

# Iran - South Africa Relations: Past Trends, Future Prospects

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## Abstract

In every country's policy settings, a realist and reasonable understanding of national power, features of the external environment, the dominant international and regional paradigms as well as environmental vulnerabilities and threats is required. The African continent has turned into a significant region in the aftermath of the cold war and the emergence of the regionalism era. One of the key actors in this continent is South Africa. This article examines the past trends in Iran's relations with Africa in general, and studies the significance of Iran's relations with South Africa in particular. The hypothesis is that for Iran, expansion of relations with an emerging regional power like South Africa advances national interests, strengthens south-south relations and reduces international and western pressures. The methodology of this research is one of explanatory-analytical; using the SWOT matrix, the points of strength and weakness of the Islamic Republic is studied with the ultimate aim of presenting solutions to policy-makers in political, social, cultural and economic sectors.

**Keywords:** South Africa, Emerging Powers, Iran, National Interests, Foreign Relations.

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## **Introduction**

Regions are currently one of the most important features of international politics. Region is a group of politically interdependent states who maintain collective identity. It may also refer to a collection of states that are linked to each other by geography or by common characteristics including levels of development and political institutions. Some experts regard regionalism a change in the international system and believe that “the world, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is experiencing new fractures in the nation-state system ... So there may occur an eminent change from the old Westphalian system to a new world order in which regional institutions play an important role in global governance” (Farrell & et.al, 2011: 19). After the Cold War, Rosow claimed that the world of diminished states’ capabilities should be replaced by “a federal model of regional and global cooperation” that enables us to institutionalize the “future era of regionalism” and propose it as a desirable pathway (Rosow, 1990: 3-7). Many intellectuals have expressed ideas about region and regionalism under titles like world of regions (Katzenstein), the world security as a result of regional security (Buzan, Alagappa and Ayoub), second regionalism and new regionalism. Such ways to address regions, suggest transformation of regions into important hubs of world politics (Fry & O'Hagan, 2011: 217). This drove Barry Buzan to acknowledge that “during the first decade after the Cold War, the structure of world politics took a 1+4 form in which the United States was regarded as the sole superpower with China, the EU, Japan and Russia as its great powers” (Buzan and

Waeber, 2009: 207). Elsewhere, he further expressed that “the social structure of relations among superpowers, will be completely different from what happened in 1945 to 1989. China and the EU, however, are not supposed to enter identity clashes with the US and their relations with this superpower will be more likely based on friendship/competition rather than conflict” (Buzan, 2010: 19).

Regionalism or regional integration has many advantages for states; among them economic development, gradual integration into the world economy, trade benefits, structural political and economic reforms, political security, increase in bargaining power and finally fairer distribution of information (Clive, 2005: 11). During the process of regional integration, the transnational-national cooperation increases domestic stability and security. The start of cooperation in subjects related to low-politics paves the way for political-security cooperation; regional cooperation can manage a region’s internal and external vulnerabilities and creates a foundations for regional security (Abdollah Khani, 2003; 126).

Other positive trends in regionalism are decreasing the traditional differences between developed and developing countries, creating necessary social culture which prepares states to enter world interactions and increase in trade both within and between regions. Since new regionalism is based on market, it increases investment and trade among states and, in sum, brings about a low-scale globalization (Mousavi, 2009: 129).

Perhaps the most well-known criteria for determining a region is geographical proximity, by which region is defined as a ‘collection of neighboring states’ (Muller, 1381; 5). In addition to geography, regions are defined based on high levels of political, economic, cultural, and military interactions. The forms of these interactions can be either positive (alliances or security cooperation) or negative (arms race and war) ways. Barry Buzan suggests the notion of “security complexes” based on the above concepts (Muller, 1381; 7). From this point of view, a region is a specific semi-system of security relations

between a group of states which are geographically close to each other (Buzan, 1378; 213). Louis Cantori and Steven Spiegel define region as 'a dependent system in international politics'.

