

Fortifying Intercontinental Relations: A Diplomatic Endorsement and Rejuvenation of Iran in Africa: An Economic Analysis

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Abstract

In an era of unprecedented display of diplomatic force and geopolitical novelty, Iran's recent diplomatic voyage to Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe indicates a decade of Tehran's inaction on the diplomatic front with the continent. Relations between Iran and African states have a strong footing from the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in addition to the fact that they all are members of the UN and other international institutions. Iran, rich in oil wealth and seeking to peacefully use its nuclear program, has been under sanctions from the West for a long time now. This paper examines the diplomatic affirmation and renewal of Iran's government engagement in Africa from an economic perspective, dwelling on three key questions. What are the key historical contexts in Iran-Africa ties? what factors are responsible for the recent driving force behind Iran's renewed entente with the continent? And what are the economic effects on Africa? The overall goal of the article is to analyze the economic dimensions responsible for Iran's engagement with Africa. The article revealed that Tehran's recent engagement with the continent is because of Western economic sanctions and the need for Tehran to propel its economy by engaging economically with the continent despite Western states courting Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Continents, Economic Effects, Iran, Motivations

A. Introduction

From the look of events in the field of international relations, south-south cooperation took a backbench with most research works focusing on Global North pitting Global South ties. The rise of States from the Global South the likes of China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Iran, Nigeria, Qatar, etc. cooperating among themselves has culminated in a new breed of research between states of the Global South, what influence, and the power they have in global politics. This claim is supported by Neuman (1998) who opined that ‘the role of the Third World in international politics remains relatively unexploited in the literature, a tendency that took several decades to diagnosed with contemporary scholarships offering studies on south-south ties with the presence of international organizations like BRICS+. (Hisham, 2009) wrote that The Islamic Republic of Iran and its nuclear ambitions remain at the center of American diplomatic attention. In 2009 Iran was the focus of President Obama’s first television interview as president of the United States. The branding of Iran, alongside Iraq, and North Korea as an “axis of evil” by George Bush, ushered in tough moments for Tehran-vis-à-vis the world.

With the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979, who was a Western/American puppet, Iran’s foreign policy has undergone a monumental shift based on religious grounds. (Chimarizeni, 2017) held that nonetheless, only after it came into existence as an Islamic Republic, the situation transformed. By this time, the foreign policy of Iran took an autonomous direction. It was clearly defined in its Constitution and noted through Iran’s actions towards the US. Indeed, it was only after the establishment of an Islamic Republic, that Iran’s foreign policy took a U-turn. The new Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran was essentially a reflection of a novel view of the new leaders governing Iran’s politics. As such, based on Article 152 of the new Constitution new principles upon which the country was to be governed, were laid down. Picking on this and from clear observations, Iran’s closeness with Sudan, Nigeria, Eritrea, and Senegal can be tight to religious aspects.

The nexus between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the African continent has been achieved historically as a testament to the forging spirit of diplomacy and partnership. It is one of trade, cultural exchange, and mutual respect that dates back to millennia. The 21st century witnessed a recent historical revival, Iran an oil-rich state, with nuclear/military

capabilities, a thriving economy though facing Western sanctions, and an innovative foreign policy, is reverberating its links across Africa, paying attention to economic collaboration. The diplomatic reaffirmation and renewal of ties usher in a hopeful age of collaboration, set to open new opportunities for both Iran and Africa. Under former Iranian president Ahmadinejad, Iran operated a proactive foreign policy towards Africa with numerous visits made across the continent. However, the departure of Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) from office and following Iran's nuclear program sanctioned by the West, pushed the country into isolation thus culminating in a discontinuity of relations with Africa with little or no economic fruits to be talked about.

Iran's strategy, however, is broader than Western policymakers' focus on its nuclear program and its activities in the Middle East or perhaps Latin America. American strategists might describe Iran as a "regional power," but in recent years, Iranian officials have described the Islamic Republic as an "extra-regional power." They see Iran as a pivotal state able to exert its influence not only in the Middle East, but also in South Asia, and not only in the Persian Gulf but also in the Indian Ocean. Tehran's diplomatic ambitions, however, may be considerably broader: Iran increasingly appears to be looking at Africa as a fertile ground for expanding its influence. Iranian outreach takes many guises and is geared toward specific purposes, some diplomatic and others military (Rubin, 2013) Szrom posits Iran's four-pronged approach to courting African allies: through diplomacy, economics, culture, and defense.

