



BRIEFING

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# Iran and its trade ties with the African continent

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## Iran and its trade ties with the African continent

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# Iran and its trade ties with the African continent

With an increasingly prominent role in the Middle East, Iran has sought to diversify its economy and materialise links with other regions capable of contributing to its development. As the second-largest country in the region after Saudi Arabia, today, the Islamic Republic of Iran represents a nation of geopolitical interest for industrialised states, and in turn, a country with interests of its own.

History indicates that the economic interests have conditioned the political trajectory of this Islamic and ancient homeland, while possessing extraordinary geographic conditions that could serve the interests of economies in search of opportunities. As specialist in the field Juan Carlos Camacho explains: "Iran could be considered a 'second order' or emerging power, based on its privileged geographic position, natural resources, especially its energy, religious and ideological influence within the Shia Muslim community and deep historical references."<sup>1</sup>

Due to this desire for entrepreneurship and openness towards new horizons, one of the territories in which Iran increasingly displays interest is Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is essential to bear in mind that Iran has been immersed in a nuclear conflict since 2002, achieving a moment of near calm with the signing of the nuclear agreement with the P5+1 group (the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany) in 2015. However, with the arrival of the Donald Trump

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1 Sanamé Chávez, Gleydis, "In the name of money: The journalistic discourse on the nuclear conflict between Iran and the US in the media between the last three months of the administration of Barack Obama and the first three of the government of Donald Trump," Bachelor of Journalism thesis, University of Havana, 2018, P. 198.

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administration in 2016, relations between Tehran and Washington became icier following accusations by the White House of non-compliance of the pact by Iran; an unproven pretext and, at the same time, an incentive for the US to abandon it. The US strategy was punishing; it included the implementation of sanctions against the Shia government, resulting in inflation processes, the reduction of oil and gas sales and the freezing of bank accounts.

Under these embargo conditions, Iran designed policies capable of overcoming these obstacles, including strengthening bilateral ties with African countries. The relationships have primarily been economic, and not as recent as the nuclear agreement or the crisis that led it to materialise. The ties with the continent date back to the beginning of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, from the establishment of its principles where nationalism was positioned as fundamental and the export of revolutionary ideals as a paradigm.

## The main economic links between Iran and Sub-Saharan Africa

Among Iran's main African trading partners is South Africa, one of the countries with the greatest economic stability in the area, boasting outstanding natural resources. The largest number of bilateral agreements were signed in 2016. Thus, with former South African President Jacob Zuma's visit to Tehran in the same year, eight agreements were signed in trade, industry, insurance, art, culture, water resources, investment and agriculture sectors. For some experts, prior to the sanctions period that led to the nuclear agreement, Iran was one of the ten largest trading partners of South Africa, supplying 25 per cent of the oil to its refineries.<sup>2</sup>

During this visit, it was agreed that Iran would sell to South Africa up to 68,000 barrels of Iranian crude oil per day for a three-month period in 2016, increasing

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2 Juventud Rebelde, "Fortalecen nexos comerciales Irán y Sudáfrica al firmar ocho acuerdos," April 24, 2016, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/internacionales/2016-04-24/fortalecen-nexos-comerciales-iran-sudafrica-al-firmar-ocho-acuerdos>.

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the commercial exchange transactions to \$8 billion by 2020.<sup>3</sup> By 2017, with the visit of the Speaker of the South African Parliament Baleka Mbete, the main agreed cooperations were aimed at the energy and mining sectors, as well as technical services and engineering. In 2019, both countries expressed their intention to expand joint investment, allowing South Africa to become a partner in a telecommunications project in Iran, maintaining business in tourism, maritime transport and the shipping industry.

Economic relations with Ghana have also gained importance. In 2018, Iran and Ghana signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), underwritten by the Securities and Exchange Organisation (SEO) of Iran and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Ghana, focusing on financial expertise.<sup>4</sup> The meeting, which took place in Tehran in July, was timely for Ghanaians to express their interest in participating in the international scholarships proposed by the SEO. Likewise, both parties agreed to work on the creation of a shared fund for the exchange.