They deal with international politics before anything and divided it into three spheres of global, regional and domestic. On this basis, three types of system (dominant, dependent and internal) are identified. The dependent system, includes mutual relations within a region, whilst the internal system encompasses the country and its organizations (Ghasemi, 1384; 185). As a result, a region is considered a part of the world that its constituting units are geographically adjacent and their foreign relations issues are related to one another. Common regional foreign policy is a result of activities and measures of all regional members. Although some members of a region may have extra regional interests; as a rule, the majority of any given region's members will remain incapable of gaining successes in other regions as long as they do not find their real status in their own region. From Cantori's viewpoint, region is defined as a combination of geographical proximity, high levels of interactions, institutional frameworks and cultural identity. Regionalism is analyzed based on the degree of social cohesion (language, ethnicity, race, culture, religion, history, awareness about common heritage) economic integration (trade patterns and economic complementarity) political integrity (regime type and ideology) and organizational consistency (existence of formal regional institutions).

Regional power is a concept posed after collapse of the bipolar system. In world hierarchical system, regional powers are actors with significant positions and functions. Øyvind Østerud, a researcher of this study field, assigns four characteristics to a regional power: A) geographically placed in a specific area, B) able to counter any alliance of other states in region, C) have significant influence in regional affairs, D) has the potential to turn into a great power on a global level due to its regional status and credibility (Flemes, 2007, 10). Furthermore, according to Max Schoeman, in order for a regional

power to act as a regional leader, it has to meet four prerequisites: 1- internal dynamism in politics and economics, 2- inclination and motivation 3- capacity to accept regional leadership 4- acceptance of the region by neighbors as well as a trans-regional acceptance (Schoeman, 2003; 353).

Daniel Flesmes, another researcher of regional powers, makes use of four primary criteria to define and distinguish regional powers.

**Table 1. Regional Power Elements from Flesmes Viewpoint**

	General qualifications of important elements	General qualifications of important elements
1	Leadership claim	Leadership of region's stability and security Leadership of region's economic growth and development
2	Necessary resources of power	Material: military, economic, technical, geographical and etc. Non-material: Ethical principles, values, norms and etc.
3	Foreign policy tools	Mandatory (material or non-material) Encouraging (material or non-material)
4	Acceptance by other states	Regional states Trans-regional influential powers

Source: Ghanbarloo, 2009: 60

In light of regionalism and implementation of mentioned regional policies in the two past decades, the world is experiencing creation of a bloc of states as emerging powers that have high rate of economic growth and have become new economic poles. They started off by playing a role in their adjacent regions (China in South East Asia, India in South Asia, Russia in its own neighborhood and also East Europe, Brazil in Latin and South America and South Africa in Africa); but later on, sought an expand their role on the trans-regional level. They have continued such trends by forming coalitions within blocs like Shanghai Cooperation Organization, IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) on the one hand and acting as alternatives to the international system and as the voice of south on the other hand.

The BRICS coalition is rooted in two phenomena: the first phenomenon is their economic growth, particularly the increase in their financial reserves during the recent years; this enabled them to play role in international monetary systems. The second phenomenon

is the change in the nature of international politics in general and in post-Cold War era in particular. There are some other factors that feed the empowerment of BRICS which are basically rooted in America's unwillingness to embark on unnecessary interventions in regions. Since the most important need of the emerging powers is acquisition of raw materials, energy and external markets, those regions with the largest resources and markets are the primary target of emerging powers. This fact is best reflected in geopolitical rivalries among regional powers in the Middle East, East Asia, Africa and Latin America a time of diminished U.S. control over these regions. As the now famous report from Goldman Sachs economists indicates, developing economies in Asia constitute the primary source of U.S. concerns about its global trade position. According to this report, China will replace the United States in 2027 and the BRICS will have an economy larger than the Group Eight by that time. The Share of this group of states in the world economy growth was 30 percent in the years between 2000 and 2008; this is while, before a decade their share could not exceed 16 percent and they are anticipated to possess close to 50 percent of world market assets by 2050.