Over the years, Iran's diplomatic strategy toward Africa has been threefold. First, with additional aid, Tehran has cultivated relationships with countries voting in important international bodies, such as non-permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council or term members serving on the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Board of Governors. Additional targets for Iranian largesse have been African states active in the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Union. Second, beyond the diplomatic quid pro quo, Iranian officials appear to be prioritizing outreach to those African countries that are mining or prospecting for uranium deposits. Lastly, senior Iranian officials have sought to cement partnerships that they could leverage to gain access to strategic bases (ibid). (Lefebvre, 2019). Held that the IRI's 'offensive' foreign policy stems from a sense of insecurity (not unreasonable given Western and Arab support for Baghdad during the 1980-

1988 Iran-Iraq Wars, past and current international sanctions on Iran, and frequent talk of supporting regime change in Tehran), not from a position of power.

This article focuses on the historical and contemporary development of Iran-Africa relations with the core focus on assessing the economic impact it has on the continent of Africa. It looks at how Tehran's diplomatic and economic might benefit those African states that forge closer ties with Iran to elevate the economic burden on them. Most research works have been based on Iran-Africa relations in the areas of security and military. Ever since Iran's nuclear program came to the lamplight, Tehran has been unable to concretize the economic largess in Africa.

B. Historicity of Africa-Iran Relations

Though Iran gained independence in 1921 and the majority of sub-Saharan African states gained theirs by the early 1960s, the two regions have deep historical ties. Before European colonialism, Persian-African relations were primarily based on trade. As early as the 9th century migrants from the Persian Gulf settled in urban areas in East Africa, and Iranian merchants had visited East Africa by the 16th century (Chaudhuri, 1985). Basically, the rise of Iran's deep engagement with Africa was witnessed in 2005. Affirmatively, the rise of President Ahmadinejad to power between (2005-2013) transformed the dynamics of that relationship (Rubin, 2013). Iran's policies in sub-Saharan Africa have been driven through the years by a variety of interests that have varied from the days of the Shah's regime to the current Islamic Republic. However, over the past decades of the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the intensity and nature of the IRI's policies in the region have changed and not remained static. Besides the impact of Iranian domestic politics (especially the regime changes in 1979 from a monarchy to an Islamic Republic), regional and international conflicts have also shaped Iran's policies (Lefebvre, 2019).

After the wave of African independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, African relations with Iran were characterized as ideological, with a moderate undercurrent of Iranian patronage. In the aftermath of the global oil boom of 1974, Tehran's treasury was inundated with cash, which Iran declared it would use to help African states develop. In addition, Cold War politics led Iran to provide support for African insurgent movements fighting regimes it perceived to be supporters of Western imperialism. When Mao Zedong, a supporter of what would become Nelson Mandela's African National Congress, died in 1976, leaders of the

South African movement quickly turned to Iran and Libya for assistance (Jason & Carol, 2013). The Iranian Revolution of 1979 signaled a shift in Iranian foreign policy, not least toward Africa. The Revolution-which saw the overthrow of the US-supported Shah and the installation of the Ayatollah Khomeini paved the way for anti-US and anti-imperial rhetoric, and the desire to export the Revolution's conservative version of Islam. For Africa, the Iranian Revolution signaled both continuity and change. Unchanged was the pro-South, anti-imperial language of solidarity, but a new dimension, which resonated with many African states, was Iran's promotion of Shi'a Islam (ibid).

As a result of this stand taken by Iran, she was awarded observer status at the African Union (AU). Through this position, Iran secured the support of some of the member states of the AU as it can interact with many of these states (Kobi., 2011) cited by (Chimarizeni, 2017). The consequences of those interactions are reflected in the observable alliance between Iran and some African states and their endless support to Iranian ventures in other organizations such as IAEA other than UN (Chimarizeni, 2017). Under the leadership of Ahmadinejad due to his rampant visit to the continent, he successful championed the 2008 Iran-Africa Conference that took place in Tehran. Following in the footsteps of his predecessor, former Iran leader Ibrahim Raisi inaugurated in March 2023 the Economic Cooperation Summit between West African States and Iran. During this economic gathering, the Iranian leader reiterated The Islamic Republic of Iran's willingness and dedication to deepening cooperation across the different spheres.

With the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the end of the Cold War, Iran's foreign policy toward Africa between 1988 and 2005 continued to be ideologically based on pro-Third World rhetoric. Iran remained friendly with African states diplomatically through the discourses of Third Worldism and Islamism, quietly dropping the anti-imperial tinge in its unsuccessful attempts to befriend the West. In the end, Africa continued to play a marginal role in Iran's international calculus. Western hostility toward Iran was no longer to be tolerated once Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the ultra-conservative former mayor of Tehran, was elected President in 2005. Under Ahmadinejad, Iranian foreign policy has been described as 'muddled', 'badly fragmented', 'far from monolithic', and lacking consensus', all leading to 'inadequate implementation'. With limited ties with the continent by the West between the period of 2003-2013, seemingly Iran exploited this by extending its influence on the

continent. During this period, the former Iranian president and Cabinet members made yearly visits to Africa as compared to successive US governments. The visit to Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Ethiopia, was made by former Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi in 2013 where he declared Africa as a priority for Iran in Ghana and attended the AU summit that year (ibid).

