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The Ezri Center for Iran & Persian Gulf Studies

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**Iranian Advances into Africa**

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Attached please find the 32<sup>nd</sup> issue of *Persian Gulf Observer*, titled "*Iranian Advances into Africa*" by The Ezri Center's research fellow, Dr. Glen Segell.

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# Iranian Advances into Africa

By Glen Segell

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Since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has made enormous efforts to export its revolution around the world. Iranian diplomats, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and subordinate organs are engaged in spreading this and Shiite doctrine. [1]

One of the most aggressive new advances in this context is into Africa. Iran sees Africa as a strategically important region for several reasons. Nearly 45 percent of the continent's 1.2 billion persons are Muslim. [2] As elsewhere in the Muslim world the major is Sunni. Tehran realizes that the lack of presence and power there presents a serious impairment to its pursuit to dominate the Islamic world. More than 25% of the world's states and hence members of the United Nations are African states, 54 out of a total of 194. Iran seeks support from African governments in the U.N. Security Council and other international bodies to circumvent economic sanctions. Iran seeks African raw materials such as uranium resources and a market to export its oil. A strong presence on the African continent would also provide Iran with a network and routes for logistical support to radical groups it promotes in the Middle East. Africa's Shiite communities are a potential source of financial and human support for Tehran's Hezbollah proxy in Lebanon and others. [3]

To meet these goals Iranian leaders are collaborating with African leaders to ensure that the interests of both are met with little concern of any for the development, sustainability and poverty reduction and wellbeing in African countries. Iran is advancing a strong presence in Africa primarily through financial and commercial support to economically weak African governments or through bribes to corrupt leaders and dictators, all of whom ignore or underestimate the long-term threat posed by the Iranian-promoted militant Islam. Iran is also advancing popular support within African communities to influence the policies of their governments with little in return except radicalization.

This has enabled Iran to engage in direct subversion, terrorism, and organized crime. Some examples of documented Iranian radical activities in Africa are as follows, with evidence of substantial more of the same. In 2003 *Union Transport Africaines* Flight 141 crashed on take-off in Benin West Africa killing Hezbollah officials carrying US\$2 million in contributions to Beirut. [4] In 2010 weapons destined for Hamas were seized in Nigeria. [5] In 2012 terrorist suspects tied to Iran were arrested in Kenya plotting to attack Israeli and Western targets, after they were caught collecting video footage of the Israeli embassy. [6] In June 2013, a Hezbollah armory was uncovered in Nigeria. [7] In 2016, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration uncovered how Hezbollah operatives used their network in West African countries to launder drug money. [8] In February 2018 two Lebanese citizens were arrested in South Africa when illegally buying digital components used in drones by Hezbollah. [9]

Iran advances popular support within African Muslim communities to influence the policies of their governments toward Iran. Tehran advances the cultural attachés in Iranian embassies to play an important role in facilitating and/or organizing activities in each country and in coordinating with local partners. To win the hearts and minds of African Muslims, the Iranian regime and its

institutions organize conferences, conduct religious and political events, work with local partners, and run more than one hundred Islamic centers, schools, seminaries, and mosques in more than thirty African countries with thousands of students, clerics and missionaries.

Spearheading this effort are the Al-Mustafa International University, [10] which trains foreign clerics and missionaries around the world and the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization [11] that coordinates the activities of various Iranian organizations responsible for religious and cultural activities abroad either under their own name or by subordinate organizations that operate a large number of mosques and Islamic centers across Africa and collaborate with local Islamic centers.

Tehran also advances two of its charities, the Iranian Red Crescent [12] and the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee [13] in more than a dozen African countries, including Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Comoro Islands, Niger, Mali, Sierra Leon, Ivory Coast, Comoro, Uganda, and Somalia. Although these provide some assistance there is a price to pay in return. Iranian assistance traps the African people into a dependency where they are forced to disseminate Tehran's fundamentalist ideology, and generate grassroots support for its foreign policy, its position in the Islamic world, and its quest to dominate the Middle East. They are required to participate in street demonstrations and in some cases, also in violent battles locally against other religions and globally. Iran uses Africa as a recruiting pool for the IRGC's Quds Force and other Iranian institutions responsible for terrorism or military activities abroad, for example in Syria.

Concluding by turning to Iran's goals in advancing into Africa and the consequences. There is the ongoing destruction of the traditional culture, religion and education of African states through Iranian advances of their own but as with Christian missionaries Africa tends to blend and merge their own with the foreign. So there is no evidence that Iran is succeeding in converting any substantial masses to Shiite Islam. Africa's Shiite communities not particularly wealthy so they cannot provide financial support for Tehran's Hezbollah proxy in Lebanon and others. Too be sure Iran with its oil is far wealthier than any of the African Shiite communities.

There is a regressive impact of the collaboration of African leaders with Iranian leaders. Iran has succeeded in gaining more support from African leaders in debates and votes the United Nation's General Assembly, but this has not prevented or circumvented sanctions. There is a radicalization of the African population. In this Iran is succeeding in using Africa for networks and routes for logistical and human support to radical groups it promotes in the Middle East.

The bottom line in a cost-benefit analysis Iran is failing in its goals and Africa is suffering from Iranian advances. The evidence of Iranian advances into Africa is a real threat to peace on the continent, resulting in the material disaster of societies matched by moral and political debilitation.

## Notes

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