Regarding links with Senegal, the geographic position of the nation was favourable to Iran's interests in expanding into West Africa.<sup>5</sup> Thus, cooperation includes gas, oil, medicine, science, healthcare, education and the manufacture of automobiles. Likewise, the materialisation of energy diplomacy due to the proximity with Nigeria, a member of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and with vast amounts of resources, not only oil but also gas, should

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3 Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA Spanish), "El volumen comercial entre Irán y Sudáfrica alcanzará los 8 mil millones de \$," May 18, 2016, <http://www.irna.ir/es/News/3090140>.

4 Financial Tribune, "Iran, Ghana Sign Capital Market Deal," July 17, 2018, <https://financiatribune.com/articles/economy-business-and-markets/89961/iran-ghana-sign-capital-market-deal>.

5 Pars Today, "Irán, listo para transmitir sus experiencias a Senegal," April 10, 2018, [http://parstoday.com/es/news/iran-i52188-ir%C3%A1n\\_listo\\_para\\_transmitir\\_sus\\_experiencias\\_a\\_senegal](http://parstoday.com/es/news/iran-i52188-ir%C3%A1n_listo_para_transmitir_sus_experiencias_a_senegal).

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not be ignored.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the links with Kenya are notable, giving prominence to exchanges in East Africa and the nascent platform created by the China Belt and Road Initiative.

For greater momentum, an economic forum was successfully held in Tehran in July 2019, promoted by the Iran Trade Promotion Organisation (OEAI), which assumed the objective of fostering relations with the countries of East Africa.<sup>7</sup> The event focused on banking, transport and security within the area, especially concerning maritime transport.

## Cooperation, imports and exports

Between 2009 and 2019, trade between Iran and Africa peaked in 2017-2018, with an approximate value of \$1.2 trillion. According to Director-General of the Trade Promotion Organisation of Iran's African-Arab office Masoud Kamali Ardakani, Tehran exported nearly \$642 million in goods to the African continent between March 2018 and March 2019. Meanwhile, it imported an amount close to \$16 million from the region.<sup>8</sup> It has come to represent 0.12 per cent of the total trade in Africa.

In terms of Iranian exports from the Sub-Saharan region, the main trading partners for 2019 comprise Sudan, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Djibouti, Mozambique, Nigeria and Somalia. On the other hand, exporters to Iran

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6 Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA Spanish), "Under the title Iran begins its presence in Africa with the visit of the foreign minister. After the approval of the Comprehensive Plan," November 18, 2016, <http://es.irna.ir/news-iran-initiates-its-presence-in-africa-with-the-visit-of-the-foreign-minister-after-the-approval-of-the-comprehensive-plan>.

7 Hispan TV, "Irán y África Oriental fortalecen lazos económicos," July 24, 2019, <http://www.hispan.tv/noticias/economia/433859/iran-africa-oriental-relaciones-comerciales>.

8 Eghtesad, "10-Year Review of Iran-Africa Trade," October 8, 2019, <https://www.en.eghtesadonline.com/Section-economy-4/30471-year-review-of-iran-africa-trade>.

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include South Africa, Eswatini, Ghana, Zambia, Seychelles, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Sudan.<sup>9</sup>

Among the main products exported from Iran are butane gas, bitumen, steel, iron, clinker, cement, fertilisers and hydrocarbons (with their derivatives). The goods imported by Iran include phosphates, steel, oranges, legumes, tobacco, fish, tea and cocoa beans. Despite the positive intentions of the parties, greater cooperation is not possible due to the high infrastructure deficiencies for direct transportation by sea and air, the limitations imposed by a weak financial relationship and the deprivations incurred by constant economic and political instabilities.

As for the African continent, Egypt tops the list of countries with the greatest commercial exchanges with Iran between 2018 and 2019, reaching an approximate amount of 500,000 tonnes of merchandise.<sup>10</sup> In the area south of the Sahara Desert, trade varies by nation as outlined below:

- Kenya predominantly imports goods such as liquefied butane, bitumen and liquefied propane from Iran, while mainly exporting coffee and tea to Iran.
- Sudan imports from Iran products derived from iron and steel, iron and steel ingots, bitumen, petroleum jelly, paraffin and petroleum wax. It mainly exports sesame seeds, other oilseed varieties and capsules for the agriculture of vegetables.<sup>11</sup>
- South Africa primarily ships chemicals, raw copper and stainless steel products. It imports petroleum bitumen, mineral and chemical nitrogenous fertilisers, petroleum gas, horses, donkeys and mules.<sup>12</sup>

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9 Ibid.