Iran's desire to break out of its international isolation by penetrating sub-Saharan Africa extends beyond Tehran's strategic outreach to Eritrea, an African political outcast. In September 2010, Tehran hosted a two-day Iran-Africa Forum attended by 40 African countries (Valanka, 2016) as cited by (Lefebvre, 2019). Tehran hoped to use the summit to win African support to oppose future UN-imposed sanctions. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also underlined Iran's desire to boost cooperation with Africa and host a summit of African Union (AU) heads of state in Tehran, especially in the areas of technical, engineering, and medical expertise (Lefebvre, 2019) 5 citing Wikileaks, 2012).

C. Why was there a Discontinuity in Iran-Africa Relations under President Rouhani

During the reign of Former Iranian President Ahmadinejad Africa furthered so much in Iran's foreign policy marked by numerous visits to African states and top Iranian officials took rounds visiting the continent for political, diplomatic, economic, and military reasons. By 2011, Ahmadinejad's diplomatic voyages had taken him to Senegal, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Mali, Nigeria, Djibouti, the Comoros, Kenya, Sudan, Algeria, and Gambia. In addition, Tehran also dispatched and embarked on diplomatic voyages by dispatching ministerial-level delegations to improve relations with other strategic partners on the continent such as Ghana, Angola, and South Africa. It was during Ahmadinejad's presidency, that Iran made two smart and strong bonds that sought African friendship, the first in 2005 and the second in 2010. Iran moved ahead to sign several Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with African countries in a variety of areas, including education, agriculture, scientific research, and energy.

However, under President Rouhani, relations with Africa were not given due preference since he favored relations with the West to ease tension on the nuclear deal and economic setbacks on Iran. According to (Chimarizeni, 2017), reacting to the low level of relations with Africa by Iran, he stated that resultantly, the new standing coming from the current Iranian leadership (Rouhani) has undermined the existing Iran-Africa relations. Recently the "third world" principle transformed into action has been weakened as more focus has been given to

the Iranian nuclear deal with the West. Nonetheless, the strategic relevance of Africa for Iran has not changed. Essentially, though the relationship between Iran and the African states has registered a considerable improvement during the Ahmadinejad era, the same involvement has not been witnessed during the current Rouhani presidency. Although Rouhani has expressed his willingness to keep Iran-Africa relations on the same path, the previous flexible relations between both are yet to come back to the previous stage or even gain a new dynamic (Hammond, 2013); (PressTv, 2014) as cited by (Chimarizeni, 2017).

Accordingly, Rouhani has so far reaffirmed his commitment to Africa. Nonetheless, that commitment is witnessed mostly in terms of political speeches. Rouhani's practical focus has been, instead, mostly on the nuclear issue rather than on concrete actions envisioning extending Iranian bonds with African states. Moreover, Rouhani's "engagement" with the West, instead of Africa, unlikely Ahmadinejad's, puts Africa behind concerning Iran's current foreign policy priorities (ibid). As the United States and the European Union invest in reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, the Iranian leadership has chosen to strengthen its non-Western foreign policy stance. In line with this approach, Former President Ibrahim Raisi embarked on a three-country trip to Africa in mid-July 2023, marking the first time an Iranian president has undertaken such a visit in over 11 years. Earlier in the month, Iranian officials reported that the Islamic Republic's exports to the continent had increased by 100% over the past year. It is now clear that engagement with Africa will be a major foreign policy focus under Raisi's administration. This raises the question of whether, a decade on, Raisi's Africa policy will prove any more successful (Amin, 2023).

To summarize, to comprehend the discontinuity of Tehran in Africa during the tenure of Rouhani's foreign policy towards Africa, four points indicate these disruptions.

1. Less emphasis on the Third Worldism in the speeches of Iranian leaders.
2. Rouhani did not travel to Africa.
3. His support for the reestablishment of ties with the West was based on uplifting the economic sanctions and negotiations on the nuclear program.
4. Iran's economic reduction in terms of economic engagement with Africa.

It was during the leadership of Ahmadinejad that Iran-Africa relations were at their best marked by numerous diplomatic, economic, and political visits. Under Rouhani, Tehran in Africa was at its lowest point with little or no engagement to be written about and finally, it

was this low-key for close to a decade that saw the reuniting of Iran-Africa relations ignited by former Iranian leader Ibrahim Raisi. What becomes of Iran-Africa relations in the future over the sudden death of Ibrahim Raisi and with President Masoud Pezeshkian as the new president in 2024 is unknown.

