Vaseline. Iran imported from Africa agricultural seeds, high-fat food, plant-based oils, chlorine, detergent extract, spare parts for industrial-scale auto manufacturing, clutch pads, packaging containers, medical equipment, sesame seeds, tobacco, industrial sheets, and rolls. In addition, it received sunflower seeds, tea, palm oil, phosphates, and tropical fruits from the continent.

Furthermore, Iran entered into talks to set up trade centers in the continent and regular maritime trade routes. It also expressed interest in exporting technical and engineering services to Africa and developing the continent's urban water management system, construction business, industrial factories, and agricultural sector. To this end, Iran's Trade Promotion Organization entered into talks with a number of the Gulf Arab states, which it regarded as its traditional trade partners, to expand port and maritime facilities to enable Iran's trade with Africa. Experts in Iran recommended that the country use the opportunity to reach Africa's more remote markets where competition was limited—namely, in East Africa. Reaching North or West African markets was more demanding for Iran. Experts also encouraged Iran to leverage the Shi'i business community in Africa to consolidate trade partnerships.⁽³⁹⁾

(39) "Iran's 7-Month Exports to Africa," *Donya-e-Eqtesad*, Azar 1, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3mzaAxG>; "Difficulties Expanding Trade Between Iran and Africa at Three Levels," *Eghtesad Online*, Dei 4, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3fWyzG4>; "Iran's Share of \$523 billion African Market is Less Than Half Percent."

Iran's Cultural Initiatives in Africa

Policy indifference—combined with a misplaced sense of superiority toward other developing countries—has restricted Iran's ability to readily connect with Africa on a cultural level. This stance reflects a revolutionary penchant in Tehran to discount complaints from African governments when problems arise. Iran prefers a “wait and see” approach, thereby “riding out” problems in the hope of a solution while maintaining diplomatic relations with the African countries. Iran has never wavered from the revolution's foreign policy goals of building strategic depth in the Middle East and Muslim countries farther afield. Tehran has therefore sought to cultivate ties with the African OIC member states, the continent's Islamic movements, and other anti-Western groups in Africa.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Iran's cultural interest in Africa has also reflected the revolution's apprehension about Western cultural influence over Africa's Christian populations, Iraq's ability to propagate the Ba'ath ideology in Africa, and Saudi Arabia's religious influence over African Muslim communities.

These trends threatened to raise anti-Iranian and anti-Shi'i sentiments across the continent. In response, Iran aimed to reduce the Western influence in Africa in an effort to rebuild the continent in a way that empowered Muslim communities with sympathies toward Iran's revolution. Mindful that many of Africa's leaders studied in Israel, Iran invited a larger pool of Africans to study in Iranian universities and religious seminaries. Encouraging Africans to embrace Shi'i Islam allowed Iran better access to these communities.⁽⁴¹⁾ Iran also openly questioned the Ba'ath ideological influence in North Africa, the Western missionary agenda on the continent, as well as Saudi cultural influence.

Despite limited evidence suggesting that Iran's mobilization of Shi'a in Africa triggers major security threats or is used to counter rival powers, Tehran does deploy supporters to bolster its power and influence to advance Iranian interests in Africa. Indeed, at times Tehran has abandoned its followers in Africa—namely, when it is distracted with other foreign policy priorities.⁽⁴²⁾ But it has also sought to boost ties with Africa's Sunni communities, seeking to build leverage. This

(40) “Why Does the Government Ignore Ties with Africa?” *Afkar News*, Bahman 6, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3uEILa2>.

(41) “A Look at Iran's Presence in the African Continent in Talks with Hojatollah Joudaki,” *Shoaresal*, Bahman 3, 1397, <https://bit.ly/2RpwdFz>.

(42) “A Look at Iran's Presence in the African Continent.”

move has not always met with success, given that many Sunni religious institutions in Africa shun any connection with Iran. To overcome this hurdle and build leverage, Iran has made wider contacts with African Shi'i institutions supported by charitable groups and individuals in Europe, the Arab world, and the Gulf Arab states, including Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

Iran considered the expansion of Shi'i Islam in Africa as a necessary step to counter the spread of extremist practices of Islam promoted through strict interpretations of the Sunni faith. As a result, Iran has built contacts with Islamic or liberation movements in Africa and nurtured those contacts over an extended period. The result has been an activist model of Islam in Africa that follows the Iranian revolutionary brand and a growing number of African converts to Shi'i Islam. The policy has also bolstered Iran's ability to reach out to Africans of other religious persuasions. Iran has skillfully deployed this influence to accumulate state-to-state contacts with the African capitals.

Tehran has also encouraged conversions to Shi'i Islam in Africa. Conversions increased following the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Iraq in 2003 and Saudi Arabia's crackdown on extremism following 9/11.⁽⁴³⁾ While Tehran has encouraged Africans to view the Iranian version of Shi'i Islam as a non-radical faith, this view was not shared by all. In fact, Iran's efforts to promote its revolutionary ideology in Africa have faced local resistance in most African countries and widened preexisting gaps that divided the African communities along ethnic, tribal, economic, and religious lines.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Although an increased number of converts have been attracted to Iran's revolution, most Africans have shunned it and followed the more moderate and widespread forms of the practice of Islam in the Sunni faith, often promoted by the Egyptian Al-Azhar University and Lebanese preachers who better understood the non-Iranian Muslim world.

Not surprisingly, Iran's efforts to influence Africa's religious landscape have stirred local disputes between Muslims and Christians as well as Muslim communities of Sunnis and Shi'a.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The majority of the African countries found it hard to deal with Iran's policies, particularly

(43) Jonathan Laurence, "Commentary: In Sunni North Africa, Fears of Iran's Shiite Shadow," *Reuters*, October 27, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-commentary-laurence-afterislamicstate/commentary-in-sunni-north-africa-fears-of-irans-shiite-shadow-idUSKBN1CV376>.

(44) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(45) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

in North and West Africa, where IS and Sunni radicalism have been more pervasive. African countries in these regions have sought to contain Iranian actions.

These challenges—combined with the fact that the Shi‘i influence in Africa predated the Iranian Revolution—have resulted in mixed results for Iran vis-à-vis propagating Shi‘i Islam. With few exceptions, the African Shi‘i communities, especially those who converted to Shi‘i Islam under Iranian influence, received only general training about the faith and were not seen by Iran as true converts. Africa’s leaders have generally preferred to maintain a separation between state and religion, which curtailed Iran’s ability to encourage the Shi‘i practice. Furthermore, Iran was competing with a host of rivals with considerable cultural influence in Africa, including Arab states such as Iraq, Libya, and Saudi Arabia.

Finally, Tehran’s influence over the Shi‘i communities that belong to different schools of the faith influenced by the Ismailis and Zaidis—or follow Shi‘i communities in Lebanon, the Gulf Arab states, and the Indian subcontinent—has been limited. In fact, Africa’s multi-faith fabric, which led to moderate practices within the Sunni faith, and in a host of tribal and animism belief systems in parts of the continent, meant that Iran’s Shi‘i influence in Africa remained limited. As a result, Iran could not even mobilize the Shirazi and small Baluchi communities of Iranian descent in East Africa, which had integrated into the local culture.

To overcome these hurdles, Tehran has combined its agenda of exporting the revolution to the continent with cultural and educational programs. Iran has organized art exhibits and promoted the Iranian language and literature. It has simultaneously projected a charming and inclusive image of its cultural revolution in Africa and a desire to accommodate Africa’s diverse cultures. Widespread racism toward Africans has assisted Iran in this process, as have more recent movements such as Black Lives Matter, which Iran has frequently referenced to remind Africans that it embraces inclusion, unlike the United States.

The gradual proliferation of Iranian-backed cultural and religious activities and Islamic political institutions in Africa has increased Iran’s soft power influence. Iran has cultivated ties with the African communities through a host of charitable and humanitarian organizations, including

the Iranian Red Crescent Society, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly, and branches of the Al-Mustafa University, which the United States imposed sanctions on in 2020. Iran also looks to North Africa's Berber culture and traditional practices, which have Shi'i roots. Tehran believes this could help Iran's influence, especially in North Africa. According to the Iranians, it was a region with deep sympathies for Shi'i Islam and one in which a large number of Shi'a resided but practiced *taqiyyah* to conceal their faith and avoid persecution.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Given this outlook, an Iranian preacher in Africa said he believed that the continent could re-emerge as a Shi'i stronghold in the future.⁽⁴⁷⁾

(46) "Interesting Story by Former Iran Ambassador to Morocco over Sudden Break up of Ties," *Khabar Online*, Ordibehesht 18, 1397, <https://bit.ly/2PNMRy2>.

(47) "History of Shiism in Africa Goes Back to Age of Advent of Islam," *Hawzah Official News Agency*, Esfand 13, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3d0e2yu>.

Iran's Bilateral Relations in Africa

This section of the report moves to a detailed discussion of the evolution and current development of Iran's bilateral relations with each of the fifty-four African states. The countries are presented alphabetically.

The Democratic Republic of Algeria

Algeria declared support for Iran's new revolutionary government by dispatching a special envoy to expand relations with Tehran in 1979. When United States–Iran relations broke down after revolutionaries stormed the American embassy in November 1979, Tehran asked Algeria to serve as Iran's Interest Section in Washington D.C. Algeria played a critical role in negotiations that led to the 1981 release of the American hostages held captive in Iran. Tehran–Algiers relations slowly flourished through 1989 under the ruling Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), which embodied religion as a central rallying point for opposition groups. But in 1992–1993, Iran's ties with Algeria deteriorated following the victory of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in local city elections led by figureheads such as Abbasi Madani, whom Iran respected. Algiers' subsequent dismantling of the Front—and the eruption of local conflict—led to charges that Tehran was secretly arming and financing Algerian Islamist fighters. Iran dismissed the charges, but the Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran radio program frequently broadcast sympathetic stories about the FIS military wing—namely, the Islamic Army for the Salvation of Algeria (ISA)—which led Algiers to bar Iranian reporters from entering the North African country.⁽⁴⁸⁾

In the 1990s, other violent Islamist groups fighting FIS emerged in Algeria. Between 1991 and 2002, the country descended into civil war, leading to the so-called Black Decade, which marginalized the Iranian influence over Algerian opposition groups. Still, Tehran maintained sympathy for Algeria's post-colonial plight and its challenges of state-building. As a result, even after Algeria broke off diplomatic relations with Iran in 1993, it briefly

(48) Mohsen Pakayeen, "A Look at the History of Iran's Relations with the African Continent," *AFRAN*, Shahrivar 31, 1389, <http://www.afiran.ir/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=785>; Hadi Zargari, "A Look at Relations between Iran and Algeria from Onset to Present Time," *AFRAN*, Aban 29, 1389, <http://www.afiran.ir/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=874>; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Algeria: Information on the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and its Possible Involvement in Violent and Terrorist Activities* (February 1, 1995), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ad1518.html>.

retained a representative in Tehran. In subsequent years, Algeria's relative isolation from the international community, and the election of Iran's reformist president Mohammad Khatami in 1997, helped revive the ties between Algiers and Tehran. The two capitals bonded by promoting joint cultural and educational activities, which involved the recitations of Persian and Arabic poetry, the exchange of students and academics, and Quranic recital competitions. In 2000, Algiers and Tehran decided to resume diplomatic relations during meetings held on the sidelines of the UN Millennium Summit.⁽⁴⁹⁾

In 2007, relations again turned cold when Algiers opened investigations into two Shi'i groups run by Sunni converts around Mascara in northwestern Algeria and Iranian support for the conversion of Sunnis into Shi'i Islam. The Algerian Shi'i community—though relatively small in number at approximately 20,000 adherents—increased in number due to the conversion of Algerian Sunnis to Shi'i Islam. In response, the Algerian government monitored the country's Shi'i population by demanding the formal registration of their faith.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Iran attempted to revive its ties with Algeria following the Arab Spring uprisings in North Africa in 2011.⁽⁵¹⁾ As the frequency of local protests in Algeria picked up, peaking in 2019, Iran continued to support the country's political processes and new presidential elections. Nevertheless, Tehran simultaneously attempted to broaden its support base among the opposition Algerian Islamic groups, including Sunnis and Shi'a, which Tehran believed would remain a significant political force as Algeria underwent gradual reforms.⁽⁵²⁾

Algiers and Tehran coordinated their political stances on several issues during the period of flourishing relations. During the Iran–Iraq War, Algeria attempted to mediate the dispute. Algiers

(49) Hadi Zargari, "A Look at Relations between Iran and Algeria from Onset to Present Time," Hana Saada, "Bright Horizons for Deeply-Rooted Iranian-Algerian Relations with Both Sides Considering No Limit for Cooperation," *Tehran Times*, October 6, 2019, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/440838/Bright-horizons-for-deeply-rooted-Iranian-Algerian-relations>.

(50) "Shia Groups Proselytize in Western Algeria," *Algeria Events*, January 6, 2007, <http://www.algeria-events.com>, cited in CORI Research Analysis, *Algerian Sunni Converting to Shi'ite Sect of Islam* (March 2, 2009), 4–5, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/49c75c6c5.pdf>.

(51) Salahudin Khadiv, "Return of Arab Spring," *IRDiplomacy*, Farvardin 22, 1398, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1982684/بازگشت-بهار-عربی>; Saber Gol Anbari, "Is Egypt's Bitter Experience Awaiting Sudan and Algeria?" *IRDiplomacy*, Farvardin 26, 1398, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1982773/آیا-تجربه-تلخ-مصر-پیش-روی-سودان-و-الجزایر-است>.

(52) "Amaziqi Identity and Political Dispute in Algeria," *IRDiplomacy*, Tir 17, 1398, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1984715/هویت-آمازیغی-و-نزاع-سیاسی-در-الجزایر>.

declared support for Iran's peaceful nuclear program in the post-war period and worked with Tehran to align positions on crucial foreign policy issues, including Palestine and Syria in the NAM. Tehran briefly attempted to use Algeria's traditional mediating role in the Middle East to rebuild its ties with the Gulf states and resolve its tensions with Saudi Arabia.⁽⁵³⁾ In addition, Tehran entertained building an alliance with Algeria to fight terrorist groups, including IS and al-Qaeda.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Algeria and Iran upheld the Palestinian cause, reached a level of convergence over a political future for Yemen that is inclusive of the Houthis, and rejected the normalization of relations between the Muslim states and Israel.

Iran placed a premium on its ties with Algeria, which it saw as the most stable and strongest country in North Africa from both a military and security standpoint and a potential gateway for expanding its naval presence in Mediterranean waters. In 2004, Algeria and Iran convened talks to increase military and defense cooperation.⁽⁵⁵⁾ In 2011, Algeria asked to expand military cooperation with Iran, and the two countries facilitated frequent meetings between the military attaches serving in their respective embassies in Algiers and Tehran.⁽⁵⁶⁾ In 2018, Morocco charged that Iran and Hezbollah were arming the Polisario Front through Algeria. In 2019, Algeria and Iran continued to hold discussions to increase port and maritime cooperation to boost trade.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Algeria remained helpful to Iran as a trade partner, and the two countries inked dozens of economic agreements. In 2008, bilateral trade doubled from US\$25 million in the previous year to US\$50 million, and Algiers and Tehran increased mutual investments in the energy, industrial, banking, pharmaceutical, medical, and agricultural sectors.⁽⁵⁸⁾ In 2009, Iran, Eritrea, and Algeria agreed to boost trilateral investment and economic projects.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Algiers and Tehran

(53) "Algeria, a Mediator of Crises," *IRDiplomacy*, Ordibehesht 9, 1394, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1946880/الجزائر-میانجی-گر-بحران-ها>.

(54) "Ghana's President to Visit Tehran," *IRDiplomacy*, Shahrivar 3, 1394, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1951338/رییس-جمهور-غنا-به-تهران-می-آید>.

(55) Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Algeria-Iran Foreign Relations," *Critical Threats*, May 9, 2010, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/algeria-iran-foreign-relations#_ftn6.

(56) "Algerian Officials Seek More Military Cooperation between Tehran and Algeria," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Khordad 4, 1390, <https://www.irna.ir/news/7911824/مقام-الجزایری-خواستار-همکاری-هرچه-بیشتر-نظامی-تهران-و-الجزیره>.

(57) "Examination of Cooperation Areas in Ports and Maritime Between Iran and Algeria," *Khabar Online*, Mehr 30, 1398, <https://khabarban.com/a/25546586>.

(58) Hana Saada, "Bright Horizons for Deeply-Rooted Iranian-Algerian Relations with Both Sides Considering No Limit for Cooperation."

(59) Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Eritrea-Iran Foreign Relations," *Critical Threats*, January 17, 2009, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/eritrea-iran-foreign-relations>.

continued to ease customs regulations, and coordinated economic policies in the NAM and the G-15 informal forum, convened talks to expand cooperation in housing, urbanization, water resource management, and transportation, and explored options for bartering goods.

In 2015–2017, Algeria and Iran concluded agreements between their respective youth and sports ministries and agreed to expand relations between their labor ministries. In 2017, Algeria was Foreign Minister Zarif’s first destination in his Africa tour, where he discussed Syria, the Gulf crisis, and economic relations. Algeria and Iran finalized eight cooperation agreements during the Joint Iran-Algeria Economic Cooperation Commission meeting that year.⁽⁶⁰⁾ In January 2019, Algeria and Iran set up a parliamentary friendship group and agreed to expand cooperation between their religious scholars and endowment organizations, hold Quranic meetings, and promote cultural activities, including in the film industry.

In addition, Algeria and Iran increased cooperation in manufacturing and mining. Automakers Tahkout from Algeria and SAIPA, Rahmouni, and Iran Khodro in Iran set up assembly and manufacturing lines in Algeria, and Yazd Tire in Iran exported 50,000 car tires to Algeria. The two countries further conducted geological surveys to expand cooperation in Algeria’s mining sector. They convened regular meetings to standardize trade levels, promote joint trade exhibits, produce pharmaceutical drugs and medical equipment, develop joint educational and sports programs, promote youth and labor exchanges and programs, expand media exchanges and activities, invest in joint tourism, build the justice systems of the two countries, and increase cultural activities. Tehran also explored opportunities to export gas across Algeria and expand gas production and liquified natural gas projects with the North African country.⁽⁶¹⁾ But the weakening of the Iranian position in OPEC following sanctions and falling oil prices encouraged Algeria to open up its economy to countries in the Arab world that Iran considers its rivals, including Saudi Arabia. It remains to be seen if this move will adversely affect Iran’s ability to trade with the North African country.

(60) Hana Saada, “Bright Horizons for Deeply-Rooted Iranian-Algerian Relations with Both Sides Considering No Limit for Cooperation;” “Barter; A Path to Expand Trade Ties with African Continent.”

(61) Saada, “Bright Horizons for Deeply-Rooted Iranian-Algerian Relations;” Salahudin Khadiv, “Return of Arab Spring;” Saber Gol Anbari, “Is Egypt’s Bitter Experience Awaiting Sudan and Algeria?”

The Republic of Angola

Iran viewed Angola as a frontline state in the fight against apartheid and established formal ties with Luanda in 1985. Iran's ambassadors to South Africa served as accredited representatives to Angola. In 1986, Iran's then-president, Ali Khamenei, visited Angola to offer financial aid to the country and seek Luanda's support during the Iran–Iraq War.⁽⁶²⁾ In the following years, Tehran sought Luanda's vote to defend Iran's nuclear program, which it compared to Angola's long fight against colonialism. In addition, Iran attempted to sway Angola to defend the Syrian government as it consolidated its position against local armed groups in 2018 and as Iran attempted to expand its access to maritime routes from the Iranian-operated Syrian ports in the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean. Iran valued Angola as a top-ranking African destination to reach international waters.⁽⁶³⁾

As the seventh-largest country and second-largest oil producer in Africa, Angola worked with Iran to boost oil prices in OPEC, while Iran used Lebanese business people to market Iranian oil in the African country.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Moreover, as one of the largest economies in Africa's southern Sahara region, with rich mineral resources, Angola was seen by Iran as an emerging African economy. But Angola–Iran economic ties remained limited. Iran exported handicrafts and sold public transportation vehicles to Angola and allowed Indian and Lebanese business people to promote Iranian products in the African country's markets.⁽⁶⁵⁾

In 2008, as Iran struggled with UNSC sanctions, it called on Angola to promote cooperation with it in South–South development forums and the energy, housing, health, and education sectors.⁽⁶⁶⁾ In 2009, Angola and India bought into the Iranian National Oil Company's South Pars Phase 12 project. Sociedade Nacional de Combustíveis de Angola (Sonangol) took a 20 percent stake in

(62) "Examination of 30 Years of Ties Between Iran and Africa;" "Meeting of Iran Accredited Ambassador with Foreign Minister of Angola," *International Television News Agency of Iran Pars*, Esfand 24, 1396, <https://farsi.iranpress.com/iran-il24477>.

(63) "Iran Accredited Ambassador Gives Credentials to President of Angola," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Esfand 4, 1391, <https://www.irna.ir/news/80555463/انگولا-جمهور-آنگولا>; سفیر-آکرودیتة-ایران-استوارنامه-اش-را-تسلیم-ر-نئیس-جمهور-آنگولا; R. Allahverdizadeh, et al., "Establishing Connection Between State Access to Sea and Human Development Indices," *Geographic Research Quarterly*, Year 33, No. 1 (Spring 1397), <http://georesearch.ir/article-1-523-en.pdf>.

(64) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; "Willingness of Two Countries of Iran and Cameroon to Develop and Strengthen Relations," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Ordibehesht 19, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3uyHaCQ>.

(65) "Angola Ties with Iran" *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=325>.

(66) "Expansion of Iran Relations with Angola, Namibia in Energy, Trade and Health," *Mehr News Agency*, Aban 22, 1387, <https://bit.ly/3tgFxt2>.

the US\$7.5 billion venture before being forced to leave Iran due to sanctions on its energy sector.⁽⁶⁷⁾ In 2010, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned a Hezbollah financial network and business operating in Angola and working on Iran's behalf.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Following the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, held meetings with Angola to boost cooperation in various fields, including pharmaceuticals, engineering, and technology. Tehran sought new opportunities to reach markets in Angola via South Africa and invest in Angola's oil and mining sectors.⁽⁶⁹⁾ But Luanda's superior relations with Iran's competitors threatened to slow prospects of deeper trade relations with Tehran after the re-imposition of sanctions against Iran in 2018.

Iranian cultural activities in Angola were limited, given the African nation's small Muslim population.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Moreover, Angola introduced measures to control the spread of Islam and Muslim activities, particularly where these were perceived as potentially radicalizing Angolan society. But Islam grew in Angola, and Angola's local Muslim community set up prayer houses and mosques, although a number of them were closed down.⁽⁷¹⁾

The Republic of Benin

Following the revolution, Iran established ties with Benin for the first time. Tehran believed that the Sub-Saharan African nation was an important partner given its significant Muslim population and membership in the NAM and the OIC. Benin supported Iran's positions in international forums during the Iran–Iraq War and abstained or refrained from voting against Iran at the UN when it passed resolutions condemning Iran's human rights record. In the 1980s, Iran sought the support of Benin's Muslim community in its efforts to contain Israel's influence in the African country and joint calls for Israel's expulsion from the United Nations.⁽⁷²⁾

(67) Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Angola-Iran Foreign Relations," *Critical Threats*, March 2, 2010, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/angola-iran-foreign-relations>.

(68) U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Treasury Targets Hezbollah Financial Network* (September 12, 2010), <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg997.aspx>.

(69) "New Opportunities to Expand Iran Relations with South Africa," *Public Policy Studies Network*, Mordad 12, 1395, <http://npps.ir/articlepreview.aspx?id=91659>; "Win-Win Trade With Iranian Economic Investment in the African Continent," *Khaneh Mellat*, Mehr 20, 1397, <https://bit.ly/3d4rCki>; "Zarif's Meeting with Angola Foreign Minister," *Eghtesad Online*, Mordad 16, 1396, <https://www.eghtesadonline.com/بخش-اقتصاد-کلان-3/210524-دیدار-ظریف-با-وزیر-خارج-جه-آنگولا-عکس>.

(70) "Meeting of Iran Accredited Ambassador with Foreign Minister of Angola."

(71) "Islam in Angola," *International Quran News Agency*, <https://bit.ly/320Tb7W>; "Angola, First Country to Ban Religion of Islam," *Shafaqna*, <https://af.shafaqna.com/FA/042767>.

(72) "Iran Ties with Africa," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=404>; *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; "Expansion of Iran Ties with Angola and Namibia in Energy, Trade and Health," *Mehr News Agency*, Aban 22, 1287, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/781873/گسترش-روابط-ایران-با-آنگولا-و-نامیبیا-در-انرژی-تجارت-و-بهداشت>.

In 2005, President Khatami traveled to Benin to expand political and economic relations. But relations cooled during Ahmadinejad's presidency when Iran sought to buy uranium from the African country. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Treasury identified the so-called "Joumma networks"—Iranian and Hezbollah-linked financial networks led by the operative Ayman Joumma—which operated in Benin by setting up corporate entities and car dealerships and intended to lead policies and financial operations harmful to U.S. and Israeli security interests.⁽⁷³⁾ In 2013, Benin and Tehran convened talks to consolidate relations, which picked up after the Iran nuclear deal. In recent years, Porto-Novo and Tehran agreed to hold talks on the Middle East conflicts and address radicalism, terrorism, armed conflicts, and violence in the region.⁽⁷⁴⁾

(73) Eric Halliday, “Iran and Hezbollah’s Presence Around the World,” *Lawfare*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/iran-and-hezbollahs-presence-around-world>; Reza Tagizadeh, “Iran’s Infiltration Diplomacy in Africa Stalling in Movement.”

Iran cultivated ties with Benin in Islamic conferences and Benin's local Shi'i community, which is of Lebanese descent. Iran revived Shi'i traditions in Benin by holding religious events in the African country, which facilitated conversions to Shi'ism. In addition, Iran built hospitals, clinics, charitable organizations, schools, preaching centers, and cultural institutes in Benin, including a branch of the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly. Young people from Benin with high school diplomas received scholarships to study in Iran.⁽⁸⁰⁾ In recent years, Benin and Iran agreed to exchange religious scholars and university faculty members.⁽⁸¹⁾

The Republic of Botswana

Iran agreed to establish relations with Botswana for the first time after this southern African country abstained from voting in favor of a UN measure against Iran's human rights record in 1990. But Gaborone and Tehran disagreed over the former's decision to maintain official relations with Israel and ignore Iran's positions on the Palestinian issue, despite voices in the ranks of the opposition Botswana National Front calling for ending relations with Tel Aviv. According to cable reports, Botswana did not want Iran to open an embassy in the African nation and took steps to cancel a friendly match with the Iranian football federation in June 2009, which it then reluctantly agreed to hold.

Economic relations between Botswana and Iran remained limited to holding joint trade fairs in the early part of the relationship. Iran gradually expanded non-oil trade with Botswana, including in the agricultural, car manufacturing, petrochemical, technological, medical, infrastructure, tourism, and telecommunications sectors. With oil, gas, and coal of its own, and the ability to meet its energy needs from the Central African Republic, Botswana had little need for Iran's energy supplies. Botswana remained a high-risk investment destination for Iran, and the two countries generally avoided implementing joint projects. The Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly has reported that Botswana has a significant Shi'i population within its small Muslim community.⁽⁸²⁾

(80) Reza Tagizadeh, "Iran Penetration Diplomacy in Africa Has Stopped Moving."

(81) "Expansion of Relations with African Countries Is a Principle of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

(82) "Khama Would Not Allow Iran to Open Embassy," *Mmegi Online*, <https://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=1&aid=149&dir=2011/September/Wednesday7/>; Ministry of Oil, *Republic of Botswana: Energy Economy Information* (Shahrivar 1392), <https://www.mop.ir/portal/file/showfile.aspx?id=7525b05f-af5b-4587-948e-ccab499c8a3f>; "Shia Islam in Botswana," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia_Islam_in_Botswana; "Guinea Bissau Seeks Cooperation with Iran in Car Manufacturing and Steel Industry," *Khaneh Mellat*, Bahman 3, 1396, <https://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/367238/> گینه-بیسائو-خواستار-همکاری-با-ایران-در-حوزه-صنایع-خودروسازی-و-صنایع-فولاد; Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 146.

Burkina Faso

Iran has monitored the status of Burkina Faso's majority-Muslim population and regarded the African country as a terrorist hotspot. Tehran has frequently expressed concern over weak citizenship rights for Muslims, including the Lebanese community residing in Burkina Faso and the country's Shi'i community, which has grown due to conversions from the Sunni Maliki faith. Tehran saw these groups as important partners in expanding the Iranian influence and fighting militant Islamic groups in West Africa. As a result, Iran invested in building more extensive West African networks to support its interests in the region. For example, the Nigerian Islamic Movement with links to Iran has supporters in Burkina Faso.⁽⁸³⁾

Following the Arab uprisings in 2011, which Iran said was partly due to an Islamic awakening shaping in North Africa, Tehran expected a similar awakening to shape in Burkina Faso. The African country was ripe territory for unrest, given its large and disenfranchised Muslim population and the fact that it lost its traditional financial patron in North Africa—namely, Muammar el Qaddafi, who was ousted from power in Libya in October 2011. As a result, Tehran embarked on a new round of talks with Ouagadougou to address its concerns over increased attacks against Muslims and mosques in Burkina Faso.⁽⁸⁴⁾

In addition, Iran remained concerned about the operations of a host of radical groups such as Ansar al-Islam, al-Qaeda, and IS in the northern regions of Burkina Faso, where fighters were also recruited by the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Iran was also perturbed by Burkina Faso's ceding the battleground to these militant groups mostly since 2018, despite a French-led military operation and the G5 Sahel Joint Force (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), which has been combating the insurgents in Operation Barkhane since 2014.⁽⁸⁵⁾

(83) Baqeer Gashua, "We Are Not IMN! We are Muslims," *ABNA*, December 20, 2017, https://en.abna24.com/news/article/we-are-not-imn-we-are-muslims_873333.html; "Nigeria: Army Attack on Shia Unjustified," *Human Rights Watch*, December 22, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/22/nigeria-army-attack-shia-unjustified>; "As Trump Makes Threats, Iran Makes Friends," *Bloomberg*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-03-08/as-trump-makes-threats-iran-makes-friends>.

(84) "Coups or Undemocratic Power Transition in Burkina Faso," *IRDiplomacy*, Aban 22, 1393, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1940496/گودنا-پاروند-غیردموکراتیک-انتقال-قدرت-در-بوركینافاسو>.

(85) Eleanor Beevor, "ISIS Militants Pose Growing Threat Across Africa," *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, June 2, 2020, IISS, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/06/csdp-isis-militants-africa>.

Burkina Faso retained an accredited ambassador to Iran, and Tehran maintained working relations with the ECOWAS, of which Burkina Faso is a member. The association includes fifteen countries and covers a population of 340 million people.⁽⁸⁶⁾ As a result, over the years, Tehran has sought to expand talks with Ouagadougou in the technical and engineering sectors and encouraged the African nation to use Iranian anti-terrorism expertise to enable Iran to reach West African markets better. To this end, Iran held parliamentary-level security talks with Burkina Faso in 2018. The parliaments of the two countries further expressed interest in leading joint projects to promote women's rights.⁽⁸⁷⁾ In 2018, Tehran once again sought to boost relations with Burkina Faso, following the re-imposition of sanctions by the United States against Iran.

Burundi

After the revolution, Iran's oil exports to Burundi helped Tehran expand ties with other countries in Africa, including Cameroon, Chad, and the Central African Republic, all of which invited Iranian investments to develop their infrastructure.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Following the end of Burundi's civil war in 2005, and even though the African country had only a small Muslim population, Iran warmed up to the idea of opening an embassy in Gitega to expand relations. The embassy was established in 2010, but many critics in Iran questioned whether relations with Burundi warranted such a heavy investment given that the African country did not have an embassy in Tehran.⁽⁸⁹⁾ In 2014, Iran reached out to Burundi in an attempt to develop joint plans to fight extremism, violence, and terrorism. In 2017, Iran sent an accredited ambassador to Gitega and re-affirmed its commitment to helping build stability in the African country.⁽⁹⁰⁾

(86) "Efforts of Islamic Republic to Develop Ties with African Countries," *Student News Network*, Esfand 18, 1397, <https://snn.ir/fa/news/751301/های-آفریقایی-است-80٪E2%80%8Cتلاش-جمهوری-اسلامی-توسعه-روابط-با-کشور>.

(87) "Stress on Expanding Political and Economic Ties Between Iran and Burkina Faso," *Khaneh Mellat*, Dei 10, 1396, <https://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/366374/تأکید-بر-گسترش-ارتباطات-سیاسی-و-اقتصادی-میان-ایران-و-بورکینافاسو>.

(88) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; "Iran and Cameroon Will to Advance and Consolidate Ties."

(89) "Burundi, Iran's New Step Toward Africa," *Khabar Online*, Khordad 8, 1389, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/64557/بروندی-گام-جدید-ایران-به-سمت-آفریقا>; "Ambassadors and Diplomats of Foreign Countries: We Welcome Strengthening Ties with Iran," *Entekhab*, Mordad 28, 1394, <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/221646/سفر-و-دبلیلمات-های-کشور-های-خارجی-از-تحکیم-روابط-با-ایران-استقبال-می-کنیم>; Ministry of Oil, Republic of Burundi: Country Energy Economy Information (Mordad 1392), <https://www.mop.ir/portal/file/?31264-گزارش-92.05.12-کشور-ی-بوروندی-و-برایش-سایت>.pdf.

(90) "Zarif: Iran Ready to Cooperate with Friendly Countries to Fight Terrorism," *Kayhan*, Bahman 15, 1393, <http://kayhan.ir/fa/news/36826/ظریف-ایران-آماده-همکاری-با-کشور-های-دوست-برای-مبارز-میان-رو-رسم-است>; "Iran New Envoy Submits Credentials to Burundi's President," *The Iran Project*, July 2, 2017, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2017/07/02/iran-new-envoy-submits-credentials-burundis-president/>; "Zarif: Iran Supports Political Stability in Burundi," *The Iran Project*, August 15, 2016, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2016/08/15/zarif-iran-supports-political-stability-burundi/>.

Unhappy with the low level of ties with Gitega and the lack of joint projects, Tehran offered incentives, including fair energy deals to help develop Burundi's oil and gas sector. But after holding joint meetings, and despite Burundi earlier urging Iran to share its experience in the energy sector, no major agreement was reached to cooperate in the oil sector. Tehran then offered Gitega opportunities to expand tourism, engage in educational exchanges, and enhance cooperation in the NAM. In 2013, the two countries signed trade agreements in the agricultural, technical, health, education, investment, commercial, and diplomatic sectors. Iran proposed to help Burundi generate electricity and import gasoline.⁽⁹¹⁾ In an attempt to revive ties in 2014, Iran sought new investment opportunities in Burundi. After Iran finalized the nuclear deal in 2015, Gitega showed renewed interest in Iranian investments and invited Iran's business community to Burundi. In 2015, Foreign Minister Zarif traveled to Burundi.⁽⁹²⁾

In 2016, Burundi and Iran agreed to expand university-level scientific and educational contacts. At least eight students from Burundi commenced studies in Iran's top-ranking universities. In addition to their specialized field studies, students received education about Iran's revolution. Burundi further showed interest in promoting Iranian culture and the Persian language.⁽⁹³⁾ Iran continued to cultivate relations with Burundi's Muslim and Shi'i populations, encouraged blood donations during Shi'i ceremonies, and sent physicians to set up clinics in the African country. In one case, an Iranian physician turned down an offer to work in Burundi after its local authorities refused to name a health clinic after Imam Reza, a Shi'i imam revered in Iran.⁽⁹⁴⁾ In general, Burundi aimed to prevent stirring divides between its Shi'i and Sunni communities, given the history of relative peace between the followers of the two faiths.

(91) "Burundi, Iran's New Step Toward Africa;" "Ambassadors and Diplomats of Foreign Countries: We Welcome Strengthening Ties with Iran;" "Republic of Burundi: Country Energy Economy Information."

(92) "Zarif: Iran Ready to Cooperate with Friendly Countries to Fight Terrorism."

(93) "Development of Iran and Burundi University Ties," *Iranian Students' News Agency*, Tir 172, 1395, <https://www.isna.ir/news/95040106583>; توسعه روابط دانشگاهی-ایران و-بروندی: "Admitting Non-Iranian Students in University of Malayer for Second Semester of 94-95," *Malayer University*, <https://malayeru.ac.ir/portal/home/?news/20926/79249/46745/>-دوم-سال-برای-نیمسال-سال-پذیرش-دانشجویان-غیر-ایرانی-در-دانشگاه-ملایر-برای-نیمسال-دوم-سال-تحصیلی-94-95.

(94) "The Physician Who is Ambassador of Imam Reza in African Country," *Rahyafteha*, Azar 28, 1393, <https://rahyafteha.ir/11031/>ن.پزشکی-که-سفیر-امام-رضا-علیه-السلام-در-کش

The Republic of Cameroon

Ties between Cameroon and Iran have remained limited. Nevertheless, Tehran retained an accredited ambassador in the West–Central African country, while Cameroon’s ambassador in Riyadh was accredited to serve in Tehran. But Cameroon and Iran did not conclude any significant agreements in the years following the revolution. In 2017, Yaounde and Tehran held talks to consolidate relations between the two countries and invite Iranian companies to operate in the African country. Cameroon and Iran further discussed ways to coordinate regional and international efforts to fight terrorism and radicalism. But Cameroon’s relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia have been much closer.⁽⁹⁵⁾

Following the revolution, with help from Burundi, Iran attempted to assist Cameroon with oil exports and investments in its infrastructure sector. Iran also exported furniture, rugs, electronics, petrochemical products, clothing items, shoes, and decorative objects to Cameroon. A member of the NAM and the OIC, with a significantly sizeable Muslim population (mainly Sunnis), Cameroon’s Muslim leaders participated in regional and international events in Iran and made calls to strengthen unity in the Muslim world.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Iran has supported Shi‘a in Cameroon, who are free to hold gatherings and ceremonies, and launched publications to promote the faith. The Nigerian Islamic Movement—with up to three million members—has links to Iran and encourages conversions to Shi‘i Islam. The movement is believed to have supporters in Cameroon, which has increased the government’s sensitivities over the movement’s activities.⁽⁹⁷⁾

The Republic of Cape Verde

As a member of the NAM, Cape Verde has sought to maintain friendly relations with all the organization’s member countries, including Iran. In 2016, Iran appointed its representative in Senegal as its accredited ambassador to Praia, which welcomed the Iran nuclear deal.⁽⁹⁸⁾ In

(95) “Willingness of Two Countries of Iran and Cameroon to Develop and Strengthen Relations;” “Cameroon Ties with Iran,” *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=599>.

(96) “Cameroon Ties with Iran;” *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; “Willingness of Two Countries of Iran and Cameroon to Develop and Strengthen Relations.”

(97) Baqeer Gashua, “We Are Not IMN! We are Muslims;” “Nigeria: Army Attack on Shia Unjustified;” “As Trump Makes Threats, Iran Makes Friends.”

