

## **A Critical Analysis of Iran's Strategic Partnerships with Africa**

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### **Abstract**

Africa is of high significance for both developing and developed nations due to its geopolitical position, economic issues, cultural traditions, and the substantial number of Africans in international organizations and institutions. The Islamic Republic of Iran, driven by revolutionary objectives and national interests, cannot overlook Africa. Generally, In the discourse of the Iranian Islamic revolution, Africa is perceived as an oppressed continent under colonial influence with a significant Muslim population. However, despite being described as having a "strategic position" in Iran's foreign policy by Iranian officials, a closer examination of the peak periods of Iran-Africa interactions reveals that their engagement has remained limited. This paper aims to assess the status of Africa within the overarching foreign policy strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It seeks to address the question of Africa's place in Iran's strategic planning and development programs. It evaluating the content of "development plan" directives and the performance of Iranian governments since 1995 using post-event analysis and trend research methods. The findings indicate that despite Africa's importance; Iranian policymakers have never formulated a coherent strategy for effective presence in Africa. Consequently, Iran's policies in Africa have been more focused on "meta-political" statements, lacking both evaluative and measurable frameworks as well as enforcement guarantees. This study demonstrates that Iran's policies in Africa have been driven by the motivations of ambassadors and the preferences and judgments of executors, with no consistent program pursued to achieve its true goals.

**Keywords:** Iran, Africa, Foreign Policy, National Interests, Strategic Partnership.

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## **1.Introduction**

Iran's efforts to develop influence in Africa can be seen as part of a mission that the Islamic Republic of Iran has set for itself, a mission explicitly stated in its Constitution and development programs. The preamble of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran declares that the Iranian Islamic Revolution, which aimed to empower the oppressed against the oppressors, paves the way for the continuation of this revolution both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, Article 11 of the Constitution emphasizes that the Iranian government must base its policies on the coalition and unity of Islamic nations, striving to achieve political, economic, and cultural unity within the Islamic world. Additionally, the principle of "Neither East nor West," which advocates for non-alignment with hegemonic powers, is a fundamental objective of Iran's foreign policy, reiterated in various articles of the Constitution, including Articles 80, 145, and 146. Ayatollah Khomeini also considered the Iranian Revolution to be a movement for all humanity, asserting the duty to preserve the Islamic Republic for Muslims worldwide, including those in Africa (Ayatollah Khomeini,1985). According to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Africa provides a strong foundation for the expansion of the geopolitics of resistance. Furthermore, Ayatollah Khamenei highlighted the importance of Africa as a key foreign policy priority for the Islamic Republic of Iran. He emphasized that Iran and Africa can work together to challenge the colonialism of the African continent by Western powers (Khamenei,2012). Given this context, an assessment of the Islamic Republic of Iran's approach and programs toward Africa over the past four decades raises the question: what has been Africa's position in Iran's strategic planning during this period? This paper aims to address this question by evaluating the performance of Iranian governments from the 1990s to 2020 through post-event analysis and trend research methods. A meta-analysis of the "Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran" in this article reveals that, despite the continent's importance, Iranian policymakers have rarely developed a coherent strategy for effective engagement in Africa. Consequently, Iran's policies in this region have focused more on "meta-political" statements, which lack both evaluative and measurable frameworks and enforcement guarantees. In practice, the

advancement of Iran's objectives in Africa appears to have been driven by the personal motivations, preferences, and judgments of the ambassadors. Talebi Arani (2018) highlighted the requirements that could be suitable for Iran's foreign policy in Africa. Lobb (2022) discussed how Iran's extensive programs in Africa balance against the United States, delegitimize sanctions, expand the nuclear program, and increase Iran's military presence on the continent. Moreover, Kianoush (2021) in a report illustrated that Iran's efforts to expand bilateral and regional relations with African countries do not necessarily guarantee strong ties and often face challenges. Shahwar (2020) provides a general analysis of Iran's policy in Africa. Yansilo (2016) also examined the activities of the Islamic Republic's Rural Development Organization and Jihad of Construction in Africa, showing how Iran has gained access to the continent through a focus on agricultural economics rather than weapons or ideology.

Drawn on the review of related literature, the major novelty of this research lies in its diagnosis and meta-analysis of Iran-Africa relations over the past Four decades, analyzed from theoretical and political, security, economic, and cultural perspectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward Africa. Following an overview of the factors influencing the development and deepening of relations between countries, the article examines the historical relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Africa. It concludes that, despite the emphasis of the parties on the expansion of relations, Iran and Africa are currently in a state of limited engagement.

