



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

July 29, 2009

Iran's activity in East Africa, the gateway to the Middle East and the African continent



Overview

1. **Africa** is an important target for Iranian President Ahmadinejad's ambitious foreign policy. In recent months Iran has shown increasing interest in Africa, following its efforts to establish its presence in Latin America, the United States' back yard. In February 2009 Ahmadinejad visited several East African countries (including the Comoro Islands, Djibouti and Kenya). During his visits he stressed Iran's willingness to help African countries strengthen their independence and to form a united front to oppose "Western oppression." Various Iranian figures repeatedly spoke of the future of Iran's political relations with African countries and the many economic and political opportunities those relations might present.

2. Iran is particularly interested in relations with **East African** countries, especially those in the **Horn of Africa** and lying along the **Red Sea**, primarily **Sudan**. It regards East Africa as fertile ground for its political, military and economic activities. East Africa is part of Iran's overall strategy, which aspires to hegemony and the status of a major power in the Middle East (in key locations such as the Persian Gulf,¹ Syria and Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian arena) and in countries in Latin America,² the African continent and Asia. In practical terms, Iranian strategy in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and neighboring countries and those lying along the Red Sea has the following objectives:

- i) **To establish its political influence** as part of the anti-West axis of the third world countries it is trying to set up to lessen Western – primarily American – influence.
- ii) **To promote its economic interests**, in view of the sanctions harming Iran on other continents.
- iii) **To export the Islamic revolution** through Iranian Islamic organizations or cultural centers which distribute Shi'ite propaganda, and to recruit the local population by exploiting the potential in the Muslim countries and in the Muslim communities living in East Africa.
- iv) **To establish a physical Iranian presence on land and at sea** in countries and ports capable of threatening vital sea lanes during a crisis, especially at the **entrance to the Red Sea**.

¹ For further information about Iran's activity in the Persian Gulf, see our July 19, 2009 bulletin "Iran tightens its security collaboration with Persian Gulf countries in an attempt to secure regional hegemony. It also strives to moderate the tension with its neighbors and to prevent them from being used as a launching pad for attacks against Iran." http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e009.pdf.

² For further information about Iran's activity in Latin America, see our April 19, 2009 bulletin "Iran increases its political and economic presence in Latin America, defying the United States and attempting to undermine American hegemony. It also foments radical Shi'ite Islamization and exports Iran's revolutionary ideology, using Hezbollah to establish intelligence, terrorism and crime networks, liable to be exploited against the United States and Israel" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e006.pdf.

v) **To create naval and continental corridors leading to Iran's central arenas of confrontation** in the Middle East, which can be used to smuggle **weapons and terrorist operatives**. Particularly important to Iran is **Sudan, which can be used as a broker to transfer military equipment through Egypt to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip**.

3. Important weapons in Iran's arsenal for achieving political influence are **expanding economic ties and oil diplomacy**. Iran attempts to establish economic ties with East Africa (and Africa in general) and offers various projects in agriculture and energy, and by building dams, roads, housing, etc. It exploited its political influence in **Sudan** to build a center for directing **subversive and terrorist activities**. Its targets are **North Africa** in general and **Egypt** in particular, and Iran's rivals in the Middle East (**Israel and the pro-Western Arab states**). Another important Iranian weapon is **subversion**. One obvious example was the **Hezbollah network which operated in Egypt**, which Iran used to transfer weapons from Sudan to Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, and which tried to encourage terrorist attacks in Sinai and Israel.

4. **The sea is an important component in Iranian policy**. At its southern access to the strategically important Red Sea, Iran has strengthened its naval relations with **Yemen**. In June 2009 an agreement was signed allowing Iranian battleships to anchor in the port of **Aden**, part of an Iranian task force to fight Somali pirates. They are expected to join the six Iranian battleships already patrolling the **Somali** waters to protect Iranian cargo ships. Tehran is also strengthening its ties with African countries lying on the Red Sea, among the **Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti** (See map below) to enable it to establish an active naval presence in the Red Sea leading to the Gulf of Eilat and the Suez Canal. Iran is liable to exploit its use of the ports in those countries for terrorist and subversive political activity against Israel and moderate Arab countries and to respond, should its nuclear facilities be attacked.