10 Eghtesad, "Iran non-oil trade with Africa tops in months," February 25, 2019, <https://www.en.eghtesadonline.com/Section-economy-4/28194-iran-non-oil-trade-with-africa-tops-in-months>.

11 Observatory of Economic Complexity, <https://oec.world>.

12 Ibid.

- From Eswatini, formerly Swaziland, Iran imports aluminium oxide, pesticides and parts to construct air turbines.
- Ethiopia is known to import sesame seeds, capsules for vegetable planting and grains.
- Nigeria largely imports petroleum or bituminous mineral oils, pneumatic, hydraulic or motorised tools, tractors, vegetable alkaloids and copper pipes.
- Senegal imports Iranian food products such as flour, semolina and starch.<sup>13</sup>

Commercial data indicates that between 2017 and 2018, exchanges with Rwanda reached \$41.13 million and \$22.49 million with Eswatini, showing an increase compared with previous periods. However, with the Central African Republic (\$996 million), Togo (\$2.29 million) and Zambia (\$820,552), a steep decline was evident.<sup>14</sup> Between 2009 and 2019, trade with Iran reached considerable figures regarding its most assiduous partners: Sudan (\$558 million), Kenya (\$532 million), South Africa (\$420 million), Tanzania (\$361 million), Djibouti (\$242 million), Mozambique (\$162 million), Nigeria (\$137 million) and Somalia (\$132 million).<sup>15</sup>

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13 Ibid.

14 Eghtesad, "Iran's non-oil trade with African Tops \$670m in 10 Months," February 25, 2019, <https://www.en.eghtesadonline.com/Section-economy-4/28194-iran-non-oil-trade-with-africa-tops-in-months>.

15 Eghtesad, "10-year review of Iran-Africa trade," October 8, 2019, <https://www.en.eghtesadonline.com/Section-economy-4/30471-year-review-of-iran-africa-trade>.

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## Investments

Iran is a nation that not only intends to invest economically in regions with which it maintains relations, but also enhances opportunities for greater internal investment of foreign capital. With a population of approximately 80 million, it boasts a vast youth workforce, a developing infrastructure, extensive natural resources and a privileged geographic location. In May 2017, Iran created the Chamber of Commerce Industries Mine and Agriculture Arbitration Centre for the solubility of litigation with their counterparts to streamline contracts to reduce their risks and to develop favourable climates for foreign investment. In August 2018, the then president of the Investment Promotion Office of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance Maryam Faraji highlighted to international media that more than 500 opportunities had been identified.<sup>16</sup>

South Africa is among the African nations with which Iran shares extensive investment links. During an official visit of a South African Trade and Investment delegation to Tehran in 2018, exchange with investment-ready private sector actors was prioritised. Yunus Hussain, the head of the South African Investment Promotion Agency, reiterated that his homeland had achieved economic and political stability, while highlighting advantages such as the non-existence of taxes for investors.<sup>17</sup> Both parties reaffirmed their interest in exploiting new fields such as mining. However, they identified the need for an extension to sectors such as the green economy, renewable energy, recycling, nanotechnology, medical and biochemistry.

In October 2017, during the 13th Iran-South Africa Business Forum held in Pretoria, Minister of Foreign Affairs Javad Zarif emphasised the markedly open interest of his country in the insertion of South African companies. Zarif expressed: “The Islamic Republic of Iran places no restrictions in expansion of comprehensive relations with South Africa. The doors of the Islamic Republic

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<sup>16</sup> Eghtesad, “Iran and South Africa explore investment opportunities,” August 13, 2018, <https://www.en.eghtesadonline.com/Section-economy-4/26414-iran-south-africa-explore-investment-opportunities>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

of Iran are open to state-run South African companies as well as the private sector. Also, my country’s infrastructural capacities such as railroads, roads and ports are at the service of South Africa to gain access to Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, Russia and Eastern Europe.”<sup>18</sup>