## **2 .Conceptual Framework**

According to Nadkarni (2010:45), 'structural, regional, and civilizational modifiers' could help explain why, since the end of the Cold War, international actors have departed from the alliance paradigm and instead embraced partnerships. he adds that economic globalization, non-state security threats, and nuclear weapons – account for the decision of emerging global powers and middle powers 'to steer clear of formal alliances' (Nadkarni,2010:45). Paul (2019) posits that greater incentives to cooperate – for both small and large powers alike – arise 'when balance of power meets globalization', a permeating feature of twenty-first century politics. In new times and realities actors seek new forms of cooperation and problem-solving. Laipson (2015) argues that 'for 21st-century problems, states seek partnerships, not alliances'. Menon (2007) also points to the 'end of

alliances' not least because of their rigid, limiting and exclusionist nature. In many regards, the twilight of the alliances era is seeing the dawn of the partnerships age – and many (though, not all) of the functions that alliances have performed are now substituted by SPs and the international relations system has adapted the practices of strategic partnerships.

Previously, some international relations approaches have regarded alliances as predominantly a response to external threats, whereas others have viewed them as a reaction to internal threats.

Wight (1978) asserted that the function of alliances is to strengthen the security of allies and enhance their external interests. Liska (1962) posited that states, unable to face powerful enemies alone, choose to "aggregate power" to maximize their security against a common enemy.

(Waltz, 1979: 126-127) argued that most countries, due to the nature of the international system, are inclined to align with the policies of stronger states. Schweller (1994) emphasized that the alignment of political views leads to the formation of alliances. Furthermore, political leaders and elites in smaller and weaker countries seek alliances, especially with emerging powers, not only to counter external threats but also to eliminate rival political parties and sustain their political survival (Larson, 1991). David's (1991) studies on Third World countries indicated that most leaders prefer to ally with any country that ensures the continuity of their rule. In a case study, Barnett and Levy (1992: 19-40) suggested that many leaders in less developed countries view alliances with foreign countries as solutions to legitimacy crises and internal problems.

Other theories have focused on subjective factors to explain the formation of alliances between states in the international system. Mitrany (1975) argued that modern societies face numerous technical and economic challenges, and the development and expansion of economic cooperation can lead to broad global convergence. However, neo-functionalists such as Ernst Haas and Philippe Schmitter believed that economic convergence does not necessarily result in political unity (Haas and Schmitter, 1964). Researchers like Spiegel and Cantori asserted that the greater the similarity in political structures and economic indicators between two countries, the higher the chance of reinforcing convergence (Cantori and Spiegel, 1970). Buzan and Waever (2005) emphasized that non-material factors, such as historical identities, significantly influence the formation and persistence of both hostile and

friendly relationships between countries. Furthermore, Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1993) argued that political systems achieve and maintain cohesion and solidarity for the presence of shared and overarching values among their members. Referring to U.S. support for Israel, Barnett (1996) believed that such support is driven by the leaders' shared psychological, identity, and ideological similarities.

Overall, it appears that the first condition for establishing strategic partnership between two or more actors is the presence of shared strategic interests or common threats and challenges to those interests. Additionally, a crucial element for creating a Strategic Partnerships ship is the availability of resources to achieve the objectives, with each party committing part of their human, financial, knowledge, and technological resources to gain tangible benefits. Lastly, the presence of shared value systems is essential for achieving desirable Strategic Partnerships. Factors such as geopolitical and geostrategic positions, along with national and international capabilities, also play significant roles in forming Strategic Partnerships and can be considered determining factors.

### **3 .Environmental Assessment of Iran and Africa Relations**

Africa, with 54 independent countries, has been a region where the Islamic Republic of Iran has persistently sought to enhance its presence over the past four decades. The initial significant steps towards a targeted presence in Africa were taken during the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the 1990s (1989-1997). In the final years of his presidency, Rafsanjani, accompanied by the Foreign Minister and numerous Iranian businessmen, embarked on a notable 13-day tour of East and Southern African countries, starting with Kenya and continuing to Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and finally South Africa. This visit, which faced public opposition from American officials in African media, garnered extensive coverage, especially in the six countries Rafsanjani visited (IRNA,1996). Rafsanjani emphasized that "the priority in Iran's foreign policy is given to Third World countries, particularly African countries" (Hashemi,1996). The trip resulted in significant financial and political agreements, including efforts to facilitate Africa's entry into Central Asia through agreements on transit routes via ports, railways, roads, and airlines, allowing South African investors to operate in free zones without taxation. Rafsanjani aimed to foster a sense of solidarity between Africa and Iran by highlighting the anti-



colonial identity of the Islamic Revolution. In Johannesburg, South Africa, during a press interview, he stated:

...My main message in Africa to everyone is that most African countries have good resources and should think about building their nations with their own capabilities. I found Africa very oppressed on this trip. The backwardness of the African people is a result of the injustices imposed on them by the West...(IRNA,1996 September13).

