



# The future of Iranian expansion in Africa: The impossible challenge





Iran took an interest in the African continent in the 1960s and began to establish diplomatic relations with African countries in the framework of the general coordination of the international and regional situation after the Cold War. Iran was considered the western camp led by the United States. But this interest declined after the 1979 revolution, the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, the rearrangement of new conditions in the country, the Iranian war with Iraq, and then the new Iranian regime began to look carefully at the common relations with African countries(1).

## Why is Iran interested in the continent of Africa?

The continent is a fertile ground for all intellectual and religious activities, because of the geographical nature and the easy and open African personality, which makes it easy prey to the trap of Shiism and others. The West Africa region has a population of over 300 million people and represents the largest Muslim bloc on the African continent, which has enticed Iran to expand at the expense of tolerant Sunni Islam. Iran has sought to extend its influence on the African continent in recognition of the importance of the continent to the Arab neighborhood on the one hand and the important role expected of the continent in terms of energy in the future.(2) Expansion in the Horn of Africa is considered the strategic guarantor of the Iranian project to encircle the Gulf states from the other Mediterranean coast, the Iranian arms supply lines from «the Houthis», and Hezbollah. The war of piracy, which many countries collapsed under the pretext of protecting its reformer at the end of the last decade of this century Announced the presence of maritime in the region

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and soon culminated in the establishment of the multi-tasking at the port (Massawa) Eritrean on «Bab al-Mandab»(3).

Iran has recognized that it is trying hard to control the entrances of the Red Sea at the Straits of Aden off the coast of Yemen. Iranian policy makers also see the search for new places of expansion, far from the conflict zone, very vital, taking advantage of the French experience when Paris fell, the Vichy government remained in Algeria, and the export strategy of the revolution came within the framework of finding the "alternative homeland" Iran struck an existential threat.

## Iranian ways of spreading in Africa





# Iran's expansionist strategy in Africa(4)

Tehran's new strategy towards Africa depends on building civil and political influence before turning that influence into a military force in the orbit of Iran's supreme interests. But the limits of the old colonial powers, which are Africa's sphere of influence, do not allow Iran to be the size of a nation with armies. It is limited to militia tactics, starting with the formation of rebel cells that turn into gangs, then militias, and then integrate these militias as a reality on the ground in the form of a regular army. As was the case with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the popular crowd in Iraq, and Houthi in Yemen.

## Map of Iran's influence in Africa

From the former Iranian president "Hashemi Rafsanjani," who was found on the continent to spread the scope of Shiite ideas, and compete with the Sunni opponent. The map of Iranian influence in Africa can be divided geographically into three regions, namely West Africa, the Nile Basin, East Africa, and the South and North Africa, which we will explain as follows:(5)

1-The area of "Islamic Belt in West Africa". West Africa is the geographical region that stretches from Mauritania in the west to Niger in the east, from Mauritania in the north to Liberia to the south, and from there to Nigeria. Iran has benefited from the characteristics of this region to strengthen its relations with its countries, especially that it represents an Islamic bloc in the African continent, since the Islamic religion is the official religion of the majority of the population. This demographic structure has created a fertile environment for «spreading Shiism».



2-The region of the "Nile Basin and East Africa", and through this region, Iran was able to use the term "maritime jihad" from the transfer of the battle from the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Gulf, to the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden and Bab al-Mandeb between Eritrea and Yemen, which is the narrowest corridor in the Gulf of Aden, Through the establishment of a military base in the Eritrean port of Assab.

Maritime jihad is an Iranian strategy, which means policies that enable the state to take control or a strong presence near the shipping lanes in anticipation of any military confrontation that threatens its interests. As well as the opening of sea and land corridors that facilitate access to crisis areas in the Middle East by securing an Iranian presence close to these areas and providing bargaining chips in the Middle East. This represented Iran's interest in Sudan for a strong presence in the Red Sea and its relations with Eritrea, Djibouti and Yemen.





3-South and North Africa, Iran has exploited the Muslim minority in South Africa because of its economic strength and role in the growth of the national economy. In addition to the tendency of the minority to the Iranian role in the face of Zionism. Iran also sees South Africa as Africa's most powerful economy and Africa's political gateway to the world, especially after its alliance with India and Brazil. In North Africa, Iran is based on the Muslim majority of the North African population, and Algeria is the focus of Iranian presence in the Arab Maghreb countries, despite the tension.