In the south of Africa, South Africa has managed to acquire enough strength and capability to create and maintain the regional regime to the collective advantage of the regional states. This country is also been asked by other regional states to play the role of a benign dominant power (Hettne and others, 2012; 300). With the end of the Cold War, collapse of the apartheid system and change in the political ideology, the political identity of South Africa and its domestic politics were changed as well. South African politicians began to redefine their security priorities and with the emergence of a popular government led by the National Congress a new regionalism outlook was shaped instead of previous animosities. In the new approach, Pretoria was eager to be the regional integration focal point and drive south of Africa towards wealth and welfare. After apartheid,

South Africa tried to resolve the crises through multilateralism and in this way stabilize its regional position. This country was gradually introduced as a regional peace builder and peace keeper in line with the role it played as an emerging power.

Concerning the role of regional states and their potentials in different international relations areas, this research is seeking to answer the question “What are the contributing factors and benefits in Islamic Republic of Iran’s relations with the Republic of South Africa?” in order to answer this question, the following hypotheses is being tested: the factors contributing to Iran – South Africa relations are mutual economic and political needs, common viewpoints with respect for regional issues as well as promotion of south-south cooperation.

### **I. Iran and Africa**

Foreign Relations, studies the relations between states and describes interactions taking place both among states, as well as, between states and international organizations. Existence of foreign relations is dependent to existence of commitments and contracts concerning a peaceful life and economic, political and cultural cooperation. Iran’s foreign relations with the African continent have a long historical background; this background can be traced back to the Achaemenidian era and ancient Egypt. The second wave of relations is mainly related to the ties between the peoples of east Africa and Iranian Shirazi immigrants. These immigrants managed to deeply affect the history of east Africa by gradually expanding the domain of their activities to Zanzibar and other cities as well as establishing administrations in Mozambique and Comoros. This group of Iranians used the wealth they acquired from trade with eastern Africa to build ports, administrative buildings, stores and trade centers. In the Qajar era, Iran’s relations with Africa were handled through Iran’s consulate in Egypt. In the Pahlavi era and especially after the independence of the African countries, Iran decided to open embassies in African

countries. But due to ideological issues these relations were not expanded much. In this period, Iran only had political representations in nine African countries and close ties were only maintained with South Africa (Bakhshi, 2009, 39).

After the revolution, the revolutionary discourse of exporting the revolution and internationalization of the Islamic government became dominant in Iran. This revolutionary- Islamic discourse of the new rulers caused a profound divide in Iran's foreign policy doctrine. Only ten years after collapse of the socialist bloc, Iran's foreign policy sought to create a third replacement bloc. The special historical characteristics of the African continent as a region being exploited by colonialist powers made it fit for expansion of cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Such cooperation was conducted against an idealist backdrop insisting on strengthening ties with freedom-seeking movements in accordance with non-aligned principles. Gradually, the number of Iran's embassies in Africa doubled and the number of Africa's political representatives in Iran increased from six to more than twenty. However, despite increase in cooperation with African countries, the relations have not reached a desirable point yet. Trade interactions worth less than one billion dollars demonstrate insufficiency of relations. The Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution stipulates four criteria for choosing the countries that should be given priority in foreign relations. Many African countries possess three of these criteria i.e. being Islamic, belonging to the third world and having the capacities for mutual satisfaction of needs. In spite of this, unfortunately Africa is not among Iran's first choices in many policy making initiatives and the extensive capacities of this continent has remained unnoticed by Iranian policy makers. Africa has 187 million hectare of agricultural lands and 15 percent of world jungles as well as 25 percent of world pasture lands. Moreover, Africa is the second largest continent in the world after Asia in both population and geographical size. The over one billion people of this continent make it home to 15 percent of the world's population. This figure is

expected to reach two billion by 2050 (World Population, 2010). This continent has the largest investment return in the world; four times more than the Group Eight, two times more than Asia and two-third more than Latin America (African Union, 2004).

The rich mineral resources of Africa have attracted the attention of European countries for years. Today that Western interest is even stronger and much of African mineral output is directly shipped to European countries and America. The most important African mineral materials are precious metals, gemstones, Iron, copper, tin and phosphate. This continent possesses 48 percent of world diamond and plutonium, 46 percent of Chromium, 35 percent of Cobalt, 29 percent of gold, 25 percent of phosphate, 22 percent of uranium and 23 percent of manganese (Trumer, 2012: 376). Africa's share of world oil output has risen to 9.7 percent in recent years (Villiers, 2008: 83-93).