In December 1997, the Islamic Republic of Iran hosted the leaders of the member countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Tehran. Leaders from African Muslim countries, including Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, welcomed Iran's official invitation to the conference. During this period, Iran saw the expansion of relations with African Muslim countries as an opportunity to mitigate the risks associated with reduced relations with Europe. With the advent of the reformist government by President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), Iran's foreign policy shifted towards resolving issues with the West through dialogue and détente. Khatami's emphasis on the "Dialogue of Civilizations" aimed to transform the East into a negotiating partner rather than a subject of negotiation with the West, thereby diminishing the strategic focus on African countries. Khatami's visit to Africa only in the final year of his presidency indicates that this move was a response to the frustrations with the West and the Dialogue of Civilizations doctrine, as an alternative means to secure Iran's national interests. In October 2004, responding to official invitations from Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, Khatami visited these countries. During his six-day trip, Khatami signed five cooperation agreements with Algeria and spoke before the National People's Assembly about the Dialogue of Civilizations and efforts to promote democracy worldwide for peace. In Sudan, Khatami was officially received by President Omar al-Bashir and signed three cooperation agreements to enhance bilateral economic, agricultural, and banking relations. Emphasizing political development and the importance of democracy, Khatami stated in his meeting with al-Bashir: "We have common goals of achieving democracy, progress, and development, and we strive to attain these objectives through Islam and religious teachings" (MehrNews,2004 September 7).

In his final year as president, Khatami also toured seven countries: Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mali, Benin, Zimbabwe, and Uganda, where technology transfer agreements were signed. Upon returning from Africa, Khatami acknowledged that the fruitful and successful trip was belated and would have had better economic, political, and international outcomes if conducted three years earlier. Six months before Khatami's trip, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi visited West Africa on March 28, 2004, at the invitation of the Foreign Ministers of Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana, accompanied by a high-ranking economic delegation comprising deputy ministers and directors from various ministries including health, petroleum, energy, industries, commerce, and members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (MehrNews, 2004 March 28).

During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013), significant efforts were made to counter American dominance and globalization by adopting strategies focused on the Third World and maximizing engagement with Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member countries. This included hosting NAM ministerial meetings on human rights and cultural diversity, leveraging NAM's capabilities in nuclear discussions, and attempting to form a solidarity front against global imperialism (Imani Satvat, 2012). Under Ahmadinejad, Iran's trade with Africa increased due to his closer ties with the continent and the rising international oil prices. Iranian exports to Africa grew from \$332 million in 2009 to \$864 million by the end of his presidency in 2013, marking a more than twofold increase (Mashreghnews, 2019 October 6).

Despite Ahmadinejad's professed interest in Third World countries, he commenced his travels to Africa only in his second term, after having made sixty international trips elsewhere. In 2009, he visited Gambia and Senegal. His itinerary included joint negotiations, bilateral meetings, press conferences, and the signing of agreements aimed at strengthening relations between Iran and these African nations. Ahmadinejad also undertook two extensive tours of Africa, visiting Kenya, Djibouti, and the Comoros in his first tour. These visits resulted in several memorandums of understanding in political, economic, and commercial areas with the three East African countries.

During his visit to Kenya, Prime Minister Raila Odinga criticized Western colonialism in Africa, expressing a desire to advance with the help of

friends like Iran. He highlighted shared views between Kenya and Iran on issues such as Palestine and the pursuit of peaceful nuclear energy. Ahmadinejad echoed these sentiments, condemning Africa's colonial past and asserting that the era of superpower dominance had ended. Similar anti-colonial rhetoric was expressed during his visit to the Comoros (MehrNews,2009 February 28).

In 2010, Ahmadinejad focused on expanding relations with Zimbabwe, resulting in multiple presidential visits and the signing of numerous trade and economic agreements, including eleven memorandums of understanding in scientific, cultural, political, and economic domains. A joint statement emphasized two main points: resistance as the means to thwart conspiracies, and the Security Council as a tool for exerting pressure on independent nations. However, Iran's closer ties with Zimbabwe were controversial, given Zimbabwe's economic collapse and political instability under Robert Mugabe's prolonged and contentious rule (Bosch,2010 April 22).