## Tools of Iranian penetration in Africa

Iran has pursued a range of soft policies that have helped to penetrate Africa, including development assistance in the areas of technology, energy, oil exploration and exploration, oil refinery maintenance, petrochemical and gas industries, development of agricultural and health sectors, dam construction, Oil for African countries at cheap prices compared to the global market. These policies have contributed to the growth of trade between Iran and African countries.(6)

### - Exploitation of religion:

The second tool used by Iran to penetrate Africa is the religious tool of spreading Shiism. The data reveal the extent of the spread of Shiism in the countries of the African continent, while statistics published by other Shiite sites, the number of Shiites in the West African region amounted to about 7 million. Shiites in West Africa supply Lebanon's Hezbollah with about \$ 200 million a year to Lebanese Shiites, migrants in Africa, and have set up centers to spread Shiism in Africa.



In order to spread Shiism within the African countries, Iran has been interested in attracting influential Islamic leaders in African countries, building educational institutions and advocacy and press publications, whose mission is to spread the Shiite doctrine.

- Military support:

The third tool used by Iran to penetrate into Africa is the military tool, the supply of weapons, training and other activities in secret ways because of the sensitivities it raises, and Sudan was one of the most important countries that benefited from this military aspect.





The military complex between Sudan and Iran, the complex of "Yarmouk military" industries near Khartoum, and that the plant was designed to be the production line of Iran's strategic reserves of missiles, in the event of any military confrontation, in return for the Sudanese army to acquire "missiles Shihab".

Field reports confirmed that there were 14 cases in which Iranian weapons were found in areas of conflict within the continent, of which only 4 were with governments, while the remaining 10 were with rebel groups, which strained relations between Iran and some African countries. Reports have also been uncovered of activities an Iranian weapons smuggling network called Unit 190, which includes about 24 people, and is smuggling weapons to the Central African Republic and Yemen.

## Iranian gains from incursions into Africa

Iran has achieved many political and strategic gains because of "the mutual influence of Iranian political discourse and the integrated recruitment of foreign policy instruments." The most important of these gains is to help Iran emerge from international and regional isolation. In addition to ensuring that African countries vote in their favor in many cases before international forums, or at least abstain from voting, especially with regard to human rights issues and the nuclear file. In addition, the volume of Iranian trade and investment in the continent, and access to uranium for the nuclear program.



As an example, all West African states, except Liberia and Togo, are reserving the UN resolution on human rights violations during Iran's 2009 presidential election and most African countries have issued statements confirming their support for Iran's right to possess nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.(7)

## The future of the Iranian project in Africa

Overall, Iran's role in Africa faces many challenges over the past years, notably Tehran's failure to meet many of its economic commitments to some African countries. This situation was evident in the Sudanese situation, Saudi Arabia became the largest investor in Sudan, and relations deteriorated between Tehran and Khartoum.



International pressures aimed at curbing Iranian influence in Africa also posed a new challenge to Iran's expansion, resulting in the closure of Iranian cultural centers in Sudan and the participation of some African countries in a military operation against "the Huthis" in Yemen. As well fear of spreading "Shiism", and strained relations with the Kingdom of Morocco, Nigeria and Senegal.

Certainly the expansionist Iranian project has its own plans and common in the African continent. It is strange, however, that the Shiite expansion is characterized by its presence in the Sunni areas only, and absent in the other countries with a large population such as China, Russia, Europe, and the Indian subcontinent, which is the closest to him in terms of geography, which makes the Iranian project a bad project and demolition.