(98) “Appointment of Iran Accredited Ambassador to Cape Verde,” *Iranian Students News Agency*, Mordad 10, 1395, <https://bit.ly/3wJd7tS>.

the subsequent two years, seeking to elevate the level of trade ties with Cape Verde, Iran's Chamber of Commerce encouraged Iranian traders and entrepreneurs to participate in Cape Verde's international trade exhibits.⁽⁹⁹⁾ In 2020, authorities in Cape Verde arrested Alex Nain Saab Moran, a Colombian trader close to Venezuela and Iran who the United States indicted on money laundering charges. The arrest came when Moran attempted to fly to Iran on a personal jet via the island nation. The arrest came weeks after Iran's oil tankers reached Venezuela as part of an oil barter plan designed to avoid U.S. sanctions ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

The Central African Republic (CAR)

Following the revolution, Iran sought Burundi's help to export Iranian oil and invest in the CAR.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Iran remained interested in the CAR's uranium deposits, some located in conflict-prone uranium-mining towns. Tehran reportedly attempted to buy the uranium concentrate powder known as yellowcake from Bangui.⁽¹⁰²⁾ The CAR is on Iran's terrorist watchlist. In 2013, civil strife in the CAR between a small Muslim minority and a large Christian majority impeded Iran's ability to influence the African country. Iran has remained concerned by the massacre of Muslims in the CAR and the violence perpetrated in the African country by radical Islamic groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the IS. In 2019, security forces in the CAR arrested a member of Iran's Quds Force while uncovering the Saraya Zahara network, which ran operations in Chad, Sudan, and Eritrea. The network was believed to help pro-Iranian African leaders reach positions of political prominence and influence in the continent.⁽¹⁰³⁾

The Republic of Chad

Chad's geographic location as a conflict-prone, landlocked, and vastly desert country surrounded by neighbors that experienced frequent conflicts prevented Iran's easy access to the Sub-Saharan

(99) Letter of Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture of Iran, <http://khdccima.ir/namayeshgah-2/>.

(100) "A Colombian Businessman Said to be on His Way to Iran is Arrested in Cape Verde on request by U.S.," *RFI*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/fa/20200614-یک-تاجر-کلمبیایی-که-گفته-می-شود-راهی-ایران-بوده-با-در-خواست-آمریکا-در-کشور-دماغه-سبز-باز-داشت-شد>.

(101) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; "Willingness of Two Countries of Iran and Cameroon to Develop and Strengthen Relations."

(102) "L'Uranium Centrafricain Conduit Bozizé à Vouloir Jouer dans la Cour des Grands" [Central African Uranium Leads [François] Bozizé to Want to Play in the Big Leagues], *Centrafrique-Presse Online*, April 19, 2010, <http://centrafrique-presse.over-blog.com/article-l-uranium-centrafricain-conduit-bozize-a-vouloir-jouer-dans-la-cour-des-grands-48866866.html>.

(103) "Iranian Terror Network Exposed in Central Africa," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 18, 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iranian-terror-network-exposed-in-central-africa-587339>.

country.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Still, Tehran sought to expand its ties with the poverty-stricken African nation given its majority population of Muslims.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Iran's Red Crescent Society delivered aid to Chad when it faced famine and offered to build infrastructure in the African country.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ In 2016, N'Djamena and Tehran agreed to expand cooperation in the health and pharmaceutical sectors and use the Iranian Red Crescent Society's pool of nearly two million trained humanitarian volunteers to meet Chad's aid and disaster relief needs. To this end, the Iranian Red Crescent Society called for an agreement with Chad's Red Cross to prevent diseases, set up health training courses, and prepare for disasters in the African nation.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Iran has built influence in Chad by addressing the African country's conflicts, albeit in ways that serve Iranian security interests. For example, the Iran-linked Nigerian Islamic Movement has supporters in Chad. The movement is claimed to operate paramilitary training camps while encouraging conversions to Shi'i Islam.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ In 2017, Chad sided with Saudi Arabia by severing its ties with Qatar, which hampered Iran's ability to consolidate diplomatic relations with N'Djamena. Chad's experience with armed uprisings led by Sunni extremists and terrorist groups in the northern and eastern parts of the country, and its renewed security ties with Israel, gave Iran even fewer opportunities to expand bilateral relations.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Iran viewed Chad as a terrorist hotspot given its proximity to the conflicts in Libya and Sudan and the activities of groups such as Boko Haram and IS in Chad and around the Lake Chad basin neighboring Niger, Nigeria, and the CAR. In 2019, Chad security forces uncovered an Iranian-backed network called the Saraya Zahara, which was known to support emerging African leaders close to Tehran.⁽¹¹⁰⁾

(104) "Israel in the Black Continent-6," *Tasnim News Agency*, Esfand 17, 1398, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/12/17/2214207/اسرائیل-در-قاره-سیاه-6-مترفندهای-نتانیاهو-در-گسترش-مناسبات-با-آفریقا>.

(105) "President Stresses Closer Iran-Chad Ties," *DSW*, August 10, 2014, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2014/08/10/president-stresses-closer-iran-chad-ties/>.

(106) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(107) "Expansion of Cooperation in Pharmaceuticals and Health Between Iran and Chad," *Mehr News Agency*, Tir 20, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3dPPtDs>.

(108) Baqeer Gashua, "We Are Not IMN! We are Muslims;" "Nigeria: Army Attack on Shia Unjustified;" "As Trump Makes Threats, Iran Makes Friends."

(109) "Israel in the Black Continent-6."

(110) "Iranian Terror Network Exposed in Central Africa."

The Union of the Comoros (also known as the Comoro Islands)

Comoros hosts immigrants from the Gulf region, including a business community of Iranian descent. But civil war, which raged in 1993–1994 and again in 1997–1999, impeded Iran’s outreach to the country. Following its civil war, Moroni enjoyed cordial relations with Tehran, and Iran offered Comoros US\$2 million in loans to build 500 housing units.⁽¹¹¹⁾ Iran’s clerical establishment views Comoros as a nation ripe with opportunities to embrace Shi‘i Islam, given its community of immigrants from the Gulf region and the Indian subcontinent. In 2006, Iran set up a cultural center in Moroni called the Al-Thaqalain to select and send students from Comoros to Iranian religious seminaries.⁽¹¹²⁾

Under President Ahmad Abdullah Mohammad Sambi—who led the island nation from 2011 to 2016—Comoros drew closer to Iran. The government of President Sambi, who had Iranian bodyguards and previously studied in the Iranian seminary city of Qom, issued some 300 passports to Iranian nationals. New passport owners included senior managers in Iran’s transportation, oil and gas, metals, and foreign currency exchange sectors. In addition, Comoros briefly allowed its embassy in the UAE to issue passports valid for two months to Iranians visiting the island nation. A member of the Arab League, the small island nation broke its ties off with Iran in 2016, after Iranian mobs attacked the Saudi embassy in Tehran. In 2018, Comoros canceled some 100 passports previously issued to Iranians after increased international concerns that its passports were being used to circumvent sanctions.⁽¹¹³⁾

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (known as the Republic of Zaire until 1997) has a significant Muslim population that Iran sought to influence. In addition, the African country’s proximity to the anti-apartheid front states of Angola and Zambia made it immediately attractive

(111) “Laughter Over Djibouti or Cry for Iran?” *Radio Farda*, Mehr 7, 1399, <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f8-iran-saudi-and-where-is-djibouti/27468606.html>.

(112) Najla’ Mar’i, “Iran in the Face of the International Scramble for Africa,” *Journal for Iranian Studies*, Year 1, Issue 2 (March 2017): 55-69, <https://rasanah-iiis.org/english/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/06/Iran-in-the-Face-of-the-International-Scramble-for-Africa.pdf>, citing Alikhtiraq Alirani Alna’im fi Africa: Wama’alatih Ala Alomah Alarabiah fi Zil Alrabee’ Alarabi fi “Alomah Wama’rakat Alta’ifah,” *The 13th Strategic Report for the Arabian Center for Humanitarian Studies*, Cairo: *Arabian Center for Humanitarian Studies*, 2016, 375–378; “History of Shiism in Africa Goes Back to Age of Advent of Islam.”

(113) “As Sanctions Bit, Iranian Executives Bought African Passports,” *Reuters*, June 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/iran-passports-comoros/>; “100 Iranians With Passports from the Comoros Islands,” *Tabnak*, July 1, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3mAP6AS>.

to Tehran after the Iranian Revolution.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ But Tehran admonished Zaire for building ties with Israel, and in protest, retained a temporary staff at its embassy in Kinshasa until 1986.⁽¹¹⁵⁾

Still, Iran donated to projects benefiting the local Muslim communities in Zaire and sought opportunities to expand trade with the African country in the mining and oil sectors, at times through swap deals.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Kinshasa subsequently supported Iran's positions in the NAM and other international bodies. In addition, the two countries engaged in talks to expand cooperation in the nuclear field. In 2006, a shipment of uranium originating from the DRC was intercepted in Tanzania. Officials in Kinshasa rejected that they had shipped uranium to Iran, but some reports pointed to lax security in the Congolese nuclear plants and uranium mines. In 2008, the DRC supported International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) measures to resolve international tensions over the Iranian nuclear file to express solidarity with Iran's nuclear program. The DRC and Iran entered into talks to expand economic relations and signed two MoUs the following year. The two countries proceeded to hold joint meetings to cooperate in the energy and infrastructure sectors, build power plants, and develop the mining, industrial and agricultural sectors.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

In 2010–2011, the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned businesses linked to Hezbollah operating in Africa. Specifically, the U.S. Treasury identified the aforementioned “Joumma networks” moving money around the DRC and elsewhere on Iran's behalf.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Trade remained a pivotal concern for Kinshasa and Tehran. Following the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal, the two capitals engaged in talks to expand trade ties. But international sanctions on Iran and Israel's increased influence in the DRC threatened to slow down the expansion of economic

(114) Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamed, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

(115) “Zaire Ties with Iran,” *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=387>.

(116) Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamed, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

(117) Ariel Farrar-Wellman, “DR Congo-Iran Foreign Relations,” *Critical Threats*, September 25, 2009, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/dr-congo-iran-foreign-relations>, citing “Iran Bid to Get Congo Uranium,” *The Australian*, August 7, 2006; Jon Swain, et al., “Iran's Plot to Mine Uranium in South Africa,” *Sunday Times*, August 6, 2006, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article601432.ece>; Chris McGreal, “Congo Nuclear Chief Held Over Uranium Sale,” *The Guardian*, March 9, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/mar/09/congo.chrismcgreal>; Statement On The Islamic Republic Of Iran's Nuclear Issue, 15th Ministerial Conference Of The Non-Aligned Movement, Tehran, July 27–30, 2008; “Iran Determined To Strengthen, Expand Ties With Africa – Minister,” *IRNA*, November 18, 2008; “Global Change Should Benefit Peoples,” *Iran Daily*, February 18, 2009, <http://www.iran-daily.com/1387/3344/html/national.htm#s364422>.

(118) Ariel Farrar-Wellman, “DR Congo-Iran Foreign Relations;” Chris McGreal, “Congo Nuclear Chief Held Over Uranium Sale;” Eric Halliday, “Iran and Hezbollah's Presence Around the World.”

relations between Kinshasa and Tehran. In 2020, Iran explored sending construction material to the DRC.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ The DRC and Iran also maintained cultural ties, including in the film industry.⁽¹²⁰⁾

The DRC is on Iran's list of terrorist hotspots, given the central African country's intermittent civil strife between 1996 and 2003. Predicting that the DRC could turn into a center of global terrorism and attract greater Western influence to control rebel fighting, Iran monitored activities by IS and other terrorist groups in the country. Specifically, Iran remained concerned that the IS could move into Africa quicker after its defeat in Syria, despite the group's military setbacks across the continent.⁽¹²¹⁾ The merging of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) in the central Sahel region with the ISWAP—another IS branch operating in the Lake Chad basin—added to Iran's concerns about the stability of this central African country.⁽¹²²⁾ In April 2019, the Allied Democratic Forces, with ties to Uganda and seeking to build an Islamic state, attacked the small northeastern town of Beni in the DRC. The Congolese army's engagement with the rebels increased Iranian concerns about the merging of terrorist groups in central Africa.

The Republic of the Congo

Iran sought relations with the minority Muslim and Shi'i communities in the Republic of the Congo. But Congo's civil wars in 1993–1994 and 1997–1999 impeded Iran's ability to influence the country. In more recent years, Iran's Red Crescent Society sought opportunities to work with Congo's Red Cross to expand the African country's health sector. It also offered to send volunteers to build health clinics and promote disaster relief education, and dispatch drones and ambulances to help with relief aid in the Congo. In addition, Iran's Red Crescent Society's team from Kinshasa in the DRC were ready to dispatch to Brazzaville.⁽¹²³⁾ But the Congo's renewed ties with Israel threatened to restrict Tehran's ability to strengthen bilateral relations with Brazzaville.

(119) "Africa in Latest Destination for Iranian Construction Material," *Iranian Students' News Agency*, Aban 13, 1399, <https://www.isna.ir/news/99072014886/اfrica-جدیدترین-مقصد-مصلح-ساختمانی-ایران>.

(120) "An Iranian Director Heads Kinshasa Festival Judges," *Khabar Online*, Shahrivar 22, 1399, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1431621/یک-کارگردان-ایرانی-رییس-هیأت-داوران-جشنواره-مکینشاسا-شد>; "Summer Trade Agreements with Foreigners," *Bourseiness*, Khordad 27, 1395, <https://www.bourseiness.com/breaking-news/22369>.

(121) "2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism."

(122) Eleanor Beevor, "ISIS Militants Pose Growing Threat Across Africa."

(123) "Iran Red Crescent Society Health Center Ready to Operate in the Congo," *Pishkhan*, Mordad 17, 1396, <https://www.pishkhan.com/news/33828>.

In 2013, Iran aimed once more to expand cooperation with Brazzaville given its relatively prominent role in promoting stability in Sub-Sahara Africa, potentially granting Iran opportunities to increase its influence in the region. Iran specifically offered its assistance to implement technical and industrial projects in the Congo.⁽¹²⁴⁾ A year later, Iran expressed readiness to help the Congo build oil refineries and cooperate in petrochemical projects. Brazzaville invited Tehran to share its expertise so the West African country could boost the capacity of its legislative bodies.⁽¹²⁵⁾ In 2018, faced with sanctions, Iran renewed its outreach to the Congo by urging the government to expand relations in all sectors and to reopen embassies in the two capitals.⁽¹²⁶⁾ In 2019, the Iran–Congo Parliamentary Friendship Group hosted a delegation from Tehran to strengthen ties and condemned unilateral measures taken to punish Iran due to the sanctions regime against the country.⁽¹²⁷⁾

The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

The Ivory Coast maintained ambassadorial relations with Tehran following the Iranian Revolution, and Iran kept a representative in the port city of Abidjan. Relations between the two countries broke down after Tehran gave the Ivory Coast embassy a month to close when the West African country resumed ties with Israel in 1986. Following years of diplomatic negotiations, the Ivory Coast and Iran agreed to resume relations and reopen embassies in 1995.⁽¹²⁸⁾

Iran values the Ivory Coast's strategic location and its ports on the Atlantic Ocean, and its railway infrastructure, which connects to neighboring countries. Following the resumption of ties, the Ivory Coast and Iran took part in trade exhibits to promote economic relations. However, the Ivory Coast's superior relations with Israel impeded Iranian access to the West African country.⁽¹²⁹⁾

(124) "Iran's Deputy FM, Foreign Minister of Congo-Brazzaville Discuss Bilateral Ties," *Tasnim News Agency*, November 11, 2013, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2013/11/11/190210/iran-s-deputy-fm-foreign-minister-of-congo-brazzaville-discuss-bilateral-ties>.

(125) "Iran Ready to Cooperate with Congo in Building Refineries," *Tasnim News Agency*, March 8, 2014, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2014/03/08/306977/iran-ready-to-cooperate-with-congo-in-building-refineries>.

(126) "Must Expand Relations Between Tehran-Brazzaville," *Borna News*, Esfand 18, 1397, <https://www.borna.news/بخش-سیاسی-3/821946-باید-روابط-تهران-بraz-اول-را-گسترش-دهیم>.

(127) "Congo Keen on Expanding Ties with Tehran: Ambassador," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, March 7, 2019, <https://en.irna.ir/news/83234336/Congo-keen-on-expanding-ties-with-Tehran-Ambassador>.

(128) "Ivory Coast Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=479>.

(129) "Israel in the Black Continent-6," "Ivory Coast Relations with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=479>.

In 2016, Yamoussoukro and Tehran discussed ways to increase Iranian investments in the West African country in the energy sector, automobile industry, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment industry, and agriculture. The Ivory Coast sought further Iranian investments in the technical fields of computer science, mining, telecommunications, and oil and invited the Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran to visit the port city of Abidjan to probe prospective areas of economic cooperation.

In 2018, to fight sanctions, Tehran attempted to boost its economic ties with Yamoussoukro. A year later, the Ivory Coast National Union of Savings and Credit Cooperatives (COOPEC) visited Iran to boost trade. Iran expressed interest in receiving agricultural products from the Ivory Coast.⁽¹³⁰⁾ But it remained concerned by high transportation costs to reach markets in the Ivory Coast and explored barter arrangements with the African country. Still, the Iranian agricultural sector produced cotton on 150 hectares of land in the Ivory Coast, which was sold immediately on ships for transfer to other markets. The two countries further explored opportunities to build up the capacity of friendship associations to expand ties and promote the promising “Silkworm Butterfly” project, which enabled the Iranian Basij Organization to expand the private sector’s ability to increase government subsidies to boost exports to the Ivory Coast. To fight sanctions, Yamoussoukro and Tehran have explored setting up micro banking services and continue to hold joint economic commission meetings. Finally, the Ivory Coast and Iran have examined ways to boost relations in sports and the film industry.⁽¹³¹⁾ Iran has further promoted cultural activities in the Ivory Coast and hosted an art exhibit from the African country in Tehran.⁽¹³²⁾

Iran has remained concerned about the spill-over effects of the Ivory Coast’s ongoing internal conflict on neighboring countries and has continued to support the local Muslim population.

(130) “Côte d’Ivoire Seeks Boosting Trade Ties With Iran,” *Tehran Times*, May 10, 2019, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/435685/Côte-d-Ivoire-seeks-boosting-trade-ties-with-Iran>; “Iran Eyes Growing Ties with Ivory Coast,” *Tasnim News Agency*, August 7, 2018, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2018/08/07/1796159/iran-eyes-growing-ties-with-ivory-coast>; “Iran, Côte d’Ivoire Keen on Boosting Trade Relations,” *Mehr News Agency*, November 16, 2016, <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/121381/Iran-Côte-d-Ivoire-keen-on-boosting-trade-relations>.

(131) “Head of Friendship Society of Iran and Ivory Coast: Transportation Costs Major Issue in Expanding Ties with Africa,” *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Aban 20, 1399, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82711876/اصلی-مشکل-و-نقل-محمل-و-هزینه-حمل-عاج-هزینه-حمل-و-نقل-مشکل-اصلی>; “Barter; A Path to Expand Trade Ties with African Continent.”

(132) “Côte d’Ivoire Art Exhibition Underway in Tehran,” *IFP News*, December 14, 2018, <https://ifpnews.com/cote-divoire-art-exhibition-underway-in-tehran>.

Tehran's support for the Ivory Coast's Shi'i population led to Iranian financial assistance to set up societies and Islamic universities in the African nation. Students from the Ivory Coast subsequently traveled to Iran to study in its religious seminaries. In addition, Tehran maintains an Islamic library and a seminary in the Ivory Coast and has backed Muslim figures demanding political reforms and power-sharing with Christians in the African country.⁽¹³³⁾

Tehran further expressed its concern over weak citizenship rights for Muslims in the Ivory Coast, including the rights of the growing Shi'i community in the country, which has sought inspiration from Iran. Specifically, Tehran remained concerned by the victimization of Ivory Coast Muslims during the civil war there in 2002–2007.⁽¹³⁴⁾ By 2016, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly had resumed its activities in the Ivory Coast, promoted Shi'i matrimonial ceremonies, and held regular meetings with local Shi'i, Sunni and Sufi leaders, religious scholars, and prayer leaders, in an attempt to neutralize what the organization termed an "enemy conspiracy" against Muslims in West Africa. In addition, the Shi'a is helping to operate a seminary in Abidjan to accommodate the city's growing Shi'i community, which includes a mosque, seminary classrooms, and dormitories.⁽¹³⁵⁾

The Republic of Djibouti

After the revolution, Iran saw Djibouti as a strategic gateway into Africa and the Red Sea and a bridge to the Arabian Peninsula. Tehran specifically hoped that Djibouti's under-developed infrastructure would lead the African country to welcome Iranian construction projects. The Iranian embassy in Mogadishu served Iranian interests in neighboring Djibouti. But Djibouti's relative isolation post-independence in 1977, its preoccupation with security in the Horn of Africa, its membership in the Arab League, and civil war in the early 1990s encouraged only a gradual opening with Tehran. As a result, the Iranian Red Crescent Society became the primary arm of diplomacy with Djibouti by delivering aid locally for years.

(133) Mohammad Reza Haji Karim Jabbari, "Muslims, Victims of the Ivory Coast Crisis," *IRDiplomacy*, Esfand 16, 1389, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/10578/عاج-ساحل-بحران-قربانیان-مسلمانان>.

(134) Mohammad Reza Haji Karim Jabbari, "Muslims, Victims of the Ivory Coast Crisis," *IRDiplomacy*, Esfand 16, 1389, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/10578/عاج-ساحل-بحران-قربانیان-مسلمانان>.

(135) "Head of Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly Meets Shia, Sunni Scholars of Ivory Coast," *ABNA*, November 7, 2019, <https://en.abna24.com/service/africa/archive/2016/11/07/790288/story.html>; "Photos: Arbaeen Mourning Ceremony at Al Ghadir Center in Abidjan, Ivory Coast," *ABNA*, October 13, 2020, <https://en.abna24.com/news/photos-arbaeen-mourning-ceremony-at-al-ghadir-center-in-abidjan-ivory-coast1077874.html>; "Hawzah Building at Abidjan," <https://www.tahafunder.com/ivorycoastschool>.

Over the subsequent years, Iran has helped build local infrastructure in Djibouti, including its parliament building.⁽¹³⁶⁾

In 1997, Tehran and Djibouti City agreed to expand the operation of Iranian companies and the private sector in the African country during talks held in Tehran on the sidelines of an OIC summit meeting that marked Iran's gradual rapprochement with members of the Arab League. The following year, Djibouti appointed its ambassador in Yemen as its accredited representative to Tehran. Djibouti's president Esmail Omar Guelleh subsequently traveled to Iran twice in 2003 and 2006.⁽¹³⁷⁾ In 2008, Tehran's ambassador in Ethiopia was appointed as an accredited representative to Djibouti and Somalia. Djibouti consistently avoided voting against Iran's human rights record at the UN, defended a peaceful Iranian nuclear program, and welcomed expanding ties with Tehran as the Iranians shifted their attention and investments away from Somalia when the country descended into chaos.⁽¹³⁸⁾

After 2001, the U.S.-led global war on terrorism pushed Tehran to expand its security influence in Djibouti while tracing terrorist operations across East Africa and the Horn region by groups such as al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab. Iran subsequently enlisted Djibouti's help to increase the Iranian presence in the Horn region.⁽¹³⁹⁾ By 2008, Iran expanded its anti-piracy operations in the Red Sea, raising concerns over its ability to ship Iranian arms to the Houthis in Yemen via Djibouti's ports. Reports further pointed to the presence of Iranian warships in the Red Sea.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

Tehran further attempted to use Djibouti's ports and airports as alternative routes to export its oil through the Bab-el-Mandab to the Suez Canal.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ Iran simultaneously extended a US\$10

(136) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(137) "Iran and Djibouti Relations," *Wikipedia*, https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/روابط_ایران_و_جیبوتی.

(138) Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 144.

(139) "Iran and Djibouti Relations."

(140) Hassan Msaddek, "The Challenges of Peace and Security in the Red Sea," *The Arab Weekly*, October 26, 2019, <https://the arabweekly.com/challenges-peace-and-security-red-sea>.

(141) "Djibouti, the Bab-el-Mandeb and Routes for Iranian Oil Tankers!!" *Eranico*, Dei 15, 1394, <https://www.eranico.com/fa/content/47063>; "Plane Carrying Iranian Crescent Aid to Yemen Landed in Djibouti," *MPO Helal*, Khordad 8, 1394, <http://www.mpo-helal.org/fa/news/1756/جیبوتی-نشیست-در-ایران-به-یمین-در-جیبوتی-نشیست>; "Djibouti, A Country Where Iran Built its Parliament, But Joined Saudi Coalition," *Khabar Online*, Khordad 3, 1394, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/419317/کشوری-که-پارلمانش-را-ایران-ساخت-اما-با-عربستان-ائتلاف-کرد>.

million loan to Djibouti.⁽¹⁴²⁾ In 2003, Iran agreed to fund and allow two Iranian companies to build Djibouti's new parliament building and a trade center supported by Iran's Chamber of Commerce after the two countries concluded a commercial cooperation agreement. In 2006, the two countries entered into talks to establish joint ventures to sell liquified natural gas (LNG) and fuel for two years and build up Djibouti's security and defense capabilities. Iran subsequently sent five Iranian-assembled Samand vehicles to Djibouti. In 2007–2008, Iranian officials visited Djibouti to expand economic ties, conclude diplomatic agreements that led to the lifting of diplomatic and service visa requirements, and sign a development agreement to build a technical and vocational training center in Djibouti. By 2009, Iran agreed to lift visa requirements for 30 days for Djibouti passport holders provided that the same treatment would be extended to Iranian passport holders.⁽¹⁴³⁾ In 2013, Djibouti appointed a new ambassador to Iran. In 2014, Iran inaugurated the opening of the Djibouti parliamentary building, constructed with Iranian loans that Djibouti failed to repay and designed by Iranian architects.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾

(142) “Djibouti: Iran Built its Parliament; It Joined the Saudi Coalition,” *Asr Iran*, Khordad 3, 1394, <https://www.asriran.com/fa/news/397425/جیبوتی-پارلمانش-را-ایران-ساخت-با-عربستان-اتلاف-کرد>; “Djibouti Did Not Return Money to Iran Given to Build Its Parliament,” *Tabnak*, Tir 11 1398, <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/909067/جیبوتی-پول-ساخت-پارلمانش-را-هنوز-به-ایران-نداده>.

(144) “Djibouti: Iran Built its Parliament; It Joined the Saudi Coalition.”

(146) “Djibouti, the Bab-el-Mandeb and Routes for Iranian Oil Tankers!!”; “Plane Carrying Iranian Crescent Aid to Yemen Landed in Djibouti.” “Djibouti, A Country Where Iran Built its Parliament, But Joined Saudi Coalition.”

(148) "Djibouti: Iran Built its Parliament; It Joined the Saudi Coalition."

Saudi Arabia and Iran increased in 2016, Djibouti insisted that it never wanted Iran to open an embassy in the African country to ensure that it would remain immune to Iranian interference.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ Still, Iran was able to increase its non-oil exports to Djibouti even after the collapse in their relations in 2016, when Djibouti sided with Saudi Arabia over a mob attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾

Following the break in its ties with Saudi Arabia, Iran sought more comprehensive access to the Red Sea. But its outreach efforts were hampered because of severed ties with Djibouti and the African country's increased military cooperation with Riyadh. Iran aimed to maintain its access to the high seas, despite a Saudi-led coalition of Muslim and Arab countries (including Djibouti) seeking to secure navigation routes in the Red Sea. Claiming not to be threatened by Djibouti's small military contribution to the IMCTC, Iran sought opportunities to informally retain contacts with Djibouti. However, the African country insisted that Iranian ships no longer dock in its ports.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Iran asserted that its goal was to deliver humanitarian aid for Yemen, some of which was diverted to ports in Djibouti, given the United Nations' verification and inspection mechanism.⁽¹⁵²⁾ By 2018, Djibouti took a firm stance against Iran by expressing support for Morocco's decision to end ties with the Islamic Republic. In 2020, Djibouti was said to be in talks with Israel to normalize relations, which promised to contain Iranian influence in the African country and the Red Sea region.

The Arab Republic of Egypt

Iran's condemnation of the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel signed in 1978 and Egypt's hosting of the deposed Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi after the Iranian Revolution increased tensions between Cairo and Tehran and led to the severing of diplomatic relations in 1980. Hoping to replace Egyptian influence in the Arab world, Iran vocally admonished Cairo over its foreign policy, backed Palestinian groups opposed to the Camp David Accords, honored the Islamist groups responsible for the killing of Egyptian President

(149) "Laughter Over Djibouti or Cry for Iran?"

(150) "Iran Non-Oil Exports to Djibouti and Sudan More than the UK and France," *Moqavemati News*, Mehr 24, 1397, <https://moqavemati.net/70211/صداوات-غيرنفتي-ايران-به-جيبوتي-وسودان/>.

(151) "Iran to Develop Nuclear Ship Propulsion Systems."

(152) "Djibouti: Iran Built its Parliament; It Joined the Saudi Coalition"

Muhammad Anwar Sadat in 1981, and named a street in Tehran after Khaled Eslamboli who carried out the assassination.⁽¹⁵³⁾

In the following years, Tehran saw the tensions in its ties with Cairo as an extension of larger problems in the Gulf waterway between Iran and its Arab neighbors and Egypt's desire to influence the region. Egypt criticized Iran's attempts to valorize and export its revolution. Specifically, it believed that Iran propagated Shi'ism and supported Shi'i cells in Egypt, and was responsible for setting up the North African country's first major Shi'i group. As a result, Egypt expanded ties with the Gulf Arab states to undermine Iran's regional influence and supported Baghdad during the Iran–Iraq War, reportedly sending 18,000 Egyptians to fight the Iranians. Furthermore, Egypt encouraged policies to pressure Iran to accept a ceasefire in 1986, as Israel intercepted arms shipments from Egypt to Gaza, believed to have originated from Iran.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾

Following the war, Iran returned Egyptian prisoners of war to Cairo, seeking to ease tensions. In subsequent years, Cairo and Tehran expanded their cultural ties toward a potential rapprochement. Iran invested in the Egyptian textile and industrial sectors, and Cairo offered Iran food products, construction materials, chemical products, metals, and engineering services. By 2001, the trade volume between Egypt and Iran stood at around US\$200 million. The two countries gradually expanded contacts through the OIC and other South–South initiatives, adopted joint stances on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, expressed concern over the consolidation of Turkish–Israeli relations, and developed an understanding over the need to maintain constructive relations with the Palestinians as Iran gradually accepted Egypt's superior role in the process.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾

After 9/11, Iran apprehended Egyptian rebels crossing its borders from Afghanistan who had joined al-Qaeda there and promised to prosecute them despite Cairo's demand that Iran extradite the Egyptian nationals. Cairo and Tehran continued a level of cooperation over regional issues to

(153) "Long Arms Rivalry – Iran, Israel and Sudan," *BBC Farsi*, April 3, 2009, https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2009/04/090403_he_iran_sucan.

(154) "Long Arms Rivalry;" "Somalia's Ties with Iran;" *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=453>; Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, *Bilateral Relations between Iran and Egypt: Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects for the Future*, 16–17, 21.

(155) *Bilateral Relations between Iran and Egypt: Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects for the Future*, 18–20, 27–28.

diffuse growing tensions in the Middle East after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ In 2008, as Iran expanded its anti-piracy operations, it hoped to lead joint anti-terrorism missions with Cairo in the Red Sea.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ In addition, Tehran sought alternative routes to export its oil through the Suez Canal with the agreement of the Egyptian authorities.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾

Iran subsequently sought to re-establish diplomatic ties with Egypt and export gas to the North African country. In 2011, political pundits in Tehran insisted that African countries facing uprisings following the Arab Spring (including Egypt) should build domestic peace by embracing relations with Iran, rejecting ties with Israel, avoiding close relations with major Western powers, and supporting Islamic movements. But despite a brief opening with Cairo after Mohamed Mohamed Morsi's presidency in 2012–2013 and a visit to Cairo by President Ahmadinejad during which he was attacked by a hurled shoe, Tehran failed to break the impasse in its ties with Egypt. President Morsi and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood were keen to explore ties with Tehran to position Egypt better in the Muslim world while keeping a healthy distance from Tehran, given Egyptian disenchantment with the Iranian revolutionary model. Recognizing that Iran's calls for closer ties in the wake of the Arab uprisings were falling on deaf ears, Iranian pundits argued that Egypt's uprisings were a kind of pre-mature revolution that would take time to mature into full revolution at some later date.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾

Despite challenges in their ties, Iran continued to view Egypt as a balancing force in Africa, given that Cairo was able to build relations with both Iranian allies in Syria and Iraq and with the Gulf Arab states that were keen to contain Iranian power. As a result, Tehran explored opportunities to engage in an effort to maintain safe navigation in the Red Sea while viewing the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula as a major terrorist hotspot that would require Iranian anti-terrorism monitoring in the years to come.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ But Egypt remained cordially distant from Iran, given

(156) *Bilateral Relations between Iran and Egypt*.

(157) Hassan Msaddek, "The Challenges of Peace and Security in the Red Sea."

(158) "Djibouti, the Bab-el-Mandeb and Routes for Iranian Oil Tankers!!"; "Plane Carrying Iranian Crescent Aid to Yemen Landed in Djibouti;" "Djibouti, A Country Where Iran Built its Parliament, But Joined Saudi Coalition."

(159) "Examining Iran-Egypt Ties: Structural Challenges," *AFRAN*, Shahrivar 6, 1393, <http://www.afiran.ir/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=3064>; "Iran's Ahmadinejad Attacked by Man with Shoe During Egypt Visit," *Toronto Star*, February 6, 2013, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/02/06/irans_ahmadinejad_attacked_by_man_with_shoe_during_egypt_visit.html.

(160) "2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism."

the lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and joined the Horn initiative with Saudi Arabia to build a Red Sea security alliance and the Saudi-led IMCTC.

By 2018, Egypt was Iran's largest trade partner in North Africa. The volume of trade remained at around US\$220 million, compared to Iran's overall trade with North Africa, which stood at US\$312 million. Iran retained its cultural influence in Egypt, where the Persian language remained popular as an academic field of study in at least over a dozen universities. Still, the trade with Egypt accounted for only 0.36 percent of Iranian exports, and there were no further guarantees that the trade could expand under a tight sanction regime against Iran.⁽¹⁶¹⁾

The number of Shi'a in Egypt, estimated at slightly over 650,000, enabled the population to perform Shi'i religious ceremonies and train Islamic scholars who influenced the Arab world. According to some sources, satellite networks played an important role in increasing conversions to Shi'i Islam in Egypt. Iran's revolution, and Hezbollah's position on Israel and support for Gaza, continued to win sympathizers across Egypt. The Egyptian Shi'a ran associations and attempted to set up the Unity and Freedom Party after the Arab uprising in 2011 to network with other rising political forces inside Egypt and run in future elections. Iranian religious scholars believed that Egyptian Shi'a were mainly Twelvers like the dominant Shi'i school of thought inside Iran.⁽¹⁶²⁾ Over the years, the al-Azhar attempted to bridge the gap between Shi'a and Sunnis by recognizing the Shi'i practice as a school of Islam. Still, Egyptian clerics were not united on the topic. Egypt continued to build mechanisms to be inclusive of its Shi'i population, but the Iranians believed that some Egyptian Shi'a practiced *taqiyyah* to conceal their identities.⁽¹⁶³⁾

In recent years, Egypt and Iran have held talks to promote cultural activities and tourism between the two countries and concluded an MoU on the issue. Iran subsequently dispatched

(161) Tabriz Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, *Study of African Continent 2* (Shahrivar 26, 1398), <https://www.tzccim.ir/News/524/-2آفریقا-بررسی-قاره.html>.

(162) "Growing Expansion of Shiism in Egypt According to Leader of al-Azhar: Report About Shia Activities in Egypt," *Shafaqna*, Azar 12, 1397, <https://fa.shafaqna.com/news/670712/>; Omar Halawa, "Egypt's Shias to Form Political Party, Run in Elections," *Egypt Independent*, September 18, 2011, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/egypts-shias-form-political-party-run-elections/>.

(163) "Egypt is Sunni as a Majority But Carries Shia Spirit," *Mehr News Agency*, 30, 1396, <https://bit.ly/2RmAcTd>; Rasool Soltani, "Shia World; Shias in Egypt," *Hawzah Net*, <https://bit.ly/2PFMqWD>.

a cultural attaché to Cairo. Although political disagreements between Cairo and Tehran have impeded the expansion of cultural activities, Iran has remained hopeful that a change of management in Egypt's cultural organizations could eventually lead to an opening with Tehran.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ Egypt and Iran participated in each other's Quranic recitation competitions, and the two countries have held talks to expand joint work on the technical and specialized aspects of Quranic studies and entertained establishing joint Quranic schools. Iran believed that Egypt's Quranic studies experts could help promote the Iranian Revolution's message in North Africa and the Arab world.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea

Iran's ties with Equatorial Guinea have been driven by a series of interests in multiple sectors. Despite the West African country's small Muslim population, Iran has sought its support to develop similar positions on international issues. In return, Equatorial Guinea has sought to develop its health sector with assistance from Iran. By 2008, Malabo and Tehran were making plans to expand development in the agricultural sector.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ In the 2000s, Iran offered Equatorial Guinea engineering and technological services and to build roads and dams for the African country.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ Tehran was criticized internally for investing time and money in the small and sparsely populated African nation. Still, it argued that ties with Malabo helped build influence in the NAM and the AU and expand South–South cooperation.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾

Equatorial Guinea and Iran joined the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) in 2008. Together, the two countries aimed to regulate gas prices, increase gas sales, and fight greenhouse gases. Iranian experts visited LNG facilities to exchange technologies and know-how. In 2017, after Equatorial Guinea became a full member of OPEC, Iran lobbied the country to sustain higher oil prices. Following the return of the U.S.-led economic sanctions regime against Iran in 2018, and

(164) "Meeting Between Tourism Deputy and Iran Cultural Attaché in Egypt," *Shabestan*, Aban 21, 1398, <http://shabestan.ir/detail/News/853576>.

(165) "A Look at the Cultural Grounds of Relations Between Iran and Egypt," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Bahman 11, 1391, <https://bit.ly/39ZsJzI>.

(166) "Iran's Readiness to Expand Development and Agricultural Ties with EG," *Mehr News Agency*, Aban 9, 1387, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/774226/آمادگی-ایران-برای-گسترش-روابط-عمرانی-و-کشاورزی-با-گینه-استوایی>.

(167) "Hosseini's Meeting with Statesmen in Gabon and Guinea," *Aftab*, Aban 12, 1387, <https://www.magiran.com/article/1734264>.

(168) "Mottaki's Response to Critics over Visits to Countries with a Population of a Few Hundred Thousand," *Khabar Online*, Azar 29, 1388, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/31480/پاسخ-مٹکی-به-چرايي-سفر-به-کشورهای-چندصد-هزار-نفری>.

during the 5th summit of the GECF a year later, Iran expressed readiness to expand cooperation with Equatorial Guinea in the agricultural, energy, and oil and gas sectors. To this end, it proposed to use alternative foreign currencies other than the U.S. dollar to work with Iran under sanctions.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾

Iran viewed Equatorial Guinea as an important partner in the fight against piracy and the promotion of safe navigation. As a result, Iran attempted to seek Equatorial Guinea's endorsement of the Hormuz Peace initiative suggested by President Hassan Rouhani to end tensions in the Gulf region following tanker attacks in the Gulf waterway in 2019.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ In addition, Equatorial Guinea had the potential to offer Iran safe sea routes to reach Venezuela, a country that was also sanctioned by the United States and is a member of the GECF. Equatorial Guinea's goal to expand African membership in the GECF promised to open new areas of cooperation with Iran on the continent. But in 2017, Malabo's outreach to the Gulf Arab states and Israel—combined with the sanction regime against Iran—threatened to weaken the ties between Equatorial Guinea and Iran.