Since the end of the Cold War, the geo-economic importance of this continent has risen; European countries, America, China, Canada and Japan view this continent as an long term resource that should be invested in. Mineral resources are the most important incentive for these developed countries to invest in Africa. The international and political status of this continent is also very important. They comprise of 55 countries that are members of international organizations making Africa a powerful bloc which cannot be overlooked by international actors and therefore constant efforts are made by world powers to influence African politics. In search for ways to alleviate pressures applied by great powers, African states have sought regional integration initiatives; among the most important of them are the Africa Union and The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

## **II. Iran-South Africa Relations**

In the 1970s, the most intense issues of the world after the Palestine crisis were those related to South Africa. This country represented an

extreme case of discrimination against the blacks and therefore initiating on constructive ties with this state was a red line not to be crossed by the newly independent states of Africa. However, Iran maintained positive relations with the apartheid regime as a result of a number of factors including its inclination to the West and playing the role of United States interests protector in southern African and the region north of Indian Ocean, its close ties to the occupier regime of Israel, its mission to establish triangular relations with other states was seen necessary by the U.S., South Africa's need of Iranian oil and, at the end, the special interest of the Shah in South Africa after Reza Shah's exile to Durban and Johannesburg. Reza Shah's exile to this country was a turning point in the two countries foreign relations. After, Reza Khan's death, the building he was residing in for eighteen months was bought for a price of half a million dollars (equal to fifty million rials) from the government of South Africa in 1971 (Bakhshi and Ghorban Oghli, 1387: 11). An agreement was reached by the two countries' officials in November of 1970; the consulates were opened in the two capitals which was followed by exchange of visits between the two countries' officials. Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs outlined a number of reasons for establishing relations with South Africa which are as follows: 1- Presence of Reza Shah Pahlavi in Johannesburg in the last years of his life and persistent demand by public to purchase his house for maintenance and protection; 2- Trade relations and presence of Iranian nationals in South Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1350: 143).

The relations between Iran and South Africa were maintained at high levels and Iran even became this country's second largest trade partner after Israel in 1977-1978 (Sharifi Sadati, 2005: 238). The trade relations between the two countries were limited to oil sector before the revolution. The most important agreements between the two countries were those of the Sasolburg oil refinery construction and the long term petroleum sale. According to these agreements, the Sasolburg refinery was built 40 kilometers off Johannesburg with the

cooperation of French Total and the South African Sasol oil companies and with a capacity for production of 50,000 barrels a day. The share of each partner's cooperation in this project was as follows: the Sasol Company of South Africa would receive 52.5 percent, French Total 30 percent and the Iranian National Oil Company 17.5 percent. After the revolution, Iran sought to sell its share but soon declared that it has been unable to do so because of Sasol's objections.

However, such close ties to the apartheid regime of South Africa during the Pahlavi era were to the detriment of Iran's reputation. Sales of Iran's oil to South Africa continued despite the bans imposed by United Nations resolutions. The result was isolation of Iran among the frontier and Islamic states of Africa. Export of oil to South Africa despite the United Nations obligatory sanctions continued up until the collapse of the Shah's regime. Between 1973 and 1979, Iran provided this country with more than 90 percent of its oil needs. In return, Iran was importing iron stone, steel, cement, sugar and other agricultural products. In another agreement, the Iranian National Oil Company was committed to guarantee provision of 70 percent of Sasolburg refinery oil for 15 years. In return, Iran would import uranium and steel (Chamankar, 1994; 128). Iran's position as the gendarme of the Persian Gulf and South Africa's position as West's client in the combat against communist activities caused a convergence of the interests of the two countries. In this framework, the two countries cooperated aiming to prevent the expansion of Soviet influence in their respected regions and also defuse the international pressures applied to South Africa. After the revolution and implementation of sanctions against Iran, the countries of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Qatar served as major providers of oil to South Africa. This is while Iran used to provide 78 percent, 90 percent and 98 percent of South Africa's oil in 1975, 1977 and 1978 respectively (Gurdon, et.al, 1994: 29).