## Resources

- 1-Iranian presence in Africa: motives and objectives- <https://goo.gl/BQLgf5>
- 2-Iranian incursion into Africa: objectives and tools- Arafa al-Bandari- <https://goo.gl/LQhTQN>
- 3-Iran's Awkward Diplomacy in Africa- By: Alex Vatanka- <https://goo.gl/RN2Mfu>
- 4-Saudi Arabia and Iran fight for Africa's loyalty By Tomi Oladipo- <https://goo.gl/MPRm5L>
- 5-Iran Seeks Closer Economic Ties with Africa to Minimize U.S. Sanctions- <https://goo.gl/rkRPnm>

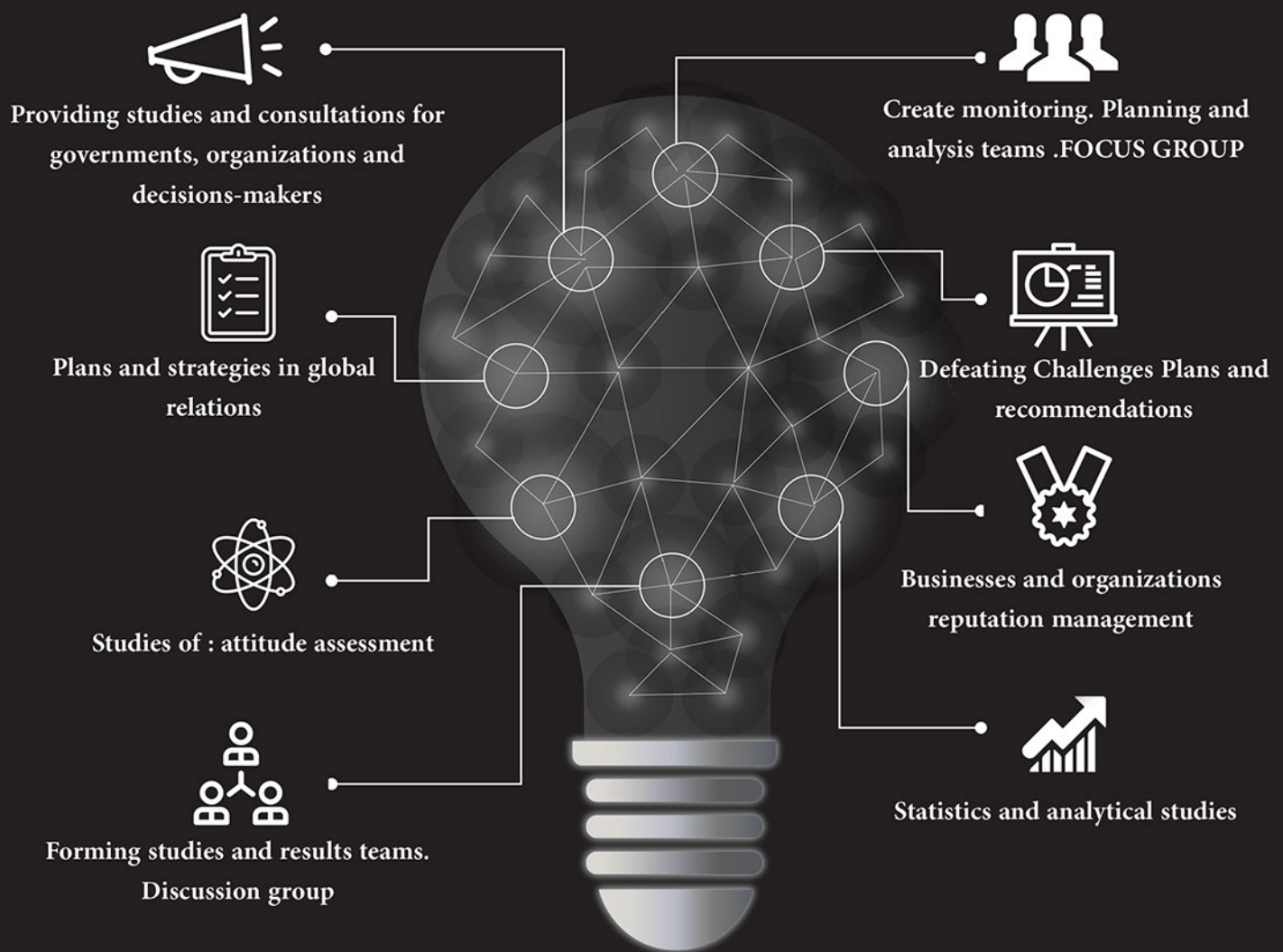


6-Iran in the Horn of Africa: Outflanking U.S. Allies- <https://goo.gl/NTjZCh>

7-Middle East's leaders cross the Red Sea to woo east Africa- <https://goo.gl/3XR3KM>



# What We Do



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