The State of Eritrea

After the revolution, Iran supported Eritrean rebels fighting for independence from Ethiopia. Eritrean freedom fighters briefly set up an office in Tehran. But the office closed after Ethiopia and Iran improved their ties. Iran appointed its ambassador in Addis Ababa as an accredited ambassador to Eritrea when the new East African country gained its independence in 1993.⁽¹⁷¹⁾ In 2001, the U.S.-led global anti-terrorism war encouraged Tehran to build a security alliance with African countries to trace terrorist operations by groups such as al-Qaeda and later al-Shabaab. By 2005—when Tehran shifted its attention away from rival Somalia as the country descended into chaos—relations between Asmara and Tehran improved. Despite a brief setback in ties until then, Iran repaired its relations with Eritrea by sending its ambassador in Sudan as an accredited representative to Asmara.⁽¹⁷²⁾

(169) "Meeting of President's Economic Deputy with Resident of Equatorial Guinea," *Government Press*, Azar 9, 1398, <http://dolat.ir/detail/331298>; Ministry of Oil, Sanctions Threaten World Energy Security (Dei 9, 1398), <https://bit.ly/3s16HTL>.

(170) *Sanctions Threaten World Energy Security*.

(171) "Ethiopia Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=352>; *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(172) "Eritrean President Says Iran Has Undeniable Right to Nuclear Energy," *Tehran Times*, June 7, 2007, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/142583/Eritrean-president-says-iran-has-undeniable-right-to-nuclear>; Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 143–144.

In 2006, Tehran was accused of supporting Islamization programs in Eritrea, the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement, and funding Eritrean Islamic courts.⁽¹⁷³⁾ The Hawzah (the institutions of religious seminaries in Iran) confirmed that the country retained soft power influence over Eritrean Muslims, including its small Shi'ite population. In 2007, Eritrea endorsed Iran's right to obtain nuclear energy and said that the Iranian nuclear advancement was a source of pride for the African nation.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ In 2009, Iran, Eritrea, and Algeria agreed to expand trilateral investment and economic opportunities.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ In addition, Iran's Red Crescent Society delivered aid to Eritrea and offered to bolster the African country's local infrastructure.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾

In the following years, Eritrea's international isolation led the African country to offer its ports to the Iranian navy. Iranian ships visited the ports of Massawa and Assab.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ Iran expanded its anti-piracy operations in the Red Sea using the Assab port, but in the process, raised concerns over its ability to potentially ship Iranian arms to the Houthis in Yemen through this improved access to the Red Sea.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ Eritrea began lifting itself out of international isolation by 2014 and moved away from Iran after the UAE and Saudi Arabia stepped up diplomatic and commercial engagements with the African country. This led to Arab-led investment and security initiatives in the Assab port and a peace deal between Eritrea and neighboring Ethiopia and Djibouti. In 2016, after Riyadh severed ties with Tehran, Iran sought wider access to the Red Sea, a strategy frequently articulated by its army and the IRGC, by insisting on leading anti-piracy operations to facilitate Iranian trade through the Suez Canal. But Iran's attempts to build up naval ports in the Red Sea were hampered by Eritrea's decision to sever diplomatic ties.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ Eritrea subsequently joined talks with other Horn countries, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to boost a region-wide Red Sea security alliance.

(173) Lefebvre, "A New Scramble."

(174) "Eritrean President Says Iran Has Undeniable Right to Nuclear Energy," Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 143–144.

(175) Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Eritrea-Iran Foreign Relations," *Critical Threats*, January 17, 2009, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/eritrea-iran-foreign-relations>.

(176) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(177) "Iran Steps Up Support for Houthis in Yemen's War – Sources," *Reuters*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/exclusive-iran-steps-up-support-for-hout-idUSKBN16S22R>.

(178) Hassan Msaddek, "The Challenges of Peace and Security in the Red Sea."

(179) "Iran to Develop Nuclear Ship Propulsion Systems."

The Kingdom of Eswatini (formerly the Kingdom of Swaziland)

In Eswatini, Iran donated to projects to support the African nation's small Muslim communities of mainly South Asian origin. In the process, Iran sought opportunities with Eswatini to expand trade in the mining and the oil sectors, at times through swap arrangements, encouraged by the African country's landlocked status neighboring South Africa and Mozambique, which retain friendly ties with Tehran.⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ But Eswatini's unique kingship and tribal culture, along with two capital cities of Lobamba and Mbabane, mean Iran has had few incentives to engage with the small African country beyond the broader frameworks of its ties with countries in the southeastern part of the continent. Iran's ambassadors to South Africa have also been accredited to Eswatini. In 2016, following the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal, Eswatini held talks with Tehran to expand counter-terrorism ties.⁽¹⁸¹⁾ Eswatini continued to attract Iran's attention, given its proximity to South Africa's markets, and has cultivated relations with Tehran. Reports revealed that the African country was mulling re-exporting arms purchased on international markets to Iran.⁽¹⁸²⁾

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Ethiopia was one of the first countries in the Horn region to congratulate Iran for its revolution and call for the expansion of ties with Tehran. Iranian officials and clerics frequently traveled to Ethiopia to build relations, and Ethiopia shut down its embassies in Prague, Athens, and Kinshasa, reallocating resources for a new embassy in Tehran. Iran simultaneously developed contacts with Islamic groups in Ethiopia and cultivated ties with Addis Ababa through frequent meetings with Ethiopian officials whose country hosts the AU. Iranian measures led Addis Ababa to condemn Iraq's aggression and use of chemical weapons against Iran during the Iran–Iraq War. Addis Ababa further agreed to sell spare airplane parts to Tehran to meet some of Iran's wartime needs.⁽¹⁸³⁾

In 2001, the U.S.-led global war on terrorism encouraged Tehran to expand its security influence in Africa. In the Horn region, Iran maintained its relations with Ethiopia while

(180) Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamed, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

(181) "Rouhani: Iran is Prepared to Expand Relations with African Countries," *Iran Pars International News Agency*, Mordad 15, 1396, <https://farsi.iranpress.com/iran-i90122>.

(182) "WikiLeaks Cables: UK Blocked \$60m Arms Deal Over Fears of Iran Link," *The Guardian*, February 23, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/23/wikileaks-cables-arms-deal-swaziland>.

(183) "Ethiopia Ties with Iran;" *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

tracing terrorist operations across East Africa by groups such as al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab.⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ But Ethiopia's superior relations with Israel hindered the expansion of security ties between Addis Ababa and Tehran.⁽¹⁸⁵⁾

Tehran hoped that the reforms introduced in Ethiopia under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali, who was elected to office in 2018, might boost the relationship with Ethiopia. To this end, Iran insisted that the two countries enjoyed good political relations and welcomed cooperation on pressing international issues. Tehran was pleased by Ethiopia's support for the Iran nuclear deal, and it urged the African country to use the opportunity to boost trade with Tehran. Iran further said that its positions were similar to Ethiopia's regarding the conflict in Yemen. Iran called for a ceasefire and non-military political intervention to end the Yemen conflict, while Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed called on all parties to cease the war and urged Yemenis to solve the dispute through negotiations. Iran said it shared positions with Ethiopia over the need to fight terrorism and that the two countries faced similar challenges in this sphere, given Ethiopia's concerns over the crisis in Somalia and Iran's concerns over conflicts in the Middle East. Iran further reminded Ethiopia of its experience and ability to crush IS in Iraq and Syria in an effort to encourage Addis Ababa to use Tehran's counter-terrorism expertise.⁽¹⁸⁶⁾

In the 1990s, Ethiopia expanded ties with Iran in the oil, energy, mining, and agricultural sectors. It agreed—subject to existing laws—to trade needed commodities with Iran to the extent possible. Ethiopia also sought to facilitate mutual business opportunities, participate in joint trade exhibits, hold commercial and business workshops with Tehran, and invite Tehran to meet Ethiopia's financial needs by purchasing construction material from the African country and expanding relations between the respective Chambers of Commerce.⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ In 2005, Iran sought to strengthen cooperation with Ethiopia in different fields, including the agricultural sector, machinery for farms, road construction, trade, education, and the private sector.⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ In 2016,

(184) Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 144.

(185) "Iran, Ethiopia Keen to Expand Investment, Trade Relation," *Sudan Tribune*, February 15, 2005, <https://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article8027>.

(186) "Ethio-Iranian Relations: Old Kingdoms in the New Era," *The Reporter*, February 23, 2019, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/ethio-iranian-relations-old-kingdoms-new-era>.

(187) "Ethiopia Ties with Iran," *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(188) "Iran, Ethiopia Keen to Expand Investment, Trade Relation," *Sudan Tribune*, February 15, 2005, <https://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article8027>.

Ethiopian exports to Iran were around US\$2 million, and Iranian exports to Ethiopia were nearly US\$12 million. In 2017, members of Ethiopia's and Iran's business communities exchanged visits to boost trade. The value of Iran's exports to Ethiopia remained around US\$12 million in 2017, while Ethiopia's direct and indirect exports to Iran reached over US\$50 million.

Iran remains the third biggest market for Ethiopia's export products in the Middle East and North Africa region. In the first ten months of 2018, Ethiopia exported nearly US\$31 million of products to Iranian markets. Since the potential for trade remains huge, Iran has continued to encourage Ethiopia to compete for a larger share of Iran's vast agricultural import market of roughly US\$8.5 billion annually by exporting US\$170 million in farm products to Iran per year. To boost trade, Tehran reminded Addis Ababa that Iran was the world's eighteenth largest economy by purchasing power parity (PPP), and Ethiopia was the fastest growing economy in Africa. Tehran encouraged Addis Ababa to reopen an embassy in Tehran to bolster trade and said it was looking to open the export of livestock and meat from Ethiopia to Iran for the first time. Iranian importers were keen to invest in this market, which is worth roughly US\$60–90 million. Ethiopian coffee and textiles were other products that could be introduced to Iran's markets.⁽¹⁸⁹⁾

In 1989, Iran signed a cultural agreement with Ethiopia and set up a cultural office in its embassy in Addis Ababa. By 1991, as Ethiopia went through an internal political transition that led to higher religious tolerance levels, Iran carried out its cultural activities more freely in the African country. Iran signed a second cultural agreement with Ethiopia in 2000, leading to the exchange of books, publications, photos, computer software, radio and television programs, academics and students, and a host of educational, artistic, and research programs. Iran aimed to increase contacts with multiple ethnic groups, promote interfaith unity, introduce Ahl al-Bayt publications, and hold religious discussion groups in Ethiopia.⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ Iran also held Shi'i religious ceremonies in Ethiopia and other events to encourage Islamic unity and coexistence among Ethiopia's multiple ethnic communities.⁽¹⁹¹⁾ Addis Ababa and Tehran further agreed to

(189) "Ethio-Iranian Relations: Old Kingdoms in the New Era."

(190) Mohammad Reza Tartar, "A Look at the History of Relations between Iran and Ethiopia," Bahman 17, 1391, <http://addisababa.icro.ir/index.aspx?siteid=166&pageid=34929>.

(191) "Imam Hussein Mourning Ceremony Held in Ethiopia," *Hawzah Official News Agency*, Shahrivar 25, 1397, <https://www.hawzahnews.com/news/462014/می-شود-ع-در-اتیوپی-بزرگزار>; "مراسم-عزاداری-امام-حسین-ع-در-اتیوپی-بزرگزار", *Hawzah Official News Agency*, Azar 3, 1397, <https://www.hawzahnews.com/news/469598/همایش-و-حدث-و-همزیستی-اسلامی-در-اتیوپی-بزرگزار-شد>.

promote joint travel and medical tourism, the sale of Iranian handicrafts, and large-scale cultural heritage preservation programs. Iran sought to promote Persian language television channels in Ethiopia and introduce carpet weaving and sewing workshops to the African country to generate employment and promote the Iranian culture. As a result, the two capitals discussed facilitating electronic visas and extending one-month stays for each other's citizens.⁽¹⁹²⁾

The Gabonese Republic

Following the 1979 revolution, Gabon avoided heavily investing in its ties with Iran, given Libreville's closer relations with Iran's pre-revolutionary government. However, seeking harmonious relations with the Muslim world generally, Gabon tried to stay neutral in the Iran–Iraq War, although it retained closer ties with the Gulf Arab states. Still, Libreville supported some of Iran's positions in discussions about the war in the OIC and maintained an embassy in Tehran after it closed some twenty other embassies abroad (including the one in Baghdad). The Gabonese embassy in Tehran shut down during the “War of the Cities” during the Iran–Iraq War, but Libreville expressed hope to reopen the embassy at a later time. Gabon continued to abstain from voting against Iran in resolutions that condemned its human rights record, generally remained supportive of Iranian positions in the NAM and OPEC, and maintained a closer position to the Arab world on the issue of upholding Palestinian rights, which Iran appreciated despite Gabon's on and off ties with Israel.⁽¹⁹³⁾

Officials in Gabon and Iran frequently met to coordinate positions on international issues. Additionally, Iran accepted Gabon's role in resolving tensions between Tehran and France. In 1987, Gabon received fourteen Iranian opposition members of the Mujahedin Khalq Organization from France as part of an agreement between Paris and Tehran to free French hostages in Lebanon.⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ In 2010–2011, Gabon's presidency of the UNSC increased Iran's outreach to the Sub-Saharan African country, despite reports suggesting tensions in Libreville–Tehran ties as a result of Gabon's decision to vote in favor of U.S. positions that led to UN sanctions against

(192) Fatimah Karimi, “Income Generation of Ethiopian Women by Weaving Persian Carpets,” *Mehr News Agency*, Farvardin 15, 1399, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4850761/د-آدمخوار-خندارد-اتیوپی-ایرانی-فرش-بافت-از-اتیوپیایی-زنان-آمندزایی>.

(193) “Gabon Ties with Iran,” *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=666>.

(194) “France Expels Iranians to Gabon,” *The New York Times*, December 9, 1987, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/12/09/world/france-expels-iranians-to-gabon.html>.

Iran over its nuclear file.⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ Gabon's political ties with Iran cooled when the African country joined the Saudi-led IMCTC. In 2017, to demonstrate its partnership with Saudi Arabia, Gabon sided with Riyadh when it broke off its ties with Qatar. Gabon's internal power struggles in 2019, following a coup d'état attempt, could have further dampened Iran's ability to influence the West–Central African nation. In 2020, reports emerged that Gabon might have de-flagged Iranian-linked tankers carrying Iranian cargoes to the port of Fujairah in the UAE.⁽¹⁹⁶⁾

An agreement to buy uranium from Gabon concluded before the revolution did not materialize after Iran's Atomic Energy Agency and other government organizations went on strike during the revolution. Gabon sold the uranium to Japan, but Iran sent a delegation to the African nation to conclude an agreement to purchase okoumé timber to make plywood. Iran's embassy in Gabon subsequently promoted opportunities to introduce Iranian products to Gabonese and French businesses trading in the African nation.⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2009, Iran insisted that its economic ties with Gabon were insufficient and that the African country should reopen its embassy in Tehran. To this end, Libreville and Tehran signed four agreements which included steps to ease diplomatic and service visa requirements, enhance ministerial-level cooperation, and expand counselor services and cultural relations. Earlier, Gabon helped Tehran host an African summit meeting to explore Iranian access to the continent's markets. The summit aimed to accelerate Iranian economic activities in Africa, emphasizing building power plants, dams, auto, and tractor assembly plants, and low-income housing.⁽¹⁹⁸⁾

In 2011, Gabon stressed the need to expand its economic and political relations with Iran. In 2012, Iran reaffirmed its desire to develop cultural and economic ties with Gabon and build low-income housing in the African country.⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ Gabon's position as one of Africa's largest oil

(195) Christine Roberts, "President Obama Invited Controversial President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, to the White House," *Daily News*, June 9, 2011, <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/president-obama-invites-controversial-president-gabon-ali-bongo-ondimba-white-house-article-1.128557>.

(196) Michelle Wiese Bockmann, "Gabon De-Flags More Iran-Linked Tankers," *Lloyd's List*, September 17, 2020, <https://lloydslist.maritimeintelligence.informa.com/LL1133940/Gabon-de-flags-more-Iran-linked-tankers>.

(197) "Gabon Ties with Iran."

(198) "Opening of Gabon Embassy in Tehran/Iran and Gabon Agree to Lift Visa Requirements," *Mehr News Agency*, Khordad 5, 1388, <https://bit.ly/3wFVqeW>.

(199) "Minister of Guidance in Meeting with Gabon Parliament Speaker: Iran is Willing to Transfer Cultural Experience to Gabon," *Farhang*, Ordibehesht 4, 1391, <https://bit.ly/39ZmVXc>.

producers, its uranium mines, and adjacency to the Atlantic coast increased Iran's interest in the African country following the Iran nuclear deal. Libreville and Tehran subsequently welcomed holding joint commissions to expand ties. In 2015, Libreville and Tehran addressed measures to halt falling oil prices in international markets. In 2017, they discussed plans to cooperate in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors and the health, technical, and engineering fields.⁽²⁰⁰⁾ But the discussions arrived on the heels of improved relations between Gabon and Saudi Arabia, which could have dampened Gabon's ties with Iran.

Following the revolution, Gabon participated in Islamic art exhibits in Iran and celebrations marking the anniversary of the victory of the revolution. In 1997, Iran offered scholarships to Gabonese students. Since Gabon's former president El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba and a growing number of Gabonese converted to Islam, Iran hoped to expand its religious activities, including the holding of Shi'i rituals and ceremonies in the African nation, despite Gabon's small Shi'i population, and the absence of local Shi'i seminaries and trained local imams in the African nation. Iran built a mosque and set up classes in Libreville to propagate Islam, and held regular Quranic recitation classes in the capital.⁽²⁰¹⁾ It also expressed interest in promoting Iranian cinema, books, press and sharing other cultural experiences with Gabon.⁽²⁰²⁾

The Republic of The Gambia

Iran viewed the Gambia as an important OIC country given the African nation's majority Muslim population and its community of influential Lebanese businessmen and investors. The discovery of uranium in the West African country increased Tehran's resolve to strengthen ties with Banjul. Still, building relations proved difficult as the Gambia experienced frequent internal political transition and expanded its relations with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States. As a result, Iran was slow in tapping into the Gambia's position as a regional player in West Africa, a member of ECOWAS, and a relatively active member of the AU and the wider international community. But following the Gambia's internal upheavals in 2004, the

(200) "Delivery of Copy of Appointment as Ambassador of Iran in Gabon to Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon," *Mizan News Agency*, Bahman 27, 1395, <https://bit.ly/3s9PNCo>.

(201) "Gabon Ties with Iran."

(202) "Iran Ready to Transfer Cultural Experiences to Gabon," *International Quran News Agency*, Ordibehesht 2, 1391, <https://bit.ly/2OEU9ni>.

African country reached out to Iran. In 2006, President Ahmadinejad was received as a guest of honor at the AU summit in the Gambia by President Yahya Abdul-Aziz Jemus Junkung Jammeh, who vowed to expand relations with Tehran. Iran offered the Gambia assistance to develop its fishing and farming industries and investments to provide commercial vehicles to the African country.⁽²⁰³⁾

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned businesses linked to Hezbollah with networks in the Gambia. The same year, Nigerian authorities arrested a Quds Force operative and seized thirteen containers of weapons in Lagos, which they said were linked to an IRGC-affiliated group attempting to help the separatist Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) seeking independence from Senegal. Other reports suggested that the arms shipment, which may have also included illicit drugs were destined to reach Gaza. Tehran suggested that the seizure was a set up to destroy Iranian reputation and asserted that it had no interest in disrupting Senegal's independence, given that it invested millions of dollars in the African country. The Gambia rejected involvement in the arms transfer or that they were to be sent to the African country. Banjul subsequently suspended and then cut its ties with Tehran and canceled all joint projects with the country.⁽²⁰⁴⁾

When the government, under President Jammeh's leadership, briefly renamed the country the Islamic Republic of The Gambia in 2015, it refused to expel a Lebanese businessman, Hussein Tajudeen, accused by the United States of funding Hezbollah. In 2017, President Adama Barrow restored the former name of the country.⁽²⁰⁵⁾ The Gambia's new government said it would welcome reopening Iran's embassy in Banjul following the Iran nuclear deal and after Iran's embassy in Senegal reached out to Gambia's representatives in Dakar. Banjul blamed the breakdown of ties with Tehran on former President Jammeh. Specifically, it

(203) Joshua Keating, "Why is The Gambia Picking a Fight with Iran?" *Foreign Policy*, November 24, 2010, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/24/why-is-the-gambia-picking-a-fight-with-iran/>; Eric Halliday, "Iran and Hezbollah's Presence Around the World."

(204) "Senegal Ended Ties with Iran," *BBC Farsi*, February 23, 2011, https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2011/02/110222_u01_senegal-iran; "Reasons and Results of Breakdown of Ties with Senegal," *IRDiplomacy*, Esfand 5, 1389, <https://bit.ly/3myqicr>; Joshua Keating, "Why is The Gambia Picking a Fight with Iran?"; Eric Halliday, "Iran and Hezbollah's Presence Around the World."

(205) "Gambia Cuts Ties with Iran and Orders Diplomats to Go," *BBC*, November 23, 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-11819143>.

said that Jammeh had attempted to buy arms from Iran, which Tehran declined to send. The Gambia's new government asked Tehran to help the African country develop its health and agricultural sectors.⁽²⁰⁶⁾

The Republic of Ghana

After the 1979 revolution, the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi introduced construction projects in Ghana, seeking to infuse an Islamic revolutionary model of development into the African country's economic projects.⁽²⁰⁷⁾ But despite Iran's repeated attempts to expand commercial activities in Ghana, progress in ties remained slow.⁽²⁰⁸⁾ Authorities in Accra prevented the spread of Iran's revolutionary ideology, despite Ghana's infrequent attempts to expand ties with Tehran. Ghana closed its embassy in Tehran two years after the revolution and asked its ambassador in Saudi Arabia to represent its interests in Iran. In 2006, Ghana agreed to consider reopening an embassy in Tehran during Ahmadinejad's presidency, which encouraged an Africa outreach policy.⁽²⁰⁹⁾ As late as 2014, Ghana and Iran may have held additional meetings to expand ties.⁽²¹⁰⁾ Against this backdrop, Iran has patiently cultivated ties with Ghana and its relatively sizeable Shi'i community. The Nigerian Islamic Movement, with links to Iran, has gained supporters in Ghana over time.⁽²¹¹⁾ Iran further maintained ongoing discussions with Ghana on anti-terrorism issues.⁽²¹²⁾

Iran's cultural activities in Ghana first established formally in 1986, led to the establishment of a seminary and conversions from Sunni to Shi'i Islam among the African country's Muslim population. The Hazrat Fatimah high school in Accra, supported by Iran, provides education to

(206) "Gambia Welcomes Re-opening of Iran Embassy/New Government of Gambia Seeks to Establish Ties with Iran," *Khaneh Mellat*, Mordad 15, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3d3kncw>; "Gambia Cancels Expulsion of 'Hezbollah-Linked' Lebanese Tycoon," *AFP*, June 28, 2005, <https://news.yahoo.com/gambia-cancels-expulsion-hezbollah-linked-lebanese-tycoon-103133192.html>.

(207) "Iran's Relations with Africa in Conversation with Dr. Bakhshi."

(208) "Trade and Economic Relations Between Iran and Ghana Need to be Consolidated."

(209) Reza Tagizadeh, "Iran's Infiltration Diplomacy in Africa Stalling in Movement."

(210) "Harsh Statements by an African Official Against Iran," *IRDiplomacy*, Khordad 26, 1395, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1960008>; -اظهارات تندمقام آفریقای-علیه ایران/1960008, *Afham: The Landed Airplane in Mehrabad is Leased by Ghana*, *IRDiplomacy*, Farvardin 30, 1393, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1931687/>; -افخم-هو ایپمای-فرودآمده-در-1931687, "Ghana Rejected its Officials Visited Iran," *IRDiplomacy*, Ordibehesht 3, 1393, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1931900/>; -مهرآباد-اجاره-غنا-است, "Ghana Rejected its Officials Visited Iran," *IRDiplomacy*, Ordibehesht 3, 1393, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1931900/>; -غنا-سفر-مقاماتش-به-ایران-را-تکذیب-کرد, Jessica Silver-Greenberg, "Paper Shows U.S.-Flagged Plane in Iran Has Ties to Ghana," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/19/world/middleeast/paper-shows-us-flagged-plane-in-iran-has-ties-to-ghana.html>.

(211) Baqeer Gashua, "We Are Not IMN! We are Muslims;" "Nigeria: Army Attack on Shia Unjustified;" "As Trump Makes Threats, Iran Makes Friends."

(212) "Ghana's President to Visit Tehran."

both Muslims and non-Muslims. In addition, Iran set up a technology and vocational training center in Ghana, and the Iranian Red Crescent Society operates health clinics in the African country.⁽²¹³⁾ Iran also supports Ghana's Islamic university and allows students from Ghana to study in Iran. Simultaneously, Iran has strengthened relations with Ghana's Sunni and Christian communities in an effort to contain the influence of radical groups in the country. Tehran also encourages wider connectivity among Ghana's Shi'i community by holding Quranic and *tafsir* (religious interpretation) classes and organizing Quds Day demonstrations designed to build support for the Palestinian cause. Iranian religious activities are mostly concentrated in the capital Accra and the capital city of the northern region, Tamale. But Ghana's efforts to curb Islamization programs have limited the activities of the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly. In response, the body has sought to distribute more books and publications and raise funds to set up television channels in the African country.⁽²¹⁴⁾

Ghana and Iran established a Permanent Joint Commission to expand trade. But the absence of Iranian shipping lanes to Ghana, and the West African country's membership in the World Trade Organization, have impeded trade. The Ghana–Iran Parliamentary Friendship Group actively promoted trade between the two countries. Iran's embassy in Accra has emphasized cooperation on agricultural and rural development projects and dispatched medical teams on mission to Ghana. In 2010, the Iran Export Promotion Bank allocated US\$20 million to promote private sector trade with Ghana, and the country remains Iran's second-largest trade partner in West Africa. Through these measures, the volume of Iranian exports to the West African country increased between 2005 and 2015. Iran sent manufactured products, minerals, fuel, machinery, electronics, precious stones, glassware, and transportation machines to Ghana, and imported raw materials, textiles, clothing, and food products from Ghana. Ghana subsequently became Iran's largest trading partner in West Africa, with a trading volume that reached roughly US\$36 million.⁽²¹⁵⁾ The total volume of trade over time, however, remained minimal, and trade exchanges were inconsistent.

(213) Umar Mohammed, "A Review of Economic Relations Between Iran and Ghana," *Center for Iranian Studies in Ankara*, 2017, https://iramcenter.org/d_hbanaliz/a_review_of_economic_relations_between_ghana_and_iran.pdf.

(214) "Is Ahl al-Bayt Recognized in the Country of Ghana?" *Shia News*, <https://www.shia-news.com/fa/news/235164/آيا-اهل-بيتع-در-کشور-غنا-شناخته-شده-هستند>.

(215) "Study of African Continent 2," <https://www.tzccim.ir/News/524/-2آفريقا-بررسی.html>.

In 2011, when Ghana started oil production operations, it turned to Iran for expertise in the field. As a result, Accra and Tehran signed agreements in 2014 to carry out oil drilling operations, open a business center, and mine for gold in Ghana.⁽²¹⁶⁾ In 2016, Foreign Minister Zarif traveled to Ghana. Accra and Tehran sought to expand cooperation in the oil sector, engineering services, electricity generation, gas production, refinery construction, telecommunications, and the agricultural sector. In addition, Iran offered to export rugs and aluminum to Ghana and build roads in the country. In 2017, the two countries held talks to facilitate banking arrangements and a joint commission of trade and industries to retain strong banking relations.⁽²¹⁷⁾

In 2018, Iran consolidated its partnership with Ghana in the industrial and agricultural sectors. The two countries further explored options for bartering goods and expanding trade through the ports in Oman. By 2020, Iran had exported plaster, bitumen, motor oil, semi-chemical fluting paper, plaster, and wood furniture to the African country. In return, Ghana agreed to allocate 6,000 hectares to Iran to pursue its agro-outsourcing “Beyond Borders Agricultural” plan, resulting in products that would be exported to Iran or third countries. It also agreed that Iran could launch a cement factory and a tractor production line in Ghana. Ghana invited Iran to participate in the construction of at least 100 industrial parks.⁽²¹⁸⁾

The Republic of Guinea

Guinea and Iran established diplomatic relations in 1984-1985 after Tehran dispatched a chargé d'affaires to Conakry. Guinea's ambassador to Saudi Arabia would later be accredited to

(216) Umar Mohammed, “A Review of Economic Relations Between Iran and Ghana.”

(217) “Iran to Open Business Center in Ghana,” *Tehran Times*, August 20, 2019, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/439438/Iran-to-open-business-center-in-Ghana>; “The Success of Zarif's Trip to Africa was Beyond Expectation,” *IRDiplomacy*, Ordibehesht 3, 1397, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1976086/موفقیت-سفر-ظریف-به-آفریقا-فوق-انتظار-بود>; Ali Mousavi Khalkhali, “Warm Reception by Authorities in Senegal for Zarif,” *IRDiplomacy*, Farvardin 20, 1397, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1975909/استقبال-گرم-مقامات-سنگالی-از-ظریف>; “Economic Problems Do Exist But We Must Adapt,” *IRDiplomacy*, Ordibehesht 5, 1397, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1976142/مشکلات-اقتصادی-وجود-دارد-اما-باید-خودمان-را-تطبیق-دهیم>.

(218) “127% Rise in Exports to Ghana,” *Financial Tribune*, November 1, 2020, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/81778/127-rise-in-exports-to-ghana>; “Iran's Trade and Economic Relations with Ghana Needs Strengthening,” *Tasnim News Agency*, Aban 10, 1397, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1397/08/01/1860146/روابط-تجاری-و-اقتصادی-ایران-و-غنا-نیاز-مند-تقویت-است>; “Iran's Serious Commitment with Ghana to Develop Ties More,” *Iranian Students' News Agency*, Mordad 15, 1396, <https://www.isna.ir/news/96051509315/اراده-مجدی-دولت-ایران-و-غنا-در-توسعه-هر-چه-بیشتر-روابط-استوار>; “New Opportunities for Relations between Iran and Ghana—with Jafar Gonadhashi,” *International Peace Studies Center*, Esfand 15, 1394, <http://peace-ipsc.org/fa/غنا-گفتگو>; “Barter; A Path to Expand Trade Ties with African Continent.”

serve in Iran. During the Iran–Iraq War, Iran sought Guinea’s support through the OIC to condemn Baghdad. But political relations between Conakry and Tehran never improved significantly. As a result, Iran sent special envoys to Guinea to cultivate ties. When Conakry and Baghdad broke off their relations after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Conakry and Tehran drew closer. In the following years, Tehran viewed Conakry as an important partner in the Muslim world. Tehran cultivated relations with Guinea’s rapidly expanding Shi‘i community, which constituted a small minority in the 1990s, by establishing an Ahl al-Bayt School in Conakry led by scholars trained in the Iranian seminary city of Qom. It offered scholarships to students from Guinea to study in Iran and to receive training to become religious leaders to propagate Shi‘i Islam in West Africa. By 2020, figures placed the number of Shi‘a in Guinea at roughly six percent of its majority Muslim population. The Shi‘a hold religious ceremonies and support the establishment of local mosques.⁽²¹⁹⁾

In 2015, Guinea and Iran revived a 25-year project to extract bauxite in the African country. Under the deal, Iran held a 51 percent stake in the Societe des Bauxites de Dabola-Tougue, estimated to be worth US\$10 billion. The agreement allows the shipment of bauxite to Iran for aluminum production, but operations halted despite talks to revive the deal. In 2016, Iranian businesspeople accompanied Foreign Minister Zarif to Conakry to explore trade options. In 2017, the project was revived to enable the transfer of bauxite from the port city of Conakry to Iran, which expected to develop its aluminum industry in line with a National Vision Plan for 2025. Iran further discussed plans to build Guinea’s iron, gold, and diamond reserves and signed ten economic cooperation agreements with Conakry in 2016. By 2018, the annual trade volume between Guinea and Iran stood at US\$6 million, resulting in part from the sale of 100 SAIPA cars to the African country. Iran expressed interest in investing in Guinea’s petrochemical markets.⁽²²⁰⁾

(219) “Guinea Ties with Iran,” *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=495>; “Presence of More than 7 Million Shias in Country of Guinea,” *Hawza Net*, Ordibehesht 13, 1389, <https://bit.ly/39X28n0>; “6 Percent of Population of Guinea Conakry is Shia,” *Shia News*, Mordad 4, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3s35jQj>; “Hawzahs in Africa Shelter for Lovers of Ahl al-Bayt,” *Hawzah Official News Agency*, Aban 7, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3fVidgJ>.

(220) “Trade Exchange at 6 Million Dollars Between Iran and Guinea,” *Tasnim News Agency*, Khordad 29, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3fSuzq5>; “The Success of Zarif’s Trip to Africa was Beyond Expectation,” Ali Mousavi Khalkhali, “Warm Reception by Authorities in Senegal for Zarif,” “Economic Problems Do Exist But We Must Adapt,” “Guinea Bauxite Project Revived,” *Financial Tribune*, October 15, 2020, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-business-and-markets/15998/guinea-bauxite-project-revived>; “Iran, Guinea Revive 25-Year Bauxite Plan,” *Iran Project*, August 12, 2020, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2015/08/12/iran-guinea-revive-25-year-bauxite-plan/>; “Diplomat: 10 Protocols Signed With Guinea for Economic Cooperation,” *The Iran Project*, July 29, 2016, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2016/07/29/diplomat-10-protocols-signed-guinea-economic-cooperation/>.

Despite sanctions on Iran and the revival of Guinea's relations with Israel in 2016, Conakry continued to view Tehran as an important trade partner. The two countries discussed using Iranian expertise to build roads, bridges, dams, airports, ports, and industrial zones in Guinea. In 2020, Guinea confirmed that Iranian companies were capable partners in developing the African country's mining sector and welcomed expanding cooperation in mines and minerals with Tehran. In return, it asked Iran to share its expertise in boosting aluminum production. Guinea continued to explore options to launch the bauxite project, which remained dormant.⁽²²¹⁾

The Republic of Guinea-Bissau

Iran views Guinea-Bissau as an important country, given its membership in ECOWAS. In addition, Tehran has stressed working with Bissau in the OIC and the NAM to reverse international efforts to isolate Iran. To fight the UN sanctions regime in place against Iran before 2015, Tehran held regular consultations with Bissau over developments in the Iranian nuclear program in attempts to reassure the West African country of the peaceful nature of the program. In addition, Tehran held talks with Bissau to expand cooperation in the private sector and facilitate consular services. The two capitals signed agreements to expand cooperation in pharmaceuticals and in the mining, health, agriculture, energy, technology, electronics, and development sectors. Guinea-Bissau and Iran held further talks on security developments and the civil unrest in Syria and Mali.⁽²²²⁾

Guinea-Bissau's improved bilateral relations with Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia in recent years, combined with sanctions against Iran, threatened to weaken bilateral ties. To prevent this prospect, Guinea-Bissau and Iran held interparliamentary talks when sanctions were not fully in place in 2018. Subsequently, Guinea-Bissau stressed its desire to expand economic, commercial, and parliamentary relations with Muslim countries, including Iran.⁽²²³⁾ Iran further sought to influence Guinea-Bissau's significant Muslim population. It gave scholarships to

(221) "Guinea Minister of Mines: Iran a Competent Partner for the Development of Mining Projects," *Al Circle*, May 16, 2020, <https://www.alcircle.com/news/guinea-minister-of-mines-iran-a-competent-partner-for-the-development-of-mining-projects-55825>; "Guinea Sought to Improve Economic Relations with Iran," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Khordad 29, 1397, <https://bit.ly/3rYTcnb>.

(222) "Iran and Guinea-Bissau Have Special Relations," *Tasnim News Agency*, Ordibehesht 8, 1392, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1392/02/08/48373/هستند-ای-روابطویژه-ای-گینه-بیسائو-دارای-رابطویژه-ای-هستند>.

(223) "Larijani: Expanding Parliamentary Relations Between Iran and Guinea-Bissau Will Help Promote Level of Ties," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Bahman 1, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3d0g9Cn>.

students from Guinea-Bissau to study in Qom, including to members of the African country's small Shi'i community, which increased local sensitivities about the Shi'i connection to Tehran.

The Republic of Kenya

Following Iran's revolution, officials in Nairobi and Tehran exchanged visits. However, despite reports that it received Iranian oil, Nairobi was reluctant to build diplomatic relations with Tehran. This reluctance came, in part, because of tensions over pre-revolutionary Iran's decision to send light arms to Somalia in the Ogaden War, which threatened to change boundaries inherited by Africa's colonial past. But Kenya's domestic political tensions and its volatile ties with the United States over disagreements about the African country's challenges with reforms, foreign aid distribution, and fight against terrorism contributed to Nairobi's decisions to remain engaged with Tehran. Kenya's coastline on the Indian Ocean, its proximity to terrorist hotspots in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan, ongoing Israeli investments, and Libya's inability to sustain its investments in Kenya after the 2011 Libyan Arab uprising made the East African country increasingly important to Iran.⁽²²⁴⁾

Nairobi and Tehran agreed to establish formal ties in 1982 and set up embassies in the two capitals three years later. But Kenya restricted visits by Iranians to its shores. Nairobi and Tehran held several meetings to resolve the issue, which led to an official statement promising to ease relations. President Mwai Kibaki's "Look East" policy helped facilitate ties with Iran when he assumed office in 2002. Nairobi and Tehran subsequently promoted interparliamentary exchanges, followed by frequent visits between Kenyan and Iranian officials.⁽²²⁵⁾

In 2012, Kenyan officials arrested two Iranians believed to be members of the IRGC Quds Force. The two were suspected of planning operations against targets in Nairobi, including the embassies of Israel, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Saudi Arabia. In 2014, Kenyan authorities detained two other Iranians who entered the country with forged Israeli passports and were suspected of plotting to carry out attacks in the African country. In 2015, two Kenyans were arrested on suspicion of working with Iran. Iran's embassy in Nairobi rejected the charge that the Kenyans were linked to Iranian security and intelligence organizations. In 2016, two

(224) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *History of Political Relations*, <https://nairobi.mfa.ir/portal/GeneralCategoryServices/4605>; "Iran-Kenya Relations," *Farsi Wikipedia*, <https://bit.ly/2QeoKsk>.

(225) *History of Political Relations*.

Iranians were arrested in an Iranian diplomatic car in Kenya and charged with collecting information to facilitate an attack against the Israeli embassy in Nairobi.⁽²²⁶⁾ The arrests and the refusal by Kenya to commute the sentences of those arrested led to diplomatic rows between Nairobi and Tehran.

Throughout the period, Iran remained concerned by potential threats to its interests in Kenya as a result of operations by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab, and the military presence of U.S. forces in Kenya.⁽²²⁷⁾ In early 2020, when al-Shabaab attacked a U.S. military post in Kenya, Washington rejected speculations that it was connected to its tensions with Tehran following the U.S. assassination of Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani in Iraq in early January.⁽²²⁸⁾ In August 2020, an al-Qaeda leader who was believed to have masterminded the 1998 U.S. embassy attack in Nairobi was reportedly assassinated in Tehran.

Kenya remained an important trade partner for Iran, despite the security tensions between the two countries. In 1996, President Rafsanjani visited Kenya to sign new economic development agreements in the areas of environmental and livestock development, combating illicit drugs, expanding tourism, promoting postal services, building direct phone lines, and expanding port and maritime relations. The agreements enabled Iran to participate in Kenya's infrastructural projects, including dam building, power plant development, building refineries, rehabilitating an old refinery in Mombasa, building petrochemical industries, and repairing roads. Kenya vowed to buy Iranian tractors, agricultural machinery, telecommunication products, and minerals. Two years later, Kenya and Iran held talks to expand cooperation in the commercial, customs, banking, oil, industrial, technical, agricultural, communications, and transportation sectors. The two countries further agreed to establish air routes and sports centers and promote cooperation in the fishery, health, and forestry sectors.⁽²²⁹⁾

(226) "Iran's Relations with Kenya," *Farsi Wikipedia*, https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/روابط_ایران_و_کنیا.