In February 2019, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani also stressed, within the framework of meetings to receive and accredit new ambassadors from Sierra Leone and Mali, the capacity and interest of Iran to invest and cooperate with both countries in matters of technical, scientific and medical services.<sup>19</sup> Concerning Sierra Leone, there was a transparent intention to advance investments in the healthcare and agriculture sectors, especially in the cultivation of products. With Mali, Rouhani restated the interest in maintaining the presence of agricultural engineers in the country, as well as continuing the rapprochement in matters of culture, healthcare and agriculture.<sup>20</sup>

Other Iranian investments in the African region are significant, dating back to the first decade of the current millennium, such as those developed in Nigeria, Kenya, Comoros, Uganda and Senegal.<sup>21</sup> In Senegal, Khodro, the most prominent Iranian car manufacturer, opened an assembly line in 2007. Khodro agreed with the Senegalese government a 60 per cent ownership of the new company on West African soil. Firstly, the focus turned to the construction of passenger cars, and later, to custom designs.<sup>22</sup> The remaining 40 per cent of shares were divided between the government in Dakar and private investors, at a cost of approximately \$82 million. Until the birth of this agreement in 2005,

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<sup>18</sup> MEI, “Iran seeks closer economic ties with Africa,” October 23, 2017, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-seeks-closer-economic-ties-africa-minimize-us-sanctions>.

<sup>19</sup> Tasnim News, “Iran is ready to invest in Africa,” February 2, 2019, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2019/02/02/1937846/president-iran-ready-to-invest-in-africa>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> DW, “Iran makes inroads in parts of Africa,” February 28, 2010, <https://m.dw.com/en/iran-makes-inroads-in-parts-of-africa/a-5257032>.

<sup>22</sup> Gulf Industry, “Iran Khodro to make cars in Senegal,” February 1, 2005, [http://www.gulfindustryworldwide.com/news/3002\\_Iran-Khodro-to-make-cars-in-Senegal.html](http://www.gulfindustryworldwide.com/news/3002_Iran-Khodro-to-make-cars-in-Senegal.html).

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South Africa was the leading country for the assembly of cars, with around 83 per cent of the total manufactured in the continent, with parts from developed economies in the Western Hemisphere representing brands such as Daimler Chrysler, Volkswagen, BMW, Toyota, Nissan and General Motors. By 2018, Khodro had exported new vehicle models for police services. The bilateral agreement has allowed Senegal to re-export these products to neighbouring countries such as Guinea and Nigeria, while continuously respecting Iranian rights and promoting new models such as Samand, Dena and Runna.

Iran's ties with Senegal, spanning more than 50 years, are profound. The nation's geographic location gives it incalculable importance in the commercial development with West Africa, because the Port of Dakar offers access possibilities to the economies of other states. Taking into account its capabilities in technical services, civil engineering, road construction, food and petrochemical industries, the Shia government has allocated investments and prioritised cooperation for advancement in medical tourism, rice production, crops, medicine (including technology), precious metals, coffee and cocoa. Also noteworthy are the construction of a chemical plant and a refinery for Iranian crude oil, as well as financial ties through the Export Development Bank of Iran.

Other projects include:

- Cement and asphalt production plants in Comoros.
- The first dialysis centre in Sierra Leone.
- An oil refinery, a tractor assembly plant and a meat cannery in Uganda.<sup>23</sup>

In the latter nation, the first Iran-Uganda Business Forum was held in 2018, which took place at the Sheraton Hotel in Kampala. At this event, Ugandan representatives noted that their country would profit from millions of dollars

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<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia, "Iran in Africa," [https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irán\\_en\\_África](https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irán_en_África).

due to the acceptance of investment from various Iranian firms.<sup>24</sup> Among the sectors in which the companies showed interest are healthcare, medical equipment, chemical and natural medicine, communication technologies, the chemical industry, electronics, pharmaceuticals and the mining industry. Uganda boasts considerable population growth, and therefore a proliferating workforce, with an expanding economy whose standards promise appeal and business opportunities.

In 2019, an MoU was signed with Ghana between the high command of free-trade zones of both countries, the Iranian Secretariat of the Free Zones High Council (MOU) and the Ghana Free Zones Authority (GFZA).<sup>25</sup> It would facilitate, among other points, electronic commerce from the use of a digital currency and the development of investments from other countries in the region under the benefits of the free zone.