5. This document includes the following sections:

- i) A general description of Ahmadinejad's African policy
- ii) Sudan
- iii) Eritrea
- iv) Kenya
- v) Somalia
- vi) The Comoro Islands, Djibouti and Tanzania



The Horn of Africa and the entrance to the Red Sea.

A general description of Ahmadinejad's African policy

6. Iranian President Ahmadinejad, who on June 12 was elected to a second term of office in a disputed election, was supposed to participate at the African Union convention recently held in Libya. It was supposed to be his first appearance at an official convention outside Iran (with the exception of a short visit to Russia immediately after the elections, which had been planned in advance). In the end, however, he cancelled. He was to have told the assembled delegates about the need for the African states to form a united front led by Iran against "global imperialism which still covets African natural resources" and to integrate Africa into his ambitious foreign policy, **meant to create an (Islamic) alternative to the West.**

7. Ahmadinejad used his foreign policy, **which is aimed far beyond the Middle East**, was one of the key issues on the propaganda agenda during the last election campaign. His rivals criticized the resources expended on foreign policy and on the unsophisticated, defiant way he conducts it at the expense of the Iranian people. On the other hand, immediately after the election, he said that during his current term of office **his foreign policy would be far more aggressive and assertive** regarding forming an anti-imperialist front. In the middle of July 2009 he gave a speech in Mashad using religious messianic terminology when referring to his foreign policy, saying that "this is the time for the reappearance of the

Mahdi [the prophesized redeemer of Shi'ite Islam]...We must work shoulder to shoulder to build Iran and to fulfill its global revolutionary mission...through strong involvement in international affairs."³



"The time of the Mahdi...a global revolutionary mission"
(Iranian president's website, July 18, 2009).

8. **The African continent integrates well into Ahmadinejad's policies** and his ambition to lead an anti-imperialistic front. On many occasions he has noted that Africa was "oppressed" by colonialism for years and that now is the time to for the African continent to formulate, with Iranian support, its own independent policy. Before he left for his visit to Africa in February 2009 he said that "Iran enjoys close political, economic and cultural relations with countries in Africa" (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, February 24, 2009). In Kenya on February 25, 2009, he said that Africa was determined and vigilant and would not allow "the hooligan powers to return and rob its countries.

9. In addition to ideological-political-security considerations, Iran also has many **economic interests**, in East Africa and in Africa in general. The Iranian deputy foreign minister for African affairs, **Muhammad Reza Baqeri**, asked the private sector in Iran to increase cooperation with Africa, saying that it would be advantageous for Iranian companies. "Iran has a comprehensive political, economic and cultural plan for Africa...That is also the reason the great powers still covet the continent" (Fars News Agency, Iran, May 17, 2009). In a similar vein, the **Iranian foreign minister** noted that Africa was a top priority for Iranian foreign policy. The Iranian president called Africa "the richest continent in the world," and

³ <http://www.president.ir/fa/?ArtID=17235>

therefore, he said, Iran had to increase cooperation with it (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, November 12, 2007).⁴

10. In May 2009 **Hussein Hussein**, the director of the organization for developing commerce with Arab and African countries, told a seminar devoted to Iranian-African cooperation that Iran had formulated a program for 48 projects to broaden its ties with African countries. Among the projects were air links, transportation and the founding of joint banks. One of the countries involved was Kenya, which Iran regards as a gateway to other African countries (ISNA, May 29, 2009). On November 12, 2007, Iran held a similar convention regarding possible Iranian-African trade relations, in which Kenya and Sudan also participated.