(227) "Rejecting Links Between Kenyans and Iranian Security Organizations," *Tabnak*, Azar 9, 1394, <https://bit.ly/3s19bkD>; "Iran-Kenya Relations," *Farsi Wikipedia*, <https://bit.ly/3t40Td3>; "Harsh Statements by an African Official Against Iran," *IRDiplomacy*, Khordad 26, 1395, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1960008/اظهارات-تند-مقام-آفریقایی-علیه-ایران>.

(228) Eric Schmitt, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "3 Americans Die in Shabab Attack on Kenyan Base," *New York Times*, January 5, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/05/world/africa/al-shabab-camp-simba-kenya.html>.

(229) "Review of Political-Economic Relations between Iran and Kenya," *Iranian Students' News Agency*, Esfand 14, 1388, <https://bit.ly/320eQNC>; Hussein al-Nadeem, "Iranian Mission to Africa is Bad News for the British," *Non-Intervention*, September 20, 1996, <https://nointervention.com/archive/Sudan/aboutsudan.com/delegations/iran.htm>.

In 2009, President Ahmadinejad visited Nairobi and concluded agreements to export oil to Kenya, establish direct Nairobi–Tehran flights, and offer scholarships to Kenyan students to study in higher educational institutions in Iran. Kenya reportedly received US\$500,000 from Iran to develop its agricultural sector. But although the oil agreement to export 80,000 barrels of oil daily to Kenya was finalized by 2012, it was canceled due to sanctions against Iran.⁽²³⁰⁾ Still, Kenya and Iran agreed to jointly invest in building a terminal to transfer food from the Imam Khomeini Port to Mombasa Port, which Iran stressed served as a gateway for Iranian products into Africa.⁽²³¹⁾

In 2014, Kenya expressed interest in developing relations with Iran in the industrial, technology, and scientific fields. The two countries signed an MoU to expand cooperation in these fields and other sectors, including transport, infrastructure, agriculture, irrigation, water resource management, health, and housing. Kenya insisted that it would retain its commercial ties with Iran despite sanctions, given that many other countries around the world did the same. In 2015, Foreign Minister Zarif traveled to Kenya, and the two countries signed a tax agreement to facilitate trade. Kenya exported tea to Iran, and the Lahijan Province in Iran sought to ship food and construction materials to Kenya.⁽²³²⁾

In 2017, Iran set up an exhibition of its products in Nairobi and announced it would resume banking relations with Kenya.⁽²³³⁾ But Kenya reportedly moved to block accounts in its banks held by the Iranian business community to comply with the sanction regime.⁽²³⁴⁾ The cost of Iranian products in Kenya's markets increased due to Iran's use of ports in the UAE for shipments to Kenya. Iran encouraged its business community to invest in Kenya in food agriculture—including the meat industry, fresh food and dairy, and dried and powdered food items—as well as honey production and beekeeping. Beyond agriculture, Tehran promoted investments in a diverse range of sectors, including production of leather goods, light construction materials,

(230) Iran-Kenya Relations;” “Trip by Iran President to Three African Countries,” *BBC Farsi*, February 24, 2009, https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2009/02/090224_mg_africa_ahmadinejad.

(231) Ministry of Road and Urban Development, Director General of Organization for Ports and Navigation, *Kenya Is Gateway into African Markets* (Azar 27, 1399), <https://bit.ly/3uyWMGo>.

(232) “Kenya’s Ambassador Said Tea Exports to Take Place to Lahijan,” *Ava Diplomatic*, Shahrivar 3, 1395, <https://bit.ly/3d1E83T>.

(233) “Iran-Kenya Relations;” “Trip by Iran President to Three African Countries.”

(234) “Kenya Blocked Accounts of Iranian Business Members,” *Radio Farda*, Esfand 5, 1397, <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/29787822.html>.

concentrates, LPG, and tar, chemicals and petrochemicals, as well as the packaging industry for detergents and cleaners, housing and real estate, the door, and window construction industry, decorative and office furniture production, the timber industry, and the hydro and solar power industries. Iran further encouraged investments in Kenya's road and dam construction and oil production and Kenya's railway system to transport Iranian goods and services.⁽²³⁵⁾

Kenya's Vision 2030 plan—which builds on an ambitious agenda to reach the goals of food security, stable housing, and stable manufacturing—has given Iran more reason to invest in the African country.⁽²³⁶⁾ Although Kenya moved toward expanding its trade ties with Israel in 2019–2020, it was still engaged in talks with Iranian Danesh Bonyan companies to explore innovative technologies for water management, agriculture, environmental protection, and renewable energies.⁽²³⁷⁾ Kenya stressed its desire for ongoing relations with Iran as the two countries surveyed barter arrangements. It also urged Iranian businesses to invest in the African country's construction, mining, textile, health, and industrial sectors. Kenyan food security and its ability to serve as a gateway into five African countries that lack ports of their own piqued Iran's interest in investing in the African country, while Kenya sees an excellent opportunity to export bananas and coffee, and mangos to Iran.⁽²³⁸⁾ In addition, Tehran sees Kenya as a potentially strong market for Iranian oil and gas.

Iran's embassy in Nairobi houses a cultural center, and the Iranian Red Crescent Society set up health clinics in Kenya to encourage Iranian soft power influence in the African country.⁽²³⁹⁾ After the revolution, Iran urged the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly to set up shop in Kenya. The organization expanded its membership base to advance an Islamic awakening in Kenya. Other Iranian cultural activities in Kenya include funding religious groups, contributing to the construction of housing projects and dams, and expanding healthcare and humanitarian services

(235) "Iran's Trade Opportunities in Kenya," *Donya-e-Eqtesad*, Khordad 2, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3d2XIT5>.

(236) Ebrahim Fallahi, "Iran Seeking Deeper Trade Ties with East Africa," *Tehran Times*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/438525/Iran-seeking-deeper-trade-ties-with-East-Africa>.

(237) Presidential Scientific and Technical Deputy Office, Innovative Opportunity; Iranian Danesh Bonyans Exchange Ideas with a Kenyan Delegation (Mehr 20, 1399), <https://bit.ly/31W0NZkF>.

(238) "Kenya's Policy is to Continue Relations with Iran," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Esfand 18, 1397, <https://bit.ly/3s3Vn9l>; "Barter: A Path to Expand Trade Ties with African Continent."

(239) "History of Political Relations."

focused mainly on Kenya's Shi'i population, a small group among the African country's minority Muslim population.⁽²⁴⁰⁾

Iran retained an active cultural presence in the port city of Mombasa. Over 900 years ago, Shirazi and Baluchi Iranians and business leaders arrived to build a new home in this area. The Shirazis helped introduce Shi'i Islam to the area and left behind a deep cultural heritage. Revolutionary Iran promoted Shi'i Islam in Kenya, which encouraged conversions by the African country's Sunni Muslim community to Shi'ism. The Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly placed the figure of Kenya's Shi'i population at around 560,000 in 2008. In addition to the Iranian-backed Shi'i communities in Kenya, groups among Kenya's population of Ismailis, and Indian, Pakistani, and Arab descent practiced different versions of Shi'i Islam, leading to a multiplication of varied practices of the faith, which was not uncommon in the eastern shores of Africa bordering the Indian Ocean. As a result, Iran benefited from the presence of a relatively wide network of Shi'a in Kenya, who offered charitable giving to build mosques, local schools, and prayer centers. The Kenyan Shi'i Association serves as an umbrella group to unify the country's Shi'i communities, as do multiple other splinter *ithna ashari* (Twelver Shi'a who also form a majority of Iran's population) Shi'i groups such as the Khoja Shi'i Association. While Kenya's Shi'i communities followed leaders from Pakistani and Lebanese descent, a growing number of Kenyan Shi'a followed Iranian and Iraqi clerical leaders after Iran's revolution.⁽²⁴¹⁾

As part of its cultural programs, Iran built professional networks with Islamic universities in Kenya, and it encouraged the opening of Persian language chairs in local universities. It also offered scholarships to Kenyan students and clerics and supported plans to expand television programs promoting Shi'i Islam in Kenya. Mahdi TV was established in 2018, offering free programs, with plans to increase viewership across Kenya and East Africa to 150–200 million people. Concerned by al-Shabaab operations against Kenyan educational centers, Iran encouraged Muslim unity in Kenya and held roundtables to educate Kenyans about the Iranian Revolution.⁽²⁴²⁾

(240) "Kenyan Cleric: Shia Population Rapidly Increasing in Kenya," *Ahl al-Bayt Assembly*, Sep 12, 2011, <https://en.abna24.com/service/ahb/archive/2011/09/12/265224/story.html>.

(241) "Kenya," *Wikishia*, <https://fa.wikishia.net/view/%DA%A9%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%A7>.

(242) "From Migration of Shirazis to Kenya to Hejra of Kenyans to Qom: Speaking is Sheikh Ali Moyga," *Jahan News*, Tir 1, 1399, <https://bit.ly/39ZO38c>; "Expansion of Iran's Relations with Religious Universities in Kenya," *International Quran News Agency*, Tir 30, 1397, <https://bit.ly/3d7XqF5>.

The Kingdom of Lesotho

Iran's close ties with South Africa helped improve Tehran's relations with Lesotho after the 1979 revolution. Iran's ambassadors to South Africa were accredited to Lesotho, and Lesotho retained an ambassador in Tehran. In 1986, Lesotho supported Iran's proposal to establish a human rights and cultural diversity center at a NAM foreign ministerial meeting in Ethiopia. In the following years, Iran's Red Crescent Society set up at least two medical centers in Lesotho and expanded cooperation with the African country in the health sector to help contain the spread of HIV/AIDS. In 2008, Maseru and Tehran held talks to increase joint investment, trade, and development projects and support Iran's nuclear program. The two capitals held further talks to expand ties for the delivery to Lesotho of Iranian educational, engineering, and security services, encourage private sector investments and increase joint efforts at the United Nations. The two countries signed cooperation agreements including in pharmaceuticals and the agricultural sector.⁽²⁴³⁾

Lesotho's close ties with Israel in recent years have challenged Maseru's relations with Tehran. Exports from Iran to Lesotho remained nominal, but that is discounting the potential trade that could occur through South Africa by land, given that Lesotho is surrounded by this major African state. Although Lesotho was believed to have uranium mines that could supply the Iranian nuclear program, it is unclear if there is any significant uranium in the African country to attract Iranian investments. Lesotho is not a major attraction for Iran to propagate Shi'i Islam, given the African country's dominant Christian population.

The Republic of Liberia

Liberia's relations with Iran deteriorated following the 1979 revolution. Relations between Monrovia and Tehran improved following the end of Liberia's civil war in 1996 and before the African country descended into a second civil war in 1999. President Charles Taylor's shift away from the West and support for revolutionary movements in West Africa helped improve Monrovia's ties with Tehran. Subsequently, Liberia at times was absent or abstained from voting against Iran in resolutions that were passed against it at the United Nations. But economic relations between the two countries fluctuated and never strengthened significantly.

(243) "Iran Bilateral Relations with Lesotho on Margins of Official Meetings," *AFRAN*, Aban 8, 1388, <http://www.afiran.ir/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=769>.

Following the end of Liberia's second civil war in 2003, a new government in Monrovia supported votes against Iran in resolutions passed by the United Nations. In so doing, it significantly harmed Tehran's international interests. Iran's ambassadors to the Ivory Coast were accredited to Liberia, but Liberia did not appoint an accredited ambassador to Iran.⁽²⁴⁴⁾

Cultural contacts between the two countries have remained almost non-existent, despite a sizable Shi'i minority community in Liberia. The Shi'i community has lacked sufficient representation, despite the relatively large Muslim community in the predominantly Christian African nation. Some Liberians also retain ties with Lebanon or are involved in Liberia's diamond trade, which may have supplied financial assistance to Hezbollah. In recent years, Israel's growing relations with Liberia have impeded Iran's influence in the West African coastal state. However, the London-based World Assembly of Ahl al-Bayt—considered an arm of the Tehran-based organization with a similar name—constructed a Shi'i mosque and a school among the Brewerville community of Jah Tondo outside Monrovia in 2014.⁽²⁴⁵⁾

The State of Libya (name selected by the General National Congress in 2013)

Before the 1979 revolution, Iran's future leaders reached out to Libya to ask if the African country would host Ayatollah Khomeini while he was in exile in France and preparing to leave. Libya's leader Muammar el Qaddafi welcomed Khomeini, but Iran's future leader rejected the invitation, insisting that Qaddafi was unreliable.⁽²⁴⁶⁾ After the revolution, tensions between Libya and Iran persisted over the fate of the missing Iranian Shi'i cleric Musa Sadr. Sadr was rumored to have disappeared and later died in Libyan prisons. In the following years, Libya–Iran ties improved over their mutual support for the Palestinian cause. Still, competition to influence the Muslim and Arab world precluded Tripoli and Tehran from building closer relations. Tripoli insisted on retaining a cultural center in Tehran, but it barred Iran from propagating its revolution inside Libya or building cultural centers in the North African country.⁽²⁴⁷⁾

(244) "Liberia Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=623>.

(245) Andrew Norfolk, "Scholar Spreads Iranian Propaganda in Britain," *The Times*, January 11, 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/scholar-spreads-iranian-propaganda-in-britain-3q90fvzxd>; "Liberia: Muslims Dedicate First Shia Mosque, School in Liberia," *All Africa*, October 6, 2014, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201410061498.html>; Congressional Research Service, *Lebanese Businessmen and Hezbollah in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Symbiotic Relationship* (September 2010), 11–13; "Liberia Ties with Iran."

(246) "Close Brother but Unreliable to the Revolution," *Emam*, <http://emam.com/posts/view/18836>.

(247) "Libya Ties with Iran," *Farsi Wikipedia*, https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/روابط_ایران_و_لیبی.

But, led by Abbas Mohammad Montazeri, Iran's revolutionaries set up freedom movements with undercover branches in Libya. Libya occasionally supported separatist movements in the Iranian Arab region of Khuzestan and separatists in the Iranian Kurdistan region while simultaneously agreeing to freely provide Iran with old Scud-B missiles, only half of which worked to fight the war with Iraq. Tehran welcomed Tripoli's outreach intending to break the potential formation of an Arab-led coalition including Libya against Iran. To this end, an IRGC commander and the head of Iran's Jihad-e-Sāzandegi, Mohsen Rafighdoost, cultivated personal ties with Qaddafi and facilitated visits to Libya by Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and other Iranian army and IRGC commanders.⁽²⁴⁸⁾

In 1984, President Ali Khamenei traveled to Libya. The trip marked Iran's efforts to reach out to the so-called "resistance front" countries in Africa. Iran specifically sought Tripoli's support to contain Israel's influence in North Africa. But Qaddafi encouraged Iran to attack Saudi Arabia instead. Iran's president insisted that the country's war policy focused on ensuring that Saddam Hussein would eventually be forced to abandon power in Iraq. Rafighdoost rejected Qaddafi's encouragements to attack Saudi Arabia, bluntly reminding the Libyan leader that Iran's commander in chief was Ayatollah Khomeini and not the Libyan leader. In addition, Qaddafi advised the Iranians to empower the masses and provide social welfare to the people while praising Iran for fighting Iraq in a long war. Libya continued to sell or supply for free needed arms to Iran, most of which Tehran claimed were bought by Libya from countries such as Brazil and the Soviet Union for which Iran had limited use given Saddam's more advanced weapons.⁽²⁴⁹⁾

Following the war, Iran pressured Libya to resolve Musa Sadr's file.⁽²⁵⁰⁾ In the 2006 Lebanon war and a subsequent conflict in Gaza, Qaddafi backed the Iranian position of supporting

(248) "Relations Between Iran and Libya under Muammar Gaddafi 'the Dethroned Libyan Ruler'," *Islamic World News*, Tir 27, 1396, <https://iswnnews.com/389/-ح-قذافي-در-زمان-معمار-قذافي-2>; "Qaddafi Told Iran to Use Missile to Hit Saudi Arabia!" *Iranian Students' News Agency*, Mehr 3, 1397, <https://www.isna.ir/news/97070302027/ن-ایران-گفت-با-موشک-ما-عربستان-را-بزن>; Perseverance Center for Studies, Research, Culture, and Literature, Revolutionary Iran and Ghaddafi, <http://oral-history.ir/?page=post&id=1244>; "Special Issue Remembering Martyrs Unmanly Killed on Seven Tir of the Islamic Republic Party, Ali Akbar Ejei," *Forsat Dar Goroob*, Tir 1398, <http://nedaesfahan.ir/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/-98-نشریه-هفت-تیر.pdf>.

(249) "Qaddafi Told Iran to Use Missile to Hit Saudi Arabia!"

(250) Michelle Nicholas, "Anti-Tank Missile In Libya Looks Like Iran-Produced Weapon – UN," *Reuters*, December 8, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-arms-libya-un-int-idUSKBN28I2SG>; "Close Brother But Unreliable to the Revolution," Emam, <http://emam.com/posts/view/18836>.

Hezbollah and Hamas. Iran, in turn, encouraged Qaddafi to promote widespread participation in Libyan politics to avert potential instability. But Qaddafi's opening to the West and the United States to help lift Libya out of isolation and sanctions cooled the ties between Tripoli and Tehran. When Qaddafi was ousted from power in 2011, Iran maintained that he should never have trusted the West. Still, Iran welcomed the Libyan uprising in 2011 while condemning foreign military attacks against Libya and suggesting that only Libyans could overthrow their government by force. Tehran later publicly congratulated Qaddafi's opponents for their victory.⁽²⁵¹⁾ Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi confirmed that Tehran had secretly forged close ties with Qaddafi's opponents and supported their efforts to overthrow the Libyan leader. Furthermore, Iran had long-standing contacts with the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood. Some 132 members of parliament in Iran signed a statement welcoming Qaddafi's ouster from power.

Iran then called on international actors to help end the violence in Libya that ensued. Still, when little was done, Tehran shifted its position to condemn the violence and foreign power intervention in the African country. Iran specifically provided material aid to Qaddafi's opponents in Benghazi and entered into talks with the Libyan transitional council while rejecting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) role in the African country, given that NATO insisted that the transitional council avoid working with Tehran. Despite a UN arms embargo on Libya in 2011, in late 2020, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reported to the Security Council that one of four antitank guided missiles in Libya—photos of which were taken by Israel and submitted to the organization—had characteristics like the Iranian Dehlavieh missile but for which a production date could not be verified. Some of the rockets could have ended up in the hands of different sides in the Libyan conflict, given black-market arms sales, and were even used by the Libyan National Army fighting the Government of National Accord (GNA), which Iran supports.⁽²⁵²⁾

(251) "Controversial Stance of Islamic Republic Toward Libya," *DW*, August 29, 2011, <https://bit.ly/2QcAlb9>; "New Chapter in Iran and Libya Relations and Ahmadinejad's Warning," *Hamshahri*, Aban 3, 1390, <https://bit.ly/3taVsJt>; Katayoun Mafi, "Gradual and Persistent Common Steps Between Iran and the People of Libya," *Jam-e Jam*, Shahrivar 13, 1390, <https://www.magiran.com/article/2349689>.

(252) "Controversial Stance of Islamic Republic Toward Libya;" "Anti-Tank Missile In Libya Looks Like Iran-Produced Weapon - UN."

Iran's embassy in Tripoli stayed open after the Libyan uprising, but Tehran could not formulate a cohesive foreign policy toward the African country when it descended into chaos. Iran blamed excessive Western and regional interventions in Libya as a factor that delayed the flourishing of an Islamic awakening in the North African country.⁽²⁵³⁾ Tehran officially recognized the GNA based in the Libyan capital. It also sought a political solution to end the Libyan conflict. From Iran's perspective, the Libyan uprising was likely to continue indefinitely. Tehran further hoped that the Libyan uprising would weaken the Arab country's hold over African countries, paving the way for Iran's influence to grow across the continent.⁽²⁵⁴⁾ More specifically, Tehran saw the Libyan uprising as an incomplete revolution that offered Iran opportunities to expand its influence in the African country and contain the influence of other rival countries, including the Gulf Arab states in Libya.⁽²⁵⁵⁾

Nevertheless, Iran remained concerned by the rise of terrorism in Libya and the ability of groups such as the IS to operate in the country.⁽²⁵⁶⁾ As a result, Iran supported the internationally recognized government in Tripoli and established contacts with different Libyan Islamic groups. The goal was to contain hostile terrorist or para-militia factions from breaking up the country.

Iran remained interested in exploring trade and economic ties with Libya after the uprising, given the African country's long Mediterranean coast, its rich oil and gas resources, and membership in a host of African, Arab, and Islamic organizations, and banks, and international development bodies. However, under President Ahmadinejad, Iran was reluctant to invest in Libya due to concerns the country's rich resources would be taken by more powerful rival local factions and regional and international powers that might undermine any Iranian investments in the African country.⁽²⁵⁷⁾ The increasingly assertive security role that other regional countries undertook in Libya threatened to complicate Iran's influence further there and harm broader Iranian economic and energy interests in North Africa. As a result, Iran did not try to support any other regional country's interests in Libya fully or without reservations.

(253) "Fate of the Fall of a Dictator," *IMNA News Agency*, Mehr 30, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3wUCIjZ>.

(254) "Coups or Undemocratic Power Transition in Burkina Faso."

(255) Salahudin Khadiv, "Return of Arab Spring," Saber Gol Anbari, "Is Egypt's Bitter Experience Awaiting Sudan and Algeria?"

(256) "2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism."

(257) "Controversial Stance of Islamic Republic Toward Libya;" "New Chapter in Iran and Libya Relations and Ahmadinejad's Warning."

The Republic of Madagascar

Madagascar historically hosted an Iranian immigrant business community, and it sought to expand ties with Iran to facilitate the trade in crude oil following the 1979 revolution. Iran sent oil to Madagascar's refinery and opened an embassy in Antananarivo in 1984. In 1997, Iran's Red Crescent Society offered natural disaster aid to Madagascar when a deadly cyclone hit the island nation.⁽²⁵⁸⁾ In 1998, Tehran reached out to Madagascar to advance Iranian access to the Indian Ocean and its port cities. The two countries promoted interparliamentary exchanges in the context of cooperation among the Indian Ocean littoral states. But Madagascar's financial troubles prevented the island nation from opening an embassy in Tehran. In 2002, Iran briefly suspended its embassy's activities in Madagascar but continued to send representatives to visit the African nation.⁽²⁵⁹⁾ Furthermore, Madagascar and Iran have remained engaged as part of the twenty-three-member Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), established in 1997.

Additionally, Iran actively encourages politicians in Antananarivo to support the Palestinian cause, and its policies have been geared toward limiting Israel's influence in Madagascar. Following the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, Tehran invited Antananarivo to unite against Israel during discussions held on the sidelines of an international conference in Iran to support the Palestinian cause.⁽²⁶⁰⁾ In the process, Iran followed the gradual rise of anti-Israeli sentiments in the island nation.⁽²⁶¹⁾

Iran sought opportunities for trade in the non-oil sector with Madagascar, including in the agricultural, fishery, car manufacturing, petrochemical, technological, medical, infrastructure, tourism, and telecommunications sectors.⁽²⁶²⁾ Iran further explored opportunities to develop Madagascar's fishing industry in Exclusive Economic Zones and share Iranian expertise and

(258) "Madagascar Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=573>; "Guinea Bissau Seeks Cooperation with Iran in Car Manufacturing and Steel Industry," *Khaneh Mellat*, Bahman 3, 1396, <https://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/367238/فولاد-صنایع-و-خودروسازی-صنایع-حوزه-دیران-با-همکاری-خواستار-گیبساو-گینه>; see also Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 146.

(259) "A Look at Iran's Relations with African Continent Throughout History," *Quds Online*, Tir 31, 1391, <http://www.qudsonline.ir/news/60071/نگاهی-بمروابط-ایران-و-قاره-آفریقا-در-گذر-تاریخ>; "Madagascar Ties with Iran."

(260) "Iran's Support for Countries Confronting Zionist Regime's Over-Demands," *Pars Today*, 1395, <https://bit.ly/3mBJ42N>.

(261) Seyyed Ahmad Seyyed Moradi, "Shias in Madagascar," *Shia in Africa*, Shahrivar 29, 1399, <http://shiafrica45.blogfa.com>.

(262) "Madagascar Ties with Iran;" "Guinea Bissau Seeks Cooperation with Iran in Car Manufacturing and Steel Industry;" see also Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 146.

private sector investments in the field.⁽²⁶³⁾ Following the conclusion of the nuclear deal, Iran invited Madagascar's representatives to visit its local factories to boost trade.⁽²⁶⁴⁾ Tehran also invited Antananarivo to draw on Iranian expertise and experience to boost economic cooperation.⁽²⁶⁵⁾ In 2016, Madagascar reiterated to Iran its need for energy and fuel and sought technical assistance from Iranians to produce clean automobile fuel.⁽²⁶⁶⁾ In 2017, Iran offered to provide Madagascar with fuel, petrochemical products, household products, and supplies in the agricultural, health, and tourism sectors. It further attempted to facilitate the operation of Iranian companies in Madagascar.⁽²⁶⁷⁾ After the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran, the country urged Antananarivo to tap into Iranian commercial expertise. The two countries agreed to open investment opportunities to one another.⁽²⁶⁸⁾

Iran has promoted the causes of Madagascar's Shi'i community while also building Shi'i mosques in the African country.⁽²⁶⁹⁾ Three years after establishing relations, Antananarivo and Tehran finalized a joint agreement that facilitated new programs to train young people in Islamic studies at the Imam Jafar Sadigh School in Antananarivo. Subsequently, both male and female students in Madagascar could access exchange programs to study in Iran's religious seminaries.⁽²⁷⁰⁾ In October 1990, Antananarivo and Tehran concluded a comprehensive three-year renewable cultural, scientific and technical agreement, paving the way for joint cultural activities, including publications, artistic and educational exchanges, television programming and radio and cinematic activities, exchange of technical expertise, and research, as well as scholarships and training programs. Moreover, several jointly managed schools were established, as was a university chair to promote the Persian language in Madagascar. The two governments

(263) Agriculture Jihad Ministry, *Ways to Expand Fishery Cooperation Between Iran and Madagascar* (Esfand 8, 1395), <https://bit.ly/2RrTzKA>.

(264) Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, *Visit of Head of Madagascar National Majlis to a Manufacturing Unit in Shabestar* (Mordad 19, 1396), <https://bit.ly/3dUW6Ey>.

(265) "Meeting Between Zarif and Senior Officials from Congo and Madagascar," *Khabar Online*, Mordad 16, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3s8DuWO>.

(266) "Madagascar's Expressed Interest to Use Iran's Experiences to Produce Clean Automobile Fuel," *Iranian Students' News Agency*, Farvardin 28, 1399, <https://www.isna.ir/news/95011906490/> *ابراز تمایل-ماداگاسکار-به-استفاده-از-تجربیات-ایران-در-زمینه-تولید*.

(267) "Head of Parliament: Iran's Sustainable Security to Pave the Way for Developing Relations with Madagascar," *Shakhe Sabz*, Mordad 14, 1396, <http://shakhesabz.ir/news/64824/> *ساز-توسعه-روابط-ماداگاسکار-است-رئیس-مجلس-امنیت-پایدار-ایران-زمینه*.

(268) "Iran and Africa Council for Economic Cooperation."

(269) Seyyed Ahmad Seyyed Moradi, "Shias in Madagascar."

(270) "Madagascar Ties with Iran."

committed to fighting illiteracy, expanding tourism, and halting of illegal transfer of historical art and rare artifacts.⁽²⁷¹⁾

The Republic of Malawi

Malawi's location neighboring African countries friendly to Iran—and its links with Tanzania, where Iran retains considerable cultural influence—has seen Lilongwe's relations with Tehran gradually develop over time. Iran's ambassadors in Tanzania were accredited to Malawi, and Lilongwe generally abstained from votes condemning Iran's human rights record at the United Nations. In 1998 during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, Malawi reached out to Iran in the NAM to boost ties. Malawi subsequently invited Iran to share its expertise in the agricultural and health sectors and water resource management. Iran reiterated its commitment to developing Malawi's agricultural sector. A decade later, Iran offered Malawi technical vocational training services. Malawi and Iran subsequently scrapped visa requirements for one-month stays.⁽²⁷²⁾

In 2009, Iran began to focus on Malawi's mining sector, with an interest in uranium extraction for its nuclear program. In 2011, Tehran offered Lilongwe US\$50 million to develop its uranium-mining industry. Malawi subsequently said it would open an embassy in Tehran to strengthen bilateral relations, contradicting its previous position that it was pursuing more robust ties to boost aid flows from Tehran.⁽²⁷³⁾ In 2014, Malawi and Iran held talks to expand cooperation in tobacco production in the African country. Iran offered Malawi additional assistance to develop its irrigation technology.⁽²⁷⁴⁾

By 2020, Malawi's decision to open an embassy in Israel, combined with sanctions against Iran, threatened to dampen bilateral ties. In general, relations between Malawi and Iran have endured (albeit on occasion with tensions), given Iran's potential ability to influence the African country's

(271) Majlis, *Bill on Cultural, Scientific, and Technical Agreement Between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Democratic Republic of Madagascar* (Aban 23, 1399), <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/92077>.

(272) "In Meeting with Foreign Minister of Malawi: President Emphasizes Ending Oppressive World Conditions," *Magiran*, Farvardin 28, 1387, <https://www.magiran.com/article/1602845>; "Government's Agreement to Lift Visas for One Month Stays with Cambodia and Malawi," *Dolat*, Dei 13, 1389, <http://dolat.ir/detail/197256>.

(273) "50 Million Help by Iran to Malawi," *Asr Iran*, Mordad 8, 1390, <https://www.asriran.com/fa/news/174862/توسعه-یافته-کمک-کنیم>; "50-میلیون-دلاری-ایران-به-مالاوی-وظیفه-داریم-به-کشورهای-کمتر-توسعه-یافته-کمک-کنیم"; "Malawi To Open Embassy in Iran," *Nyasa Times*, September 3, 2011, <https://www.nyasatimes.com/malawi-to-open-embassy-in-iran/>.

(274) "Malawi and Iran Agricultural Relations Will Expand," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Mordad 26, 1393, <https://www.irna.ir/news/81275892/روابط-کشاورزی-مالاوی-و-ایران-گسترش-می-یابد>.

significant Shi‘i population of mostly Lebanese origin. Malawi’s Muslim leaders, and particularly members of its Shi‘i community, have traveled often to Iran. In addition, Iran has welcomed the rise of Muslim political leaders to some prominence in Malawi, a majority Christian country.

The Republic of Mali

In the 1980s, Iran could not build strong contacts in Mali, a predominantly Muslim country, given Bamako’s close ties with Baghdad.⁽²⁷⁵⁾ However, despite its relatively small population and economy compared to many of its neighbors, Mali has remained important for Iran’s strategy to increase its soft power influence in West Africa. As a result, Mali’s relations with Iran have remained cordial, albeit limited.

In 2005, Bamako and Tehran increased cooperation in the OIC. Mali later moved to support Iran’s peaceful nuclear program. In turn, Iran expanded its investment profile in Mali to reduce Bamako’s dependence on financial aid and investment from the United States and other Western countries. In 2007, Mali recognized Iranian engineers’ contribution to the success of local infrastructure development projects, including dam construction.⁽²⁷⁶⁾

In recent years, Iran has sought to expand trade ties with Mali. The biggest ticket items in Iranian exports to the landlocked African country are cement, food paste, tiles, and biscuits.⁽²⁷⁷⁾ In 2016, Foreign Minister Zarif traveled to Mali to explore new trade options and was accompanied by a business delegation. Further, Iran has continued to offer Mali opportunities to expand the African nation’s health sector.⁽²⁷⁸⁾

Iran has promoted its soft power influence in Mali and across West Africa by supporting the building of Islamic schools, seminaries, mosques, and local cultural centers. Iran established a cultural center in the capital Bamako and branches elsewhere across the country, offering Islamic studies from which many imams and preachers have graduated. The educational program

(275) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(276) “Iran’s Soft Power in West Africa,” *Hawzah Net*, Issue 296, Bahman 1389, <https://bit.ly/326GqZi>.

(277) “Welcoming of Largest Trade Delegates from Mali and Mauritius by Iran Expo,” Mehr 21, 1397, <https://www.irantsn.com/Fa/category/Fa-News/269/اکیپو-ایران-اکسپو>.

(278) “The Success of Zarif’s Trip to Africa was Beyond Expectation,” Ali Mousavi Khalkhali, “Warm Reception by Authorities in Senegal for Zarif;” “Economic Problems Do Exist but We Must Adapt.”

is designed to support Mali's Shi'i community—which, although small, has been increasing through conversions—and to enable the Iranian embassy in Bamako to select students to study in Iran.⁽²⁷⁹⁾

Iran has remained concerned by Mali's potential vulnerability to terrorist groups, including radical armed groups, and the ability of the ISWAP to recruit fighters in Mali and neighboring Burkina Faso.⁽²⁸⁰⁾ As a result, Iran maintained ongoing discussions with Mali on anti-terrorism issues.⁽²⁸¹⁾ In addition, Tehran offered financial aid to communities in Africa suffering from civil unrest, including in Mali.⁽²⁸²⁾ In return, in 2017, Mali declared it would not cooperate with Iran's adversaries.⁽²⁸³⁾ In 2019, Iran renewed calls to strengthen ties with Mali to beat the sanctions regime.⁽²⁸⁴⁾ But by 2020, as Mali slowly transitioned to building a civilian government, it embarked on measures to expand dialog with Israel, a step that threatened to weaken the African nation's ties with Iran.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania

Following the 1979 revolution, Iran sent its representative in Paris to establish contacts with Mauritania. In 1980, Iran opened an office to represent its interests in Nouakchott. In 1984, a coup d'état saw Mauritania's new leader Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, take the country out of Algeria's orbit and adopt a new policy of appeasing Morocco over its disputed territory of the Western Sahara. The new regime also strengthened ties with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The coup drove Nouakchott and Tehran apart. Mauritanian officials held back on an official invitation to open a diplomatic office in Nouakchott until Tehran issued a stern ultimatum to the effect that it would consider ending ties altogether. As an Arab state that sees itself as African as well, Mauritania feared its conservative Sunni population would react adversely to stronger relations with Tehran.

(279) "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa."

(280) "2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism."

(281) "Ghana's President to Visit Tehran."

(282) "Salehi: Iran is Ready to Help Resolve Mali's Financial Crisis," *IRDiplomacy*, Bahman 8, 1391, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1912085/صالحی-ایران-آماده-کمک-به-حل-بحران-مالی-است>.

(283) "Mali Will Never Cooperate with Iran's Enemies: Speaker," *Press TV*, October 8, 2017, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2017/10/08/537852/Iran-Africa-Mali-Larijani-Sidibe>.

(284) "Iran Willing to Deepen Ties with African Countries," *The Iran Project*, February 2, 2019, <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2019/02/02/iran-willing-to-deepen-ties-with-african-countries/>.

In addition, Mauritania had enjoyed close security relations with Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran. Both countries had supported Morocco's position on the Western Sahara against Algeria, which supported the Sahara Polisario Front. These were fundamentally different positions than those taken by revolutionary Iran, which supported the Polisario. As a result, the brief opening of an Iranian embassy in Nouakchott in 1984–85 did not improve relations. In 1986, Mauritania's embassy in Iran submitted an official letter severing diplomatic ties, citing Iran's insistence on continued war with Iraq and its apparent fomenting of conflict in the Gulf Arab region. Iran's embassy in Nouakchott subsequently closed. Mauritania supported Iraq during the war, as Iran's relations with France, which backed Mauritania, deteriorated.⁽²⁸⁵⁾

Despite these diplomatic hurdles, Iran considers Mauritania to be its most successful project as far as spreading Iranian soft power influence in Africa is concerned. In general, Iranian policies have sought to nudge Mauritania away from backing Western security plans for West Africa that give a dominant role to the French. In the process, Mauritania has been encouraged to support Iran's positions on different issues in international forums. In 2007, after Iran dispatched envoys to Mauritania to reopen embassies, the African country supported Iran's allies in Lebanon and Iraq which pleased Tehran. In 2008, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz came to power following a coup d'état in Mauritania. Relations improved under the new regime, despite Iran's initial concerns about the coup. In addition, Iran took credit for altering the African country's foreign policy course in general, including its decision to suspend ties with Israel over the Gaza War in 2008–2009. According to reports, Iran offered Mauritania security support in exchange for ending relations with Tel Aviv. But Mauritania continued to cooperate with Western countries, including the United States, over how to manage al-Qaeda's threat in West Africa, which prevented Iran from readily advancing its security interests in the African nation.⁽²⁸⁶⁾

In 2017, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif paid a visit to Mauritania to discuss a range of political issues, including developments in Tunisia and Algeria, and to urge for

(285) "Mauritania Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=728>; *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(286) "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa;" "Iran-Mauritania Relations Instead of Mauritania-Israel Relations," *IRDiplomacy*, Farvardin 30, 1389, <https://bit.ly/3a1BklG>.

counter-terrorism collaboration. According to reports, Iran began construction of a road linking Tindouf in Algeria with Zouerat in Mauritania as a strategic highway that could potentially impact the outcome of the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario, in which Mauritania was also a disputing party given that Morocco annexed Mauritania's portion of the claim over the Western Sahara after the latter two made peace in 1979.⁽²⁸⁷⁾

Following the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, Mauritania attempted to advance ties with Tehran, without hurting Nouakchott's relations with the Gulf Arab states in the process, given the West African country's dire economic needs. Along the way, Tehran believed that Saudi Arabia's relations with Mauritania would not be strong enough to discourage Nouakchott from drawing closer to Tehran. Tehran specifically reiterated its appreciation for Mauritania's decision to support Damascus by reopening an embassy in Syria. Mauritania and Iran seemed to reach an understanding over a series of security issues when Iran's defense minister Amir Hatami visited Nouakchott on his way to Venezuela in January 2019. In meetings with officials, Hatami emphasized that the election of Mauritania's defense minister Yahya Ould Hademine as president would expand ties with Iran. During the talks, Hatami further reiterated the need to coordinate positions on Palestine and the lifting of sanctions against Iran.⁽²⁸⁸⁾

Since 2010, Mauritania and Iran have gradually expanded their economic ties. Iran expressed interest in investing in the West African country's fertile agricultural lands and offered to sell farm machinery and technical and engineering services to Mauritania.⁽²⁸⁹⁾ In 2012, Nouakchott and Tehran agreed to expand trade relations and explored opportunities to promote cooperation in the fields of communications, culture, interparliamentary affairs, and the justice system. Iran called on Mauritania to cooperate in the gas and energy sectors and fight terrorism and radicalism, which threatened Mauritania's borders with Mali.⁽²⁹⁰⁾

(287) Freddy Eytan, "Tension Mounts Between Iran and Mauritania," *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, May 31, 2018, <https://jcpa.org/article/tension-mounts-between-iran-and-mauritania/>.

(288) "A Look at Prospects of Iran's Ties with Mauritania," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Mordad 11, 1398, <https://bit.ly/39T1TZZ>; "Mauritania: Relations with Iran Will Not Hurt Arab Countries," *Tasnim News Agency*, Tir 2, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3fZiWO7>.

(289) "Paving Way to Trade with Mauritania," *Taadol*, Mordad 11, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3uDVOZy>.

(290) "Islamic Countries Should Cooperate to Confront Violence and Radicalism," *Presidential Informational Dissemination Staff*, Khordad 24, 1393, <http://www.president.ir/fa/7856.2>.