D. Global South Worldism

Global South Worldism is a dynamic and transformational idea that crosses geographical boundaries to bring together nations and regions that have been marginalized by the existing global power structure. This paradigm, which arose in response to the historical dominance of the Global North, symbolizes a reworking of the world's sociopolitical and economic order. It focuses on solidarity and collaboration among countries in the Global South, which includes Africa, Latin America, Asia, and portions of the Middle East. According to (Berger, 2004) after decolonization began and after the Second World War, states in the global South often engaged with one another through a bridge of 'Third World speeches' or 'Third Worldism' a 'discourse that presaged the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Third Worldism was primarily concerned with resistance to both hegemonic powers during the bipolar order of the Cold War, a stance in which states refused to side with either pole.

Global South Worldism emphasizes these various nations' shared concerns and goals, emphasizing the necessity for collaborative action in tackling issues such as poverty, inequality, and the effects of colonialism and imperialism. It advocates for a more equitable allocation of resources, technology, and global power, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and just global order. This notion questions traditional power structures and envisions a world in which the Global South plays a significant role in influencing the future of international relations and global development. Meanwhile, Warner and Gallo (2013: 397) held that this terminology is characterized by a discursive focus on several ostensibly uniquely Southern issues, including opposition to Northern hegemony; South-South solidarity; the sovereign equality and independence of nations; non-interference in internal affairs; and recognition of the perceived neo-colonialist underpinnings of global affairs. This did not, however, prevent states from instrumentalizing the ideology of the Third Worldism while also manipulating Cold War politics.

Since the landmark 1955 Bandung Conference that set its discursive tone, Third Worldism has gone through several changes. Morphing from the early anti-colonial nationalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s into the NAM of the Cold War era, it has more recently been manifesting in the new transnational anti-Bretton Woods and anti-neo-liberal movements of the 1990s and 2000s. Regionally, Third World speeches have been incubated in the intellectual paradigms of Négritude, Pan-Africanism, African socialism, and Afro-Marxism in Africa and the Caribbean, and in pan-Arabism and Maoism in the Middle East and Asia. Bilateral relations have also been based on such rhetoric. The People's Republic of China and Africa have had an understanding of sovereignty based on the equation of self-determination and anti-imperialism, while states in the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa have rooted their solidarity in a pro-black pan-African nationalism. Leftist leaders in Latin America have also evoked pro-South solidarity as the basis of their friendship, with countries across the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. (Warner and Gallo, 2013: 397-298 citing Washington Times, 2009).

Nevertheless, states across the developing world tend to frame their relationships in terms of equality. The result has been that power differentials within the global South are glossed over as stronger states seek to consolidate political power and diplomatic capital by playing to Third Worldist proclivities. This tendency is particularly visible in Iran, which today uses the rhetoric of global South speech to advance its geopolitical goals in Africa, and in African states that use similar language in an attempt to secure various kinds of external support (ibid). In this light, in forging south-south relations, these states often in unison condemn the economic and draconian laws for loan acquisition by the World Bank and other lending sister organizations especially African states which have been trapped in the debt web of Northern states via these organizations, especially from the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) that handicapped their economies till date.

China, Brazil, India, Turkiye, South Africa including Russia have often used the south-south rhetoric when pushing forth for an economic, and political agenda at global gatherings. But this has not gone well lately with the fractioning of these states when it comes to taking a uniform stand at the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council matters such as the ongoing war between Israel-Palestine (Hamas), Russia-Ukraine, the conflict in the Cameroons, Sudan, etc. The existence of BRICS+ has given room for speculations that it seeks to represent the southern voices that have been ostracized by the north in the realm of global political and economic arrangements.

E. Motives for Tehran's Renewed Interest in Africa

Iran's reproachment in Africa indicates a diplomatic (political and military) and economic objective. Tehran seeks to diversify its relationships and expand its worldwide influence in the face of international trials. To comprehend Iran in Africa and the reasons behind Tehran's move into the continent particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, (Lefebvre, 2019) posited four key episodes i) the Shah and containment, 1953-1979; ii) the Islamic Republic of Iran's diplomatic 'offensive,' 1980-2001; iii) the Islamic Republic of Iran seeking to 'escape' international isolation, 2002-2010; and iv) the Saudi Iranian Cold War, 2011-2018. In contemporary times Tehran is sailing through tough geopolitical terrain in search of economic possibilities and diplomatic relations in Africa, restructuring its presence with strategic goals in mind. These motifs for Tehran's re-uniting in Africa consist of:

1. Quest to win Friends and reduce/end International Isolation

Tehran's renewed interest in Africa is in line with her strategic goal of opening novel alliances and breaking international isolation in the face of sanctions and diplomatic setbacks. Now Tehran brainstorms on reigniting alliances throughout the continent, the recent visit of former Iran's statesman Ibrahim Raisi to Africa is a solemn testament to this. Tehran believes that engaging in Africa after 11 years will help ease the consequences of Western isolation in the light of re-energizing economic and diplomatic relations. Considering expanding its economic potential and geopolitical significance, Africa is fertile soil for Iran's re-orientation plan in forging partnerships and offset Western dominance. To redeem Iran's image and reinforce its status in the face of global constraints within the podiums of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council and not leaving out the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran pursues a calculus and holistic approach by engaging African states that have seats in these bodies to lessen the pressures and condemnations which includes economic cooperation in the form of economic promises, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic ententes.

On this same lane, (Rubin, 2013) stated that the Iranian diplomatic strategy toward Africa has been threefold. First, with additional aid, Tehran has cultivated relationships with countries voting in important international bodies, such as non-permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council or term members serving on the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Board of Governors. Additional targets for Iranian largesse have been African states active in the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Union. Second, beyond the diplomatic quid pro quo, Iranian officials appear to be prioritizing outreach to

those African countries that are mining or prospecting for uranium. Lastly, senior Iranian officials have sought to cement partnerships that they could leverage to gain access to strategic bases. Iran's attempts to leverage its relationship with South Africa into support on the UN Security Council and the IAEA Board of Governors paid dividends. Despite the February 2008 IAEA report that found that the Islamic Republic continued to enrich uranium in violation of its safeguard agreement and two Security Council resolutions, the South African government used its position on the Security Council to oppose further sanctions against Iran (ibid).

Both the UN Security Council and IAEA normally have African representation. Togo and Rwanda served as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council (between 2010 and 2011, Gabon and Nigeria served in this position). South Africa held a security council seat between 2007 and 2008 and again between 2010 and 2011, with Uganda serving in the interim. Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania also currently serve on the IAEA Board of Governors, and in recent years, Niger and Kenya have also served there. The countries listed largely coincide with the emphasis of Iran's African outreach. Iranian diplomats have long sought to cultivate ties with South Africa. The Islamic Republic's opposition to Apartheid set the foundation for warm ties after the restoration of diplomatic relations in 1994. Iranian supply of oil to South Africa has heightened economic relations. For Tehran, however, trade is not the only factor in Iran's desire to have good relations with South Africa. "South Africa is a key member of the Non-Aligned Movement, a bloc of developing countries that has resisted the efforts to force Tehran to halt uranium enrichment," a commentary in the official Tehran Times explained (Rubin, 2013).

Due to the inaction of Iran's Foreign policy towards Africa at both the UNSC and IAEA for 11 years, the deficiencies were felt by Iran which precipitated the change of policies leading to the visit of Ibrahim Raisi to Africa this year before his demise. In this light, Raisi will have to engage South Africa with a seat on the Board of Governors of IAEA, Kenya, and Niger who got the UNSC non-permanent seat in 2022. Mindful of the fact that these international institutions are subjected to change based on elections and rotations, these seats occupied by Nigeria, Kenya, and Niger are expected to be filled by other states in the future, which will propel Tehran to rush closer in knitting ties with the states to assume these seats.

Iran Leaders	Countries Visited	Years of Visit
Ibrahim Raisi (Former Iranian President)	Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe	2023
Iranian Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian and Deputies for Economic and Political Diplomacy	Mali, Tanzania, South Africa, and Niger	2022
Ali Akbar Salehi (Former Iranian Foreign Minister)	Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Ethiopia	2013
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Former Iranian President)	Benin, Niger, and Ghana	2013
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Former Iranian President)	Gambia, Senegal, Sudan, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Mali, Nigeria, Djibouti, Comoros, and Kenya	2011
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Former Iranian President)	Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo, and Benin	2010

Countries in Africa Iran has visited from 2010-2023

Source: Author's compilation

2. Quest for Uranium

A significant element that stands as a driving force for Iran's interest in Africa is connected to Africa's rich uranium deposits needed for the burgeoning of Tehran's nuclear program. Previous and present Iranian regimes have indicated that its 16 nuclear reactors are solely for civilian purposes. In this light, Iran has resorted to engaging Uranium-rich African states like Niger, Gambia, Malawi, Namibia, Uganda, Nigeria, South Africa, and a host of other countries. Whatever Tehran's nuclear playback might be, previous and present Iranian regimes have made it plain to the world that it won't abandon its nuclear program which angers the West. With an appetite for Uranium, Tehran is chasing alternative avenues of uranium that Africa can provide so that it makes up for the deficit. According to (Gregor, 2010) in 2003 Iran announced its plans to develop facilities that could produce enriched uranium.