Sudan



11. **Iran regards Sudan as particularly important because of its geostrategic position.** It is physically close to the Arab world, especially Egypt, and can serve as the back door into Black Africa and North Africa. Terrorists from the Gaza Strip, Egypt and the entire African continent can meet there using Sudanese territory as a launching pad for subversive activities. Those activities include support for terrorism against Iran's enemies, whether Israel or the pro-Western Arab countries, especially Egypt.

12. Over the years Iran's investment in Sudan has proved itself to be **particularly successful**, standing the test of time and surviving international pressure and internal Sudanese crises. It has allowed Iran to display its might and influence to both the Middle East and Black Africa, with the result that a kind of competition has developed between Iran and the Arab states, both sides trying to woo Sudan, with Iranian efforts currently more successful.

⁴ Iran aspires to gain access to Africa's natural resources, among them their contribution to its nuclear program: Iran has attempted to purchase uranium from a number of African countries (Namibia, Libya, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, and others).to increase its reservoir.

Milestones in bilateral relations

13. There have **close political-security and ideological-religious ties between Iran and Sudan** since Omar al-Bashir seized power in 1989. He took over the regime in a kind of Sudanese Islamic revolution, deeply influenced by the revolution in Iran ten years previously. Behind the Sudanese revolution was **Hassan al-Turabi**, who wanted first in Sudan and later in East Africa to establish a Sunni model of the radical Shi'ite revolution in Iran and to be the regional Khomeini. Al-Turabi was the moving spirit behind establishing Sudanese-Iranian relations. Iran, which at that time had barely recovered from eight years of war with Iraq, was looking for an Arab ally which had not supported Saddam Hussein in the war. It found that ally in Sudan, which at that time and to this day shared Iran's anti-American, anti-Israeli ideology. The alliance between the two, founded at the end of the 1980s, survived the split between Bashir's regime and Hassan al-Turabi at the end of the 1990s.

14. In 1991, in a goodwill gesture, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Iranian president at the time, visited Sudan with a delegation of more than 150 members. The two countries signed agreements, according to which Iran agreed to fund the establishment of a "popular defense militia" similar to the Basij, the militias of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (which have played a key role in suppressing the demonstrations held after the last election). The objective of the popular defense militia was to ensure the survival of the Sudanese regime.

15. In October 2004 Mohammad Khatami, at that time president of Iran, visited Sudan. In 2009 Iran criticized the international warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for the arrest of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, calling it "unjust and motivated by political considerations" (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, March 9, 2009). In return, the Sudanese leadership supported Iran's right to nuclear energy. In March 2009, a short time after Iran defended Omar al-Bashir, the head of the Iranian Majlis (parliament), Ali Larijani, visited Sudan, which surprised even the member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission (Itimad i-Melli, March 30, 2009), and met with al-Bashir.



Former Iranian President Khatami visits Sudan (October 5, 2009).

16. In January 2007, the Sudanese defense minister visited Iran, and in September 2007 he said that Iran was one of Sudan's main suppliers of weapons. On March 5, 2008, the Iranian defense minister headed a delegation of high-ranking officials to Khartoum and met with the Sudanese minister, who described his country's relations with Iran as "model." Meeting with the chairman of the Sudanese parliament, the Iranian defense minister said that he was "very satisfied with the various aspects of the bilateral military relations" between Iran and Sudan, both regional and internationally, and that for the past ten the military cooperation between the two had made a decisive contribution to strengthening the ties between them (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, March 5, 2008). He criticized "the corrupt and mistaken position of the powers having hegemony [i.e., the West, particularly the United States], which create chaos and anarchy all over the world" (ISNA, March 8, 2008). **During his visit the two countries signed a military cooperation pact.**

Sudan as a focus for Iranian subversion

17. Over the years Sudan has gradually become a magnet for radical Islamic organizations in Egypt and other North African countries. Terrorists have come to Sudan to meet with operatives from Iranian intelligence and the Revolutionary Guards, and to seek help from the religious networks and Iranian cultural centers in Sudan. Iran maintains relations with the Egyptian jihad organization and Al-Jumaah al-Islamiyyah, the Tunisian Al-Nahda, the Algerian FIS and Islamic movements from Morocco and Mauritania. Iran also has close ties with Hezbollah, and with Hamas, for which it smuggles weapons into the Gaza Strip (See below).