In his second round of African tours, towards the end of his presidency, Ahmadinejad visited Benin, Niger, and Ghana. An examination of his statements and actions during these visits, despite some controversies such as his attire when meeting Ghana's president, indicates that Iran lacked a clear and strategic plan for its engagement with Africa.

During Hassan Rouhani's presidency (2013-2021), he did not travel to Africa, although Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, made five visits to the continent. Zarif visited Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Tunisia, Uganda, Algeria, Rwanda, Botswana, Congo, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and Mauritania. These visits indicate a moderate expansion of Iran's relations with Africa during this period. Zarif's initial tours in August 2016, following the signing of the JCPOA, included stops in Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, and Mali, where he met with high-ranking officials. The economic significance of these trips was underscored by the presence of a 30-member delegation of Iranian businesspeople (MehrNews, 2019 July 29).

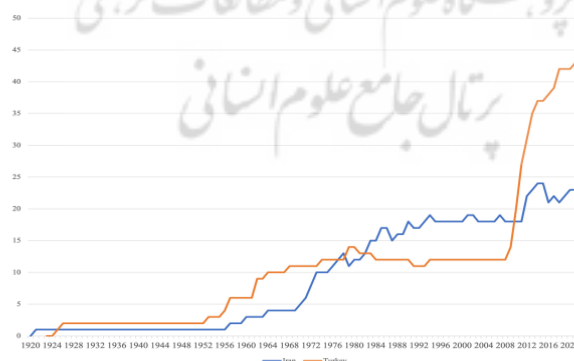
In Nigeria, Zarif emphasized bilateral cooperation and collaboration in international organizations such as OPEC, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Non-Aligned Movement. President Muhammadu Buhari said in this meeting that Nigeria is "learning the hard way through hardship" from Iran, how to diversify Nigeria's economy (Nwabufo,2016).



In Ghana, discussions focused on facilitating banking transactions and addressing concerns about terrorism. In Guinea and Mali, the emphasis was on economic collaboration, particularly involving Iranian private companies in infrastructure projects like dam construction.

Beyond economic interests and trade enhancement, security and counter-terrorism were prominent topics in Iran's dialogues with African nations. In November 2017, Zarif also traveled to South Africa, Uganda, and Niger, reiterating that "Africa holds a significant place in our foreign policy and our hearts" (FarsNews, 2017 October 26). During his final tour, which included Senegal and Namibia, Zarif was accompanied by eighty businesspeople and economic activists, highlighting the economic focus of the trip. According to officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the trip had "extraordinary" outcomes. Mehdi Aghajafari, Director-General for Africa at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, informed reporters that "in Senegal, over three hundred million euros in contracts were signed in areas such as housing construction and water projects, and in Namibia, the interest of Namibian partners was so high that several members of the delegation decided to return for further negotiations" (Irdiplomacy, 2018 April 23).

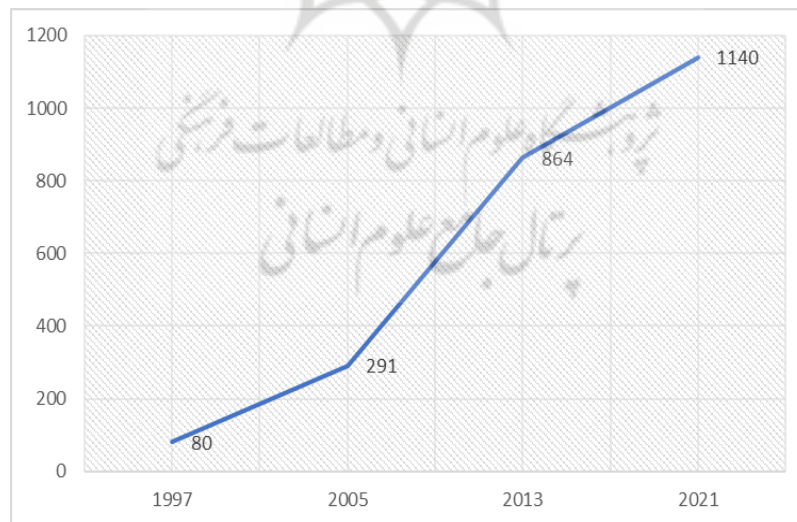
However, by the end of Rouhani's administration, Iran's engagement with African countries did not match the level of political competition seen with countries like Turkey. Iran's attention to Africa during this period remained limited, with fewer than 25 Iranian embassies on the continent, compared to Turkey's 44 embassies. Figure (1) below illustrates the number of Iranian embassies in Africa in comparison to Turkey's diplomatic presence.