Iran also tried to sign a common defense agreement in the

Indian Ocean (Saghafi-Ameri and Taghi-Zadeh; 1993, 187) and Mohammad Reza Shah proposed establishment of non-communist commonwealth society of states littoral to the Indian Ocean. This plan, however, did not materialize as a result of internal developments in South Africa in 1975-1976 and Iran's revolution of 1979 (Barber and Barrett, 1990: 118). Before the revolution, an agreement for buying 15 percent of shares of a South African atom company was signed by Iran's Nuclear Energy Organization with a value of 4 million dollars. The share now belongs to Iran's Foreign Investment Company owned by Ministry of Financial Affairs (Sharifi Sadati, 1384; 245).

Cutting ties with South Africa was amongst the plans of revolutionary Iranians even before the revolution. For instance, Imam Khomeini declared in Nofel Loshato, regarding the sale of oil to South Africa and Israel, that we will not sell oil to the racists and enemies to humanity (Collection of works: 1993, 140 and 340). He further stated that "we cannot establish relations with South Africa unless it changes its behaviour" (Collection of works: 378). All Iranian statesmen regarded Israel and the apartheid regime as exceptional cases of foreign policy. After the revolution, according to the article 10 of the executive bylaw of the Export and Import Rules "all forms of trade interactions, direct and indirect, with South Africa and the occupier regime of Qods were banned". The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, according to the Islamic ideology and in line with supporting freedom seeking movements, cut its ties with South Africa in support of the South African people and refrained from exporting oil to this country. Subsequently, Switzerland was selected as the protector of the two countries' interests and Iran's interest section started working under the supervision of Swiss diplomatic representation in South Africa. After the new approach of the Iranian government was undertaken, the representatives of the Iranian Oil Company refrained from participating in sessions held in the Natref refinery and Iran's share in Sasol Company was suspended. At the

end, Iran decided to sell the stocks of South African refinery for a reasonable price. The most important of Iran's activities in the period of suspension were the active participation in international sanctions against apartheid regime, establishing relations with the fighting groups like Africa National Congress and the Pan Africa Congress and financial, political and cultural support offered to them on national, regional and international levels, active participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in international seminars related to condemnation of the apartheid regime, supporting the frontier states, issuance of declarations by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with respect to condemning the South African regime's apartheid policies, support granted to the freedom seeking movements of South Africa by all Iranian embassies, extensive broadcast of South Africa news in internal media and Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, visits paid to Iran by Makwetu, the leader of Pan Africa Congress in 1990, and Nelson Mandela, leader of Africa's National Congress and the South Africa's president in 1992, increase in contacts between Iran and the Muslim South African businessmen after Frederik Willem de Klerk took office in 1989 and efforts made to bring about gradual changes in line with termination of the apartheid regime and the freedom of Nelson Mandela in February 1990.

Along with supporting the anti-apartheid campaigns of the people of South Africa, the Islamic Republic of Iran closed South Africa's political representation in Iran and instead allowed the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) open an office in Tehran. Selling oil to South Africa was ceased and Iranian political representations in the frontier countries were established. The zenith of Iran's support to the frontier countries was participation of Iran's president of the time, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in the non-aligned movement meeting in Zimbabwe and his insistence on the issues of South Africa.

By the end of the Cold War, and with the demise of the apartheid system and change in the political ideology and identity of

South Africa, the practical policies of this country also changed and the policy makers began to redefine their security perspectives. Removal of the major factors that used to create tension in southern Africa and transition of power to a popular government in South Africa led by the Africa National Congress, a new outlook of regional integration replaced the previous hostile one. In the new environment, Pretoria, as the focal point of cooperation in region, wanted to lead Southern Africa towards welfare and cooperation. South Africa tried to improve its regional standing by proposing solutions to regional crises based on multilateralism (Cilliers, 1999, 7). In the aftermath of the Cold War, and after shifts in the global environment, the political environment of South Africa was changed as well. In the new environment, not only was foreign policy not based on Cold War politics, it also further moved towards democracy, human rights, and good governance; these factors paved the way for peace, stability, economic growth and sustainable development in the region. Important changes occurred in the foreign and security policies of South Africa.