18. One of Iran's subversive activities is sending weapons to Sudan. Some of them are destined for the Gaza Strip (primarily for Hamas), some for radical Islamic organizations in North African countries and some are used for training in Sudan itself. A branch of the **Iranian Cultural Center** operates in Khartoum and is used as a meeting place by Islamic networks and as a center for disseminating Iranian propaganda and Shi'ite literature (Iran also uses the such methods to promote its political influence in Latin America). Sudan gives Iran a free hand to use its territory for subversion.



The website of the Iranian Cultural Center in Khartoum.

19. During the first half of 2009 Iran's subversive activities in Egypt and Sudan, direct and indirect through Hezbollah, were clearly illustrated by two incidents:

- i) **A weapons convoy was attacked in Sudan, transferring arms from Iran for Hamas in the Gaza Strip.** The attack drew world attention to the covert activities Iran has been carrying out in Sudan for years, far from the public eye. Weapons are smuggled from Iranian ports (e.g., Bandar Abbas) and from there they sail to Sudan (most likely Port Sudan) where they are transported overland to Sinai and from there transferred into the Gaza Strip through the tunnels in the Rafah area. In January 2009 American (and Arab) media reported that Israel had attacked a convoy of arms in **Sudan** meant for the Gaza Strip. According to the media reports, Israeli planes attacked a convoy composed of 20 trucks loaded with weapons. The attack was reportedly carried out in the desert southwest of the Sudanese city of Port Sudan, and that 39 people were killed

(CBS, March 25, 2009). According to other reports, **the arms shipment was sent from Iran** and paid for by the Imam Khomeini Foundation. It included long-range Fajr missiles, which if launched from the Gaza Strip could reach Tel Aviv (*Time Magazine*, March 29, 2009).⁵



Pictures allegedly taken at the scene of the attack in Sudan (Al-Jazeera TV, March 26, 2009).

⁵ For further information about Iranian support for Hamas, see our January 12, 2009 bulletin "[Iranian Support of Hamas.](#)"



The route taken by the weapons from Iran to the Gaza Strip.

ii) At the end of 2008 a Hezbollah network was exposed in Egypt by the security forces. It smuggled arms into the Gaza Strip, and encouraged both terrorist attacks against Israel and the subversion of the Egyptian regime. Initially the affair was not covered by the media. However, in early April 2009 the Egyptian regime decided to go public and revealed that the members of the network had been interrogated and that Iranian-prompted Hezbollah activities on Egyptian soil had serious implications. The network was perceived by the Egyptians as an Iranian “conspiracy” to destabilize the Egyptian regime and to promote Iranian strategic goals as part of its aspiration to regional hegemony. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, regarded by Egypt as a tool in the hands of the Iranian regime, was severely dealt with by the Egyptian media, which called him “the monkey sheikh,” “an Iranian agent,” and “leader of militias of the Iranian party in Lebanon.” The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was also accused of

having ties to the network and supporting it.⁶ At the end of July 2009 Egypt handed down indictments for 26 of the detained Hezbollah network operatives for belonging to a terrorist organization working to carry out terrorist attacks and to provide Hamas in the Gaza Strip with weapons.



Hassan Nasrallah admits that a Hezbollah operative smuggled arms and “fighters” to Egypt (Al-Manar TV, April 11, 2009).