**Figure (1): Iranian Embassies in Africa in Comparison to Turkey**  
(Source: Demirdirek and Talebian, 2022)

According to the Vice president of the Iran Trade Promotion Organization, while Africa's trade volume with the world stands at \$1,356 billion, Iran's share is a maximum of \$1.2 billion (Afmma, November 16, 2023). During Iran's most favorable trade years (2007-2008), when oil revenues were significant, Iran's annual trade with Africa never reached \$1 billion. In contrast, Turkey had around \$14 billion in trade with Africa during the same period and increased this to over \$22 billion by 2020 (Aksoy and et al, 2022), whereas Iran's trade volume remained at approximately \$1.3 billion. A report from the economic section of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that by 2022, Turkey's exports of technical and engineering services to Africa reached \$85 billion. Furthermore, the value of Turkey's direct investments in Africa is currently around \$6 billion (Ergocun and Sevenan,2023).

The Turkish Foreign Minister has stated that the trade volume between Turkey and Africa reached \$40.7 billion by the end of 2022. (hurriyetdailynews,October 14 2023). Figure (2) illustrates the trend of Iran's export growth to African countries during the final years of successive administrations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although it shows an upward trend, it is not comparable to Turkey's export figures.



**Figure (2): Trend of Iran's Export Growth to Africa (1997-2021)**

#### **4. Analysis: Evaluating Iran's Foreign Policy Towards Africa**

While it is challenging to comprehensively evaluate the foreign policy performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards Africa, this article will review several specific cultural, political, and economic situation and achievements.

##### **4-1. Cultural Situation of Iran's Foreign Policy in Africa**

Examining Iran's presence in Africa requires considering the cultural and identity-driven goals of the Islamic Revolution. The spread of Wahhabism in Africa, supported by Saudi Arabia through initiatives such as training religious scholars and building mosques, has intensified Iran's competition with other Islamic countries on the continent. Saudi Arabia's most notable success in this domain has been the severance of many African Muslim countries' cultural ties with Iran.

While the Islamic Movement in Nigeria has bolstered Iran's influence in West Africa, Saudi Arabia's efforts to curb this influence through support for rival Sunni Salafi groups like the "Izala Society," which maintains close ties with the Saudi embassy, reflect the challenging environment for Iran's cultural achievements in Africa (Feierstein and Craig, 2017). Additionally, Iranian media, such as the external broadcasts of IRIB, struggle to compete with the satellite networks of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, which have leveraged their membership in the African Union of Broadcasting.

Iran has also engaged in numerous activities through charitable and humanitarian organizations, including the Red Crescent Society, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly, and branches of Al-Mustafa International University. However, these efforts sometimes arouse religious suspicions due to the nature of the affiliated organizations. Culturally, Africa appears more inclined towards an Islam propagated by Egypt's Al-Azhar University and Lebanese Sunni or Shia preachers, who possess a more nuanced understanding of the continent. Consequently, many African governments, influenced by Iranophobia, often accuse Iran of radicalism and restrict its cultural initiatives. This environment has enabled Israel and Turkey to approach African governments by presenting themselves as opponents of radicalism, exemplified by groups like ISIS and Boko Haram.

Tehran's cultural influence in Africa is primarily confined to Shia communities belonging to various sects influenced by the Ismailis and

Zaydis or followers of Shia communities from Lebanon, the Gulf Arab countries, and the Indian subcontinent. Nevertheless, these communities offer significant opportunities for Iran. An evident example of the limited success of Iran's cultural-religious efforts is in Sudan. Despite Iran's long-standing efforts to strengthen cultural ties with Sudan (Turner,1995), many of its policies in the Horn of Africa faltered due to the deterioration of Iran-Saudi relations. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran invited numerous Sudanese students to study in its universities and seminaries. However, in 2007, Sudanese religious figures protested against Iran's cultural activities and its encouragement of Sudanese youth to convert to Shia Islam.