Zimbabwe is experiencing a consolidation of bilateral ties with Iran in various fields. In February 2020, the Zimbabwean ambassador to Tehran, in a meeting with representatives of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, expressed the desire to promote the Iran-Zimbabwe Economic Committee created in 2015, which had previously suffered some inaction. This meeting swiftly materialised agreements in areas such as agriculture, mining, energy, oil, gas, engineering services and agricultural machinery. The capital of Zimbabwe, Harare, has stressed that agricultural-friendly mineral, gas and land reserves are available for joint projects. With Nigeria, the exchange of nuclear technology for the development of electricity is also significant.

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<sup>24</sup> Rwamasyoro, Steven, "Forty-Five Iranian companies sign investment partnerships in Uganda," Trumpet News, October 3, 2018, <https://trumpetnews.co.ug/fourty-five-iranian-companies-sign-investment-partnerships-in-uganda/>.

<sup>25</sup> Tehran Times, "Iran- Zimbabwe discuss expansion of trade cooperation," February 5, 2020, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/444871/Iran-Zimbabwe-discuss-expansion-of-trade-co-op>.

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## Links with Kenya

Kenya's most recent energy requirements have prompted it to establish links with fuel-rich economies such as Iran. The development and industrialisation plans foreseen for 2030 demand the capacity to assure its domestic needs.<sup>26</sup> It has an effective generation capacity of 1,300 megawatts (MW), a figure much lower than South Africa and Iran, which both stand at around 40,000 MW. Although it has designed principles for increasing this, it still requires about 10,000 MW to meet the demands of industrial planning. The approaches with Iran also seek cooperation in nuclear energy, renewable sources and the strengthening of traditional ties, which are currently gaining vitality, including the petroleum derivatives, chemical industry, textile industry, tea and horticulture sectors. In October 2020, new agreements reaffirmed links in the meat and fish trade, transport and tourism development through the establishment of direct sea routes and Tehran-Nairobi flights. By the end of 2021, bilateral cooperation is estimated to reach \$500 million.<sup>27</sup>

Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies have played a vital role in these ties; the government of Iran is immersed in the construction of a centre for such research, located at the University of Nairobi. The Iranian Embassy has joined the task with great interest, weighing the responsibility of bringing to the universities of its nation the realisation and results of ambitious projects in these branches. Nanotechnologies have applicability in sectors such as medicine, agriculture, transportation, electronics and energy. Iran has nearly four decades of experience in this field and is among the top four leading countries after China, the US and India. For this reason, it has agreed with the Kenyan government and its higher education system (specifically with the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology) on the development of postgraduate programmes in the field of nanosciences. Kenyan students

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26 Africa Economic Development Institute, "Kenya-Iran to Strengthen Ties," April 15, 2021, [https://www.africaecon.org/index.php/africa\\_business\\_reports/read/45](https://www.africaecon.org/index.php/africa_business_reports/read/45).

27 Ibid.

and those from neighbouring nations will benefit from this.<sup>28</sup> It is estimated that Tehran awards more than 50 scholarships to African students to study for master's degrees and doctorates.

Iranian investors have set their sights on Kenya to further develop the pharmaceutical industry. By June 2020, investors had planned to build a medium-cost plant for the research, invention and manufacture of medicines. Another branch of the Iranian economy, the ceramic and tile industry (Iran is the fourth-largest international producer and exporter), holds great weight in Kenya.<sup>29</sup> President Rouhani has stressed the importance of this link on several occasions: "Kenya is among the Islamic Republic's friends in Africa." Rouhani emphasised that the relationship allows the opening to new markets in circumstances of sanctions, and Nairobi's growing relevance to the African and South Asian world on the eve of the role that it will play within the map drawn by China's Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>30</sup>

## Defence ties: Ideological influences and the military

Due to the constant external threats that the Islamic Republic of Iran receives and the nationalist and anti-imperialist pillars that politically support it, including the Islamic principles of brotherhood and transnationalisation of Shiism, there have been several attempts of ideological, political and military influence in areas of the African continent. These may be a minority in relation to other actors, but are not to be underestimated since they may appear as a new scenario for indirect confrontation.