However, since Mauritania is the only West African country that is not a member of ECOWAS, Iran has had fewer incentives to engage economically. Furthermore, the African country's recent oil discoveries, and membership in the Arab League, limit the space for the rapid growth of economic ties with Iran. But Mauritania invited Iran to invest in its fishery, animal husbandry, mining, and service sectors, increase tourism investments, and expand joint free-trade zones.⁽²⁹¹⁾ To fight sanctions, Iran has proposed barter agreements to overcome banking impediments to trade with Mauritania. The two countries exchanged trade delegations in 2017 and in the following years. Iran has continued to reach out to Mauritania. Iran has recently led talks with Mauritania over the COVID-19 pandemic and the issue of sanctions and explored barter arrangements.⁽²⁹²⁾ But Mauritania's move to restore ties with Israel potentially threatened the African country's trade relations with Tehran.

Nevertheless, Iran has encouraged Mauritania to engage in activities that sanctions do not generally preclude, such as academic exchanges, research, university-level cooperation, and promoting the Persian language in the African country's academic institutions. Iran further expressed its readiness to share its scientific achievements in nuclear technology, nanotechnology, and biotechnology with Mauritania by promoting the activities of Iranian science foundation institutions and services, otherwise known as the Bonyad Danesh Pajouh. Iran subsequently dispatched a new ambassador to Mauritania in 2020.⁽²⁹³⁾

As a sparsely populated and predominantly Sunni country, Mauritania has been sensitive to Iran's Shi'i influence and its potential to cause unrest locally. Iran, in turn, has kept an eye on rising anti-Shi'i sentiments in Mauritania, especially those expressed by Sunni clerics calling for laws to prevent the propagation of Shi'ism and the opening of Quranic Shi'i schools in the African country. To alleviate local concerns about its activities to propagate Shi'ism, Tehran has repeatedly reassured Mauritanian officials that such activities pose no risk to the country.⁽²⁹⁴⁾

(291) "Mauritanian Seeks Iranian Investment," *Tehran Times*, January 27, 2010, http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=213127.

(292) "Zarif's Telephone Conversation with Foreign Minister of Mauritania," *Donya-e-Eqtesad*, Aban 22, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3s91PM3>; "Barter: A Path to Expand Trade Ties with African Continent."

(293) "Middle East and North Africa Expert: Iran Achievements in Nano and Bio Technologies Less Recognized," *Qods*, Tir 23, 1399, <https://bit.ly/2Rg99J1>.

(294) "Insulting Remarks by a Prayer Imam in Mauritania Against Shias," *Shafaqna*, 1393, <https://af.shafaqna.com/FA/016833>.

Despite Iran's efforts, the problem has adversely affected relations. By 2010, according to reports, some 50,000 Mauritians had converted to Shi'i Islam. In 2016, Mauritania briefly broke off its ties with Iran due to its support for the local Shi'i community. When relations resumed, Mauritania summoned Iran's ambassador to explain the increased activities of the Shi'i community at the al-Mujina mosque in the capital in 2018. The leader of Mauritania's Shi'i community, Bekar Ould Bekar, has continued to facilitate Mauritians' pilgrimages to Iran's Shi'i holy sites. In addition, according to sources close to Iran, several Mauritanian business leaders and social reformers supported the gradual promotion of Shi'ism in the African country and sought inspiration from Iran.⁽²⁹⁵⁾

The Republic of Mauritius

Located in the Indian Ocean close to West Asian waters, Mauritius has long enjoyed strong ties with the Gulf states. As a result, Iran has managed to retain cordial ties with Mauritius and its Muslim and Shi'i communities, despite diplomatic hurdles. Iranian ambassadors to Madagascar were accredited to Mauritius after the revolution.⁽²⁹⁶⁾ Iran has worked with Mauritius in the NAM and through the IORA. After 2002, Iran has expanded trade ties with the island nation given its rich marine resources and capacity to help Iran develop its maritime networks. Port Louis specifically sought cooperation with Tehran in tourism and fishery. Iran views Mauritius as a country that has generally played a positive role in promoting the unity and security of the Indian Ocean states in a manner that has served Iranian maritime interests and trade relations.⁽²⁹⁷⁾

Iran's religious establishment took credit for the island nation's decision to suspend ties with Israel after its offensive in the Gaza Strip in 2009.⁽²⁹⁸⁾ But Mauritius maintained its cooperation with the United States to contain al-Qaeda, which threatened to forestall the expansion of Iran's security ties with Port Louis.

(295) Freddy Eytan, "Tension Mounts Between Iran and Mauritania."

(296) "A Look at Iran's Relations with the African Continent Throughout History," *Quds Online*, Tir 31, 1391, <http://www.qudsonline.ir/news/60071/نگاهی-به-روابط-ایران-و-قاره-آفریقا-در-گذر-تاریخ>.

(297) "Welcoming of Largest Trade Delegates From Mali and Mauritius by Iran Expo;" "Iran, Mauritius Keen on Expansion of Mutual Ties," *Tehran Times*, June 18, 2002, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/81828/Iran-Mauritius-Keen-on-Expansion-of-Mutual-Ties>.

(298) "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa."

In recent years, Mauritius took further steps to contain local Iranian influence when it sought Israeli assistance to develop its security and telecommunications industry. In 2016–2017, Mauritius supported Saudi Arabia when the kingdom broke off its relations with Iran and Qatar. But in October 2017, Port Louis and Tehran sought to reboot their cooperation through trade, economic and educational exchanges, and tourism. Other areas of collaboration involved exploring maritime bunkering and developing the energy sectors. Iran further offered to revive the Persian cultural heritage on the island nation and upgrade the Château Val Ory in Moka, where the former Iranian monarch Reza Shah Pahlavi lived in exile during World War II before Tehran decided to sell off the Iranian property on the island nation.⁽²⁹⁹⁾

The Kingdom of Morocco

Following the 1979 revolution, Tehran recalled its ambassador from Rabat to protest Morocco's decision to host the deposed Shah. In 1980, Iran lowered its diplomatic representation in Morocco to the level of a chargé d'affaires. Tehran then declared support for the Western Sahara and the Polisario Front. Believing that the Front represented one of the last bastions of Africa's anti-colonial struggle against the borders delineated in Africa by Western powers, Iran allowed the Polisario to open an office in Tehran. In protest, Morocco summoned its diplomats from Tehran, retaining only an administrative officer at its embassy. Iran reciprocated, and by 1981, political ties between the two countries were severed. The embassies of Malaysia, the UAE, and Oman served as interest sections for the two countries in the following years. In 1982, King Hassan II called on Arab states to support Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War. After a ceasefire agreement to end the Iran–Iraq War was reached in 1988, Rabat and Tehran expressed interest in reviving ties. In 1991, Morocco's prime minister, Azzeddine Laraki, met with President Rafsanjani of Iran during an OIC meeting in Dakar, Senegal. Morocco and Iran then resumed diplomatic ties, and frequent high-ranking official meetings in Rabat and Tehran soon followed.⁽³⁰⁰⁾

(299) Government of Mauritius, *Mauritius and Iran Explore Avenues of Economic and Cultural Cooperation* (October 11, 2017), <http://www.govmu.org/English/News/Pages/Mauritius-and--Iran-explore--avenues-of-economic-and-cultural-cooperation-.aspx>.

(300) "A Look at Relations Between Iran and Maghreb," *Hamshahri*, Bahman 17, 1385, <https://bit.ly/3mBKiep>; "Somalia Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=453>.

Relations between Morocco and Iran improved but remained limited to carefully monitored cultural and scientific exchanges. Rabat also barred Moroccan clerics from studying in Iran. President Ahmadinejad tried to improve ties with Morocco by inviting King Mohammad VI to visit Iran in 2007.⁽³⁰¹⁾ But in 2009, Morocco severed relations with Iran, citing Iranian intervention in Bahrain's domestic affairs and propagation of Shi'i Islam. Rabat and Tehran resumed ties in January 2017, with certain conditions laid out in negotiations between the two states through diplomatic exchanges held the year before. In February 2018, Rabat sent a note of congratulations to President Rouhani on the anniversary of the Islamic revolution. In May, Morocco cut its diplomatic ties with Tehran again, citing the Iranian support for the Polisario through Hezbollah agents. Iran said the evidence provided was weak and rejected Morocco's claims on the matter.⁽³⁰²⁾

Throughout the upheavals in the diplomatic relationship, Tehran has viewed Rabat as a capital struggling to bring Morocco's so-called "deep state" (Al-Makhzen) into line. As a result, Iran chose to expand its contacts with a host of actors in Morocco—including universities, political parties, parliament, and influential elites—but Iranian actions stirred local sensitivities in the North African country. Ultimately, Iran has maintained that holding on to relations with Morocco entailed more work than was justified given the limited trade and the geographic distance between the two countries. Iran further believes that only a major strategic conversion in the North African country's political outlook will see relations improve. As a result, Iran regards its ties with Morocco as nearly inconsequential, a position it is likely to hold until Rabat moves away from its close relations with the Gulf Arab states.⁽³⁰³⁾

In the southern border of Western Sahara, provocations by the pro-independence Polisario Front, and tensions in Moroccan-controlled areas of the disputed territory, have kept Iran concerned that rival powers might seize the Western Sahara's natural resources. Moroccan–Iranian relations have remained tense. Iran has been accused of arming the separatist Polisario Front in Western

(301) "Interesting Story by Former Iran Ambassador to Morocco over Sudden Break up of Ties;" Mehrdad Qasemfar, "Iran and Morocco; Background of Relations, Excuse to Break Ties," *Radio Farda*, Esfand 18, 1387, https://www.radiofarda.com/a/F7_Iran_Morocco_review/1506227.html.

(302) "Interesting Story by Former Iran Ambassador to Morocco over Sudden Break up of Ties."

(303) "Interesting Story by Former Iran Ambassador to Morocco over Sudden Break up of Ties."

Sahara and spreading Shi'i ideology in the area with assistance from Hezbollah and by funding of local religious foundations.⁽³⁰⁴⁾ In 2018, Morocco charged that Polisario Front members had used Iranian diplomatic passports, provided by Iran's embassy in Algeria, to participate in international meetings. Morocco further accused Hezbollah of supplying SAM-9 and SAM-11 rockets to the Front. Morocco shared evidence of the claims by dispatching a representative to Iran, but Tehran ignored Rabat over the Polisario. Still, according to reports, Morocco remains concerned about Hezbollah's financial activities in West Africa and investments in local businesses in the region, which could impact the economic landscape in the Western Sahara.⁽³⁰⁵⁾

The trade volume between Morocco and Iran stood at US\$50 million in 2001. In 2004–2005, Rabat and Tehran concluded an MoU on trade in fertilizers and phosphates. Morocco's largest oil refinery, SAMIR, finalized a renewable agreement with Iran to sell 1 million barrels of oil for 18 months, at a value of approximately US\$500 million. The volume of trade between Morocco and Iran reached US\$500 million during Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2007–2008, and according to some sources in Iran, it peaked at US\$650 million. Iran's key exports to Morocco are oil, petrochemical products, decorative glasses, dried fruits, and nuts. Iran's major imports from Morocco are phosphates and their derivatives. Iran's naval fleet has frequented ports in Morocco to transfer phosphate, sulfur phosphate, and phosphoric acid. But Morocco has placed high tariffs on Iranian imports, which has hindered the expansion of commercial ties.⁽³⁰⁶⁾ Tourism between Morocco and Iran was set to pick up in 2016 before relations between the two countries again broke down in 2018.⁽³⁰⁷⁾

Following Iran's revolution, King Hassan II chaired an international council of Islamic scholars that rejected the Islamic political doctrine preached by Ayatollah Khomeini. Rabat charged Tehran with attempting to alter Morocco's religious identity, which partly rested on historical connections

(304) Omer Dostri, "Iran's Involvement in the Western Sahara," *The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security*, September 4, 2018, <https://jiss.org.il/en/dostri-irans-involvement-western-sahara/>; "From Closure of AlJazeera Network in Egypt to Maghreb's Welcoming of Normalizing Ties with Iran," *IRDiplomacy*, Dei 4, 1393, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1942264/از-تعطیلی-شبکه-الجزیره-مصر-تا-استقبال-مغرب-از-عادی-سازی-روابط-با-ایران>.

(305) "Why Did Rabat End Ties with Iran Again?" *Tabnak*, Shahrivar 26, 1397, <https://bit.ly/3g2HJAO>; "Morocco: Polisario Front Uses Iranian Diplomatic Passports," DW, November 5, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3g28upc>.

(306) "A Look at Relations Between Iran and Maghreb."

(307) "Morocco: Polisario Front Uses Iranian Diplomatic Passports."

to Shi‘i Islam.⁽³⁰⁸⁾ Sermons by the Iranian cleric Mohammad-Ali Taskhiri appeared to question Morocco’s other religious orientations, including its embrace of the Maliki Sunni faith. By 2009, Iran was providing scholarships in the hundreds to Moroccan scholars and students to study in Iranian seminaries and disseminating Iranian publications across the North African country. Iran influenced the Moroccan expatriate community in Europe as well—specifically in France and Belgium—to encourage conversions to Shi‘i Islam. Morocco was particularly concerned by its Shi‘i community’s activities, including the Al-Gadeer Association, which helped propagate Shi‘i Islam through its publications. Simultaneously, sources close to Iran claimed that Shi‘i Islam was spreading quickly in Morocco and was influencing local Islamic movements.⁽³⁰⁹⁾

According to reports, the number of Shi‘a in Morocco increased by nearly a thousand annually by 2019, as Shi‘i television and media programs aired across the North African country. As a result, Morocco’s ruling Justice and Development Party warned that the spread of Shi‘i Islam could fuel sectarian politics.⁽³¹⁰⁾ Other reports claimed that Shi‘ism in Morocco was closely tied to the Iranian-backed Ahl al-Bayt school of thought and to upholding Shi‘i ceremonies and following Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolutionary model. The reports suggested that most Shi‘a in Morocco lived under the principle of *taqiyyah* to avoid raising local sensitivities about Shi‘i Islam, but that the rate of conversions to Shi‘i Islam was higher than what was believed, particularly among Moroccans living in Europe.⁽³¹¹⁾

The Republic of Mozambique

Following the 1979 revolution, Iran viewed Mozambique as a frontline state in the fight against apartheid, and it donated to projects benefiting local Muslim communities. Iran’s ties with Mozambique led to a more active propagation of Shi‘i Islam in the African country starting in 1980–1985. The Ahl al-Bayt School remained active in Mozambique along with several other Shi‘i schools and religious centers, including in the capital Maputo.⁽³¹²⁾ But Mozambique’s civil

(308) Jonathan Laurence, “Commentary: In Sunni North Africa, Fears of Iran’s Shiite Shadow.”

(309) “Interesting Story by Former Iran Ambassador to Morocco over Sudden Break up of Ties;” Mehrdad Qasemfar, “Iran and Morocco; Background of Relations, Excuse to Break Ties.”

(310) “How Does Iran Seek to Make Morocco Shiite?” *The Reference*, September 22, 2019, <https://www.thereference-paris.com/7061>; Jonathan Laurence, “Commentary: In Sunni North Africa, Fears of Iran’s Shiite Shadow.”

(311) “Morocco,” *Wikishia*, <https://bit.ly/2QilHiO>; “Increasing Influence of Ahl al-Bayt (aleyh-e-salam) Faith in Maghreb,” *Abna*, Aban 6, 1390, <https://fa.abna24.com/service/africa/archive/2011/10/28/275005/story.html>.

(312) “Mozambique,” *Wikishia*, <https://bit.ly/3s9xr4p>; Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamedi, *The Islamic Republic of Iran’s Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

war, and the subsequent shut down of Iran's embassy in Maputo in the early 1990s, dampened relations. As a result, Iranians were generally not well known in Mozambique, although they could acquire visas on arrival at ports of entry and Maputo's airport. In late 2020, when Mozambique arrested twelve Iranian fishers off its coasts and refused to return them to Iran, a level of uncertainty over ties with Tehran was laid bare.⁽³¹³⁾

Mozambique's challenge setting up major industries made it less attractive to the Iranian investors and business community. But Mozambique's close trade relations with South Africa increasingly made Maputo an attractive business destination for Iran. In 2017, Iran reopened its embassy in Maputo after more than two decades, intending to re-launch economic relations with Mozambique.⁽³¹⁴⁾ Tehran sought opportunities to expand trade in mines and the oil sector, at times through swap arrangements with Maputo.⁽³¹⁵⁾ Maputo subsequently entered talks to receive urea fertilizer from Iran. In 2019–2020, Iran exported US\$3.8 million worth of products to Mozambique. Mozambique imported from Iran biscuit-making machinery, plastic products, and clinker bricks.⁽³¹⁶⁾

Despite the recent setbacks for IS and its affiliate organizations across the continent, especially after suffering defeat in Syria in 2016, Iran saw Mozambique as a terrorist hotspot that would attract IS forces as they expanded operations into Africa.⁽³¹⁷⁾ Mozambique's instability due to operations in the country by groups including the IS and the al-Shabaab led some analysts to suggest that the African country was a destination for Iranian arms sent to the continent either for sale or to contain the IS forces, which Iran considers a greater threat than al-Shabaab.⁽³¹⁸⁾ In 2017–2020, al-Shabaab and IS forces increased attacks in Mozambique, and there was a danger that the two groups might combine forces.⁽³¹⁹⁾

(313) "Iranian Fishermen in Mozambique," *Tabnak*, September 25, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3wLx4Ai>.

(314) "Iran to Re-Open Embassy in Maputo After Twenty Year Lapse," *Club of Mozambique*, June 27, 2017, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/iran-to-re-open-embassy-in-maputo-after-twenty-year-lapse/>.

(315) Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamedi, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

(316) "Iran Exports to Africa in First Seven Months," *Donya-e-Eqtesad*, Azar 1, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3saPoPX>; Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, *Marketing for Iran Petrochemical Products in Black Continent* (August 9, 1395), <http://www.tccim.ir/news/PrintPage.aspx?nid=46723>.

(317) "2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism."

(318) Muhammad Fraser-Rahim, Mo Fatah, "In Somalia, Iran is Replicating Russia's Afghan Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, July 17, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/17/iran-aiding-al-shabab-somalia-united-states/>.

(319) Eleanor Beever, "ISIS Militants Pose Growing Threat Across Africa."

The Republic of Namibia

Following the 1979 revolution, Iran supported the anti-apartheid leader of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), Sam Nujoma, who would later serve three times as president of Namibia from 1990 to 2005. As Nujoma led Namibia's national liberation movement, which entailed its independence from South African rule in 1990, Iran's leaders defended SWAPO in NAM meetings and invited the party to open a diplomatic office in Tehran. In 1986, President Khamenei met with Nujoma in Angola and invited him to visit Tehran. In the following years, Namibia and Iran exchanged over thirty diplomatic delegations.⁽³²⁰⁾ In 1990, Nujoma flew to Windhoek in an Iranian-operated jet, arranged through Iran's embassy in Zambia, to assume Namibia's presidency following its independence.⁽³²¹⁾

Despite receiving Iran's support for its independence, Namibia conditioned improving its ties with Tehran on receiving Iranian aid and financial support. When the support was less than forthcoming, Namibia was equally disinclined to compromise its stronger ties with the West to boost relations with Tehran, irrespective of Iran's support to post-independence Namibian politicians. Consequently, Windhoek and Tehran were unable to foster a strong partnership. Other factors led to stagnating ties between the two capitals, including geographic distance, high transportation costs, legal and banking restrictions, Namibia's small population that depended mainly on South African markets for sustenance, and Namibia's high investment risks. As a result, Iran tended to address immediate goals in its efforts to consolidate a partnership with Namibia and mainly sought the African country's support in regional and international organizations.⁽³²²⁾ Iran subsequently closed its embassy in Windhoek, citing financial costs and the lack of strong trade incentives, which reopened 15 years later when Hassan Rouhani was elected president in 2013.⁽³²³⁾

(320) "Namibia Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=691>.

(321) "Untold Stories of Influence of Iran's Islamic Revolution in Africa's Struggle Against Apartheid," *Khabar Online*, Azar 27, 1389, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/116738/ناگفته-هائی-از-تاثیر-انقلاب-اسلامی-ایران-در-مبارز-م-آفریقا-بر>.

(322) "Namibia Ties with Iran."

(323) "Economic Cooperation, Bridge between Iran, Africa and South America," *Iran Ministry of Industry, Mines and Agriculture News Staff*, <http://otaghiranonline.ir/news/12960>; "Review of Iran's Policy Under Rouhani Government Based on Sustainable Principles," *Imna News Agency*, Tir 18, 1399, <https://www.imna.ir/news/108085/باز-نگری-سیاست-ایران-در-دولت-روحانی-بر-اساس-اصول-پایدار>.

Sanctions against Iran during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency prevented significant progress in ties with Namibia, but Windhoek and Tehran held senior-level diplomatic and defense meetings.⁽³²⁴⁾ Iran cultivated ties with Namibia, given that it is one of the world's largest uranium producers.⁽³²⁵⁾ In 1976, the Iranian Foreign Investment Company held a 15 percent stake as a passive legacy investor in Namibia's Rössing Uranium Mine. Following the conclusion of the nuclear deal in 2015, Iran expressed a renewed interest in investing in Namibia's uranium-mining industry by accelerating contacts between Windhoek and the Iranian Chamber of Commerce and Economic Forum. Earlier in 2008, intending to boost ties, Iran invited Namibia to promote cooperation in the energy, housing, and health sectors and jointly promote scientific collaboration and university-level exchanges in the spirit of South–South cooperation.⁽³²⁶⁾

Following the nuclear deal, Iran made several tentative deals worth US\$200 million to develop Namibia's construction sector and help the African country with plans to manufacture trucks and fuel tanks, promote renewable energies, build power stations, and boost industrial-scale oil production and petrochemical exports. Namibia sought Iran's technical assistance in agribusiness and agricultural production and to develop new local gas fields. It also invited Iran to build a refinery. Tehran insisted that its energy investment goal was to ensure long-term security and that the policy involving the building of refineries was strictly restricted to global locations that strategically mattered to Iran. But Iran encouraged a number of African countries, including Namibia, to cancel visa requirements for the Iranian business community and set up new banking arrangements to allow trade during sanctions, even though Namibia does not have an embassy in Tehran.⁽³²⁷⁾ In 2018, Foreign Minister Zarif met with Namibian officials in Windhoek to boost commercial ties, agribusiness, and agricultural production projects in the African country. Simultaneously, Iran's Central Bank sought to expand ties with state-run African banks.⁽³²⁸⁾

(324) "Review of Iran's Policy Under Rouhani Government Based on Sustainable Principles."

(325) "Economic Cooperation, Bridge between Iran, Africa and South America."

(326) "Expansion of Iran Relations with Angola, Namibia in Energy, Trade and Health;" "IFICK Director General: Iran Wants to Expand Relations with Namibia," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Ordibehesht 30, 1396, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82538410/> مدیر عامل-ایفیک-ایران-مایل-به-توسعه-روابط-با-نامیبیا-است.

(327) "The Success of Zarif's Trip to Africa was Beyond Expectation;" Ali Mousavi Khalkhali, "Warm Reception by Authorities in Senegal for Zarif;" "Economic Problems Do Exist but We Must Adapt;" "Namibia's Interest to Develop Economic Cooperation with Iran," *SHANA*, Mordad 15, 1396, <https://www.shana.ir/news/277946/> های-اقتصادی-با-ایران-علاقه-مندی-نامیبیا-به-توسعه-همکاری-های-اقتصادی-با-ایران.

(328) Ahmad Majidiyar, "Iran's FM Zarif Tours South America and Africa to Boost Ties," *Middle East Eye*, April 13, 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/irans-fm-zarif-tours-south-america-and-africa-boost-ties>.

In recent years, Windhoek and Tehran have occasionally found themselves in furious agreement in defense of Palestinian rights, condemning the use of chemical weapons in Syria and urging political resolutions to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen.⁽³²⁹⁾ Before the finalization of the Iran nuclear deal, Windhoek and Tehran signed an anti-piracy agreement on Iran's invitation. Namibia subsequently invited the Iranian naval fleet to visit the African country's ports and sent naval delegations to Iran's Imam University and Naval College in Noushahr. Iran inspected several different naval sites in Namibia to lay out a road map for cooperation and said it was ready to equip, organize, build, repair, and maintain Namibia's naval fleet. In addition, Iran offered to share with Namibia plans for its Persian Gulf naval training units designed to expand the capacity of the naval forces.⁽³³⁰⁾

To serve the small Muslim population in Windhoek, in 1991, Iran built Namibia's first mosque, known as the Quba Mosque, where members of the Iranian Islamic Propagation Organization offered programs, cultivated community relations, and promoted interfaith exchanges.⁽³³¹⁾ To this end, the mosque's local prayer imam was a Sunni. Given that Shi'ism in Namibia was practiced among a limited number of families, the mosque was able to recruit a local Shi'i imam only recently and planned on sending the imam to Iran to advance his religious studies. But Quranic studies at the center were instrumental in a small number of conversions among Namibia's youth to Islam. As such, the center enjoyed a growing but small number of followers among both the Sunni and Shi'i communities. The Quba Mosque also led outreach programs via local radio and television stations in Namibia and through visits to local hospitals and orphanages.⁽³³²⁾

The Republic of Niger

Iran has long seen Niger as an important country in Africa, given its sizeable Muslim population and proximity to Nigeria and North Africa. Its status as one of the world's poorest countries also

(329) "Iran, Namibia Condemn Use of Chemicals in Syria," *IFP*, April 12, 2018, <https://ifpnews.com/iran-namibia-condemn-use-of-chemicals-in-syria>.

(330) "Cooperation Between Iran and Namibia to Fight Pirates," *Tasnim News Agency*, Mehr 16, 1392, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1392/07/16/161356/همکاری-امضا-سند-همکاری-دفاعی>; "Iran's Readiness to Organize and Equip Namibia's Naval Force," *Hamshahri*, Mehr 16, 1392, <https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/234310/آمادگی-ایران-برای-ساماندهی-و-تجهیز-نیروی-دریایی-نامیبیا>.

(331) "Namibia Ties with Iran."

(332) "Study of Quran, Reason Why Youth in Namibia Are Attracted to Islam," *International Quran News Agency*, Esfand 19, 1396, <https://iqna.ir/fa/news/3698301/مطالعه-قرآن-عامل-گرایش-جوانان-نامیبیا-به-اسلام>.

invites the influence of foreign powers. Details about relations between Niamey and Tehran are often hard to come by due to Niger's complex political landscape and the multiple coup d'états in recent history. Following the 1979 revolution, Niger generally abstained from votes condemning Iran and its human rights record in the United Nations. Niger also accredited its ambassador in Libya to Iran. Iran opened an embassy in Niger to help implement a mining agreement which was stalled by foreign governments. But Iran objected to Niger's decision to promote the book *The Satanic Verses* after it was published in 1988, and relations between the two countries remained relatively stagnant.

Relations improved under Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, who became prime minister of Niger in 1997. Niger's leaders attended the OIC Summit in Tehran in 1997, and the country voted in favor of Iran in UN resolutions for three years in a row.⁽³³³⁾ In 2017, Niger and Iran held interparliamentary talks to boost understanding on the issue of Palestine and terrorism. Niger subsequently said it planned to open an embassy in Tehran.⁽³³⁴⁾ Niger's positions drew closer to Iran in defending the JCPOA and Iranian positions in the NAM and other international organizations. In 2020, Niger rejected a U.S. measure to trigger a snap-back mechanism against Iran which would tighten the sanctions regime against the country through the UNSC.⁽³³⁵⁾

Iran views Niger as a potential hotspot for terrorists.⁽³³⁶⁾ The activities of groups such as the Boko Haram in southeastern Niger, and the ISWAP, which launched a major attack in western Niger in May 2019, underscore Iran's worries about the spread of violence in Mali and Burkina Faso, which might spill over into Niger.⁽³³⁷⁾ As a result, Iran has closely monitored Niger's security developments. Nevertheless, Iran has not been a significant player in Niger since Western powers heavily influence its security.

(333) "Niger Ties with Iran," <http://www.afiran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=656>.

(334) "Emphasis on Expanding Iran-Niger Relations," *Iran Pars International Television Broadcasting*, Tir 19, 1396, <https://farsi.iranpress.com/iran-i85104>; "Iran and Niger Have Many Fields to Expand Relations On," *Islamic Azad University News Agency*, Ordibehesht 14, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3sf0OCs>.

(335) "Suitable Grounds to Expand Trade Relations Between Iran and Niger are Available," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Ordibehesht 15, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3uU9BvI>; "Left and Ikhwan Trends in Tunisia and View of Islamic Republic of Iran," *International Center for Peace Studies*, Tir 17, 1396, <http://peace-ipsc.org/fa/ایر-و-سیاسی-تونسی-به-ایر>.

(336) "2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism."

(337) Eleanor Beevor, "ISIS Militants Pose Growing Threat Across Africa."

In the mid-1980s, Iran's Red Crescent Society dispatched 36 tons of medicine via private plane to Niger to help improve ties with Niamey. Years later, General Ibrahim Bare Mainassara, the architect of Niger's power transition and its subsequent president in 1996, dispatched a delegation to Tehran to seek urgent assistance again. Within a year, Iran's Red Crescent Society sent another 50 tons of food to help Niger fight a famine. In the following years, Niger sent delegations to Iran to invite the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi to help with the African country's reconstruction. Iran held two trade exhibits and set up a health center affiliated with the Iranian Red Crescent Society in Niger after its power transition, and entered into talks with Niamey to expand cooperation in construction and rural development with aid from the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi, leading to the conclusion of an MoU on the issue and a commercial agreement. The Jihad-e-Esteghlal (Organization of the Foundation of Veterans and Oppressed Affairs), an affiliate body of the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi, dispatched a delegation to travel across Niger and explore economic projects. The trip led to talks to set up several plants to boost the African country's agricultural sector. But the implementation of the agreements stalled. ⁽³³⁸⁾

In 2013, Iran expressed renewed interest in Niger's ore when President Ahmadinejad visited Niamey. Frustrated by a uranium deal with the French, Nigerien authorities said they were looking for fair international partnerships. ⁽³³⁹⁾ Iran continued delivering aid to Niger in the following years, despite setbacks implementing joint projects. In 2017, Foreign Minister Zarif visited Niger on the final leg of an African tour. Besides, Niger and Iran held talks to build cooperation in the fields of telecommunications and science through interparliamentary meetings. Niger said it planned to open an embassy in Tehran. ⁽³⁴⁰⁾ Iran further explored investing in Niger's factories to build agricultural equipment and send medical equipment to the African nation. In addition, Iran discussed with Niger a livestock agreement, opportunities to collaborate to produce diesel fuel, build telephone transmission lines and set up banks in the two countries to facilitate trade. ⁽³⁴¹⁾

(338) "Niger Ties with Iran."

(339) "Iran's Ahmadinejad Due to Visit Uranium-Producing Niger," *Reuters*, April 15, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-niger/irans-ahmadinejad-due-to-visit-uranium-producing-niger-idUSBRE93E0KB20130415>.

(340) "Emphasis on Expanding Iran-Niger Relations;" "There Are many Fields that Iran and Niger Can Expand Relations On," *Islamic Azad University News Agency*, Ordibehesht 14, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3s7E2fD>.

(341) "New Phase of Relations Between Iran and Africa," *Sanaat*, <https://bit.ly/3dZfa4O>.

In 2019, Iran's parliament informed Niger of its offer of assistance in the health sector and investments in the local auto industry. In addition, Iran took steps to offer Niger expertise for electricity transmission. Iran further expressed interest in expanding its participation in Niger's mining industry, boosting the Iran-Niger Commercial Forum, and said it hoped that the Iranian business community would invest in Niger while offering to open up its markets to Niger's business community.⁽³⁴²⁾

In 1997, despite the absence of any cultural agreements between the two capitals, Tehran established a cultural school in Niamey. The Lebanese Shi'i community assisted Iran's religious influence in Niger. Niger has Shi'i mosques, libraries, education and health centers, charities, and religious propagation and information centers, including several centers in the capital Niamey.⁽³⁴³⁾

The Federal Republic of Nigeria

Nigeria's tenuous relations with Iran have followed the general pattern in the giant African country's cautious policies toward the Muslim world. Abuja has generally sought to avoid stirring tensions between Nigeria's Christian and Muslim communities in building ties with the Muslim world. Nigeria has frequently shifted its positions toward the Muslim world to appease its Christian community, for example, by quietly joining the OIC as a full member in 1986 while maintaining an unclear status in the organization until 1991. Nigeria further appeared inactive in the organization until 2000 and received criticism from its Christian community about its engagement with the OIC through 2020.

As a result of these multi-ethnic and multi-faith challenges in its domestic politics, Nigeria opted to close its embassy in Iran after the 1979 revolution. Yet despite Nigeria's internal political turmoil and multiple coup d'états, the African country has maintained cordial working contacts with Iran. Nigeria attempted to stay impartial in the Iran–Iraq War, supported a ceasefire, and demanded the full implementation of UNSC Resolution 598, which aimed to end the war. The Nigerian embassy in Tehran reopened shortly before peace was restored in 1988. But Nigeria's closer relations with Western countries—and a dearth of interest among its

(342) "Suitable Grounds to Expand Trade Relations Between Iran and Niger Are Available."

(343) "Niger Ties with Iran;" "Niger," *Wikishia*, <https://fa.wikishia.net/view/%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%B1>.

Christian and Muslim leaders for ties with revolutionary Iran—stalled the formation of strong bonds with Tehran.⁽³⁴⁴⁾

Nigeria's growing isolation from the international community following a military coup in 1993 led to renewed interest in relations with Iran. Under the rule of General Sani Abacha until 1998, Nigeria expanded contacts with Tehran. But General Abacha's government failed to pursue a consistent policy toward Tehran, given Nigeria's internal turmoil. As a result, relations between Abuja and Tehran remained limited. But Nigeria offered Iran US\$2 million in aid following an earthquake in the Iranian Province of Khorasan. Nigeria's interim president Abdulsalami Abubakar subsequently reached out to Iran under Mohammad Khatami's presidency, intending to boost ties. In response, Tehran moved its embassy in Nigeria from the commercial port city of Lagos to the new capital Abuja.⁽³⁴⁵⁾

Tehran expanded relations with Abuja under Olusegun Obasanjo's presidency, who was keen to fix Nigeria's economy, end its political instability, and improve its international standing. In 2001, President Obasanjo traveled to Tehran to conclude six cooperation agreements in the political, cultural, social, and economic spheres. That same year, the Nigerian embassy in Tehran said that the Iranian embassy in Abuja was involved in the trafficking of people to Iran, who were then sent to Europe. But Tehran remained keen to improve its ties with Abuja because it viewed Nigeria as an important member of the NAM, vying for a permanent UNSC seat and attempting to restore its membership in the OIC in 2005. Although President Obasanjo discouraged local Nigerian leaders in the north from setting up an Islamic shari'a legal system that could trigger local contacts with Iran, Tehran quickly expanded its contacts with the local Nigerian Muslim community after 2005. Iran simultaneously signed a US\$2.38 million agreement allowing the Iranian Saderat Development Bank to assist Nigeria.⁽³⁴⁶⁾

Iran views Nigeria as a terrorist hotspot. Specifically, Iran remained concerned by the IS and Boko Haram activities in and around Nigeria, particularly those targeting the Nigerian Muslim

(344) "Nigeria Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=537>.

(345) "Nigeria Ties with Iran."

(346) "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa," *Hawzah Net*, Issue 296, Bahman 1389, <https://bit.ly/326GqZi>; "Nigeria Ties with Iran," "Islamic Revolution and Its Reflection in the Country of Nigeria (Part 1).

community. During a visit to Nigeria, Zarif confirmed that Iran would stand beside Nigeria to fight al-Qaeda and Boko Haram.⁽³⁴⁷⁾ In March 2019, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the ISWAP merged to create a stronger IS front. Subsequently, ISWAP killed twenty-eight Nigerien soldiers and followed this up with further attacks in West Africa. Consequently, Iran sought to expand its dialog with Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari over a range of pressing security and political issues. Buhari's rise to power in 2015, and frictions with Israel, encouraged Iran to expand its security ties with Abuja. But Nigeria's decision to join the Saudi-led IMCTC in 2016 dampened Iran's ability to seek deeper ties with the African country.⁽³⁴⁸⁾

As early as 2005, Nigeria and Iran exchanged defense delegations.⁽³⁴⁹⁾ But relations remained tense on the defense and security fronts due to Israel's superior security ties with Nigeria and the transfer of Iranian arms to West Africa. Nigerian authorities took steps to control the activities of the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah in the African country.⁽³⁵⁰⁾ In 2010, Nigeria seized an Iranian arms shipment. Iran said the arms shipment was carried out by a private company selling conventional weapons in West Africa. The arms reportedly were being sent to the Gambia, leading Nigeria to cut its ties with Iran.⁽³⁵¹⁾

Iran sought to use its joint membership with Nigeria in the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, founded in 1997, as a platform to revive economic relations in West Africa. As one of Africa's largest economies and a member of OPEC, Nigeria has sought common ground with Iran to expand joint economic projects. Viewing Nigeria as a gateway to West Africa's lucrative markets, Iran offered to develop Nigeria's power grid and health sector

(347) "2020 Outlook on Terrorism in Africa, New Center of Global Terrorism;" "The Success of Zarif's Trip to Africa was Beyond Expectation."

(348) Eleanor Beevor, "ISIS Militants Pose Growing Threat Across Africa;" "Iran Relations with Nigeria," *Wikipedia*, <https://bit.ly/3sdrkf7>; "Gambia Ends its Ties with Iran," *IRDiplomacy*, Azar 2, 1389, <http://irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/9423/گامبیارواپطخودبایرانراقطعکرد>.

(349) "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa;" "Nigeria Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afiran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=537>; "Islamic Revolution and Its Reflection in the Country of Nigeria (Part 1)," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afiran.ir/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=261>.

(350) Sturat Winer, "Nigeria to Slap Hezbollah Men with Terror Charge," *Times of Israel*, June 26, 2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/nigeria-to-slap-hezbollah-men-with-terror-charge/>; "How Iran Exports its Ideology," *United Against Nuclear Iran*, May 2020, 55, https://www.unitedagainstinucleariran.com/sites/default/files/expansion/Iran%27s%20Ideological%20Expansion%20Final%20Report_05202020.pdf.

(351) Camillus Eboj, "Iran Says Arms Seized in Nigeria Were for Gambia," *Reuters*, February 9, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-nigeria-iran-arms-20110209-idAFJ0E71809H20110209>.

and asked Abuja to facilitate visa regulations to enable an easier movement of businesses in the 1990s. Over the years, the two countries signed a series of other agreements to combat illicit drugs and psychotropic substances. They further agreed to develop joint radio and television programs, establish cooperative industrial frameworks, promote joint taxation and customs policies, boost commercial councils and investment, establish joint export and import standards, promote trade, cooperate in the geological and mining sectors, and encourage mutual tourism opportunities.

Iran frequently held trade exhibitions in Nigeria and expressed interest in the African country's vast economic opportunities to generate electricity and build tractor manufacturing assembly lines and oil and gas pipelines. The lack of sufficient planning and geographic distance prevented many of these projects from materializing, and Iran was unable to realize the goal of mass selling Iranian products in Nigerian cities. The United States' provision of Nigeria's needs in the oil sector further led to Nigeria's positive vote in the UNSC against Iran, which hindered Iranian economic commitments to Nigeria and led to lower trade volumes. But Nigerian companies remained interested in Iranian Danesh Pajooch companies and startups to help develop Nigeria's technology, software, electronics, computers, food, and transport industries and its agricultural sector. In addition, Iran built a bridge over the Niger River using Iranian technical expertise and transferred Iranian know-how in the agricultural and industrial sectors to Nigeria to help set up automobile and agricultural equipment factories in Nigeria.⁽³⁵²⁾

In 2011, Nigeria and Iran signed a cooperation agreement to expand commercial and trade ties. The agreement aimed to facilitate opportunities for Iran to offer industrial, mining, engineering, development, construction, technical, oil, and petrochemical services to the West African country. The two countries further agreed to consolidate financial, insurance, investment, and banking facilities to enhance business exchanges. Iran expressed interest in helping Nigeria develop agricultural irrigation projects, build offshore platforms to strengthen its energy sector and increase the capacity of shipping lines to engage in trade. In addition, Iran explored establishing new air and naval shipping routes to Nigeria. In the following years, the Nigerian–

(352) "Nigeria: Iran Gateway to Lucrative West Africa Market," *IRIB News Agency*, Dei 25, 1397, <https://bit.ly/3mNTcFX>; "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa;" "The Success of Zarif's Trip to Africa was Beyond Expectation."