One notable aspect of developing cultural relations with African countries is the model of cultural relations between Iran and Egypt. Despite political differences hindering the expansion of cultural activities, Iran and Egypt participate in each other's Quran recitation competitions and have discussed collaborative projects in technical and specialized Quranic studies and the establishment of joint Quranic schools. At a time when Turkey is pursuing a more ambitious programme of cultural engagement with the African continent, Iran's cultural presence in the region is relatively limited. To illustrate, the education sector has become a significant component of Turkey's support for the development of young people in Africa. The Maarif Foundation, a state-run institution, oversees the operation of 175 schools across 26 countries on the continent. Additionally, in recent years, Turkey has expanded scholarship opportunities for African students pursuing higher education in Turkey at no cost. Based on publicly available data, approximately 15,000 African students have received full scholarships from the Turkish state since 1992. As an alternative to European higher education destinations, students from African countries have demonstrated a preference for universities in Turkey. According to data from the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), 5,259 African students benefited from Turkish scholarship programs between 2010 and 2019, while 1,147 African students received scholarships in 2019 alone. Similarly, Turkey's Yunus Emre Institute (YEE) has ten cultural centers in the continent offering language training courses and cultural exchange programs (Orakçi,2022). Overall, Iran's cultural relations with non-Muslim African countries have primarily involved hosting art exhibitions and promoting

Shia Islam, Persian language, and literature. However, these activities have not significantly strengthened Strategic Partnerships for Iran.

#### **4-2. Economic Situation of Iran's Foreign Policy in Africa**

Following the Islamic Revolution, the establishment of Jihad of Construction, whose primary aim was to assist the oppressed, marked Iran's initial economic involvement in Africa. This institution aimed to facilitate the spread of the Iranian Revolution in Africa and provide support to the underprivileged. Consequently, the Islamic Republic of Iran embarked on welfare distribution programs across sub-Saharan Africa to cultivate a humanitarian and ethical image. However, an analysis of Iran's broad economic activities in Africa reveals that Iran primarily viewed the continent through a cultural and religious lens rather than as a commercial destination. Many of Iran's seemingly economic endeavors were driven by cultural and religious motives, with little focus on exploiting the continent's wealth and resources. Consequently, it is likely that many of Iran's economic projects in Africa did not adhere to sustainable economic models, growth, or investment return, given the absence of private sector institutions and the predominance of state-led, often haphazard, investments. (Keynoush, 2021, 20-22).

Although Iran's foreign policy has increasingly emphasized economic engagement with the Global South, particularly Latin America and Africa, over the past decade, economic progress in Africa has fallen short of expectations and plans, primarily due to intensified economic sanctions. Many promising Iranian-led economic projects were either not realized or progressed slowly, largely due to a lack of strategic planning and necessary infrastructure for principled investment in Africa.

Several factors have hindered the development of Iran's economic relations with Africa: the frequent shifts in Iran's economic priorities, the dominance of the public sector in economic relations, budget constraints, and a general reluctance to commit to executing economic programs. Furthermore, an assessment of Iran's economic policies in Africa suggests that investments were often made because Africa was seen as a potential gateway for expanding trade with Europe and South America, rather than being a primary focus. As a result, Africa was often treated as a means to break out of isolation rather than an end in itself.



After the finalization of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), many African countries showed a willingness to renew commercial ties with Iran. In this context, Iran encouraged African capitals to enhance air and maritime connections, and alternative land and rail transit routes through third countries were also established. Despite these efforts, no Strategic Partnerships were formed between Iran and any African nation. However, during this period, Iran's trade volume with Africa increased by 23 percent. The Islamic Republic extended export incentives to 30 African countries, nearly doubling its exports to the continent (Keynoush, 2021).

During the global outbreak of COVID-19, Iran, already under the additional pressure of US sanctions, sought to expand bilateral cooperation with African leaders to combat the pandemic. Iran aimed to leverage its prior efforts in constructing health clinics and hospitals across Africa to alleviate the new sanctions. As international restrictions on oil exports increased, opportunities for trade with Africa in non-oil and petrochemical sectors grew. Key markets for Iran during this period included Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, South Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Djibouti, Ghana, Tunisia, Somalia, and Mozambique. These trends highlighted Iran's lack of long-term economic planning for increased investment and trade opportunities in Africa. Aside from South Africa, most African countries lacked the interest or infrastructure to become major trade hubs for Iran. Nevertheless, the capacity of Africa to mitigate some Western sanctions against Iran made the continent a critical supplier of Iran's trade needs, particularly when oil and oil products could not be sold. Iran encouraged African countries to apply for international bank loans to advance projects using Iranian technical assistance, establish direct banking routes with Tehran, or consider trade with Iran through third-party companies not under US sanctions. Concurrently, Iran sought collaboration with organizations and financial institutions, including the African Continental Free Trade Area, the East and Southern African Common Market, the East African Community, and the Southern African Development Community, among others.