20. The Egyptian media, both establishment and independent, and senior Egyptian figures headed by **President Hosni Mubarak**, used the exposure of the Hezbollah network to **attack Iran viciously**, accusing it of responsibility for a **“conspiracy” against Egypt** and of exploiting the Palestinian issue to **further its own regional interests**. The Egyptian regime made political capital **internally** by accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of being connected to the Hezbollah network. Egypt’s media attack on Iran marked a new stage in the confrontation between Egypt and Iran, which handles terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, and uses Sudan as a base from which to encourage terrorism and subversion.

21. Egyptian President **Hosni Mubarak** mentioned the affair and Iran’s part in it in a speech given in Ismailia on April 23 at a ceremony to honor the 27th anniversary of the liberation of the Sinai peninsula. He said that “we are aware of the connection between Egypt’s national security and the security and stability of the Middle East, the [Persian] Gulf, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean region, Sudan, the

⁶ For further information see our April 28, 2009 bulletin “Exposure of a Hezbollah network in Egypt: State of affairs, implications, and reactions in Egypt and in the Arab and Muslim world” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hezbollah_e011.pdf.

countries of the Nile Basin and Africa. **We adhere to our Arab identity and will not permit the interference of regional elements which oppose peace and push the region to the abyss [i.e., Iran].** Those elements aspire to impose their influence and agenda on our Arab world, they incite disputes within the Arab and Palestinian arenas and send their agents [i.e., Hezbollah] to the region **to threaten Egypt’s national security, to ignore its borders and to undermine its stability.**” He also sent Iran a direct threat, saying that “we say to them, we are completely **aware of your plots.** We will expose those plots and **respond accordingly.** Stop interfering in the Palestinian issue, and **beware the fury of Egypt and its people**” (Middle East News Agency, April 23, 2009).



Egyptian president at the ceremony marking the 27th anniversary of the liberation of the Sinai peninsula. He said: “...We will not permit the interference of regional elements which oppose peace and push the region to the brink of the abyss...” (Egyptian TV, April 23, 2009).

Kenya



Bilateral relations

22. Since Ahmadinejad was elected, **there has been a significant rapprochement between Iran and Kenya**. Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga visited Tehran in 2008. During the visit he declared that Kenya could profit from Iran's experience in nuclear energy and that Kenya was searching for alternate sources of energy to meet the country's demand for electricity.

23. Another example of the increasingly close relations between the two countries was **Ahmadinejad's visit to Kenya on February 24-25, 2009**, when he headed a 100-man delegation. It was the first visit of an Iranian president to Kenya since 1996. During the visit Ahmadinejad met with Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki and the prime minister, and a number of memoranda were signed. Ahmadinejad exploited the opportunity to call on the African states to ignore the international criticism of Iran and to improve their relations with it. He also exploited the visit to defame the West. In Mombasa he said that "the African governments should not allow the great powers of oppression to rob their countries again" (Mehr News Agency, Iran, February 26). He also said that "there are countries which claim that they are great nations and over the years they oppressed and exploited the developing countries, robbed them of their natural resources and denied them their liberty. The time has come for the developing countries of Asia and Africa to rise up and refuse [to accept] dictatorship" (Kenya TV, February 25, 2009). Kenya, however, made it clear that it was not interested in relations with Iran which would come at the expense of its ties to the United States.



Iranian President Ahmadinejad visits Kenya
 (Photo: Antony Njuguna for Reuters, February 24, 2009).

24. Iran and Kenya agreed to establish **sea routes between Bandar Abbas and Mombasa** and that an **Iranian commercial center would be built in Nairobi**. The media in Kenya reported that after the president' speech, Iran might help build a nuclear reactor to manufacture electricity. Joshua Musyimi, who heads an energy development project at the Kenyan Ministry of Planning, said that Kenya was looking for a partner to supply it with the knowhow necessary for developing nuclear energy. In the meantime, Iran has been involved in various energy projects in Kenya. The Kenyan government has already employed an Iranian company to build a hydroelectric plant north of Nairobi and a gas-powered power plant near Mombasa.