Iranian Commission that helped conclude the 2011 agreement convened other meetings to explore trade ties between Abuja and Tehran.⁽³⁵³⁾

In 2016, Foreign Minister Zarif visited Abuja accompanied by Iranian businessmen to explore new trade options with Nigeria. The foreign minister expressed Iran's interest in expanding cooperation with Nigeria's public and private sectors. To this end, Tehran encouraged a number of West African countries to cancel visa requirements for the Iranian business community and set up new banking arrangements to enable trade with Iran during sanctions.⁽³⁵⁴⁾ In 2019, while meeting on the sidelines of the 5th Summit of the GECE, Nigeria and Iran agreed to set up a joint economic committee to explore cooperation in petrochemicals, power, irrigation agriculture, and industry.⁽³⁵⁵⁾ But Israel remains one of Nigeria's largest economic partners, which has overshadowed Iranian efforts to obtain leverage with Nigeria.

Still, Iran believed that Nigeria's status as one of the world's largest Muslim-populated countries meant that the African country had the potential to experience an Islamic awakening if it were to follow the Iranian revolutionary model of supporting and mobilizing underserved Muslims. But Iran saw Nigeria's dominant Sunni population, along with its pluralistic tribal and ethnic structure, as a potential threat if the Nigerian society were to radicalize.

Consequently, Iran has invested in building connections with Nigeria's religious leaders, many of whom are of Lebanese descent. Tehran also supported the Nigerian Ulema Assembly established in 1980. The assembly seeks to promote a unified stance among Nigerian Muslims against colonialism and secularism, encourages an Islamic dress code and coverings for Nigerian Muslim women, holds Friday prayers to help what it has called Nigerian pagans to convert to Islam, and set up Islamic schools across the country. It has worked with Iran to politicize the pilgrimage to Mecca as a platform to propagate Iran's Islamic revolutionary model. This forced Nigeria's government to limit the number of haj pilgrims to avoid stirring tensions. Iran also

(353) Ministry of Roads and Transportation, Organization for Ports and Naval Navigation, Iran Became Nigeria's Naval Partner (Farvardin 1391), <https://www.pmo.ir/fa/news/12594/دريايي-نيجيري-شد>.

(354) "The Success of Zarif's Trip to Africa was Beyond Expectation," Ali Mousavi Khalkhali, "Warm Reception by Authorities in Senegal for Zarif," "Economic Problems Do Exist but We Must Adapt," "Nigeria Praises Iran's Role in the World," *Tehran Times*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/404643/Nigeria-praises-Iran-s-role-in-the-world>.

(355) "Iran, Nigeria to Set Up Joint Economic Committee," *Tehran Times*, November 30, 2019, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/442491/Iran-Nigeria-to-set-up-joint-economic-committee>.

worked with Nigeria's Muslim Student Society, which now hosts a sizeable Shi'i community and controls over 11,000 schools, colleges, and universities in the African country.⁽³⁵⁶⁾

Following the conclusion of a cultural agreement with Nigeria in 1997, Iran has actively propagated Shi'i Islam in Nigeria. But Nigeria has failed to uphold its side of the deal, concerned that Iran could potentially provoke religious tensions. Iran, however, has continued to offer scholarships to Nigerian students to study at international branches of the Imam Khomeini International University and religious seminaries and schools in Iran. Scholarships have also been given to Nigerians to join the Iranian international radio program and broadcasting agencies.⁽³⁵⁷⁾ By 2019, there was a conspicuous level of conversion to Shi'i Islam in northern Nigeria as a direct result of Iranian activities. Some of these activities included building extensive networks with Nigeria's religious leaders and scholars, supplying religious books, encouraging Nigerians to demand having shari'a civil courts and supporting funding and programs for Islamic schools.⁽³⁵⁸⁾

Sheikh Ebrahim Zakzaki, a Sunni who converted to Shi'i Islam after traveling to Iran following the 1979 revolution, is the focal point of recent tensions between Nigeria and Iran. Zakzaki has a strong following in northern Nigeria, an area where some Sunnis have converted to Shi'i Islam. According to sources inside Iran, his efforts increased Nigeria's Shi'i population, previously estimated to be around 2,000, to approximately 12 to 14 million.⁽³⁵⁹⁾ Zakzaki's frequent clashes with Nigerian authorities in recent years, measures by Nigeria's government to control the activities of Hezbollah in the country, and Iran's efforts to encourage Nigerian Shi'a to build a front in the African country, led to the cleric's arrest in 2015. The activities of the banned Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), led by Zakzaki, led to increased local sensitivities about Iran's influence. The group reportedly has some 3 million members, runs 300 schools in Nigeria, and has branches in Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Ghana. Iran generally dismissed Nigerian complaints about these activities and asked its authorities to release Zakzaki. Shortly after Zarif's

(356) "Islamic Revolution and Its Reflection in the Country of Nigeria (Part 1).

(357) "Nigeria Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=537>.

(358) "Iran Relations with Nigeria."

(359) Mehdi Dehnavi, "Situation of Nigerian Shias," *IRDiplomacy*, Mordad 9, 1398, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1985245/>
وضعیت شیعیان-نایجریه.

visit to Nigeria to promote economic cooperation, Iran's religious activists called on Tehran to remove its ambassador in Abuja after failing to take a firm stance in defense of Zakzaki.⁽³⁶⁰⁾

Iran has built cultural influence in Nigeria through soft power by promoting the two countries' shared love of literature and poetry and by raising awareness about the historical influence of the Iranian business community in Nigeria. Through these efforts, Tehran has encouraged the Muslims in Nigeria to view Iran as a country keen to revive Islam and maximize the impact of its Islamic revolution by working with Nigerian academics and universities and by making the study of Islam more attractive across the African nation. The measures have been intended in part to prevent the rise of alternative Islamic religious persuasions among Nigerian Muslims. They have also enabled Iran to mobilize Nigerians against rival powers competing for local influence.

Iran continues to invite Nigeria's religious leaders to visit Iran, learn about Iran's political system, and receive training in Iran's seminaries. Iran has extended economic relief packages to Muslim communities in northern Nigeria and insisted that Nigerian Shi'a face genocide. Along the way, Iran has carefully cultivated ties with Nigeria's Sunni population to win political support and open markets for Iranian exports. The Organization of Muslim Unity, established in Nigeria with Iranian financial backing, continues to invite students and Muslim scholars from West and Central Africa to Iran.⁽³⁶¹⁾

The Republic of Rwanda

Rwanda's small Muslim population and geographic distance from Iran discouraged the formation of ties with Tehran in the 1980s. In 1990–1994, the landlocked East-Central African nation's civil war deterred Tehran from attempts to spread its revolution in Rwanda. In Rwanda's post-civil war era, Iran views the country as ripe with economic opportunities, and the Iranian representatives in Uganda or Burundi served as Tehran's accredited ambassador to Kigali. As a member of the EAC—an organization of six countries in the African Great Lakes region that

(360) "Iran Ambassador in Nigeria Should be Removed," *Daneshjoo*, Mordad 1, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3d8qook>; "Gambia Ends its Ties with Iran," Baqeer Gashua, "We Are Not IMN! We are Muslims;" "Nigeria: Army Attack on Shia Unjustified;" "As Trump Makes Threats, Iran Makes Friends."

(361) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa."

has enjoyed good working relations with South Africa—Iran has viewed Rwanda as a potential gateway through which it might reach other regional markets in Africa.⁽³⁶²⁾

In 2018, Rwanda sought to expand its relations with Tehran and welcomed Iranian investments in its development projects. Kigali has encouraged the expansion of people-to-people exchanges but cautiously urged Tehran to promote regional and international convergence and unity when it advanced its policies in Africa. Rwanda and Iran discussed further plans to encourage interparliamentary exchanges and cultural ties. In addition, Kigali invited Iranian Danesh Pajooch firms to introduce technical and scientific projects to Rwanda, and Iran expressed its interest in partnering with Rwanda to develop telecommunications projects. Iran further aimed to establish cooperation agreements with Rwanda in the energy sector and send Iranian contractors to provide a wide range of services in the related fields of constructing power plants, transportation roads, and storage facilities. But Iran's outreach to Rwanda faced hurdles because of sanctions, and Iranian influence has remained limited because of the African nation's stronger relations with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel.⁽³⁶³⁾

The Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe

São Tomé and Príncipe and Iran did not establish formal diplomatic relations until 2007.⁽³⁶⁴⁾ In 2016, they held talks to expand the Iranian Red Crescent Society's operations in São Tomé and Príncipe's health sector, given frequent natural disasters across the island nation. Iran's Red Crescent Society expressed readiness to dispatch ambulances, drones, and naval relief vessels to the island nation and work in tandem with Lesotho's Red Crescent Society to develop cohesive humanitarian and health policies toward the island nation. It further offered to send from its pool of 2 million volunteers a group of experts to build health clinics in São Tomé and Príncipe and collaborate with the island nation to produce pharmaceutical products.⁽³⁶⁵⁾ In 2017, Tehran

(362) “Rwanda President Stressed Country’s Will to Expand Relations with Iran,” *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Dei 28, 2007, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82800426>; “رئیس‌جمهوری‌رواندا بر عزم کشورش برای گسترش روابط با ایران تاکید,” “Rwanda Vows to Expand Ties with Iran,” *Fars News Agency*, November 14, 2018, <https://en.farsnews.ir/newstext.aspx?nn=1397082300039>.

(363) Ibid.

(364) “São Tomé and Príncipe Relations with Iran,” *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=525>.

(365) Iran Red Crescent Society, *Development of Cooperation in Health Operations, Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment* (Mordad 16, 1396),
<http://rcs.ir/>. های-بهداشتی و-درمانی، دارو و-تجهیزات-بازشیکی %E2%80%8Cها-در-فعالیت %E2%80%8Cاخبار / توسعه-همکاری
 http://rcs.ir/

offered to implement educational, technical, vocational, and scientific projects in São Tomé and Príncipe.⁽³⁶⁶⁾ Foreign Minister Zarif simultaneously held meetings with his counterpart from São Tomé and Príncipe.⁽³⁶⁷⁾ However, as of 2018, Iran had been unable to significantly expand trade with São Tomé and Príncipe in the non-oil sector.⁽³⁶⁸⁾

The Republic of Senegal

Senegal's sizeable Muslim population and its influence in the OIC and G-17—along with its reputation as a peacemaker in regional conflicts—has drawn Iran's attention. As a result, Iran's presidents have made a point of visiting the country as often as possible, even as relations between Dakar and Tehran remained tense until 1992. Iran struggled to build influence with Senegal's post-independence ruling Socialist Party. Iran's revolutionary model gradually spread in Senegal in the 1980s as the African country went through a heated internal debate over its form of government and the need for reforms. This enabled more open contacts between Dakar and Tehran.

In subsequent years, Iran has cultivated stronger cultural connections with Senegal by maintaining high-level diplomatic contacts and encouraging joint defense initiatives. In 2008, Senegal supported Iran's peaceful nuclear program in a meeting of the OIC and condemned international sanctions against the country. Senegal's stance against Israel enabled Iranian soft power influence in the African nation to grow. In 2008, Senegal and Iran worked in tandem in preparation for an OIC meeting, and the two countries subsequently condemned the Gaza War. Senegal later vowed to always stand behind Tehran and defended the Iranian uranium enrichment program while denouncing sanctions against Iran.⁽³⁶⁹⁾

But in 2011, Senegal briefly severed ties with Iran for two years. This was not the first time that relations had soured—Senegal had unliterally broken off its ties with Tehran two decades before. The 2011 move came in response to armed clashes between the army and rioters from the MFDC

(366) Ministry of Sciences, Research and Technical Advancement, *Examining Ways to Promote Scientific and Education Cooperation between Iran and São Tomé and Príncipe* (Mordad 16, 1396),

<https://www.msrt.ir/fa/news/32970/بررسی-راه-های-گسترش-همکاری-های-علمی-و-آموزشی-ایران-و-سائوتومه-و-پرنسیپ>

(367) "Zarif's Diplomatic Exchanges with Officials from Moldova, UK, and São Tomé and Príncipe," *Iran Pars International Television Broadcasting*, Mordad 15, 1396, <https://farsi.iranpress.com/iran-i90172>.

(368) Mashad Chamber of Commerce, *Which Countries Does Iran Not Have Trade Ties With?* <https://www.mccima.com/?id=1236>.

(369) "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa."

along Senegal's southern border with the Gambia. The MFDC fighters were carrying Iranian weapons, including grenades, mortars, and rockets. According to the Senegalese government, the arms were meant to be sent to separatist groups in the Gambia.⁽³⁷⁰⁾ Iran sent its foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, to Dakar to lobby Senegal to reconsider severing diplomatic relations, but they were cut off in February 2011. The foreign minister was sacked while in Dakar and was replaced with Ali Akbar Salehi, who flew to Senegal to pick up talks. However, despite Turkey's mediation, Iran failed again to convince Senegal to retain ties. Senegal briefly agreed to return its ambassador to Iran but ultimately decided that Iran's efforts to convince the African country that the arms were not meant to cause instability had fallen short. In 2013, Iran and Senegal resumed diplomatic relations. Simultaneously, the Iranian car manufacturer Iran Khodro established an assembly line in Senegal.⁽³⁷¹⁾

In 1996, Iran joined economic meetings in Dakar to expedite the export of Iranian goods and crude oil. In 2009, Iran exported US\$16 million of goods to Senegal. By 2010, Senegal was Iran's largest trade partner in West Africa.⁽³⁷²⁾ Senegal is important for Iran's naval outreach as it attempts to establish a base on the Atlantic Ocean, and the two countries held talks on the issue in 2010–2012. Senegal expressed interest in Iran's energy prospects in return for support for the Iranian stance on its nuclear program in international forums.⁽³⁷³⁾ In addition, Lebanese businessmen in Senegal traded Iranian oil.⁽³⁷⁴⁾

Iran has sought to use Senegal to tap broader markets in the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union. In two visits in 2018 and 2019, Foreign Minister Zarif was accompanied by Iranian businessmen to explore trade options with Senegal, which Iran viewed as a politically stable country. Dakar agreed to visa-free travel for political and business visits for Iranians.⁽³⁷⁵⁾ Zarif urged Senegal to expand banking relations and issue visas on arrival for the Iranian business

(370) "Senegal Ended Ties with Iran."

(371) "Iran-Senegal Resume Severed Diplomatic Relations," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, February 7, 2013, <https://en.irna.ir/news/80533391/Iran-Senegal-resume-severed-diplomatic-relations>; "Reasons and Results of Breakdown of Ties with Senegal."

(372) "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa."

(373) "South Africa Says Will Stand by Iran in Sanctions Era;" "U.S. Blacklists Companies Over Oil Trade with Iran," *DW*, March 19, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/us-blacklists-companies-over-oil-trade-with-iran/a-52832554>.

(374) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; "Iran and Cameroon Will to Advance and Consolidate Ties."

(375) "South Africa Says Will Stand by Iran in Sanctions Era;" "U.S. Blacklists Companies Over Oil Trade with Iran."

community and entrepreneurs.⁽³⁷⁶⁾ As a result, Iranian food products and manufactured cars were frequently spotted in Senegal and an Iranian-built power station. Zarif's trips led to discussions over several new agreements worth more than 300 million euros in Senegal, including on real estate development and water projects.⁽³⁷⁷⁾ Iran remained interested in expanding Senegal's health and agricultural sectors.⁽³⁷⁸⁾

As the ties between Dakar and Tehran improved following the 1979 revolution, Tehran gradually promoted the Persian language in Senegal and helped establish a theology college in Dakar. Tehran sent clerics to preach in Dakar and to call for an African Islamic awakening.⁽³⁷⁹⁾ In Senegal, Iran's activities involved funding religious groups and dissident Muslims, some of whom had studied under Ayatollah Khomeini when he lived in exile in Najaf in the 1960s. Iran cultivated ties with the local Lebanese community, including representatives of Hezbollah in the West African nation. Senegal's Lebanese community played an important role in helping Iran increase its Shi'i influence over the African nation's Sufi community.⁽³⁸⁰⁾ In 2003, Senegal invited Iran to build Islamic schools and Quranic education centers. The Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly in Senegal, recognized officially by the Senegalese state, emphasized living in peace with the country's majority Sunni population and its tradition of Sufi mysticism and encouraged accepting the reality of the increasing number of conversions to Shi'ism.⁽³⁸¹⁾

The Republic of Seychelles

Seychelles-Iran ties have long been limited. Although Islam is practiced in mosques built around the island nation—mainly on the island of Mahe—organized Islamic societies, have been discouraged from propagating in Seychelles. Seychelles has generally avoided taking a hostile stance toward Iran by opting not to vote against it in international organizations, including at the

(376) "Report on Zarif's Lobbying in Senegal, Brazil, Uruguay and Namibia," *Daneshjoo News Agency*, Farvardin 24, 1397, <https://www.shana.ir/news/277946/ایران-با-اقتصادی-های-همکاری-توسعه-یافته-نامیبیا-مندی-علاقه>.

(377) "The Success of Zarif's Trip to Africa was Beyond Expectation,"; Ali Mousavi Khalkhali, "Warm Reception by Authorities in Senegal for Zarif,"; "Economic Problems Do Exist but We Must Adapt,"

(378) "Zarif Returns Home After South America, Africa Tour," *Young Journalists Club*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.yjc.ir/en/news/42407/zarif-returns-home-after-south-america-africa-tour>.

(379) "Iran's Soft Power in West Africa."

(380) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; "Iran and Cameroon Will to Advance and Consolidate Ties."

(381) "Shiism Not a New Phenomenon in Senegal," *Shafaqna*, August 18, 2019, <https://en.shafaqna.com/105967/shiism-not-a-new-phenomenon-in-senegal-interview-with-sheikh-sherif-mballo-part-1/>.

UN. Iran's representatives in Madagascar have been accredited to Seychelles to win the island nation's political support in international forums.⁽³⁸²⁾

As a member of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and host of IONS-2018, Iran's navy planned to carry out drills to combat piracy with other member countries, including Seychelles.⁽³⁸³⁾ Iran views the Indian Ocean and countries bordering it (including Seychelles) as good partners to advance competitive but friendly naval operations to advance security in the busy Indian Ocean sea routes. Iran has kept a watchful eye on rival states' military operations in Seychelles, including U.S. drone and military operations and the island nation's evolving relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel. Seychelles' strong relations with Russia, China, India, and previously North Korea—all countries with which Iran maintains cordial ties—means the island nation is potentially easier for Iranians to navigate.⁽³⁸⁴⁾

Victoria and Tehran have concluded several import–export agreements over the years, with Iran sending Seychelles salt and grapes, and receiving fish, dental and surgical equipment in return. Seychelles has occasionally requested medical and health teams from Iran to help train the local population in the medical field, given Iran's relative success in building local networks of community health providers.⁽³⁸⁵⁾ Iran has seen Seychelles as a stable country to advance trade relations with, considering that it ranks high in economic competitiveness. Given it has one of the highest nominal per capita GDP rates in Africa, Seychelles is an attractive destination for Iranian investors. In January 2020, the U.S. sanctioned the Seychelles-based Pamchel Trading Beijing Co. Ltd. for allegedly acting as a front company to enable trade with Iran.⁽³⁸⁶⁾

The Republic of Sierra Leone

Three years after the 1979 revolution, Iran dispatched a delegation to Sierra Leone to build bilateral ties. Sierra Leone and Iran established formal diplomatic relations in 1983, and soon

(382) "Seychelles Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=549>.

(383) "Naval Maneuver to Fight Piracy in Indian Ocean to be Held," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Aban 21, 1398, <https://tinyurl.com/bedy546a>.

(384) "U.S. Sanctions Eight Senior Iranian Officials Over Ties to Missile Attacks," *Middle East Eye*, January 10, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-sanctions-senior-iranian-officials-allegedly-linked-missile-attacks>.

(385) "Seychelles Ties with Iran."

(386) "U.S. Sanctions Eight Senior Iranian Officials Over Ties to Missile Attacks."

after concluded a renewable five-year cultural agreement. Iran promoted the Palestinian cause in Sierra Leone by sending delegations to the West African nation to celebrate Quds Day. It also urged Freetown to condemn Iraq in the war against Iran, and demand that the NAM secretariat in Iraq move to another country.⁽³⁸⁷⁾ But in the late 1980s, Sierra Leone cultivated close relations with Iran's rivals in Africa —namely, Iraq and Libya. This dampened Iranian influence in the West African country, despite Tehran's efforts to build ties with local Muslim communities and hold *hajj* conferences in the African country to promote debate about Saudi Arabia's custodianship of the holy site in Mecca.⁽³⁸⁸⁾ But Freetown urged a peaceful resolution to the Iran–Iraq War, and according to Tehran, supported positions closer to the Iranian stance on the conflict. Freetown further coordinated its positions in international meetings with Iran to promote Palestinian rights, Namibia's liberation from white rule, the ouster of foreign forces from Chad, and denounce apartheid.⁽³⁸⁹⁾

Following the 1979 revolution, Sierra Leone expressed interest in buying caviar and oil from Iran at discounted prices and below OPEC rates and offered to export timber and develop the Iranian fishery industry. Iran was able to secure local buy-in to help Sierra Leone's agricultural sector by sending pesticides, seeds, and fertilizers. The two also agreed to engage in industrial and mining projects. Iran viewed Sierra Leone as an important gateway to West Africa.

Furthermore, a sizable Lebanese community in Sierra Leone has enabled Iran to operate fundraising and financial infrastructure in the majority Muslim African country, including in the diamond industry. Iran has also drawn on the Lebanese community to monitor and contain local ties with Israel and expand the oil trade with Iran. In 1983, Sierra Leone's Lebanese business community (led by Jamil Saeed) and its religious leaders (led by Sheikh Hossein Shahada) were instrumental in a major oil deal being struck, which led to an MoU on oil trade. Sierra Leone subsequently asked Iran to build a refinery and offered to sell bauxite to Tehran, which it declined due to the high cost. Instead, Iran offered to send experts to the African nation to help cultivate rice and corn.

(387) "Sierra Leone Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=520>.

(388) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*.

(389) "Sierra Leone Ties with Iran."

In the following years, the two countries explored other trade options, including the sale of diamonds from Sierra Leone to Iran and Iranian development of mining and the fishery industries with the African nation. By 1992, the Islamic Revolution Council of Sierra Leone was leading trade talks with Iran. Sierra Leone and Iran signed another agreement for oil sales and production in 2000, which enabled Freetown to pay for oil it brought from Tehran over a period of three years and free of interest. A similar agreement was signed three years later.⁽³⁹⁰⁾ In 2010, the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned businesses linked to Hezbollah that operated in Sierra Leone. In 2013, the United States sanctioned several Lebanese nationals representing Hezbollah in Sierra Leone.⁽³⁹¹⁾

In 2015, Freetown and Tehran signed a new economic agreement. Iran said it planned to build oil storage facilities in Sierra Leone and that it would enter into talks with several African countries to build refineries to process Iranian crude.⁽³⁹²⁾ In 2017 and 2019, Freetown and Tehran held talks to expand trade ties and cooperation in the health, academic, and agricultural sectors when the African country dispatched a new ambassador to Tehran.⁽³⁹³⁾ In 2018, the two capitals discussed cooperation in various sectors, including mining, engineering, agriculture, fishing, food processing, auto manufacturing, and spare part production. In 2019, Iran encouraged Sierra Leone to expand cooperation in the health sector, engage in joint agricultural production projects, and coordinate policies in international forums. These steps led to a steady increase in the volume of Iranian exports to Sierra Leone. Besides, Iran's embassy in Freetown offered its assistance to Sierra Leone's private sector community interested in trading with Iran and encouraged the African country to consider expanding its facilities on the Atlantic coast to improve bilateral trade. Furthermore, Tehran encouraged Freetown to use its membership with the OIC, the World Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank to apply for international

(390) "Sierra Leone Ties with Iran."

(391) "Iran and Hezbollah's Presence Around the World," *Lawfare*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/iran-and-hezbollahs-presence-around-world>.

(392) "Iran Planning to Build Oil Storage Facilities in Sierra Leone," *Fars News Agency*, December 7, 2015, <https://en.farsnews.ir/newstext.aspx?nn=1394091600054>.

(393) "Cementing Close Ties With African States, Including Sierra Leone Important for Iran," *Presidential Informational Dissemination Staff*, Ordibehesht 2, 2019, <http://www.president.ir/EN/107843>; "Sierra Leone Seeking Enhanced Economic Ties With Iran," *Tasnim News Agency*, May 25, 2017, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2017/05/25/1419224/sierra-leone-seeking-enhanced-economic-ties-with-iran>.

bank loans to create opportunities for Iranian companies to take part in developing the African nation's infrastructure while Iran remained under sanctions.⁽³⁹⁴⁾

With the conclusion of the renewable cultural agreement, Tehran helped establish the Sierra Leone–Iran Friendship Association in Freetown to accommodate a growing number of joint political, cultural, and religious activities in West Africa. Built as an Islamic institution, the association played an active role in convening religious, political, and *hajj* seminars, promoting the visibility of Islamic preachers in local mosques, holding Friday prayers, and neutralizing so-called “enemy propaganda” designed to split the Muslim community. As a first step, the association established a Committee of Friday Prayer Imams to debate important Islamic issues. It also established the Islamic Organization of Veiled Women, from which several other branches of women's organizations emerged, including the Al-Nesa Supreme Islamic Organization, Fatemeh al-Zahra, and the Hosseiniyeh Women's Organization. The association expanded its operations to other cities in Sierra Leone by organizing demonstrations in Bo Town to denounce global heresy, and Saudi Arabia's custodianship of *hajj* ceremonies. It also actively promoted professional programs to elevate the status of Muslims in Sierra Leone.⁽³⁹⁵⁾

The outbreak of the civil war in Sierra Leone in 1991 exposed emerging rifts within its Muslim community and with Christians. The tensions were exacerbated by foreign influence and high poverty levels despite Sierra Leone's rich store of natural resources. Iran's relations with Sierra Leone picked up after the end of the civil war in 2002. In 2005 and the following years, Iran's leaders and diplomats paid frequent visits to Sierra Leone and cultivated relations with local mosques and the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly branch in Freetown.⁽³⁹⁶⁾ In 2009, Sierra Leone and Iran promised to build stronger ties, to celebrate each other's commitment to principles of religious tolerance. The African country also convened a seminar on “Religious Democracy

(394) Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, *Sierra Leone Membership in OIC Opportunity to Implement Projects by Iranian Companies*, Chamber (Mehr 14, 1397), <http://otaghiranonline.ir/news/15663>; “Sierra Leone Is Important to Iran as a West Africa Gateway,” *Borna News*, Bahman 13, 1397, <https://www.borna.news/3/807642-سیاسی-بخش>. دارد-اهمیت-ایران-برای-آفریقا-غربی-دروازه-عنوان-به-سیرالئون-3/807642-سیاسی-بخش

(395) “Sierra Leone Ties with Iran.”

(396) Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamed, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

and Development” to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Iran’s Islamic revolution.⁽³⁹⁷⁾ But in recent years, Sierra Leone built closer ties with other Sunni Muslim states, including Saudi Arabia, and joined the Saudi-led IMCTC, which saw Freetown seek to block Iranian influence in Sierra Leone.

The Federal Republic of Somalia

Following the Islamic revolution, Iran dispatched a delegation to Somalia. The Iranian embassy in Mogadishu served Iranian interests in neighboring Djibouti as well. But within a year after the revolution, Somali authorities warned Tehran to halt its religious propaganda in the African country. Somalia supported Iraq in the war against Iran in the 1980s, which barred Iran’s influence in the Horn nation. But Iran’s Red Crescent Society delivered aid and offered to build Somalia’s local infrastructure, while Tehran offered to sell oil to Mogadishu.⁽³⁹⁸⁾

By 1991—after the overthrow of Somali President Jaalle Mohamed Siad Barre—numerous Islamic groups had set up shop in Somalia. When Somaliland declared itself autonomous the same year, Iran refused to recognize it. Puntland and Galmudug—which did not seek to become independent—remained engaged with the Somali central government, and Iran cultivated relations with both. When central authority in Somalia fell apart after the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent U.S.-led global war on terrorism, Iran paid more attention to the African country as a potential terrorism hotspot. In 2006, Mogadishu reported that Tehran had sought access to uranium deposits in South Central Somalia in the area around Galmudug in exchange for arms to the local anti-Western Council of Islamic Courts (CIS) that operated in the country between 2000 and 2007 to fight crime and warlords. The CIS activities appeared quite inflammatory in promoting armed groups, making Iran cautious about its role in the country. More importantly, Iran aimed to avoid conflict with other Horn countries such as Ethiopia and Djibouti with broader interests in Somalia and getting caught up in the local U.S.

(397) Alpha Rashid Jalloh, “Iran Promises Stronger Ties with Sierra Leone,” *Salone News*, February 13, 2009, <http://www.thepatrioticvanguard.com/iran-promises-stronger-ties-with-sierra-leone>.

(398) *Sub-Saharan Africa: Growing Iranian Activity*; Ashley Elliot and Georg-Sebastian Holzer, “The Invention of Terrorism in Somalia: Paradigms and Policy in U.S. Foreign Relations,” *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 16, Issue 2 (November 2009): 227; “Somalia’s Ties with Iran,” Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, “Iran in the Horn of Africa: Outflanking U.S. Allies,” *Middle East Policy Journal*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (Summer 2012): 226-227.

anti-terrorism operations. Somalia later insisted that there were no active mining activities around its small uranium deposits, and—as the CIS gradually lost influence—Iran reverted to supporting Mogadishu.⁽³⁹⁹⁾

The emergence of the al-Shabaab group, which embraced strict Sunni practices in 2007–2008, despite its early anti-Western and pan-nationalist views, once again placed Somalia on Iran’s list of terrorist hotspots. In the following years, Iran officially endorsed intra-Somali talks to end the civil strife in the Horn region and rejected foreign intervention in the conflict while welcoming multilateral efforts to bring peace. In 2012, as al-Shabaab retreated from major cities and joined forces with al-Qaeda, Iran reopened its embassy in Somalia, which had closed after violence erupted in 2007–2008. Iran subsequently increased Islamic relief aid and offered educational programs to the government in Mogadishu.⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾

In 2015, Somalia arrested two Iranian Shi‘i clerics linked to a local group calling itself Al-Khomeini, which operated under the Iranian embassy’s protection in the capital Mogadishu. However, prominent Iranian clerics continued to call for support for the Shi‘a in Somalia, which they said constituted 20 percent of the African country’s population, although other sources placed the figure far lower, at less than 1 percent.⁽⁴⁰¹⁾ The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation office in Mogadishu was attacked and burglarized, and Iran’s Red Crescent Society announced it was ending aid delivery to Somalia.⁽⁴⁰²⁾ In 2016, after diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia were severed, Iran sought wider access to the Red Sea. But its outreach efforts were hampered when Somalia broke ties with Iran and joined the Saudi-led IMCTC. Iranian efforts sought to maintain Tehran’s access to the high seas, despite the moves by the Saudi-led coalition of Muslim and Arab countries to assume control over securing navigation routes in the Red Sea.

(399) Cindy Vestergaard, “The Fact of the Matter: Al-Shabab is Not Mining Uranium in Somalia to Sell to Iran,” *Stimson Center*, September 8, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/2017/fact-matter-al-shabaab-not-mining-uranium-somalia-sell-iran/>; Eric Herring, et al., “Nuclear Security and Somalia,” *Global Security: Health, Science and Policy*, Vol. 5, Issue 1 (2020): 1–16, <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F23779497.2020.172922>.

(400) “Salehi: Re-opening of Iran Embassy in Somalia to Facilitate Cooperation,” *Islamic Republic News Agency*, November 15, 2012, <https://en.irna.ir/news/80415847/Salehi-Re-opening-of-Iran-Embassy-in-Somalia-to-facilitate-cooperation>.

(401) “Arrest of Two Iranian Missionaries Spreading Shiism in Somalia,” *Shia News*, Dei 7, 1394, <https://www.shia-news.com/fa/news/108834/بازداشت-2-ایرانی-مروج-مذهب-تشیع-در-سومالی>; Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Javedan, “Somalia and Shias,” Dei 5, 1399, http://new.javedan.ir/selected_questions/1390/06/06/index.html?id=1029.

(402) “Attack on Office of Iran Relief Committee in Somalia,” *Entekhab*, Dei 23, 1394, <https://tinyurl.com/436pe52k>.

In the process, Iran insisted on seeking new opportunities to expand ties with African countries such as Somalia despite its commitment to the IMCTC.⁽⁴⁰³⁾

In 2017, conflicting and unverified reports emerged when Somalia claimed Iran had attempted to secure uranium from al-Shabaab. Simultaneously, Somalia sought U.S. assistance to fight al-Shabaab control over uranium mines in the autonomous regions of central Somalia. Analysts argued that there were no operational uranium mines in Somalia and that the allegations against Iran were intended to draw the United States back into Somalia's protracted civil war.⁽⁴⁰⁴⁾ Still, some earlier reports had suggested links between Iran and al-Shabaab. In 2018, a UN report pointed to coal trading operations between al-Shabaab and Iran. In 2020, a report published by the Emirates Policy Center pointed to contacts between al-Shabaab and Iran as part of Iranian plans to expand contacts with non-state actors in the Horn region. Other reports suggesting a potential collaboration between al-Shabaab and Iran to target U.S. interests in Kenya were rejected by the United States, which insisted that al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda had their own anti-American agenda which did not involve Iran.⁽⁴⁰⁵⁾ As late as 2020, Iran itself was subject to terrorist attacks by Somali pirates. In one incident, international actors stepped in to offer US\$180,000 to the pirates to secure the release of 2,000 sailors taken hostage between 2005 and 2012.⁽⁴⁰⁶⁾

The Republic of South Africa

After returning from exile to Iran in 1979, the founder of the revolution Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ordered the country to break its ties with the apartheid regime in South Africa. Iran ended its oil exports to South Africa, and the Swiss embassy was asked to represent Iran's interest section in Pretoria. The severing of ties between Pretoria and Tehran helped

(403) "Iran to Develop Nuclear Ship Propulsion Systems."

(404) "Somalia's Al-Shabaab Plans to Send Uranium to Iran," *Middle East Monitor*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170905-somalias-al-shabaab-plans-to-send-uranium-to-iran/>; Cindy Vestergaard, "The Fact of the Matter: Shabaab is Not Mining Uranium in Somalia to Sell to Iran."

(405) Ahmed Askar, "The Growing Relationship Between Iran and Al-Shabaab Movement in Somalia: Motives and Potential Consequences," *Emirates Policy Center*, July 28, 2020, <https://epc.ae/topic/the-growing-relationship-between-iran-and-al-shabab-movement-in-somalia-motives-and-potential-consequences>; "Extremists Attack Kenya Military Base, 3 Americans Killed," *U.S. News*, January 5, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-01-05/al-shabab-claims-attack-on-base-serving-us-kenyan-troops>.

(406) "UK Team Helps Free Iranian Hostages from Somali Pirates," *Arab News*, August 27 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1725431/middle-east>.

consolidate Iran's relations with South African civic leaders, including Imam Ahmed Cassiem. He led a Muslim community called the Qibla in Cape Town, which sought its inspiration from Iran's revolution to rally some 250 local Muslim groups to overthrow the apartheid regime.⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾

Tehran expanded its contacts with the African National Congress (ANC) to condemn apartheid, which led to closer ties between Pretoria and Tehran in the post-apartheid era. Iran also participated in international efforts to enforce sanctions against South Africa and reached out to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). It also offered political, financial, and cultural support at national, regional, and international levels to anti-apartheid groups, participated in international meetings calling for the end of apartheid, issued frequent declarations condemning apartheid, offered the support of its embassies across Africa to South African freedom fighters, frequently covered and broadcast news on South Africa, and tried to secure the release of the anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela.⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾

After the end of apartheid in the early 1990s, PAC representatives and Mandela traveled to Tehran. Iran expanded its contacts with the Muslim business community in South Africa as the country took gradual steps to end apartheid and ended sanctions on the African nation. The South African organization for foreign trade and the ABSA Banking Group subsequently traveled to Tehran to hold trade talks. South Africa and Iran agreed to reopen embassies and exchange ambassadors in 1993.⁽⁴⁰⁹⁾

Iran's early support for anti-apartheid groups in South Africa led to lasting ties between the two countries. Pretoria and Tehran shared common positions over the Syrian civil war. They

(407) "Iran Relations With South Africa," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=301>; Abdolkader Tayob, et al., *Religion, Politics, and Identity in Changing South Africa, Religion and Society in Transition*, Waxmann e-book, 109, https://www.waxmann.com/waxmann-buecher/?no_cache=1&tx_p2waxmann_pi2%5Bbuchnr%5D=1328&tx_p2waxmann_pi2%5Baction%5D=show&tx_p2waxmann_pi2%5Bcontroller%5D=Buch&cHash=c74abe489202aea489d8817c5bd2cb08.

(408) "Mandela Saw South Africa's Revolution Owing to Iran: Envoy," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, October 20, 2018, <https://en.irna.ir/news/83072158/Mandela-saw-South-Africa-s-revolution-owing-to-Iran-Envoy>; "Mandela Arrives in Tehran, Lays Wreath At Khomeini Shrine," *Associated Press*, July 21, 1992, <https://apnews.com/ad81cee784fd0130a2aaafa8aace9997>; "Video: Nelson Mandela Calls Ayatollah Khamenei as 'My Leader,'" *Khamenei.IR*, April 27, 2016, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/3709/Video-Nelson-Mandela-calls-Ayatollah-Khamenei-as-My-Leader>; "South Africa Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=301>.

(409) "Iran Relations with South Africa."

rejected the foreign interventions that triggered the 2011 Libyan civil war despite South Africa's early endorsement of the intervention in the UNSC. South Africa expanded contacts with the Palestinian Hamas as the group increasingly reached out to Iran and several African states for support.⁽⁴¹⁰⁾

South Africa supported Iran during sanctions over the Iranian nuclear program, despite the blacklisting of several South African companies by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.⁽⁴¹¹⁾ In addition, Pretoria and Tehran cultivated contacts to develop the Iranian nuclear program. Immediately after resuming ties with post-apartheid South Africa and as late as 1997, Iran reported that it had imported yellowcake stockpile and discussed seeking enrichment expertise from South Africa.⁽⁴¹²⁾ South Africa continued to support Iran's nuclear program in 2008–2010 when the UNSC passed four resolutions against Iran. In 2010, Pretoria received 25 percent of its crude oil from Iran, often at discounted prices, and sought to make changes to an IAEA report that was highly critical of Iran's uranium enrichment program.⁽⁴¹³⁾

South Africa's maritime capabilities and its ability to use different fleets were important to Iran's efforts to expand its geopolitical outreach via naval routes.⁽⁴¹⁴⁾ In 2014, Iran dispatched a vessel to South Africa.⁽⁴¹⁵⁾ In 2016, Iran and South Africa held talks to expand shipping routes, build up trade infrastructure, and establish direct flights. In December, Iran's defense minister, Hossein Dehghani Poudeh, visited South Africa to seek expanded military and defense ties and concluded an MoU related to security and anti-terrorism with the African country. Iran stressed that it aimed to use South African ports to expand South-North naval corridors in the Red Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and help connect Africa to Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia via

(410) "Hamas Lobbying with Tunisia; Examining Launch of Association of Members Supporting Quds," *Fars News Agency*, Esfand 21, 1398,

<https://www.farsnews.ir/news/13981221001066/> اندازی-انجمن-نمایندگان-حامی-قدس %E2%80%8C%ایزنی-حماس-باجتونس-بررسی-راه/؛
"Head of Political Office of Hamas to Travel to South Africa Next Month," *Fars News Agency*, Esfand 12, 1398,
<https://www.farsnews.ir/news/13981213000479/> رود %E2%80%8C%دفتر-سیاسی-حماس-ماه-آینده-به-آفریقای-جنوبی-می/

(411) "South Africa Says Will Stand by Iran in Sanctions Era," "U.S. Blacklists Companies Over Oil Trade with Iran," *DW*, March 19, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/us-blacklists-companies-over-oil-trade-with-iran/a-52832554>.