Currently, the exchange of goods and the execution of agricultural, technical, and engineering projects constitute the bulk of Iran's economic activities in Africa. However, due to heightened sanctions and limited trade data, the overall trade trends between Iran and Africa have been uncertain, with low and often declining figures.

Iran's economic strategies in Africa lack a coherent logic, making any expansion of economic relations with African countries highly risky. Sudan is an example of significant political and cultural engagement by Iran, leading to notable economic investments and trade relations. Through the Jihad-e-Sazandegi organization, Iran engaged in temporary development policies in Sudan. In 1991, the two countries agreed to enhance trade and investment, with Iranian engineers aiding in various water resource management and construction projects in Sudan. Iran also expressed readiness to transfer civilian nuclear knowledge to Sudan in exchange for support of Iran's peaceful nuclear program (Keynoush,2021). However, this relationship was threatened as Arab states in the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, increased their investments in Sudan. This country turned its back on Iran after 25 years and instead chose the Saudis, who have provided more financial support (Reuters,January 12,2016).

Algeria is another example of Iran's failed economic policies in Africa. Despite the signing of numerous economic agreements and increased mutual investments in energy, industry, banking, pharmaceuticals, medical, and agricultural sectors (Saada,2019), many agreements have not been operationalized. Iran explored opportunities for gas exports and developing gas and liquefied natural gas projects with Algeria (Saada,2019), but sanctions and falling oil prices weakened Iran's position in OPEC, prompting Algeria to open its economy to Arab countries that Iran considers competitors, such as Saudi Arabia. Similar trends are observed with Morocco and Tunisia. Morocco imposed high tariffs on Iranian imports due to changing political dynamics, hindering trade expansion. Tunisia, an economically significant North African country for Iran, was seen as a potential springboard for Iran into Mediterranean markets. However, political considerations have affected Iran's economic relations with Tunisia. Sanctions have reduced trade volumes, and while Iran proposed direct trade links and investment options in mining and technology, the expectation that ideological and identity trends in northern Tunisia would make Iran a vital trade partner has not been realized.

#### **4-3- Political and Security Situation of Iran's Foreign Policy in Africa**

The dual containment policy and subsequent hostility and intensification of unjust sanctions by the United States prompted Iran to engage in broader security partnerships in Africa. Tehran expanded its relations with African

Islamic parties and, in some instances, exported weapons to the continent. Iran also strengthened its connections with the African bloc within the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Union, particularly promoting South-South cooperation to foster the concept of "nuclear unity" among developing African nations.

Another factor driving Iran's security strategies in Africa is the spread and severity of terrorism on the continent. Following their military defeats in Iraq and Syria in 2018, extremist groups like ISIS consolidated their positions across Africa. In response, Iran has led comprehensive policies to portray itself as an anti-terrorist nation in Africa, partly in reaction to the presence of American forces there. By leveraging the dispersed nature of conflicts and the diverse foreign actors involved, Iran has expanded its security dialogues with African countries.

Iran's efforts to create a cooperative security image and combat terrorism in Africa have enabled it to influence both Shi'it and Sunni communities on the continent, making its allies prone to security tensions with groups opposed to Iranian influence. Algeria is one of the most suitable partners for Iran's security cooperation. In 2004, Algeria and Iran engaged in negotiations to enhance military and defense cooperation. By 2011, Algeria sought to expand military collaboration with Iran, facilitating frequent meetings between military attachés in their respective embassies in Algiers and Tehran (Keynoush,2021). Despite some positive experiences, there have been several failed instances of Iran's security cooperation with African countries. Libya serves as one example. Libya was once part of Iran's "resistance front" in Africa, fully supporting Tehran's efforts to counter Israeli influence in North Africa. However, Libyan leader Qaddafi also encouraged Iran to attack Saudi Arabia, a strategy not aligned with Iran's defensive doctrine. During the war, Libya supplied Iran with weapons, mainly procured from countries like Brazil and the Soviet Union (Keynoush,2021:71). However, post-war, Iran pressured Libya to resolve the Musa Sadr case, causing a strategic rift between the two nations (Nicholas,2020). Nevertheless, Libya supported Iran's stance during the 2006 Lebanon war and subsequent Gaza conflict, although Libya's pivot towards the West to escape isolation and sanctions cooled relations with Tehran. Iran welcomed the 2011 Libyan uprising, condemned foreign military interventions, and asserted that only Libyans should decide their

new government. Tehran publicly congratulated the anti-Qaddafi forces' victory, with around 132 Iranian parliament members endorsing a statement welcoming Qaddafi's ouster. Specifically, Tehran viewed the Libyan developments as opportunities to expand its influence in the African country and counter the influence of rival states, including the Gulf Arab countries (Khadiyev, 2018).