After apartheid, the policy of supporting human rights was supported by South Africa's new government. With changes in the foreign policy ideology as a result of its emergence as a new leader, a globalist approach was prioritized and the country moved towards establishing relations with all other states. In response to such real changes, the international system also called for South Africa's greater role in global equations. The country which once was a source for insecurity turned into a force for security and peace-building in the region, it participated in peace making initiatives and shifted its priority from security to development. After a while, the idea of 'geopolitics of war' gave its place to 'geopolitics of peace'. Negotiations among different political groups started and citizens were involved in foreign policy making. In such a new environment, concepts like frontier states, regional cooperation conference and even Africa Union Organization lost their *Raison d'être*. In these new

circumstances, old structures had to be either put aside or accept new functions; and they opted for the latter (Sariolghalam, et.al, 1385, 35).

Iran is among the first countries that started its relations with post-apartheid South Africa. Subsequent to positive developments in the country and in response to Nelson Mandela's request, the General Assembly of the United Nations nullified all economic, trade and oil sanctions and restrictions imposed on South Africa. After this incident, the Economic Relations Coordination Headquarters decided in October 5, 1993 that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall resume Iran's relations with South Africa and discontinues application of sanctions to this country. The cabinet approved this decision on January 5, 1994 and the council of ministers decided to resume Iran's relations with South Africa and revise sanctions applied against this country. After such measures were taken, the legal restrictions for trade with South Africa were removed. Iran also sent four diplomats as observers for the 1994 elections and the deputy foreign minister of Iran participated in the inauguration ceremony of Mandela's presidency (Pak Ayeen, 1998; 104).

Some days later, the economic relations of the two countries were resumed based on oil trades. During the 1994-1996, Iran provided South Africa with 70 percent of its oil. Since both Iran and South Africa were powerful countries in their respected regions, there existed common interests in expansion of relations for both states. For instance, in this period, conferences were held centered on subjects of mutual interests including International Conference on Anti-racism. In August 1995, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs paid a visit to South Africa; during meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister Mandela expressed that his country values relations with Iran because of support Iran granted to South Africa in hard times. In this meeting, a contract for establishment of a joint commission between the two states was signed. The two sides also reached agreement over storing of 15 million barrels of oil in Saldanha Bay with a value of

13.7 million dollars per year (Damanpak Jami, 2006; 92).

The relations between Iran and the South Africa Republic are of importance after the apartheid regime from the following viewpoints: strategic need, need for purchase of Iranian oil, readiness of South African companies for investment in Iran (Sasol and M.T.N Irancell), presence of more than one million Muslims in South Africa, common political viewpoints of the two countries about international and regional developments (including the Palestine issue, human rights, increase in the number of United Nations Security Council members, veto right and nuclear energy), being active members of the non-aligned movement and South-South cooperation.

Iran was among the first countries that established common committees with South Africa in 1995; ever since, eleven common commissions between the two countries were held; the last one was in November 2013 held in Pretoria (South Africa Embassy, 2013; Ebrahim). The United States has been critical towards expansion of South Africa's relations with Iran; but this has not driven South Africa to reverse relations with Iran. The South African leaders have reacted to the U.S. requests for stopping cooperation with Iran by expressing their desire to choose their friends based on their own national interests (Broderik, 2001: 88 & 152). Some experts believe that such independent South African position vis a vis U.S. pressures is a response to the support the Africa National Congress has received from Iran in the course of its battles with the apartheid regime (Spence, 1998; 167). Iran supported the National Congress Party and the Communist Party of South Africa during apartheid and therefore when Mandela took office he declared that South Africa will not apply restrictions to its relations with friends who were supportive of freedom seeking efforts in this country in the dark days of history. Today, the two countries maintain positive relations and the mutual regional and international cooperation between them is an example for relations based on friendship, brotherhood and empathy. Considerable steps have also been taken in economic and trade

domains. In 2006, for example, the two countries economic relations rose to 19 billion rands which is 27 percent more than the preceding year.