25. Iran will provide also Kenya with four million tons of crude oil (about 80,000 barrels a day). A senior figure in the Kenyan foreign minister said that "Iran wants to send its companies to Kenya to build roads and dams and to develop the medicinal industry." The Iranian delegation which accompanied Ahmadinejad also included businessmen from the private sector. According to the agreements signed during Ahmadinejad's visit, Iran lent Kenya \$10 million (Fars News Agency, Iran, March 6, 2009).

26. **In May 2009, Kenya's prime minister, Raila Odinga, paid a visit to Iran.** He told Ahmadinejad that the paper of understanding signed when Ahmadinejad was in Kenya had been ratified and would put Kenya on the fast tract to development and industrialization. He added that the two countries had agreed to increase their cooperation in education, research, the economy and health. In addition, previous agreements had been ratified which would allow Iranian companies to build cheap housing. The two countries agreed to set up task forces to implement the agreements in economics,

trade, banking, agriculture, education, energy, oil and industry, as well as agreements for political, cultural, health and housing cooperation.

27. **That same month Ahmadinejad's deputy visited Kenya.** He said that the most important issue on Iran's agenda was instituting diplomatic relations with the African countries, especially Kenya. "Iran is ready to expand its activity in Kenya in a way that will be suitable to both countries" and to support Kenya in agriculture, gas, housing and power plants.

Cultural and religious activity

28. Kenya has a large Muslim population, about half a million of whom are Shi'ites.⁷ They are easy prey for the spread of radical Iranian Shi'ite Islam. When Ahmadinejad arrived in the port city of Mombasa he was surrounded by thousands of Shi'ites shouting "Allahu Akbar" (Reuters, February 25, 2009).

29. Iran has a large cultural office in Kenya which operates alongside its embassies and is responsible for cultural and religious activity as well as for updating information about events in Iran. There is a branch of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization in Kenya, one of many in African countries. At the end of June 2009 the ICRO organized a week of Iran-Kenya friendship. In June it also initiated the Iran/Kenya Children's Friendship Week, which brought 211 children's books to Nairobi as well as movies, computer programs and pictures. The IRCO website issued invitations to various competitions in Iran about Qur'an memorization and other cultural activities intended to make Shi'ite Islam more attractive to Kenyan Muslims.

⁷ According to the CIA website, Kenya's population is 39 million, with about 10% Muslims. According to various sources half a million of the Muslims are Shi'ites.



Website of the Iranian cultural center in Kenya.

IRAN / KENYA
Children's Friendship Week

IRAN / KENYA
Children's Friendship Week

Children will have first-hand experience. Participants in Drawing, Painting and exhibition of Iranian Art and crafts books for children

Venue: Nairobi Jaffery Sports Club, Lavinton,
El Molo Drive Off James Gicharu Road.

Date: 29th June - 4th July, 2009

Time: 8.30 am - 4.30 pm

Entrance: Free

Schools Participation is by Booking
Iran Cultural Council

سازمان فرهنگ و ارتباطات اسلامی

وایتزنی فرهنگی جمهوری اسلامی ایران - نایروبی

اسلام | ایران | زبان و ادب فارسی



Iran/Kenya Children's Friendship Week (www.icro.ir).

Eritrea



30. Iran is interested in close relations with Eritrea because of the importance it gives to Muslim countries lying on the Red Sea. One of the milestones in the relations between the two countries was the **May 2008 visit of Isaias Afworki, the Eritrean president, in Iran and his meeting with Ahmadinejad.**

31. During the visit agreements were signed to strengthen the cooperation between the two countries. The agreements were for trade and investment and were signed by Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and the Eritrean ministers of economy and agriculture. Iranian businessmen also participated in the visit (Eritrean foreign ministry website, May 2008). The Iranian president said that “[our] two countries have a program to stand fast and oppose Western hegemony” and that Iran had offered to help Eritrea with its energy, industry and agriculture (Press TV website, May 20, 2009). The Eritrean foreign minister visited Iran and met with his Iranian counterpart Manouchehr Mottaki, who described the visit as a turning point in relations between the two countries and said that Iran would be able to help the Horn of Africa achieve security and stability (Press TV website, May 6, 2009).