In conclusion, evaluating Iran's political and security policies towards African countries indicates that neither excessive optimism nor pessimism towards governments can form the basis of precise policy-making. Iran must base its strategic behavior in Africa on Strategic Partnerships. One criterion for these relations is the assessment of African countries' alignment concerning United Nations Security Council sanctions.

During the 2000s and 2010s, Iran invested significantly in garnering Africa's support through diplomacy and enhancing trade and cultural relations. However, the results suggest these policies have not been highly successful. Iran must either lower its expectations from African countries or adopt more targeted, specific, and strategic policies towards Africa. The table below shows the performance of African representatives in the UN Security Council regarding anti-Iranian resolutions.

**Table (1): African Countries' Performance on Anti-Iran UN Security Council Resolutions (2006-2020)**

Resolution Number	Voting Outcome	African Member States on the UN Security Council
<b>Resolution 1696</b>	Passed with 14 votes in favor and 1 vote against by Qatar on July 31, 2006	Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Tanzania
<b>Resolution 1733</b>	Passed unanimously with 15 votes in favor on December 23, 2006	Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Tanzania
<b>Resolution 1747</b>	Passed unanimously with all 15 Security Council members in favor on March 24, 2007	Republic of the Congo, Ghana, South Africa
<b>Resolution 1803</b>	Passed with 14 votes in favor and 1 abstention by Indonesia on March 3, 2008. Libya, Vietnam, Indonesia, and South Africa had pledged to abstain, but only Indonesia did	Burkina Faso, Libya, South Africa
<b>Resolution 1929</b>	Passed with 12 votes in favor, 1 abstention by Lebanon, and 2 votes against by Brazil and Turkey on June 10, 2010	Gabon, Nigeria, Uganda
<b>Resolution 1984</b>	Passed with 14 votes in favor, 0 against, and 1 abstention on June 9, 2011	Gabon, Nigeria, South Africa
<b>Resolution 2029</b>	Passed unanimously with 15 votes in favor on June 7, 2012	Morocco, South Africa, Togo

## **5. Conclusion**

An examination of Iran's constitution reveals that goals such as promoting an Islamic worldview and eliminating racist ideologies are consistently pursued by the Islamic Republic, aiming to solidify its hegemony regionally and globally. The theoretical section of this study shows that the expansion of relations between political entities is influenced by political, economic, security considerations, and similarities in ideologies and identities. The greater these factors, the higher the likelihood of convergence between Iran and African countries. The article showed that despite the emphasis on developing cooperation between Iran and Africa, the current state of relations between the two regions is not optimal. Iran's regional rivals, such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have been able to gain a stronger foothold in the religious, economic and even political and military sectors of the African continent than Iran. Despite the strategic intentions embedded in Iran's higher-level policies towards African countries, which can be leveraged to enhance Iran-Africa relations, the realization of these objectives requires effective planning within Iran. However, this has not been adequately addressed in Iran's development plans. While development planning in Iran dates back to the time before the Islamic Revolution, foreign policy was not a focus in Iran's first post-revolution development plan. Consequently, Africa was overlooked. Foreign policy was only highlighted in Iran's development plans starting in 1995, but an analysis shows that Africa or the term 'Africa' was absent from the second to sixth economic, social, and cultural development plans of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The draft of Iran's seventh development plan mentions 'Africa' only once and places it after neighboring countries and Asia in terms of economic priority. This study indicates that Iranian presidents have never prioritized relations with Africa, and there has been no systematic framework in Iran to monitor policies and hold officials accountable for developing these relations, resulting in an ineffective and inconsistent foreign policy towards Africa.

To design an effective behavioral model towards Africa, Iran needs to seriously revisit its higher-level policies in development plans with a focus on Africa and systematically leverage both successful and unsuccessful past experiences. This study emphasizes that Iran should focus on developing artistic, tourism, and scientific capacities, and adopt a more conservative approach towards religious issues, emphasizing commonalities.



Economically, Iran should strengthen its private sector to circumvent sanctions in Africa, and politically and security-wise, it should prioritize anti-terrorism and anti-separatism policies. It is evident that these policies require avoiding temporary measures, ensuring stability in management, and replacing "tactical rationality" with "strategic rationality" to secure Iran's national interests.

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