After resuming relations, South Africa began to import more than 50 percent of its oil from Iran; this however, declined to the average import of 33.7 percent. At the same time, South Africa increased its oil import from Saudi Arabia from 10 percent to 46 percent in 2003 and 36 percent in 2006. In a similar way, oil imports from Nigeria increased from 5 percent to 17 percent (Nkomo, 2009; 20). These changes were mainly aimed at diversification in sources of petroleum imports and avoiding overreliance on a single country. The government of South Africa, from 1996 onwards, adopted a market economy policy and sought purchase of inexpensive oil, barter trades with oil producing countries and sustaining a balance between its imports and exports. At the same time, other factors have contributed to the decline in import of Iranian oil including Iran's own decision to export oil mainly to the Asian countries and also inflexibility in terms of monetary and financial policies.

Iran and South Africa have, until now, signed eighty contracts in subjects related to trade, economy, culture, sport, health and treatment, housing and security. The most important South African investment case in Iran is the eight hundred financing of the petrochemical project Elphin (number nine) in 2002. On the other side, one case of Iran's cooperation with South Africa is sending of Iranian medical teams to South African rural areas for provide treatment. Iranian physicians were employed by the South African Ministry of Health and Treatment through three years contracts.

Official statistics show that, through 2011, South Africa has imported twenty five percent of its crude oil from Iran. Import of around 98,000 barrels of crude oil from Iran has placed South Africa in ninth place among the buyers of Iranian oil after China, India, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Italy, Spain and Greece. According to the South African annual reports around a half of South Africa's oil

has been provided by Iran and Saudi Arabia (Annual Report, 2012; 57). Gradually and with the increase in intensity of sanctions against Iran, this amount decreased to 80,000 barrels, accounting for 14 percent of oil imports of South Africa. In 2012, South Africa declared that it has stopped importing oil from Iran despite its negative attitude towards sanctioning Iran's oil. South African companies had experienced difficulties in import of oil from Iran prior to this as a result of Iran's sanctions. This had lead South African officials to voice objections against sanctioning Iran by saying tha: it is impossible to say that we will not import oil from Iran overnight (Objection of South Africa against the Sanctions, 2013).

Despite sanctions, until 2012, seventy percent of Iran's oil exports (910,000 barrels per day) have been made to three counties of China, India and South Africa (Jam-e-jam, 2013; 4). The amount of trade interactions (non-oil exports) between the two countries is around 100 million dollars; this is below expectations. The important point is that the non-oil trade balance which used to be in Iran's disadvantage reversed in favor of Iran by 42 million dollars (Table number two).

**Table 2. Non-Oil Trade Interactions between Islamic Republic of Iran and South Africa in the Years between 2004 and 2013 (in million dollars)**

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Export	18.1	17	18.1	17	38.1	60	23	73
Import	86.7	127	86.8	127	84.1	79	51	31
Trade balance	-68.7	-110	-68.7	-110	-46	-19	-19	42
Quantity of transactions	104.9	144	104.9	144	122.2	129	84	104

Source: Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, 2013 and Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines, 2013

### Capacity Measurement for Relations

South Africa is considered an important actor when it comes to Iranian foreign policy making. Its active foreign policy in its neighborhood, the African continent and even the international level

has transformed this country from a rogue state with the geopolitics of war to a peace-seeking and development-oriented country with geopolitics of peace. This country is performing an important role in international system and benefitting from elements of power, and is known today as a regional power in Africa and an emerging power at the international level. Iran's cooperation with South Africa like its relations with China, Russia, Brazil and India as other emerging powers is beneficial for Iran not only in terms of meeting mutual interests but also as a means of alleviating pressures Iran due to the nuclear crisis, sanctions and its revisionist vision of the hegemonic structure of the international system. Iran can play a significant role in providing South Africa with oil. Under normal conditions, this has been the case and 25 to 40 percent of South Africa's demand for oil has been met by Iran. The Sasol Company is heavily dependent to Iranian oil and receives 120,000 barrels of oil per day from Iran, accounting for 20 percent of its total needs. South Africa has supported Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency and in the non-aligned movement in a way that in many cases South Africa's mediatory and cooperative measures have been appreciated by the International Atomic Energy Agency's officials. South Africa has also been less critical towards Iran in the Security Council during the period of its membership compared to some other actors like the Zionist Regime. Iran is a supporter of the Africa National Congress during the apartheid period and so this country voted to abstain with regards to resolution 1929 against Iran in June 9, 2010 together with Turkey, Brazil and Lebanon. The 1.5 to 1.7 million Muslim population of South Africa also leave their imprints on relations with Iran (Bishku, 2010; 10). South Africa's relations with Iran have also been impacted by shifts in political landscape of the country. During Mbeki, for instance, the relations were positive and under Zuma were conducted through a more pragmatist approach. All in all, these changes have never led to introduction of conflicts into our bilateral relations (Bishku, 2010: 10). South Africa's trade with Iran has also