The ((IAEA), 2008) International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) paid several visits to the country and insisted all details be revealed. Ahmadinejad’s refusal to allow inspections by the IAEA led to four sets of international sanctions against Iran in 2006 and 2007. These sanctions have led Iran feverishly to seek out international allies: ‘Iran is always trying to expand its areas of diplomacy and economic influence on counterbalance against its isolation. As it has done in various international forums, Iran tends to talk about its nuclear program with African states in peaceful terms, claiming that its program poses no real threat to international security. African states are by and large in support of Iran’s right to peaceful development of nuclear technology for civilian purposes. Djibouti has come out as an advocate of Iran’s right to peaceful nuclear technology, going far as to praise Tehran for its determination to access it (Wellman, 2009). Kenya, which faces enormous energy security challenges, has shown support for Iranian nuclear technology in the hopes of receiving assistance in potentially developing its nuclear power.

African Countries with Uranium, UNSC, and IAEA seats Iran has Courted.
Niger
Guinea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Zimbabwe
Namibia
Malawi
South Africa
Gambia
Uganda
Gabon
Togo
Central Africa Republic
South Africa
Kenya

Source: Author

3. Need to expand Trading Ties

The need to foster close ties with the African continent rests on forging genuine economic and trading ties by Tehran has become a novel strategic dimension meant to cement and deepen economic rapprochement. With a geopolitical obligation as a geopolitical player, Tehran's will to forge economic contacts with the continent rests on the need to prove to its critics that it has been ostracized economically. The mutual pros in deepening trade, economic interconnection, and building markets are part of Tehran's economic expansion to lobby for certain natural resources particularly uranium for her nuclear program. With the reinforcement of business contacts, Iran and African states can reap complementary resources, market accessibility, and technical know-how. Iran's proactive foreign policy is amplified by a proactive economic scheme that shows its devotion to equal economic growth and development. The establishment of continental alliances is a central objective of Iran in Africa which is achievable by establishing trade and economic ties all geared at reducing dependence on specific market products.

(Rubin, 2013) in line with trade ties with the African continent held that while visits by Iranian officials to the West African country of Guinea were relatively scarce a decade ago, Tehran has taken more interest in Conakry since the discovery of commercially viable uranium deposits in 2007. In 2010, Mottaki announced a 140 percent increase in Iran-Guinean trade, for which the mining sector accounted for the greatest proportion. According to (Gyezaho, 2009), Uganda announced its uranium discovery in 2004. While commercial relations between Iran and Uganda remained dormant under the presidencies of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-97) and Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005), this changed in subsequent years. Visiting Tehran in 2009, Uganda President Yoweri Museveni met not only with his counterpart but also with Iran's minister of mining. The Kampala-based Daily Monitor reported, "a strong indication that the two leaders discussed prospects of exploiting Uganda's uranium resources, which Mr. Museveni has often said would only be used for "the generation of energy."

The recent visit of Bakary Yaou Sangare, the Foreign Minister of Niger's military government to Tehran after the Raisi visits to three African states and the expulsion of France from Niger is an indication of Tehran's cementing economic interest in the country driven by the huge Uranium deposits. According to Iranian State news agency (IRNA), 'As Niger's

Foreign Minister is in Tehran, the European Union has introduced sanctions targeting individuals and entities linked to the military junta that seized power in July. Foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said, "The EU has from the very beginning condemned the coup d'état in Niger in the strongest terms." The newly established framework empowers the EU to impose sanctions on those responsible for actions that it deems 'jeopardize Niger's peace, stability, and security, undermine its constitutional order, or involve severe violations of human rights and international humanitarian law'. In doing so, the EU seeks to align and reinforce the actions taken by the West African regional organization ECOWAS (<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202310249083>). According to the website of Iran Primer wrote that "President Raisi signed 12 cooperation agreements with Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa after his three-country African tour.

The agreements covered energy, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, and scientific research projects. On the 14th of July 2023, former President Raisi returned to Tehran from his African tour and outlined his desire to "increase strategic depth" in the continent. He specified that Iran would trade petrochemicals for raw materials, including food. "We share common views with these African countries on opposing unilateralism, defending human rights, protecting family values, and fighting against moral corruption and organized crime,".