The presidents of Iran and Eritrea (Mehr News Agency, Iran, May 2008).



Iran and Eritrea sign bilateral economic agreements (Eritrea foreign ministry website, May 2008).

32. During the visit of the Eritrean president, the chairman of the Senegalese parliament and the Ghanaian foreign minister were also present in Iran. In view of their presence, the conservative daily *Siasat-e-Ruz* printed a short op-ed piece about Iran's interests in having ties with the African countries. It said that the visits of senior African figures indicated the great importance with which Iran views developing relations with the African continent. According to the article, it was important for Iran to develop them because there were many Muslim countries in Africa with great economic potential which were ignored by the [Western] powers. The paper also noted that Organization of African Unity, with its many members, could be a beneficial ally for Iran in the international arena.

33. Other events in Iranian-Eritrean relations were: the finance ministers of both countries signed a memorandum of understanding to encourage foreign investments (*Tehran Times*, September 16, 2008). The Iranian minister said that Iran was prepared to let Eritrea profit from its experience and achievements in agriculture and mining. The Iranian bank for export development gave Eritrea \$35 million in credit to promote trade relations between the two countries. The Eritrean foreign minister expressed support for Iran's nuclear program when the Iranian minister visited the UN (Iranmania website, November 28, 2008). The Eritrean opposition democratic party said that "the president is playing with fire in his dealings with Iran and it may lead to serious [international] repercussions."

34. In recent months the relations between Iran and Eritrea made the headlines following unverified reports, especially from Eritrean opposition sources, that Iranian battleships and submarines were in the port of Assab, located at a strategic site at the entrance to the Red Sea. According to the sources, Iran

stationed soldiers and long-range missiles to protect an oil refining facility. The Eritrean leadership denied the reports.



The Eritrean port of Assab

Somalia



35. For Iran, **Somalia is another link in the chain of Iranian influence and presence in the Horn of Africa, at the entrance to the Red Sea.** Iran has also joined the list of countries whose shipping is endangered by the pirates operating off the Somali coast. On August 21, 2008, pirates seized an Iranian cargo ship on its way from China to Holland with 40,000 tons of iron (Fars News Agency, Iran, August 22, 2008). The hijacking occurred at the height of contacts between Iran and Somalia, and just as a new Somali ambassador had been appointed to Iran. On the occasion of the appointment Ahmadinejad said that "Iran knows the Somali people and will not avoid its commitment to defend the oppressed Somali nation" (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, July 31, 2008).

36. In view of the threat of piracy, the Iranian ambassador to the UN sent a letter to Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon stating that Iran would send two Iranian navy vessels to patrol the Somali coast and the Gulf of Aden for a period of five months. That would be done to fight the pirates operating in the area and to protect Iranian cargo ships⁸ (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, May 14, 2009). The presence of the Iranian navy near Somalia will enable Iran not only to protect its own ships, but to achieve wider freedom of movement in the region.



Iranian navy ship (Photo: ISNA, from a Payvand Iran News report, May 14, 2009).

37. The Iranian foreign minister told his Somali counterpart that Somalia's strategic location and its many natural resources were still coveted by the "arrogant great powers" and that their intervention was responsible for "Somalia's crisis and instability." He said that Iran was prepared to provide all the aid [necessary] to solve the Somali crisis. However, apparently the radical Sunni takeover led by **Shabab al Mujahideen**⁹ will present difficulties for relations between Somalia and Shi'ite Iran. However, Afghanistan showed that Iran does not hesitate to collaborate with extremist Sunni elements if it serves

⁸ According to a Security Council resolution various countries can send ships to the Somali coast and the Gulf of Aden to fight piracy and to that end may even enter Somalia's territorial waters.