(412) "Why Iran's Nuclear Program Would Not Exist Without South Africa."

(413) "Iran Mobile Operator Iran Cell Secures U.S. Technology," *BBC*, June 6, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-18339623>.

(414) "Next Few Decades of the Economy Belongs to Africa," *Ensaf News*, Esfand 13 1395, <https://tinyurl.com/eaybnmem>.

(415) "Islamic Republic of Iran Navy IRIN / Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy," *Global Security*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/navy.htm>.

sea and land routes.⁽⁴¹⁶⁾ In 2018, Iran informed South Africa that it was ready to conclude a new MoU on military cooperation, which involved selling South African arms to Iran if sanctions allowed and holding a joint commission in Pretoria on defense issues.⁽⁴¹⁷⁾

Following the revolution, South Africa and Iran signed two new oil contracts, which marked the first post-apartheid bilateral economic agreement. The contracts enhanced cooperation between the National Iranian Oil Company and the South African Coal, Oil and Gas Company, SASOL. The first contract involved joint investment plans in the National Petroleum Refiners of South Africa (Natref). The second contract enabled Iran to supply 70 percent of the refinery's crude oil for 15 years and receive in exchange from South Africa uranium and steel. A joint venture between the Iranian National Petrochemical Company and Arya SASOL increased South Africa's holdings in Iran's petrochemical markets. SASOL ended ongoing investments in Iran in 2013, but the deal came under scrutiny when the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned Iran's petrochemical industry in 2020.⁽⁴¹⁸⁾

Iran expressed interest in receiving South African expertise in the mining sector. Following the revolution, Tehran asked Pretoria to open a mining college in Iran and sent three Iranian experts to study in the field in South Africa. Pretoria sent experts to conduct preliminary feasibility studies for the college, which opened in the city of Shahroud with partial gifts and funding from South Africa. South Africa and Iran reduced transportation costs which helped Iran become Pretoria's second-largest trade partner. Iran exported, among other things, household products—including plastic, tiles, marble, laundry detergents, rugs, and handicrafts—as well as pistachios, shrimp, dates, and walnuts to South Africa. It received non-flammable cotton fabric, fur, and animal skin, automobiles, uranium, and steel from South Africa in return.⁽⁴¹⁹⁾

(416) "Trip by Iran Defense Minister to South Africa, an Important Step to Promote Strategic Level of Ties," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Azar 14, 1395, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82346886/ارنقای-جنوبی-گامی-مهم-در-جهت-ارتقای>.

(417) "Expansion of Defense Cooperation between Iran and South Africa," *Iran Press*, Mehr 22, 1397, <https://farsi.iranpress.com/africa-i150094>.

(418) "South Africa Ties with Iran," "U.S. Sanctions Buyers and Sellers of Iran Oil," *Iran Primer*, October 30, 2020, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/index.php/blog/2020/oct/29/us-sanctions-buyers-and-sellers-iran-oil-0>; "SASOL Disposes of Its Investment in the Iranian Joint Venture Arya SASOL Polymer Company," SASOL, August 19, 2013, <https://www.sasol.com/media-centre/media-releases/sasol-disposes-its-investment-iranian-joint-venture-arya-sasol-polymer>.

(419) "South Africa Ties with Iran."

In 2012, reports emerged that the South African Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) had helped Iran Cell access advanced mobile phone technologies despite sanctions and reportedly held a 49 percent stake in the Iranian company.⁽⁴²⁰⁾ Iran sought opportunities to increase crude oil sales to South Africa and use the African country's oil and gas storage facilities. Following President Jacob Zuma's visit to Iran in 2016, Pretoria and Tehran took measures to enhance cooperation in the fields of transportation, shipping, tourism, and banking. The two capitals held talks to exchange scientific and educational resources, generate electricity, harness renewable energies, and expand cooperation in the gas and petrochemical sectors. In 2017, MTN agreed to invest in Iran and lend a total sum of US\$750 million to develop the Iranian fiber-optic network. Two years later, South Africa's ambassador to Iran, Yusuf Saloojee, was charged with receiving bribes related to an MTN deal with Iran. The company continues to hold a 49 percent stake in Iran Cell.⁽⁴²¹⁾

In 2017, Foreign Minister Zarif traveled to Pretoria to attend the 13th meeting of the Iran-South Africa Economic Commission. He encouraged South Africa to boost its technological capacity and infrastructure through Iranian Danesh Pajooch companies and establish a bank to facilitate trade transactions.⁽⁴²²⁾ In 2018, Zarif returned to South Africa, intending to expand ties. In 2019–2020, South Africa and Iran revived the joint economic commission to support Iranian businesses trading locally. The commission reportedly closed down as the business environment became nearly impossible for Iran following the return of sanctions in 2018 and was briefly dismantled. While political relations between Pretoria and Tehran remained steady, their economic ties were consequently restricted.⁽⁴²³⁾

Iran aimed to make headways into South Africa's markets by offering the country petrochemical products, asphalt, food products, oil by-products, car spare parts, electricity, and services to

(420) "Iran Mobile Operator Iran Cell Secures U.S. Technology."

(421) "FM Zarif Hails South Africa Tour as Fruitful," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, June 13, 2018, <https://en.irna.ir/news/82942484/FM-Zarif-hails-South-Africa-tour-as-fruitful>; "South Africa's MTN Investing \$750 million in Iran Fiber Optic Network," *Financial Tribune*, December 1, 2020, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-sci-tech/63997/south-africas-mtn-investing-750m-in-iran-fiber-optic-network>; Naledi Shange, "Ex SA Ambassador to Iran Arrested for Bribery Relating to MTN Deal," *Times Live*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-02-15-ex-sa-ambassador-to-iran-arrested-for-bribery-relating-to-mtn-deal/>; "Next Few Decades of the Economy Belongs to Africa."

(422) "New Phase of Relations Between Iran and Africa."

(423) Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, *Joint Commercial Committee Between Iran and South Africa Once More Revived* (Azar 13, 1398), <http://otaghiranonline.ir/news/31340>.

develop its engineering sectors. Iran eyed South Africa's ability to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) with over US\$135 billion in FDI stocks in 2018. But reaching South African markets required Iran to first resolve banking restrictions to enable trade transactions between the two countries. To resolve the issue, Iran explored entering into barter agreements with South Africa despite preferring to trade in dollars, operating smaller banks to facilitate trade with South Africa, and establishing faster land, sea, and air routes to resolve trade impediments. Through South Africa, Iran aimed to reach markets in East and West Africa more efficiently, given that some twenty African economies depend on South Africa. Iran increased trade with South Africa in 2018–2019 and explored facilitating visa arrangements to boost it even further.

Iran's exports to South Africa increased from US\$27 million to US\$43 million in the first six months of the Iranian calendar year 2019–2020. Some figures placed annual trade volumes between the two countries at US\$300 million, including their trade arrangements via third countries.⁽⁴²⁴⁾ As a member of the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) club of emerging economies and the G-20, South Africa offers enormous market potential for Iran. As a result, Iran aimed to reach markets in Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Eswatini, and Lesotho through South Africa and expand the Iranian presence in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans with South Africa as an essential partner.⁽⁴²⁵⁾

Over the years, Pretoria and Tehran entered into several cultural agreements to exchange historical and archival documents, offer educational scholarships, participate in art festivals, promote Iranian films, exchange cultural information, and promote tourism, leading to tens of thousands of annual visitations between South Africa and Iran.⁽⁴²⁶⁾ Iran cultivated relations with South Africa's small but politically influential Muslim community of Sunnis and Shi'a and with local followers of Sufi practices. Given South Africa's growing Muslim community, Iranian clerics frequently visited the African country to convene talks and religious ceremonies. According to Iranian sources, there are over a million Shi'a in South Africa, mainly concentrated

(424) Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, *Joint Commercial Committee Between Iran and South Africa Once More Revived*.

(425) "Next Few Decades of the Economy Belongs to Africa."

(426) "South Africa Ties with Iran."

in Cape Town, where the Ahl al-Bayt Mosque and several Shi'i schools and charities operate. In Johannesburg, the Al-Mustafa Society runs a seminary, and there are several Shi'i mosques and Islamic institutions. In the capital Pretoria, Iran helped set up prayer centers.⁽⁴²⁷⁾ By 2003, Iran was sending physicians to South Africa to serve the local Muslim community.⁽⁴²⁸⁾ But Iran remains challenged by rising anti-Shi'i sentiments in the African country, which have seen several attacks on Shi'i mosques in recent years.⁽⁴²⁹⁾

The Republic of South Sudan

Iran saw South Sudan's independence as an international scheme to break up a powerful and sizeable Muslim country (Sudan) and thus boost Western influence over Africa's Muslim communities.⁽⁴³⁰⁾ As a result, Iran was for many years opposed to the separatist movement in South Sudan before its independence following a referendum in 2011. South Sudan's independence, however, overlapped with a period of stagnation in Iranian foreign policy given Tehran's preoccupation with sanctions and its desire to craft an opening with the West over its nuclear program.

As a result, the nature of Iran's relations with South Sudan remained unclear as Tehran's policies toward Juba slowly evolved. Iran suspects that the African country's poverty, instability, and distant cultural connections with Israel and the West mean it is open to other influences. However, South Sudan's large non-Muslim community limits Iranian cultural influence over the country. Still, Muslims in South Sudan publicly observe religious rituals and ceremonies. Given the history of conflict in the nation and the predominant role of international actors struggling to ensure South Sudan's stability, the Iranian influence over Juba has been minimal.

From a security perspective, Iran has monitored potential terrorist hotspots in South Sudan and Israel's influence in the country, given that Juba and Tel Aviv embraced having diplomatic relations. Some 68 percent or more of Sudan's oil reserves now belong to South

(427) "8-Day Promotional/Propagation Trip to the South of Africa," *Hawzah Official News Agency*, Bahman 29, 1396, <https://www.hawzahnews.com/news/441207/سفر-تبلیغی-هشت-روزه-به-جنوب-آفریقا-تصاویر>.

(428) "Next Few Decades of the Economy Belongs to Africa."

(429) "Publication of Insulting Anti-Shia List in Social Networks in South Africa," *Hawzah Official News Agency*, Ordibehesht 26, 1397, <https://www.hawzahnews.com/news/450330/انتشار-فهرست-موهن-ضدشیعه-در-شبکه-های-اجتماعی-آفریقای-جنوبی>.

(430) "Role of Influential Foreign Groups in Break Up and Independence of South Sudan," *Political Studies of Muslim World*, Cycle 2, No. 3, (Fall 1391): 113–142, <https://www.sid.ir/fa/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?id=208951>.

Sudan, making the African country a potential energy partner for countries like Iran to expand its energy partnerships in the continent through Iranian relations with South Sudan's neighbors.⁽⁴³¹⁾

The Republic of Sudan

Sudan did not hold an important strategic position for Iran immediately after the 1979 revolution. Still, Khartoum sent a delegation to Tehran in 1980, intending to build ties. Nevertheless, the African country sided with Baghdad during the Iran–Iraq War. Following the war, Iran cultivated relations with Sudan considering its sizeable Muslim population and strategic location on the Red Sea. The National Islamic Front's rise to power in Sudan was followed by a visit to the country by President Rafsanjani in 1991. These developments led to the expansion of formal relations between Khartoum and Tehran. For the next 15 years, Khartoum–Tehran ties remained steady and close. Both rejected international efforts to isolate the two capitals, which enabled Iran to expand its influence in the African country as rival Sudanese factions fought each other. Iran partially helped mediate the conflict between Sudan and Uganda in 1996, when Rafsanjani visited Khartoum. Hundreds of other meetings followed between Khartoum and Tehran. But Tehran was preoccupied with its post-war reconstruction goals, which meant that ties with Sudan were not a priority.⁽⁴³²⁾

Sudan's civil war from 1983 to 2005 provided Iran with opportunities to use the chaos to influence the African country. In 1991, Sudan and Iran held comprehensive security talks. By 1993, after the United States charged Sudan with state-sponsored terrorism, the African country turned into a strategic base for Iran to launch a campaign to encircle Israel from North Africa. Iran supplied Sudan with oil and investments and helped the African country purchase some US\$300 million in military equipment from China. In 1995, Iran supplied heavy military equipment to Sudan, and the following year dispatched its navy to use Sudan's ports. The

(431) "South Sudan: Roots and Consequences of Cessation," *IRDiplomacy*, Tir 21, 1390, <http://irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/14562/>; "سودان-جنوبی-ریشه-هاو-پیامدهای-جدایی"; "Celebration of Birthday of the Great Prophet of Islam," *Information Staff for Shias in South Sudan*, Aban 22, 1395, <http://shiafrica26.blogfa.com/post/2>; "Sudan, the Largest Islamic Country Broke Apart," *Ehya-e Saghalain*, Mehr 14, 1396, <https://ehya-e-saghalain.ir/article/-2117/>; "سودان، پهناورترین-کشور-اسلامی-تجزیه-شده-2117".

(432) Qasem Zakeri, "Clear Pattern of Policy Result of Compromising with U.S.," *IRDiplomacy*, Farvardin 15, 1399, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1990492/>; "الگوی-روشن-نتیجه-سیاست-سمازش-با-امریکا"; "Iran Relations with Sudan;" "Iran Relations with Africa in Discussions with Dr. Bakhshi."

same year, Sudanese gunmen attempted to assassinate Egyptian President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak, and they were linked to the Vanguard of Conquest, which was influenced by Iran's revolutionary model. In 1996, Iran sent a delegation to Sudan to assess its military needs, and Sudan agreed to let Iran's naval forces use its Red Sea ports. In 2001, the U.S.-led global war on terror encouraged Tehran to expand its security influence in Sudan. In 2002, Israel seized a ship carrying arms in the Red Sea headed for Palestine that had sailed to Sudan, and it alleged that Hezbollah had links to the shipment. As tensions mounted over Sudan, President Khatami traveled to the country in 2004 and urged for an end to the crisis in the Darfur region by inviting interested countries to help resolve the tensions in the African country.⁽⁴³³⁾

In 2008, Iran protested President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir's arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court. Khartoum's ties with Tehran expanded during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, who sought to build a stronger strategic partnership with Sudan and receive its support for the Iranian nuclear program. Sudan and Iran subsequently signed a military cooperation agreement, which reaffirmed Tehran's status as a major supplier of arms to the African country. Iranian supply ships, including some linked to the IRGC, docked in Sudan Port to expand economic, trade, and security cooperation with Khartoum and reportedly helped train Sudan's army. Iran simultaneously expanded its anti-piracy operations in the Red Sea, raising international concerns over its ability to ship supplies to the Houthis in Yemen.⁽⁴³⁴⁾

To avoid stoking further internal conflict in the African country when Sudan faced uprisings in 2011, the Iranian media refused to call it an Islamic awakening, although it quickly did so when similar uprisings occurred in other parts of the Arab world. Following the outbreak of Libya's civil war in the same year, Iran reportedly transferred arms from the North African

(433) Qasem Zakeri, "Clear Pattern of Policy Result of Compromising with U.S.," "Iran Relations with Sudan," "Iran Relations with Africa in Discussions with Dr. Bakhshi," Craig Turner, "Egypt's Leader Survives Assassination Attempt: Africa: Muslim Extremists Suspected in Attack on Mubarak's Motorcade in Ethiopia. President is Unharmed," *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1995, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-06-27-mn-17703-story.html>; Lefebvre, "A New Scramble," 144; "Karine A Affair," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karine_A_affair; Hassan Msaddek, "The Challenges of Peace and Security in the Red Sea," Ian Black, "Israeli Attack on Sudanese Arms Factory Offers Glimpse of Secret War," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/25/israeli-sudanese-factory-secret-war>; "Iran Naval Task Force Docks in Sudan," *BBC News*, October 29, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-20121580>.

(434) "Clear Pattern of Policy Result of Compromising with U.S.," "Iran Relations with Africa in Discussions with Dr. Bakhshi," Lefebvre, "A New Scramble."

country for storage in Sudan. In 2012, a munitions factory with links to Iran said to be supplying weapons to Hamas exploded in Khartoum, reportedly bombed by Israel. Within days of the attack, an Iranian naval task force docked in Sudan's port, saying that it brought a message of peace and security to neighboring countries. Iranian visits to Port Sudan happened twice in late 2012, but Khartoum refuted that it had joined a military alliance with Tehran. In the following years, Iran supported Khartoum's central government while tracing terrorist operations across East Africa by groups such as al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab. In 2014, Israel intercepted arms shipments from Sudan and Egypt heading to Gaza, which were believed to have originated in Iran.⁽⁴³⁵⁾

Iran has insisted on cementing its so-called “axis of resistance” in Sudan, designed to build support in North Africa for groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas and to contain Israel.⁽⁴³⁶⁾ Iran subsequently trained groups in Sudan, believing that it could further help preserve Sudan’s territorial integrity and prevent the country from breaking up given its internal strife.⁽⁴³⁷⁾ Iran monitored Sudan’s developments with concern as this northeastern African country gradually succumbed to international pressures to change its political course. Tehran saw Khartoum’s choice of accommodating its critics as a poor example to follow and would later blame Sudan for causing its own breakup, seeing it as vindication that Iran itself must not succumb to international pressures to alter its revolutionary course in Africa.⁽⁴³⁸⁾

In 2015, Sudan joined the Saudi-led IMCTC and the military campaign in Yemen. In 2016, Khartoum broke ties with Tehran following mob attacks on the Saudi embassy in Tehran. In 2019, Sudan's power transition following a coup d'état, and its recognition of Israel a year later, left Iran on the margins of the African country's rapidly unfolding political developments.

(435) Black, "Israeli Attack on Sudanese Arms Factory Offers Glimpse of Secret War," "Iran Naval Task Force Docks in Sudan."

(436) Mostafa Ghasemi, "Support for Resistance in Foreign Policy of North African Countries and Influencing Factors," *Islamic World Strategic Studies Magazine*, No. 72 (Winter 1396).

(437) "Iran Relations with Sudan," Scott Modell and David Asher, "Pushback, Countering the Iran Action Network," *Center for a New American Security*, September 2013, https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/CNAS_Pushback_ModellAsher_0.pdf.

(438) “Phone Call by Hamas Leader to President of Tunisia: Stressing Need to Fight Corona in Gaza,” *Fars News Agency*, Farvardin 9, 1399, <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/13990109000084/%E2%80%8Cمقابله با کرونا-۸۰۲۹تماس تلفنی رهبر حماس و رئیس جمهور تونس تاکید بر>; “Hammas Lobbying with Tunisia; Examining Launch of Association of Members Supporting Quds”; “Head of Political Office of Hamas to Travel to South Africa Next Month.”

Over the years, Iran has engaged in ad hoc development policies through the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi organization in Sudan. In 1991, the two countries agreed to increase trade and investments, and Iranian engineers helped develop several water resource management and construction projects in Sudan. Iran's Saderat Development Bank supplied US\$177 million to finance some of the projects in Sudan. Joint private sector activities increased significantly in 2004, and Iran continued to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in water projects and the building of industrial plants in the African country.⁽⁴³⁹⁾ In 2006, Iran urged Sudan to agree to joint ventures in the agricultural and industrial sectors and set up Khartoum–Tehran flights to ease trade.⁽⁴⁴⁰⁾ Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Iran was prepared to transfer civilian nuclear know-how to Sudan in return for its support for a peaceful Iranian nuclear program.⁽⁴⁴¹⁾ In 2011, Sudan and Iran expanded interparliamentary friendship ties to facilitate trade in the industrial, agricultural, and mining sectors.⁽⁴⁴²⁾ But relations took a turn for the worse when the Gulf Arab states increased investments in Sudan. In March 2017, Sudan refused visas to an Iranian delegation aiming to take part in a meeting of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties.⁽⁴⁴³⁾

Over the years, Iran has steadily cultivated its cultural ties in Sudan. Tehran's frequent political setbacks in other countries in the Horn of Africa mean it views the Sunnis in Sudan as kindred spirits in a mutual struggle to build a revolutionary Islamic state. But Iran's ties with Sudan—like the rest of its relations across the Horn—have proven unsteady.⁽⁴⁴⁴⁾ After the revolution, Tehran invited Sudanese students to study in Iranian universities and religious seminaries.⁽⁴⁴⁵⁾ By 2007, Sudan's religious figures were publicly objecting to Iran's cultural activities and its encouragement of the conversion of Sudanese youth to Shi'i Islam.⁽⁴⁴⁶⁾

(439) "Iran Relations with Sudan."

(440) "Sudan Has Special Status in Iran's Relations with Africa," *Mehr News Agency*, Ordibehesht 5, 1385, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/316935/سودان-جایگاه-ویژه-ای-در-روابط-ایران-با-آفریقا-دارد>.

(441) "Fate of Ties Between Iran and Sudan After Bashir's Sudden Ouster," *Sputnik*, November 4, 2019, <https://ir.sputniknews.com/opinion/201904114641609-سپاه-ایران-البشیر-سودان/>.

(442) "Examining Iran and Sudan Economic Ties in Meeting with Sudan Ambassador," *Mehr News Agency*, Dei 1, 1399, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2017099/سودان-سفیر-و-سودانی-دیدار-در-سودان-و-ایران-اقتصادی-روابط-بررسی>.

(443) "Iran Relations with Sudan," Jalil Roshandel, "From Strategic Ties to Expelling Ambassador, 180 Degree Turn in Iran-Sudan Relations," *Radio Farda*, Dei 20, 1399, <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f3-sudan-uturn-relation-iran/27479388.html>.

(444) Craig Turner, "Egypt's Leader Survives Assassination Attempt: Africa: Muslim Extremists Suspected in Attack on Mubarak's Motorcade in Ethiopia. President is Unharmful," *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1995, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-06-27-mn-17703-story.html>.

(445) Qasem Zakeri, "Clear Pattern of Policy Result of Compromising with U.S."

(446) "Objection to Iran's Cultural Activities in Sudan," *BBC Farsi*, March 2, 2007, https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2007/03/070302_mf_sudan.shtml.

Still, by 2015, there were signs of large numbers of conversions from Sunni Islam to Shi'ism taking place in Sudan, even though Khartoum had ordered the closure of Iranian-backed Shi'i and cultural centers a year earlier. Iranian sources placed the number of Shi'a at 300,000 to 600,000. Many Sudanese supporters of Iran felt close enough to Tehran to name their children after Iran's supreme leaders Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In late 2015, Sudan shut down Iranian offices in the African country and reportedly expelled Iranian diplomats. Tehran subsequently halted the implementation of its development projects in the African country.⁽⁴⁴⁷⁾

The United Republic of Tanzania

Tehran set up an office in Dar es Salaam in 1981, after Tanzania congratulated Iran on the 1979 revolution. In the following years, Iran began viewing Tanzania as a frontline state in the fight against apartheid. Tanzania's shores on the Indian Ocean, and relative proximity to southern Africa, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, made the country even more important to Iran in seeking to expand its influence in southern and central Africa. As a result, Dodoma and Tehran agreed to establish formal ties in 1986, and Iran subsequently opened an embassy in Tanzania.⁽⁴⁴⁸⁾

In 1987, President Ali Khamenei visited Tanzania to launch Jihad-e-Sāzandegi projects and famously remarked that "Tanzania is to Iran in Africa what Syria is to Iran in the Arab world." The following year, Dodoma and Tehran agreed to set up a joint commission to expand ties. In subsequent years, the two capitals set up an interparliamentary friendship group.⁽⁴⁴⁹⁾ Tanzania supported the Iranian position on its nuclear program in international forums. But in 2005, Tanzania's authorities discovered a shipment of uranium from the DRC to Iran. Iran rejected that it was interested in importing uranium.⁽⁴⁵⁰⁾ Still, under sanctions in 2012, Iran used Tanzanian

(447) "We are Ready to Sacrifice Sudan for Iran, so Iran can Stay," *Raja News*, Bahman 8, 1391, <http://www.rajanews.com/news/132152>; "Mr. President! Have You Not Seen Hundreds of Thousands of Sudanese Shias?" *Ahl al-Bayt News Agency*, Bahman 13, 1394, <https://fa.abna24.com/service/africa/archive/2016/02/02/698381/story.html>; "Sudan Closes Iranian Cultural Centers and Expels Diplomats," *Reuters*, September 2, 2014, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-sudan-iran-culture/sudan-closes-iranian-cultural-centres-and-expels-diplomats-source-idUKKBN0GX15G20140902>; "Iran Relations with Sudan."

(448) "History of Shiism in Africa Goes Back to Age of Advent of Islam."

(449) "Tanzania Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=345>.

(450) "Iran's Ahmadinejad Due to Visit Uranium-Producing Niger."

flagged ships to export goods. Dodoma conducted investigations and deregistered the ships but insisted that it would continue its relations with Tehran in other areas.⁽⁴⁵¹⁾

In 2014, the two country's defense establishments concluded an agreement to enable Iran's navy to make regular stops in the East African country's ports.⁽⁴⁵²⁾ The two countries continued to interact as IORA members, aiming to promote balanced development in the region. In 2017, Iran urged Tanzania to open its embassy in Tehran, condemn Israel and the U.S. sanctions, and use Iranian counter-terrorism expertise given the threat of Islamic radicalization facing the African country through efforts by groups such as IS and al-Qaeda to enlist recruits and unrest in neighboring countries around Tanzania.⁽⁴⁵³⁾

Tanzania was one of the first African countries that the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi decided to concentrate its broader activities on, in light of extreme poverty levels in the Rufiji river area where several other countries had abandoned projects. Floods in the Ikwiriri area led to the expansion of the Jihad-e-Sāzandegi organization's agricultural projects in Tanzania and the conclusion of at least five economic development agreements with Tehran. The Jihad-e-Sāzandegi concluded new agreements with Tanzania during President Rafsanjani's state visit to the African country in 1996. Still, most arrangements—including one aiming to set up university branches in Zanzibar—were either poorly implemented or never came to fruition, which meant the Iranians developed a poor reputation.⁽⁴⁵⁴⁾

In 2006, Tanzania was Iran's eighth-largest trading partner, and the two countries held talks to expand tourism. In 2009, they agreed to boost joint work in the agricultural sector, and Iran expressed interest in establishing an agricultural office in Dar es Salaam. In 2009, Tanzania and

(451) "History of Shiism in Africa Goes Back to Age of Advent of Islam."

(452) Fumbuka Ng'wanakilala, "Tanzania Confirms It Re-flagged 36 Iranian Ships, to Deregister Them," *Reuters*, August 11, 2012, <https://in.reuters.com/article/tanzania-iran/update-2-tanzania-confirms-it-re-flagged-36-iranian-ships-to-deregister-them-idINL6E8JC00D20120812>; "Information Center for Shias in Tanzania," *Shia in Africa*, Aban 14, 1396, <http://shiafrica12.blogfa.com/post/36>; "Agreement Between Iran and Tanzania Naval Forces to Continue Regular Visits," *Mehr News Agency*, Azar 19, 1399, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/3572611> توأفاق نیروی دریایی ایران و خاناتز انیادری ای-استمرار جاز دیدهای منظم

(453) "Breaking JCPOA Promises by Trump Is Extension of Past U.S. Policies Against Iran," *Khaneh Mellat*, Ordibehesht 1, 1397, <https://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/379507> بال-ایران 90%D9%90%های-گنشته-آمریکادر-ق80%80%E2%عهدشکنی-یرجامی-ترامپ-در-ادامه-سیاست; "Establishing Embassy of Tanzania in Iran Will Help Expand Ties," *Khaneh Mellat*, Mordad 13, 1396, <https://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/343195> تشکیل-سفارتخانه-تانزانیا-در-ایران-به-گسترش-روابط-کمک-خواهد-کرد; "Iran's Ahmadinejad Due to Visit Uranium-Producing Niger," "Iran and Tanzania To Cooperate in Health and Education Fields," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Azar 24, 1393, <https://www.irna.ir/news/81426984> ایران-و-تانزانیا-در-زمینه-های-بهداشتی-و-آموزش-پزشکی-همکاری-می

(454) "History of Shiism in Africa Goes Back to Age of Advent of Islam."

Iran agreed to expand cooperation in the health sector. In 2010, Dodoma and Tehran signed agreements on fisheries, cement production, and meat processing.⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾

In 2015, while visiting Tanzania, Foreign Minister Zarif confirmed the challenges confronting Iran in deepening relations with African countries due to problems resulting from the sanctions regime. Tanzania subsequently announced that it would send a delegation to Tehran to discuss the repayment of US\$77 million to Iran if sanctions financial relief mechanisms allowed it after the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal.⁽⁴⁵⁶⁾ Tehran invited Dodoma to expand relations in different sectors, including in fishery, commerce, shipping, transportation, oil and gas, agriculture, road construction, health and pharmaceuticals, and higher education.⁽⁴⁵⁷⁾

Iran's educational and cultural activities in Tanzania enabled its continued influence in the Sub-Saharan country. As early as 1990, Iran offered scholarships to students from Tanzania to study in Iranian universities. In 2007, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee set up an office in Tanzania to deliver humanitarian aid and promote religious activities. A large Shi'i community in Dar es Salaam enabled the expansion of Iranian activities in Zanzibar, where the local Shi'i community ran more than thirty mosques and religious centers.⁽⁴⁵⁸⁾

Iran offered scholarships to hundreds of Tanzanian students and clerics to study in Iranian seminaries in subsequent years. It built contacts with a wide network of Shi'i charities in Zanzibar funded by Gulf, Lebanese and Western-based organizations and individuals. Tehran simultaneously expanded cultural projects in Zanzibar, including access to schools, religious seminaries and colleges for men and women, libraries, books, radio and television programs, affordable housing, potable water, humanitarian activities, childcare centers, and educational programs. The Al-Mustafa Society has remained active in Tanzania, believing that the country would herald a golden age of Shi'i Islam in Africa, given that

(455) "Iran, Tanzania Agree to Boost All-Out Relations," *Tehran Times*, May 13, 2009, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/194530/Iran-Tanzania-agree-to-boost-all-out-relations>.

(456) "Tanzania-Iran Relations: Changing the Dynamics," *Financial Tribune*, February 16, 2015, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/11322/tanzania-iran-relations-changing-the-dynamics>.

(457) "Breaking JCPOA Promises by Trump Is Extension of Past U.S. Policies Against Iran;" "Establishing Embassy of Tanzania in Iran Will Help Expand Ties;" "Iran's Ahmadinejad Due to Visit Uranium-Producing Niger;" "Iran and Tanzania To Cooperate in Health and Education Fields."

(458) "History of Shiism in Africa Goes Back to Age of Advent of Islam."

it has the second-largest Shi‘i community on the continent. Iranian clerics said Tanzania’s Shi‘i community was increasing. But Iranian religious influence in Zanzibar appeared limited given the region’s multi-faith community. According to some reports, the number of Shi‘a in the area was, in fact, declining. And despite the presence of an influential Persian community that settled in Tanzania years before the revolution, the community had merged into this East African society and did not hold deep connections to Iran or its Shi‘i institutions.⁽⁴⁵⁹⁾

The Togolese Republic

Following the 1979 revolution, Tehran revived its diplomatic relations with the capital port city of Lomé in Togo when the poverty-stricken small West African nation attempted but failed to purchase oil from Iran. A few official diplomatic trips between the two countries took place in subsequent years. Iran’s ambassadors to Ghana were accredited to serve in Togo, and Togo maintained an accredited ambassador to Iran. Tehran sought Lomé’s support in international organizations, including the UN and the OIC, especially when frequent resolutions gathered international votes to condemn Iran’s human rights record. In 2010, when Togo sought a seat at the UNSC, Iran insisted on expanding its contacts with the country. In the following two years, Iran’s outreach appealed to Togo as the African state was seeking to balance its relations with Western powers, including the United States, which did not initially have major trade interests in the African country.⁽⁴⁶⁰⁾

In recent years, Togo and Iran have convened talks to expand anti-terrorism cooperation and expressed a mutual desire to hold diplomatic and interparliamentary meetings to explore ways to coordinate their policies in international forums.⁽⁴⁶¹⁾ But reports in 2013 indicated that Iranian

(459) “Level of Iran Relations with Africa and People of Zanzibar,” *Mehr News Agency*, July 15, 2017, <http://www.shiafrica.com/archive/1228/میزان-روابط-ایران-با-آفریقا-و-مردم-زنگبار>.

(460) “Togo Ties with Iran,” *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=330>; Michael Rubin, “Africa: Iran’s Final Frontier?” *American Enterprise Institute*, April 17, 2013, citing “Manouchehr Mottaki à Lomé” [Manouchehr Mottaki to Lomé], RepublicofTogo.com (Lomé), October 30, 2010, www.republicoftogo.com/Toutes-les-rubriques/Diplomatie/Manouchehr-Mottaki-a-Lome; “L’Iran, ‘Partenaire Stratégique’ de l’Afrique” [Iran ‘Strategic Partner’ of Africa], RepublicofTogo.com (Lomé), September 14, 2010, www.republicoftogo.com/Toutes-les-rubriques/Diplomatie/L-Iran-partenaire-strategique-de-l-Afrique.

(461) “Presidency: Expanding Ties with African Countries is a Principled Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Azad University Press Agency*, <https://ana.press/fa/news-amp/14/82309/با-کشورهای-آفریقای-از-جمهوری-گسترش-روابط-2013-08-22>; “ایران-اسلامی-است-2013-08-22” <http://ana.press/fa/news-amp/14/82309/با-کشورهای-آفریقای-از-جمهوری-گسترش-روابط-2013-08-22>.

cargo seized and confiscated on its way to Yemen was carried by a vessel from Togo.⁽⁴⁶²⁾ Togo subsequently joined the Saudi-led IMCTC. It also de-listed three Iranian tankers from its shipping registry data in July 2019 to demonstrate that its operational fleet was not Iranian and functioned in compliance with the sanction regime against Iran.⁽⁴⁶³⁾

In the 1980s, Lomé and Tehran signed several cooperation agreements. Iran has mainly imported phosphates from Togo, exporting rugs, healthcare facilities, and furniture in return. In addition, Iran has occasionally participated in trade exhibits in Togo.⁽⁴⁶⁴⁾ More recently, Tehran and Lomé agreed to briefly lift visa requirements between the two countries to facilitate trade, a move which would have also provided Iran's easier access to the border market towns in Ghana, Benin, and Burkina Faso. But levels of economic cooperation remained limited, especially given Togo's stronger economic ties with Israel.⁽⁴⁶⁵⁾

In 2017, Togo and Iran sought to revive economic ties once again after Tehran concluded the nuclear deal with world powers, and prospects of the lifting of sanctions against it seemed promising. Uranium deposits in Togo attracted Iran, given its desire to renew enrichment programs, as did Togo's potential to produce fertilizers and cement. But to access better economic and trade opportunities in the West African country, Tehran had to compete with Israel and the United States for influence over Lomé. Besides, Iran had to contend with Turkey's growing attraction for Togo as an investment partner after Ankara opened an embassy in Lomé in 2020. Iran subsequently expressed interest in participating in projects in Togo to build power plants and low-income housing.⁽⁴⁶⁶⁾

(462) Michael Rubin, "Africa: Iran's Final Frontier?"

(463) Jonathan Saul, Parisa Hafezi, Marianna Parraga, "Flags of Inconvenience: Noose Tightens Around Iranian Shipping," *Reuters*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-iran-tanker-flags-insight/flags-of-inconvenience-noose-tightens-around-iranian-shipping-idUSKCN1UL0M8>.

(464) "Togo Ties with Iran;" "Iran and Togo Emphasize Need to Strengthen Bilateral Economic Ties," *Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency*, Mehr 23, 1396, <https://www.irna.ir/news/82696064/ايران-و-توگو-بر-ضرورت-تقویت-روابط-دوجانبه-اقتصادی-تاکید-کردند>; "History of Shiism in Africa Goes Back to Age of Advent of Islam;" "Hawzah Centers in Africa Are Shelter for Lovers of Ahl al-Bayt (alayh-e-salam)," *Hawzah Official News Agency*, Farvardin 21, 1397, <https://www.hawzahnews.com/news/442882/حوزه-های-علمیه-در-آفریقا-پناهگاهی-برای-عاشقان-اهل-بیت-ع-است>.

(465) "Togo Ties with Iran;" "Government Agreed to Cancel Visas for A Month Between Iran and Togo," *Hamshahri*, Farvardin 14, 1390, <https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/131245/دولت-بالاتر-روادید-یک-ماه-بین-ایران-و-توگو-موافقت-کرد>.

(466) "Presidency: Expanding Ties with African Countries is a Principled Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Iran's cultural activities in Togo are limited because of the Egyptian Al-Azhar University's deeper historical ties to the local Muslim population. Togo has a small population of Lebanese Shi'a, and its Muslim community is growing. In 1996, four Shi'i clerics from Ghana arrived in Togo to propagate the faith, which led to some conversions to Shi'ism. It is now increasingly practiced openly. There are several Shi'i centers and charitable institutions in Togo, including at least one mosque, a seminary, and prayer centers where students and graduates of the Al-Mustafa University preach.⁽⁴⁶⁷⁾

The Republic of Tunisia

Tunisia closed its embassy in Tehran following the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war, citing financial reasons. But it allowed Tehran to retain a representative in its embassy in Tunis. The North African country's support for Iraq during the war and for UN resolutions condemning Iran's human rights record led to tensions with Tehran. Facing mixed results engaging with the Tunisian Muslim Brotherhood while retaining a secular society, Tunis asked Tehran to close its embassy in 1982, citing Iran's role in stirring local dissent. Following political tensions in Tunisia after the departure of Prime Minister Muhammad Mzali from office in 1986, relations with Iran deteriorated. Furthermore, Tunisia supported Egypt's efforts to pressure Iran to accept a ceasefire in 1986. After UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar submitted a 1991 report to the UNSC citing Iraq's encroachment on Iranian territory, Tunisia warmed up to the idea of better ties with Iran. Diplomatic relations between Tunis and Tehran resumed three years later.⁽⁴⁶⁸⁾

But Tunisia's closer ties to Iraq—and the influence of the Ba'ath ideology in the North African country—stalled relations between Tunis and Tehran in the following years. Still, the two capitals were able to meet eye-to-eye on several issues in the international arena as Iran tried to move away from a pronounced anti-Western ideology in the post-war period to embrace better relations with the world, including Tunisia. Tunisia sought to boost its

(467) "Togo," *Wikishia*, <https://fa.wikishia.net/view/توگو>; "Ceremony of Collective Quran Khatm Held in Togo," *ABNA*, Azar 20, 1296, https://fa.abna24.com/news/729401_اخبار-افریقا/مراسم-ختم-قرآن-جمعی-در-توگو-برگزار-شد.