4. Need for Military Bases

In a purported quest for a military base that might be used to counter Iran's rivalries on the continent and build an outreach military might, (Rubin, 2013) held that Iranian outreach to Africa may be a quest to establish Iran's own "string of pearls" that is, if not de facto bases that could provide Iran logistical support and allow it to extend its naval reach, then pivotal states upon which it could rely to advance strategic and ideological objectives (the role that Venezuela plays for Iran in South America). Initially, Iranian authorities cultivated a relationship with Senegal. There is no indication that the two states ever openly discussed formal bases, but the Islamic Republic did develop closer relations with Senegal than it did with other African states. Abdoulaye Wade, president of Senegal between 2000 and 2012, met repeatedly not only with Ahmadinejad but also with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The building up of military installations/bases could be a strategic significance for Tehran-Africa relations channeled for geopolitical sway and securing economic corridors. The erection of any military unit on the continent by Iran will guarantee vital shipping routes, safeguard investments, and override presumed threats just as other powers have done across the continent, projecting their status, fostering alliances, and wielding roles across the different regions of the continent. If Iran sets up a military installation in countries like Senegal, Sudan, or Eritrea which unconfirmed reports have insinuated will culminate in geopolitical tensions leading to loggerheads with other powers that have settled long on the continent and neighboring states. Successful Iranian regimes especially the present one are running a foreign policy that seeks to assert influence by avoiding the destabilization of the African continent as it forges diplomatic, economic, and military alliances in Africa.

F. The Economic Effects on Africa

In a political world triggered by all sorts of alliances, Iran has sought the exercise of its power to defend itself from economic sanctions imposed upon it by the United States of America and Europe. To do away with this, she has resorted to Africa as a way out under Ahmadinejad's strategies to overcome the negative economic impact caused by these sanctions. Nonetheless, the rise to power of a pragmatic leadership paved the way for solving the nuclear deadlock directly with the Western states putting the Iran-Africa relationship in a fragile condition considering Iran's foreign policy priorities ((Chimarizeni, 2017).

In terms of the economic effects reaped by African states with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The closeness and temporal seats occupied by certain African states at the UNSC and IAEA indicate what dimension of the economic package Tehran is ready to deliver to these states. However, things have not gone well with Tehran's interest in Africa and African states have not benefited fully from the economic packages promised by Iran because of Iran's discontinuity of ties with the continent for over 11 years and Donald Trump's withdrawal from the 2015 Nuclear Deal, officially known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) hence shattering the significance of this deal which President Biden has been unable to fully revive with Tehran as he faces leaves the White House come January 2025.

Warner and Gallo (2013, 440) held that Iran has been cultivating trade relations across the continent. It has made notable inroads in promoting economic development, investing

across in the domain of energy, transportation infrastructure, information and communications technology, agriculture, rural development, and technological training in the Comoros, Gabon, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Uganda, Ghana, Niger, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Mali, and Mauritania. More so, with the creation of new ‘air links, transportation and the founding of joint banks’ in some 48 African countries the opening of car manufacturing plants, and offers of oil for South Africa, Kenya, and oil-refining expertise to Uganda. In Harare, Tehran signed an MoU promising to overhaul Zimbabwe’s oil refinery and offer long-term fuel supplies in exchange for exclusive mining rights of ‘strategic’ minerals, including uranium (Wellman, 2009).

(Lefebvre, 2019) held that from 2013 onward, Iranian officials repeatedly commented about Tehran’s desire to expand various forms of cooperation with the region. Iran and Africa could boost bilateral economic and trade relations, especially given their national technical and engineering potential and capabilities. Iranian officials argued Iran should be seen as a strategic partner of the African Union along with India, Japan, China, and Turkey. To help African states benefit from Iran’s petroleum resources oil refineries could be built in the region, especially in West Africa. Iranian officials have reiterated that cooperation with Africa had been assigned a top priority by Tehran. Iran’s former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, speaking at a ceremony marking the 51st anniversary of the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 2014, reiterated that the current Iranian Administration of President Hassan Rouhani (elected in 2013) was committed to expanding Iranian diplomatic relations with sub-Saharan Africa.

Iran has been reaching out to African countries promising to take initiatives that are positively received by the African countries. Iran’s actions in Senegal focus largely on the economy, with pledges geared at the opening of factories and various projects (Chimbelu, 2010 as cited by (Chimarizeni, 2017). Essentially, it includes the extension of a 120-million-dollar line of credit from the Export Development Bank of Iran to Senegal for the purchase of Iranian tractors (Kobi., 2011) as cited by (Chimarizeni, 2017). According to Taylor (2010), those measures reflect the economic interests of the Senegalese elite. Nevertheless, Senegal has recently served as “Iran’s gateway to Africa” as the USD 16 million in exports to Senegal

in 2009 constituted a greater volume of trade than that of Iran and all other West African countries combined (Kobi., 2011); (Rubin, 2013); as cited by (Chimarizeni, 2017).