⁹ **Shabab al Mujahideen** is a radical Islamic organization affiliated with the global jihad and a serious threat to the Somali regime. In 2008 the organization took control of several important cities in Somalia and carried out several attacks against establishment institutions (BBC, November 12, 2008). Organization spokesman Mukhtar Robow said that after the organization achieves its goals in Somalia it will broaden its activities to include other countries (Al-Jazeera TV, January 2, 2009). The organization is supported by Muslims and Somali emigrants because it opposes the Somali regime.

its purpose and reduces the regional influence of the West, and in this instance as well there may be a meeting of interests.

The Comoro Islands, Djibouti and Tanzania

The Comoro Islands



Map of the Comoro Islands

38. In June 2008 President Ahmadinejad met with Ahmed Najan al-Marzuki, the new Comoro Islands ambassador to Tehran. For Ahmadinejad it was an opportunity to call for more extensive relations between the two countries (Tehran Times, June 11, 2009).



The Comoro Islands ambassador and Ahmadinejad in Tehran (Mehr News Agency, Iran, June 11, 2008).

39. The Comoro Islands were Ahmadinejad's first stop on his African visit this year. He used the opportunity to sign memoranda of understanding "to broaden political ties and advance development and training projects in the Islands." He met with senior local figures and promised Iranian aid for various projects. From the Comoro Islands he went to Djibouti for the first visit of an Iranian president to the country (See below).



Ahmadinejad visits the Comoro Islands (Reuters, September 25, 2009).

Djibouti



40. Djibouti is important to Iran because of its strategic location in the African Horn, and relations with both Yemen and Djibouti give Iran a strategic presence on both sides of the entrance to the Red Sea and its commercial sea lanes. In September 2006 Ismail Omar Guelleh, the President of Djibouti, visited Iran. At a press conference held during the visit, Ahmadinejad said that the relations between the two countries were still in their infancy because “they have no mutual history.” However, he said, they had signed agreements for mutual investment in various projects and energy cooperation (Fars News Agency, Iran, September 5, 2009).



The president of Djibouti visits Iran (Fars News Agency, Iran, September 5, 2006).

41. During Ahmadinejad’s round of visits to East Africa in February 2009, he also visited Djibouti. The Iranian delegation which accompanied him proposed scientific, industrial and engineering aid to Djibouti to promote various projects. Iran also gave Djibouti a loan and helped it establish a center for professional training.



Iranian President Ahmadinejad visits Djibouti (Fars News Agency, Iran, February 24, 2009).

Tanzania



42. Iran also wants closer relations with Tanzania, another strategic East African country. In October 2008 the Tanzanian foreign minister visited Tehran and met with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki. During the visit Iran and Tanzania signed a memorandum of understanding whose objective was to strengthen the ties between the two countries. Iran expressed its readiness to help Tanzania, especially with its economy and agriculture (*The Guardian*, October 21, 2008). Ahmadinejad said that Iran and Tanzania had historical ties and that he welcomed Iran's increasing relations with Africa (*Iran Times*, October 20, 2008).

43. In January 2009 the Iranian and Tanzanian defense ministers signed an agreement to strengthen their mutual security activities. The Iranian defense minister asserted Iran's readiness to share its security experience with Tanzania (Fars News Agency, Iran, January 20, 2009).

44. In May 2009 Parviz Davoodi, Iranian vice president, visited Iran and met with Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete to discuss relations between the two countries. During the visit agreements concerning trade, agriculture and bilateral relations were signed. Davoodi said that Iran and Tanzania

had made impressive achievements to increase the ties between them, especially economic ties (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, May 12, 2009).



Iranian vice president greeted by an honor guard his arrival in Tanzania (Reuters, May 11, 2009).