(468) "Tunisia Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=323>; "Tunisia, Accusing Iran, Cracks Down on Dissent," *New York Times*, June 22, 1987, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/06/22/world/tunisia-accusing-iran-cracks-down-on-dissent.html>; Mohammad Reza Ahouri, "Political Islamism in Tunisia Reaching End?" *IRDiplomacy*, Esfand 18, 1396, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1975442/>; Saber Golanbari, "Cradle of Arab Spring on Dangerous Curb," *IRDiplomacy*, Mehr 15, 1397, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1979389/مهد-بهار-عربی-در-سر-پیچی-خطرناک>.

regional status as a North African and Middle Eastern country by diversifying its ties with a host of other regional countries, including Iran. As a result, relations between Tunisia and Iran improved during Mohammad Khatami's presidency and continued to build during Ahmadinejad's presidency.

After the uprisings in Tunisia in 2011, Iran was concerned that Islamic political movements in the North African country could become marginalized. But the gradual rejection of Tunisia's secular and Western-oriented political outlook following the uprisings by Islamic movements such as Ennahda led to its support for Iran in developing a peaceful nuclear program. As Ennahda began envisioning a future for Tunisia that would embrace development, free of Western pressure, it saw in Iran an example of a country capable of achieving its development goals independently. Iran's independent technological and scientific advancements in the face of foreign pressure thus served as inspiration.⁽⁴⁶⁹⁾

From Iran's perspective, Tunisia after 2011 was a promising country in transition, which meant that it would face political uncertainties for years to come. Iran encouraged the North African country to keep its options open on bilateral relations. Furthermore, the Gulf Arab countries' investments in Tunisia were insufficient to keep Tunisia's struggling population content or completely dampen Tunis–Tehran ties. As a result, in subsequent years, Iran has sought to expand its ties with Tunisia, explore opportunities with Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia to export gas across Africa, and build an Iranian–North African alliance to fight the IS and al-Qaeda.⁽⁴⁷⁰⁾ Iran's hopes were temporarily dashed when Tunisia expelled the Syrian ambassador in 2012, despite Iran urging the African state to support the government in Damascus during the Syrian civil war.

Tunisia's security agreement with Qatar and Turkey in 2013 and its cooperation with the Saudi-led IMCTC after 2015 stirred the North African country's attention away from Iran and toward building stronger ties with more economically powerful regional countries. But Tunisia maintained a relatively independent regional foreign policy, including its moves to cultivate ties with Hamas and condemn the normalization of Arab ties with Israel. These

(469) Mohammad Reza Ashouri, "Political Islamism in Tunisia Reaching End?"; Saber Golanbari, "Cradle of Arab Spring on Dangerous Curb."

(470) Ashouri, "Political Islamism in Tunisia."

steps left room to maintain relations with Tehran. In 2017, Tunisia and Iran held talks to avoid sectarianism, and Iran said it welcomed what it called Tunisia's independent, logical, and moderate foreign policy.⁽⁴⁷¹⁾

Ennahda and the Nidaa Tounes, a party founded in 2012, maintained cordial ties with Iran. The latter cultivated an anti-colonial image of its revolution, which resonated with Tunisia's political elite. But Tunisia's efforts to separate politics from religion increased negative views of Iran and its anti-Israeli policies, even among Tunisia's Islamic parties, but more so with its more liberal groups. Still, Iran maintained a level of sympathy in Tunisia, given their shared struggles to build socially equitable and anti-colonial governance systems. To the Iranians, many of Tunisia's leading political elite concealed their sympathies for Iran as part of the practice of *taqiyyah* in sections of Tunisian society with roots in its Shi'i history. Proof of this sympathy, at least in the eyes of the Iranians, was the fact that Tunisia rejected a U.S. measure to trigger a snap-back mechanism under the terms of the JCPOA, which would tighten the sanctions regime against Iran through the UNSC in 2020.⁽⁴⁷²⁾

After the Iranian Revolution, trade between Tunisia and Iran remained limited due to the geographic distance between the two countries and the absence of easily accessible routes. Iran bought phosphates from Tunisia to produce chemical fertilizers, but Tunisia refused to import Iranian products and services. Iran's Export Development Center participated in Tunisia's trade exhibit in 1994 and twelve private Iranian companies. The event led to several trade deals, albeit small ones.⁽⁴⁷³⁾

Following the Tunisian uprisings in 2011, key figures in the Ennahda Movement sought better economic ties with Iran, including its founder Rached Ghannouchi and his son-in-law Rafik Ben Abdessalem, Tunisia's foreign minister from 2011 to 2013, along with Mustapha Ben Jafar, who was speaker of the parliament, and Mohamed Moncef Marzouki, who served as president between 2011 and 2014. Iran explored expanding naval ties with Tunisia and developing its

(471) "Sectarianism Threatens the Region/Need to Expand Iran and Tunisia Ties," *Mehr News Agency*, Shahrivar 9, 1394, <https://bit.ly/3g0bnGK>.

(472) "Left and Ikhwani Trends in Tunisia and View of Islamic Republic of Iran."

(473) "Tunisia Ties with Iran."

ports, industrial and commercial sectors, and tourism infrastructure. Under a joint cooperation commission, the two countries sought to generate employment opportunities in these sectors in both countries. They also explored expanding the agricultural and auto manufacturing sectors, encouraging direct flights, and easing visa restrictions.⁽⁴⁷⁴⁾

Iran aimed to reach European markets by investing in Tunisia and using the African country as a springboard to markets across the Mediterranean Sea. But sanctions lowered Tunisia's trade volume with Iran by 2014, even though Tehran had established direct trade links and suggested options for investments in mines and technology. Iran also invited Tunisia to become more active in Iraqi markets, where Iranian businesses and investments were becoming involved without the pressures of the sanction regime. The Iranians hoped that the tendency in parts of northern Tunisia bordering the Mediterranean Sea to develop an identity distinct from the Gulf Arab states would make Iran an indispensable commercial partner for the North African country if conditions were ripe.⁽⁴⁷⁵⁾ In 2017, Foreign Minister Zarif traveled to Tunisia to expand commercial relations. Tunisia and Iran agreed to hold a joint commission meeting the following year to explore trade in the energy, environment, and tourism sectors.⁽⁴⁷⁶⁾ In 2020, Tunisia and Tehran held talks to expand cooperation in the health, medical and pharmaceutical sectors, as well as interparliamentary relations to facilitate trade.⁽⁴⁷⁷⁾ Iran said it viewed Tunisia as a gateway into both Africa and Europe.⁽⁴⁷⁸⁾

After the 1979 revolution, Tunisia and Iran held several rounds of talks to revive a pre-1979 agreement on student exchanges. Failing to reach an agreement on the issue, bilateral student exchanges remained on ice for some time. Still, the Iranian cultural influence in Tunisia was relatively strong, reflected in the African country's architectural and design heritage, music,

(474) "Prospects of Relations Between Iran and Tunisia, Expectations and Realities," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Ordibehesht 3, 1391, <https://www.irna.ir/news/80091878/ها-واقعیات-انتظار-ها-و-روابط-ایران-و-تونس>.

(475) "Sanctions Against Iran Reason for Drop in Trade Ties with Tunisia," *Fars News Agency*, Aban 9, 1394, <https://bit.ly/3uGGDPo>.

(476) "Zarif: No Ceiling for Expanding Bilateral Ties Between Iran and Tunisia," *Tasnim News Agency*, Khordad 30, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3uUwpuX>.

(477) "Meeting Between Ambassador of Iran and Foreign Minister of Tunisia; Examining Ways to Expand Bilateral Relations," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Khordad 17, 1399, <https://bit.ly/39XmMn5>.

(478) "Republic of Tunisia Can Be Gateway for Iran Into Africa, Northern Africa and Europe," *Barkhat News*, Azar 25, 1399, <https://www.barkhat.news/political/160802946331/the-republic-of-tunisia-can-be-iran-s-gateway-to-african-countries-north-africa-and-europe>.

customs, and food. There are more than 200 Persian words in the Arabic language spoken in Tunisia, and several of Tunisia's prominent religious leaders throughout history were originally from Iran. As a result of this cultural influence, there are streets in Tunisia named after Iranian poets and philosophers.⁽⁴⁷⁹⁾

With this strong common heritage in mind, Iran expanded cultural ties with Tunisia through the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and urged Tunisian leaders to join Iran in promoting Muslim unity.⁽⁴⁸⁰⁾ In 2013, Tunisia and Iran held a Cultural Week to celebrate the arts, handicrafts, literature, and religious heritage of the two countries.⁽⁴⁸¹⁾ They expanded cooperation in the film industry, held book exhibits, and signed a MoU to encourage musical collaborations.⁽⁴⁸²⁾ Iran also promoted cultural activities in Tunisia around the issue of Palestine, and raised awareness about the Iranian-led 'resistance diplomacy' against Israel and the West, and sought opportunities in Tunisia to hold intellectual gatherings, increase viewers for Iranian television programs, explore publishing and translation projects, and promote appreciation for the Persian language, literature, and calligraphy.⁽⁴⁸³⁾

The cultural measures were designed to appeal to the generally moderate religious orientations that dominate Tunisian society while reminding it of the Persian and Shi'i influences in the African country's rich cultural heritage. One of the first publications in Tunisia following its uprising was about the country's awakening and made available as a Shi'i publication. Similar publications in Tunisia addressed sensitive questions about the country's post-colonial history and leadership structure, aiming to reach a wider audience of both Sunnis and diverse Shi'i communities in the African country. Iran benefited from the presence of an active expatriate Shi'i Tunisian community in European countries such as France and their efforts to encourage Tunisia's connections with its Shi'i history and promote a so-called "neo-Shi'ism culture." In

(479) "Tunisia Ties with Iran."

(480) "Elements Behind Assassination of Shokri Balid," *Mehr News Agency*, Bahman 28, 1391, <https://bit.ly/2Rqb7Xw>.

(481) Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, *Minister of Guidance Visited Iranian Cultural Office in Tunisia*, Mehr 26, 1393, <http://icro.ir/index.aspx?pageid=33037&newsview=619777>.

(482) Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, *Tunisia Culture Minister in Meeting with Iran Cinematic Organization: Bilateral Cinematic Relations in Two Public and Private Sector Spheres with Iran will be Strengthened*, Ordibehesht 20, 1393, <https://bit.ly/3fY4g1L>.

(483) "Examination of Cultural Relations Between Iran and Tunisia," *Shabestan*, Mordad 5, 1398, <http://shabestan.ir/detail/News/814516>.

addition, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly was active in Tunisia and had a considerable number of Tunisian clerics studying in Iran.⁽⁴⁸⁴⁾

Tunisia's religious heritage invited Iranian influence and propagation of Shi'i Islam, which was closely controlled by the state before 2011. This was despite efforts by the Tunisian state prior to and after the uprising to monitor the level of Shi'i conversions taking place in the African country and attacks on Shi'i cultural activities by a small group of radical Sunni Tunisians. For example, Iranians enjoyed reminding the Tunisians that their port city of Mahdia was named after the Mahdi, considered to be a savior saint in Shi'i Islam. In Southern Tunisia, where most of its Shi'i population lives, the rate of conversions was higher. But there were also highly visible Shi'i communities near the capital Tunis and in parts of northern Tunisia. Tunisians commemorated the Ashura in unique forms, for example, by setting fire to dried grass to remember the children of the Shi'i Imam Hussein and his group of martyrs during the historic Battle of Karbala. While this practice was not as common in Iran, Tunisians and Iranians, in general, avoided holding weddings and other celebrations during the month of Muharram and Ashura. Tunisia was further influenced by the Shi'i communities active in Lebanon and Syria, leading Iranians to claim that almost all Tunisians were privately sympathetic to Shi'i Islam, even if they did not show it in the public sphere to avoid discrimination by observing *taqiyyah*.⁽⁴⁸⁵⁾

The Republic of Uganda

Following the Iranian Revolution, Iran offered Uganda financial and technical assistance and loans to expand bilateral cooperation and enable Ugandans to serve as a front against apartheid. In 1988, Iran's ambassador to Kenya was accredited to Uganda, but it took another decade before Tehran sent an ambassador to Kampala. Uganda retained an accredited ambassador in Tehran and later opened an embassy there. Uganda's membership in NAM helped increase contacts with Tehran, and its membership in IGAD encouraged visits to the African country

(484) "Status of Shias in Crisis Ridden Tunisia," *Mashreq News*, Bahman 3, 1389, <https://www.mashreqnews.ir/news/25818/زده-بحران-تونس-در-شیعیان-جایگاه>.

(485) "Tunisia," *Wikishia*, <https://fa.wikishia.net/view/تونس>; "99 Percent of Tunisian People are Sympathetically Shias," *Shia News*, Khordad 22, 1391, <https://www.shia-news.com/fa/news/36450/99-درصد-مردم-تونس-شیعه-عاطفی-اند>; "Orientation of Thousands of Tunisians to Shia Faith," *IRDiplomacy*, Khordad 29, 1391, <http://irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1902879/گرایش-هزاران-تونسی-به-مذهب-تشیع>; "Intensity of Spread of Shiism in Tunisia," *ABNA*, Farvardin 19, 1395, <https://fa.abna24.com/service/africa/archive/2016/04/07/701227/story.html>.

by three of Iran's presidents—Rafsanjani in 1996, Khatami (2005), and Ahmadinejad (2010). Uganda's President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni—hailed by the Iranians as an independent-minded visionary—paid several visits to Iran. These visits paved the way for talks about Iran's nuclear program and Uganda's position on the issue when it served as a rotating member of the UNSC in 2010.⁽⁴⁸⁶⁾

In 2015, Foreign Minister Zarif traveled to Uganda to conclude an MoU to expand relations, which included an understanding to reportedly build a “coalition against domination.” The visitors arrived at an opportune time for Iran, with Uganda presiding over the UNGA. Uganda subsequently vowed to support Iran at the UNSC.⁽⁴⁸⁷⁾ Iran's chief of police and law enforcement forces, Esmail Ahmadi Moghadam, also led a delegation to Uganda. A delegation representing Uganda's police forces visited Iran in 2015 to inspect an exhibition promoting national security. Following the conclusion of an MoU, Uganda and Iran agreed to exchange experience and know-how to build the national police force and fight organized crime and terrorism. In addition, Iran agreed to train Uganda's police forces, and the Iranian Red Crescent Society offered US\$1.5 million to fund the building of a police health clinic with a one-hundred-bed capacity.⁽⁴⁸⁸⁾ Simultaneously, Uganda joined the Saudi-led IMCTC, which encouraged Iran to continue cultivating ties with Kampala. In 2017, Zarif visited Uganda to meet with the local Iranian expatriate community and open a 50-bed hospital financed by Iranians. Zarif also encouraged Kampala to work with Tehran to fight terrorism.⁽⁴⁸⁹⁾ In 2020, Iran expressed its readiness to expand military and defense cooperation with Uganda, shortly after Kampala and Tel Aviv held talks to strengthen ties.⁽⁴⁹⁰⁾

(486) Douglas Mpuga, “Iran's Leader Concludes Visit to Uganda,” *Voice of America*, April 24, 2010, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/irans-leader-concludes-visit-uganda>; “Relations Between Iran and Uganda,” *Wikipedia*, <https://tinyurl.com/rb59px5r>.

(487) “Halima Athumani, “Uganda, Iran's ‘Coalition Against Domination,’” *AA News*, March 2, 2015, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/uganda-irans-coalition-against-domination/78200>; “Zarif in Uganda Brought Up: Iran and Africa Cooperation to Fight Terrorism,” *Kayhan*, Bahman 15, 1393, <https://www.magiran.com/article/3107044>; “Relations Between Iran and Uganda.”

(488) Douglas Mpuga, “Iran's Leader Concludes Visit to Uganda,” Moses Walubiri, “Oryem Lauds Iran-Uganda Relations,” *New Vision*, December 15, 2020, <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1314060/oryem-lauds-iran-uganda-relations>; “Strengthening Cooperation and Relations Between Police in Iran and Uganda is on Agenda,” *Mehr News Agency*, Mehr 28, 1395, <https://tinyurl.com/9b9s935k>; “Relations Between Iran and Uganda.”

(489) “Zarif in Uganda Brought Up: Iran and Africa Cooperation to Fight Terrorism,” “Relations Between Iran and Uganda.”

(490) “President Museveni to Iran ‘Uganda Has Enormous Investment Potential,’” *Uganda Media Center*, September 16, 2020, <https://www.mediacentre.go.ug/media/president-museveni-iran-%E2%80%99Cuganda-has-enormous-investment-potential%E2%80%9D>.

Uganda and Iran frequently conferred over regional and international issues and the challenge of building ties during sanctions. In 1993, Iran exported agricultural machinery to Uganda. A decade later, it took part in a non-oil sector trade exhibit in the African country. In 2010, Kampala and Tehran initiated talks to conclude an agreement supporting local commercial cooperatives to promote the equitable distribution of basic goods and commerce. In 2011, Iran discussed setting up an Iranian Trade Center in Uganda, expanding cooperative agreements with Kampala, opening free-trade zones to boost joint economic activities, and facilitating banking and financial transactions.⁽⁴⁹¹⁾ In 2016, Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade offered Uganda a US\$10 million line of credit to purchase Iranian products. In general, Iran considered Uganda a ripe country for investment.⁽⁴⁹²⁾

Uganda explored using Iranian services to build up its agricultural, food production, livestock, and energy sectors, and its engineering services to build East–West railway connections in Africa. Iran built two dams and power grids in Uganda, including on the Nile River flow in Lake Victoria, using existing natural waterfalls. During the foreign minister's trips to Uganda, Iran frequently explored implementing agricultural projects and increasing cooperation with the African country in the pharmaceuticals and medical sectors. Iran further aimed to build relations between Ugandan and Iranian banks to facilitate trade during sanctions. Uganda expressed interest in attracting Iranian investment, while Iran offered the African country an opportunity to use the Danesh Bonyan companies' experience, which would give the Iranian business sector broader access in the African country. In 2019, Uganda and Iran stressed the need to expand interparliamentary cooperation to promote trade.⁽⁴⁹³⁾

In 2020, Uganda dispatched a new ambassador to Tehran, reiterating its appreciation for Iran's active engagement with mosques, universities, societies, and religious gatherings in

(491) "Iran and Uganda Cooperative Sector Economic Cooperation to Expand," *Informational Staff of Central Cooperative Chamber of Iran*, Khordad 17, 1389, <https://www.icccoop.ir/site/Page.aspx?mlID=1731&Page=News/Shownews&NewsId=311>.

(492) "Zarif in Uganda Brought Up: Iran and Africa Cooperation to Fight Terrorism," "Relations Between Iran and Uganda."

(493) "Foreign Minister of Uganda Emphasized Expanding Relations with Iran," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Azar 20, 1399, <https://bit.ly/3dOm4tp>; "New Phase of Relations Between Iran and Africa," "Iran and Uganda Emphasize Increase in Economic and Parliamentary Cooperation," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Azar 22, 1398, <https://bit.ly/3s4TWH0>; "Jahangiri Stressed Need for Regional and International Cooperation Between Iran and Uganda to Fight Terrorism and Radicalism," *Moj News*, Mordad 14, 1396, <https://bit.ly/3t5YY7Q>; "Relations Between Iran and Uganda," Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, *Iran Chamber Welcomes Gathering of Africa Day in Iran* (Khordad 8, 1398), <http://otaghiranonline.ir/news/31340>.

the African country. Based on a cultural agreement between the two, Iran said it planned to promote cooperation with Uganda to hold educational and religious programs, workshops, and seminars, conduct Friday prayer ceremonies, and collaborate with local judges in Uganda.⁽⁴⁹⁴⁾ Uganda has a significant Muslim and Shi'i population, but the country sought to control Shi'i activism in 2001. Still, Iran set up a cultural office in Uganda in 2011 to expand university and scientific contacts, promote Persian language and literature, hold religious meetings and ceremonies, exchange scholars and religious figures, expand religious media programs, and offer Ugandan students scholarships to study in Iran. In 2014, a delegation from the Al-Mustafa Society visited Uganda. Two years later, Uganda and Iran hosted Quranic recitation contests.⁽⁴⁹⁵⁾

The Republic of Zambia

Zambia was one of the first African countries to recognize Iran's revolution, given the cold relations between Lusaka and Tehran before the revolution. But Zambia refused to expand its diplomatic ties with Tehran during the early years of the Iran–Iraq War, given the closer relations between Lusaka and Baghdad. Iran initiated diplomatic contacts with Zambia some seven years after the Iranian Revolution. President Ali Khamenei met with President Kenneth Kaunda on the sidelines of a NAM meeting in neighboring Zimbabwe in 1986. Given Zambia's early anti-apartheid movement under Kaunda's leadership, Zambia slowly warmed up to the idea of expanding relations with Tehran. Iran viewed Zambia as a frontline African state in the fight against apartheid and offered financial aid to the African country. Zambia subsequently altered its position on Iraq, and the African country dispatched a representative to inspect the Iranian war front. Kaunda then encouraged Iraq to accept a ceasefire agreement with Iran in 1988.⁽⁴⁹⁶⁾

In 1986, Iran dispatched an ambassador to Lusaka, which led to a rapid expansion of political, economic, and cultural ties. In the following years, Iran's diplomats met almost daily with anti-

(494) "Uganda's New Ambassador Emphasized Expanding Relations with Iran," *Ava Diplomatic*, Khordad 24, 1399, <https://tinyurl.com/zu5yfvxd>.

(495) "Expansion of Media Cooperation Between Iran and Uganda in the Islamic Sphere," *International Quran News Network*, Aban 3, 1399, <https://tinyurl.com/56duk3kx>; "New Uganda Ambassador Stressed Expanding Ties with Iran," *Ava Diplomatic*, Khordad 3, 1399, <https://avadiplomatic.com/تاکید-سفیر-جدید-اوگاندا-بر-گسترش-روابط/>.

(496) "Zambia Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afiran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=515>.

apartheid leaders from the SWAPO and the ANC in Zambia and brought pressure on South Africa to release Nelson Mandela. But Iran believed that Kaunda would fall victim to a politically led scheme designed to marginalize Africa's anti-apartheid leaders. In 1991, Zambia's new president, Frederick Jacob Titus Chiluba, drew closer to Israel and severed Zambia's ties with Iran, citing Tehran's influence over local opposition groups. President Chiluba took additional steps to halt radio programs broadcast by Zambia's Muslim community.⁽⁴⁹⁷⁾

By 2001, Zambia and Iran revived ties, facilitated by the two countries' contacts at the UN and the NAM, and through the efforts of Iran's representatives in Zimbabwe. In the following years, Zambia and Iran discussed expanding commercial, economic, agricultural, energy, and health ties and signed several cooperation agreements. Iran sought opportunities to expand trade in mines and the oil sectors, at times through swap arrangements with Zambia.⁽⁴⁹⁸⁾ Iran's Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Mines became the central contact for commercial relations with Zambia. Iran imported refined copper and copper equipment and exported bread, cooking and baking supplies, shoes, textiles, and furniture to the African country. In 2004, Iran began crude oil exports to Zambia, following an agreement to help reduce fuel prices for the African country. But Iran faced unfavorable competition for markets in Zambia given the African country's closer relations with countries that Iran considered its rivals.⁽⁴⁹⁹⁾

Zambia remained concerned by Iran's religious influence, which triggered the conversion of Christians to Islam and led to growing support for Islamic groups in the African country.⁽⁵⁰⁰⁾ While Iran rejected active involvement in conversions to Islam in Zambia, it maintained that Iran's Islamic vision had commonalities with Zambia's indigenous religions, cultures, and

(497) "Zambia Ties with Iran"; Jameel Al-Diyabu, "Zambia 'Worried at Iran's Attempts to Spread Sectarianism in Africa,'" *Saudi Gazette*, May 23, 2016, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/05/23/Zambia-worried-at-Iran-s-attempts-to-spread-sectarianism-in-Africa->; "Zambia" *Farsi Wikipedia*, <https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/زامبيا>; "Examination of 30 Years of Ties Between Iran and Africa," Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamed, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*; "Interesting Prediction of Leader about Zambia," *Tabnak*, Ordibehesht 10, 1388, <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/45793/پیش-بینی-جالب-رهبر-ای-در-مورد-زامبيا>.

(498) "Zambia Ties with Iran."

(499) "Zambia-Iran Oil Purchasing Arrangement to Reduce Fuel Prices: Zambian Minister," *Mehr News Agency*, December 3, 2003, <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=41831>; Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamed, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

(500) Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, *Reasons Why Zambia and Islamic Republic of Iran Broke Ties*, Farvardin 24, 1383, <http://icro.ir/index.aspx?pageid=32738&p=174&showitem=4219>.

belief systems. Still, by Iran's own admission, the number of Shi'a in Zambia grew following the Iranian Revolution to nearly 2,000 people, aided in part by a Lebanese community in Zambia.⁽⁵⁰¹⁾ Iran held regular meetings for Zambia's Muslim community and at universities in the African country and promoted its revolution's message of desiring to be of service to underserved communities. To this end, Iran led blood donation campaigns on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. It retained a cultural and Islamic communications office in Lusaka, held cultural events celebrating the Persian cultural heritage, opened at least one school and a mosque both named Imam Reza in Lusaka, built ties with Zambia's ethnically pluralistic Muslim population, promoted the teaching of the Quran for teachers and students in Zambia, and celebrated Shi'i ceremonies in the African country. The Imam Reza Mosque's library, with nearly 1400 members, built connections with the nearby student community at the University of Lusaka. Iran offered support to Zambian imams and Muslim religious leaders of the Sunni faith in recognition of the fact that the vast majority of Zambia's small Muslim community follows the Sunni faith. These imams visited Iran's seminaries and mosques that promoted the study of Sunni Islam. Also, Iran facilitated contacts between Zambia and the Al-Mustafa community in Iran that specifically served Sunni Muslims.⁽⁵⁰²⁾

The Republic of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe sent a representative to Iran to congratulate its new leaders for their political victory following the 1979 revolution. Tehran's new leaders saw Zimbabwe as a frontline state in the fight against apartheid and opened a representative office in Harare in 1982 to aid

(501) Jameel Al-Diyabu, "Zambia 'Worried at Iran's Attempts to Spread Sectarianism in Africa,'" *Zambia*; "Examination of 30 Years of Ties Between Iran and Africa;" "Interesting Prediction of Leader about Zambia;" Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, "Mostafavi" *Cooperation with Government of Zambia to Defend the Rights of the People of this Country* (Ordibehesht 14, 1388), <http://icro.ir/index.aspx?pageid=31119&newsview=535005>; "Imam Reza (alayh-e-salam) Mosque is Focal Point for Shias in Zambia," *Ahl al-Bayt (alayh-e-salam) Shias in Africa*, Esfand 1, 1390, <http://shiafrica.blogfa.com/category/4>; "Zambia's Shias," *Shia in Africa*, Mehr 28, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y3dujm4p>.

(502) Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, *Convening Roundtable on Role and Thoughts of Hazrat Imam (rahmatullah) In Promoting Humanity in Zambia*, Khordad 3, 1390, <http://icro.ir/index.aspx?pageid=33037&newsview=565146>; Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, *Celebrating Those Paying Service to the Holy Quran in Zambia* (Shahrivar 6, 1388), <https://icro.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=261&pageid=33037&newsview=540048>; Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, *Meeting on Muslim Woman Status from Viewpoint of Quran and Practice of Islam in Zambia* (Khordad 24, 1388), <http://icro.ir/index.aspx?pageid=32423&newsview=536644>; "Grand Mufti of Zambia: Western Accusations Against Iran Are Completely False," *Hawzah Official News Agency*, Azar 29, 1397, <https://www.hawzahnews.com/news/472602>; مفتی-اعظم-ز امیایا-تہمت-ہای-غرب-علیہ-ایران-کذب-محض-است-مفتی-کل, "Shia in Africa," *Information Staff of Shias in Zambia*, Shahrivar 27, 1399, <http://shiafrica19.blogfa.com/>; "Imam Reza (alayh-e-salam) Mosque is Focal Point for Shias in Zambia."

the African country's post-independence government.⁽⁵⁰³⁾ Iran subsequently helped fund and rebuild Zimbabwe's national broadcasting organization.⁽⁵⁰⁴⁾ Relations between Zimbabwe and Iran improved during a NAM summit in Harare in 1986, after which President Ali Khamenei offered financial aid to the African nation. During the trip, Iran's president vowed to reverse the aggression by foreign powers against the African frontline states fighting apartheid and reaffirmed Iranian help to ensure black rule in Africa. Iran subsequently forwarded a three-tier plan to fight South Africa's apartheid regime, which included setting up a state fund financed by governments to aid South Africa's anti-apartheid fighters, rebuilding ports in Zambia and Zimbabwe to end their dependence for trade on South Africa's markets and commercial land routes, and providing forces and arms to deter South African aggression against frontline states.⁽⁵⁰⁵⁾ Following the visit, Zimbabwe backed a ceasefire agreement between Iran and Iraq.⁽⁵⁰⁶⁾

In the following years, Presidents Rafsanjani, Khatami, and Ahmadinejad traveled to Zimbabwe, and President Robert Mugabe paid several state visits to Iran to cultivate special relations.⁽⁵⁰⁷⁾ Mugabe established a close partnership with President Rafsanjani, who was invited to attend the wedding of Zimbabwe's leader in 1996. Mugabe maintained cordial ties with Khatami and expanded Harare's ties with Tehran under Ahmadinejad, given Zimbabwe's economic crisis at the time. But Zimbabwe's opposition groups did not support close relations with Ahmadinejad's government, who, during a trip to Harare to open an assembly plant, donated a tractor to President Mugabe. Earlier, both leaders were sidelined in invitations to attend a state dinner in Italy during a conference to address world food insecurity.⁽⁵⁰⁸⁾

(503) "Iran Welcomes Exceeding Expansion of Ties with Zimbabwe in All Arenas," *Borna News Agency*, Aban 8, 1398, <https://www.borna.news/بخش-سیاسی-3/925986-ایران-از-توسعه-بیش-از-پیش-روابط-باز-یمبابوه-در-همه-عرصه-ها-استقبال-می-کند-تاکید-بر-تقویت-همکاری-بخش-های-خصوصی-دو-کشور-برای-توسعه-روابط-اقتصادی>.

(504) Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, *Africa Is Culturally Important to Iran Zamin/ In Conversation with Amir Bahram Arab Ahmadi* (Bahman 5, 1399), <https://icro.ir/index.aspx?pageid=11751&newsview=340193>.

(505) "Iran and Africa, Before and After the Islamic Revolution," *Khabar Online*, Mordad 19, 1390, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/167265/اسلامی-انقلاب-از-بعد-و-قبل-آفریقا-و-ایران>.

(506) "Iran Welcomes Exceeding Expansion of Ties with Zimbabwe in All Arenas," "A Look at 4 Decades of Ties Between Mugabe and Iran," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.irna.ir/news/83467570/نگاهی-به-۴۰-سال-روابط-مؤگابه-با-ایران>.

(507) Mossafar bin Saleh al-Ghamed, *The Islamic Republic of Iran's Economic Cooperation with Mozambique*.

(508) "A Look at 4 Decades of Ties Between Mugabe and Iran."

In 2017, during President Mugabe's visit to Tehran to attend President Rouhani's swearing-in ceremony, Zimbabwe and Iran agreed to establish a joint commission to combat terrorism.⁽⁵⁰⁹⁾ In 2018, Zimbabwe's new government, led by President Emmerson Mnangagwa, reaffirmed the need to broaden ties with Iran. In 2019, Harare and Tehran reaffirmed their strong ties and sought to expand them. Facing international sanctions, the two capitals continued to collaborate politically and at international levels.⁽⁵¹⁰⁾

Harare and Tehran held numerous joint commission meetings to explore trade. The two capitals built a banking agreement, promoted urban development, and engaged in research collaboration. Iran agreed to build factories in Zimbabwe, promote the African country's textile industry, receive students from Zimbabwe to study in Iran's Oil College in Abadan, send Iranian experts to develop Zimbabwe's critical economic sectors, rebuild local infrastructure, and help the African country develop its rural economy. Zimbabwe sought Iranian support to build an oil refinery, boost trade, and introduce a food education program. The Jihad-e-Sāzandegi created large cooperatives in Zimbabwe to encourage its agricultural and industrial sectors.⁽⁵¹¹⁾

Harare and Tehran exchanged expertise in the technology, engineering, and scientific fields when Iran sought to operate a nuclear fuel cycle in Iranian nuclear plants by gaining access to needed uranium. In 2010, Iran signed the Agreement on Enhancing and Protecting Bilateral Investments with Zimbabwe, which outlined the exchange of oil and Zimbabwean uranium to boost the African country's flailing economy. According to the agreement, Iran would receive 455,000 tons of crude uranium to produce 20 tons of enriched uranium. International pressure saw the deal rejected by Zimbabwe's parliament.⁽⁵¹²⁾ In 2010–2013, reports pointed to a collaboration between Zimbabwe and Iran to mine for untapped uranium reserves, which Harare denied.⁽⁵¹³⁾

(509) Ahmad Majidiyar, "Iran Seeks to Boost Ties with African Countries."

(510) "Iran, Zimbabwe Discuss Expansion of Trade Co-Op," *Tehran Times*, February 5, 2020, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/444871/Iran-Zimbabwe-discuss-expansion-of-trade-co-op>; Elita Chikwati, "Zimbabwe: Iran, Zim to Strengthen Ties," *All Africa*, November 27, 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202011270233.html>; "Iran, New Zimbabwe Government Keen on Promoting Trade Ties, Investment," *Financial Tribune*, April 6, 2018, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/84123/iran-new-zimbabwe-government-keen-on-promoting-trade-ties>.

(511) "Iran Welcomes Exceeding Expansion of Ties with Zimbabwe in All Arenas;" "A Look at 4 Decades of Ties Between Mugabe and Iran."

(512) Najla' Mar'I, "Iran in the Face of the International Scramble for Africa."

(513) Diane Barnes, "Alleged Iranian Uranium Deal with Zimbabwe May Revive Sanctions Debate," *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, August 21, 2013, <https://www.nti.org/gsn/article/alleged-iranian-uranium-deal-zimbabwe-may-revive-sanctions-debate/>.

In 2020, Zimbabwe and Iran explored establishing a joint economic committee to address low levels of bilateral trade (due, in part, to sanctions), help promote private sector economic activities, and enhance cooperation in the mining, gas, and agricultural sectors. The two countries further agreed on collaboration to circumvent the sanctions regimes against them. Zimbabwe specifically outlined its need for heavy investment in its mining industry to achieve a Vision 2030 plan to create an upper middle class. Promising that Tehran could repatriate 100 percent of mining profits from Iranian investments, Harare invited new Iranian FDI and expertise to set up a new tractor assembly plant.⁽⁵¹⁴⁾

Also, Zimbabwe and Iran promoted joint cultural activities such as art exhibits. They established a teacher cooperative and a friendship society. The two countries expanded relations to promote youth programs, sports, radio and television programs, the film industry, and facilitate the exchange of students and scientists. They agreed to hold cultural weeks, expand library and publication cooperation, and exchange artists, artifacts, microfilms, books, and slides.⁽⁵¹⁵⁾ Iran specifically encouraged the exchange of Muslim scientists with Zimbabwe, where the Shi'a, in particular, sought higher education opportunities with Iran's help, held religious ceremonies some of which denounced Islamic radicalism carried out by Sunni Muslims, built mosques, Islamic centers, universities, and organized classes for young Muslims in Zimbabwe, despite the African country's resistance to the propagation of Islam. But Iran's religious activities in Zimbabwe were restricted given the African nation's small Muslim population and even smaller Shi'i population of nearly 1,000 people, including communities of Iranian, Lebanese, and Pakistani descent.⁽⁵¹⁶⁾

(514) "Iran, Zimbabwe Discuss Expansion of Trade Co-Op," Elita Chikwati, "Zimbabwe: Iran, Zim to Strengthen Ties;" "Iran, New Zimbabwe Government Keen on Promoting Trade Ties, Investment."

(515) "Iran Welcomes Exceeding Expansion of Ties with Zimbabwe in All Arenas."

(516) "Zimbabwe Ties with Iran," *AFRAN*, <http://www.afran.ir/modules/publisher/item.php?itemid=486>; "Iran Welcomes Exceeding Expansion of Ties with Zimbabwe in All Arenas;" "Abdullah Makoyinja: Number of Shia Community in Zimbabwe Reaches 1,000 People/ There is a Shia Islamic Center in the City of Harare," *ABNA*, Aban 3, 1399, <https://bit.ly/322Cf0N>.

TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

1.	ABSA	Amalgamated Banks of South Africa
2.	ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
3.	AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
4.	AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
5.	ANC	African National Congress
6.	AU	African Union
7.	BCEAO	La Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique l'Ouest
8.	BNF	Botswana National Front
9.	BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
10.	CAR	Central African Republic
11.	CEMAC	Central African Economic and Monetary Community
12.	CEPGL	Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries
13.	CIS	Council of Islamic
14.	COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
15.	COOPEC	COOPEC Bank Cote D'Ivoire
16.	DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
17.	EAC	East African Community
18.	EATTA	East Africa Tea Trade Association
19.	ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
20.	ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
21.	EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
22.	EIJM	Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement
23.	FDI	Foreign direct investment
24.	FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
25.	FLN	National Liberation Front
26.	GDP	Gross domestic product
27.	GECF	Gas Exporting Countries Forum

TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

28.	GNA	Government of National Accord
29.	IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
30.	ICAPP	International Conference of Asian Political Parties
31.	ICC	International Criminal Court
32.	ICESCO	Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
33.	IDB	Islamic Development Bank
34.	IFIC	Iranian Foreign Investment Company
35.	IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
36.	IMCTC	Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition
37.	IMN	Islamic Movement in Nigeria
38.	IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
39.	IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
40.	IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
41.	IRGCN	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy
42.	IRIN	Islamic Republic of Iran Navy
43.	IS	Islamic State
44.	ISWAP	Islamic State in West Africa Province
45.	JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
46.	LNA	Libyan National Army
47.	LNG	Liquified natural gas
48.	LPG	Liquified petroleum gas
49.	MB	Muslim Brotherhood
50.	MFDC	Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance
51.	MKO	Mujahedin Khalq Organization
52.	MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
53.	MTN	Mobile Telephone Network
54.	NAM	Non-Aligned Movement

TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

55.	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
56.	NIF	National Islamic Front
57.	NIOC	National Iranian Oil Company
58.	NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
59.	OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
60.	OIETAI	Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran
61.	OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
62.	PAC	Pan Africa Congress
63.	PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
64.	PPP	Purchasing power parity
65.	SADC	Southern African Development Community
66.	SAIPA	Societe anonyme iranienne de production des automobile Citroen
67.	SASOL	South African Coal, Oil and Gas Company
68.	SBDT	Societe des Bauxites de Dabola-Tougue
69.	SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organization
70.	UAE	United Arab Emirates
71.	UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
72.	UNSC	United Nations Security Council
73.	WAEMU	West Africa Economic and Monetary Union
74.	WAMU	West African Monetary Union
75.	WTO	World Trade Organization

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King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS)

The KFCRIS is an independent non-governmental institution based in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Center was founded in 1403/1983 by the King Faisal Foundation (KFF) to preserve the legacy of the late King Faisal and to continue his mission of transmitting knowledge between the Kingdom and the world. The Center serves as a platform for research and Islamic Studies, bringing together researchers and research institutions from the Kingdom and across the world through conferences, workshops, and lectures, and through the production and publication of scholarly works, as well as the preservation of Islamic manuscripts.

The Center's Research Department is home to a group of established and promising researchers who endeavor to produce in-depth analyses in various fields, ranging from Security Studies, Political Economy, African Studies and Asian Studies. The Center also hosts the Library which preserves invaluable Islamic manuscripts, the Al-Faisal Museum for Arab Islamic Art, the Al-Faisal Institute for Human Resources Development, the Darat Al-Faisal, and the Al-Faisal Cultural Press, which issues the Al-Faisal magazine and other key intellectual periodicals. For more information, please visit the Center's website: www.kfcris.com/en



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