One of those African countries that was able to reap from Iran-Africa relations has been Eritrea which saw the signing of agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2008 between Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki and former Iranian President Ahmadinejad. (McAnenny, 2014) writing on Eritrea-Iran ties based on these agreements and MoU purported that the scope of those agreements lay in the increasing of trade ties between Eritrea and Iran and expanding and encouraging Iranian investment in Eritrea's agricultural, mining, and energy sectors. Resultantly, in 2008, the Iranian Bank for Export Development gave Eritrea \$35 million in credit to promote trade relations between the two countries. As gratitude, the Eritrean foreign minister expressed support for Iran's nuclear program when the Iranian minister visited the UN (ITIC, 2009).

Moreover, worthy to note is the difference in existing degrees of interaction between Iran and the African states. As such, compared to other African regions, the East and the West African states are the ones that have recently interacted mostly with Iran. Apart from the sharing of historic ties with Iran, the East African states have recently shared political relations with it. States originating from those two African regions such as Eritrea, Sudan, Nigeria, Senegal, and so on, have economic as well as military ties with Iran (McAnenny, 2014). Sometimes, the religious component is also incorporated into those interactions (Kobi., 2011). Unlike them, the Sub-Saharan states such as Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Malawi, Malawi, and Namibia have been interacting with Iran mostly in economic areas. Hence, the seeking of uranium in the latter state Iran, to supply its nuclear venture, constitutes its main interest therein (Onderco, 2012). The exchange of uranium deposits, thus, has been the condition put by Iran upon some African states to concede to them economic or even military resources (Solomon, 2015). Resultantly, the outreach of the African mining states stands as one of the Iranian strategies towards the continent ((Chimarizeni, 2017).

According to (Amin, 2023), in March 2023, the inaugural Economic Cooperation Summit between Iran and West African countries which took place emphasized Iran's willingness and commitment to substantially expand cooperation with African countries across various sectors. There has already been significant progress on the commercial front,

with Iranian exports to Africa reaching \$1.28 billion last year, up from \$579 million in 2020. The growth in some targeted areas has been even greater, with Iran's exports of technical and engineering services to Africa increasing by 700% in 2022. According to Iranian media reports, the Islamic Republic aims to achieve a tenfold increase in trade with African countries, reaching \$12 billion, with the initial target set at \$5 billion in two years. During Raisi's July visit to Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, he signed a total of 21 agreements in domains of oil and energy, telecommunication and information technology, agriculture, and medicine, calling the continent a "land of opportunities." In the Iranian domestic sphere, recent developments suggest that the emphasis on Africa can now be regarded as part of a long-term strategic approach.

(Lefebvre, 2019) held that Iran's economic problems increased after the imposition of new economic sanctions by Washington, aimed at the Iranian oil sector (with further U.S. sanctions to be imposed at the beginning of November 2018), after the Trump Administration in May 2018 withdrew from the July 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)-Iran nuclear deal. Tehran has found it increasingly difficult to get into a 'cold war' with Saudi Arabia for the "hearts and minds" in sub-Saharan African states. This is due to Iran's ongoing military-financial commitments in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Hamas. Iran's actions under her foreign policy towards certain places and regions have proven to be antagonizing the West and the recent closeness of Iran-Niger relations is a plus to anti-French sentiments on the continent and in that region.

G. Conclusion

Iran-Africa relations date back centuries ago and Iran's support for certain African countries during colonialism offered Tehran a place in the continent's post-colonial history. Under President Ahmadinejad, Tehran was actively involved in Africa in the economic, political, diplomatic, and military domains. But under the tenure of President Rouhani, Africa was relegated in Iran's Foreign policy as he lessened economic engagement with Africa, actively engaged the West, and non-visit to Africa. Since in the West, Iran is viewed as a 'pariah state' facing economic sanctions, former Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi's administration has reignited the footsteps of Ahmadinejad by re-engaging African states. By visiting the continent in July 2023 despite the hurdles surrounding the 2015 JCPOA on the Nuclear deal. Despite these, the economic records of Iran in Africa are not felt or exposed as

compared to states like that of Türkiye, China, etc. Thus, African states will not want to only feature in speeches, NAM discourse, Third Worldism, and courting African states at the UNSC and IAEA but wish to reap succinct economic benefits from Tehran. As Iran seeks to deepen its relations with states across the world and especially with Africa, President Pezeshkian's administration is tasked to continue in the footsteps of former president Raisi in winning friends in Africa culminating in Iran's international isolation and sanctions by the West.

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