In search of an extension to their influence, Iranians have worked through soft power and asymmetric tactics, methods that, in addition to being clandestine,

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28 Web of Science, <https://login.webofknowledge.com>.

29 Cultural Council Embassy of IR of Iran, "Iran-Kenya Bilateral Relations," <https://www.irankenya.org/embassy-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-nairobi/iran-kenya-bilateral-relations/>.

30 Ibid.



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lead to much less wear on their conventional forces and arsenals. Thus, certain indirect operations have been used in their favour. Essential points on the continent, such as the African Horn or countries in the east, have been associated with Tehran as platforms for the supply through the Red Sea or North Africa of forces allied with their interests, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon or the Houthis in Yemen.<sup>31</sup> It has been explicitly underscored that once particular areas were obtained by the Houthis in the Yemeni war, especially the coastal domains north of the Bab El-Mandeb Strait, Iran would enjoy enhanced control and influence in the area, such as the Al Hudaydah Port.

By 2018, the Muslim population was still considerable in number in relation to these countries: Sudan (97 per cent), Chad (55.7 per cent), Niger (98.3 per cent), Mali (92.4 per cent), Mauritania (99.2 per cent), Senegal (96.4 per cent), Guinea-Bissau (42.8 per cent), Guinea (84.2 per cent), Sierra Leone (78 per cent), Ivory Coast (36.9 per cent), Burkina Faso (58.9 per cent), Nigeria (48.8 per cent), Djibouti (97 per cent) and Somalia (99 per cent).<sup>32</sup> This panorama does not mean an open influence, since the majority represents Sunni Islam. However, there are small communities that can identify with the postulations arising from Tehran at the time of integration with educational programmes, clerical or otherwise.

In East Africa, there are communities of Lebanese Shia Muslims whose ties to Iran are prominent. In Nigeria, the nation with the highest number of Shia Muslims in the region, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria is notable, which promotes Shiism (especially in the north). Although the economic sanctions against Iran paused the financing of proselytising activities, the educational, cultural and religious ties have benefitted from the funding. This is the case for Iranian organisations for the development of activities in the continent, for example, the Iranian Red Crescent Society and the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, with a presence in several states, Muslim and non-Muslim,

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31 Shahvar, Sholi, "The Islamic Republic of Iran's policy, involvement, and activity in Africa," Online Library, March 26, 2020, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/dome.12202>.

32 Ibid.

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including Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Comoros, Kenya, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Uganda.<sup>33</sup> These organisations are involved in humanitarian projects such as land and maritime incidents, poverty, immigration, environment, healthcare programmes and social services.

Likewise, although the Islamic presence is a minority in South Africa, agreements on military and defence matters are considerable. In 2019, interests were ratified in these areas when agreements were signed, when the respective representatives of the defence ministries met in May 2019.<sup>34</sup> Among the points agreed were the following: commitments to international and regional peace, security and stability, the fight against terrorism, mutual cooperation in maritime security, training courses and exchanges of experience in the fight against organised crime.<sup>35</sup>

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33 Ibid.

34 Council on Foreign Relations, "Shedding Light on the Iran-South Africa Relationship," December 17, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/shedding-light-iran-south-africa-relationship>.

35 Tasnim News, "Iran Eyes Strategic Defense Ties with South Africa," May 5, 2019, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2019/05/05/2004963/iran-eyes-strategic-defense-ties-with-south-africa>.

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## Conclusions

The main political and diplomatic tendencies of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards Sub-Saharan Africa have been characterised by the search for new extra-regional allies capable of recognising the role of Iran as an actor with nationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-interference positions.

They have not been essential links, but they are vital for the existence of said countries since they act as alternatives to the harsh political and commercial pressures from extra-continental powers. Simultaneously, they feed the interests of international expansion and influence. Such is the case of the new opportunities introduced by China's Belt and Road Initiative, specifically the opening of new markets under sanctions, such as the one granted by Kenya to the African and South Asian region.

In this regard, links have revolved around bilateral recognition and respect, balanced collaboration, strategic agreements and the promotion of South-South cooperation, a contextual option posing a threat to dwindling unipolarity.

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