increased in recent years. For instance, the MTN telecommunication company obtains more than ten percent of its revenues from Iran. This is far greater than the revenues it receives from its presence in some of its African neighbors. South Africa can also be a proper gateway for Iran's commodities into the markets of the Southern Africa region. One suggestion for improvement of relations is moving Iran's production lines to South Africa. The final products can be sent from there to African consumer markets. Such plans are economically reasonable and well justified. Iran can be a hub for transit of South African products into the central Asian states due to its special geopolitical situation. The two states have common understandings with respect to regional and international issues; and as a result, can contribute to promotion of regional political and economic integration in the framework of the Society of the Indian Ocean Littoral States, south-south and nonaligned cooperation. In addition to the mentioned items, further capacities can be utilized to expand relations between the two countries. This may include mutual procurement of strategic needs (including oil and food products), mutual investment, international and political common visions and cooperation in the framework of regional and international organizations. South Africa, together with the other BRICS countries maintains a critical position with respect to the international system and has voiced its objections concerning issues like the Arab-Israel conflict, human rights, intervention in other countries and western sanctions. Such views can be utilized in line with Iran's interests by promotion of mutual cooperation. Such common grounds for cooperation being discussed, it is now possible to explore Iran's relations with South Africa using the SWOT model and make suggestions for the improvement of relations.

**Table 3. Points of Strength, Opportunities, Threats and Strategies**

Opportunities	<p>Long term relations between Iran and South Africa,          South Africa being an emerging regional power,          Signature of trade, customs and transit agreements between the two countries,          South Africa as a proper market for Iran's industrial and agricultural goods,          South Africa's positive economic growth,          Awareness of the governmental agents about the existing problems and adoption of initiatives to solve them</p>
Threats	<p>Geographically distant, lack of free trade agreement and trade preferences between the two sides,          Lack of enough knowledge about facilities and capacities for cooperation,          Iran's Intense competition with rivals to expand relations with South Africa,          Some agreements remained unimplemented and as a result the mutual trust is diminished</p>
Points of strength	<p>Special attention paid by the government to expansion of non-oil exports in the twenty years perspective document,          Potentials for production of crude oil, carpet, dried fruits, fruit, plastic products and etc.,          The special geographical situation of Iran for transit of goods to Central Asia,          Iran's stability and security,          Iran's extensive and attractive market for the South African companies,          Protective policies for exporters,          Memorandums of understanding between the chambers of commerce of the two countries,          Signature of the agreement for double tax exemption between the two countries,          Presence of Iranian trade attaché in South Africa</p>
Weak points	<p>Lack of variety in the two countries trade transactions,          Lack of an Iranian trade center in South Africa to facilitate trade and provide consumer services,          High tariff rates because of Iran's non-membership in region's common markets and regional assemblies like COMESA and SADC,          A complex bureaucracy in Iran,          State-centric nature of plans and programs in Iran,          Inactivity of the joint chamber of commerce between the two countries and lack of Iranian banks branches in South Africa,          Disagreement between decision making and executive bodies,</p>
Offensive strategies	<p>Utilization of Iran's export capabilities to provide South Africa with its commercial needs including crude oil, carpet, nuts, dried fruits, fruit, plastic and petrochemical products,          Trying to increase Iran's share in South Africa's market using the friendly trade relations between the two countries,          Utilization of South Africa's regional and extra regional status as a voice for the south,          Signature of free trade agreement and trade preference between Iran and South Africa,          Transit of South African products to the neighbors of Iran through the Iranian territory,</p>
ST Strategies	<p>Utilization and expansion of trade agreements between the two countries,          Launching advertisement campaign to strengthen the status of Iranian goods in South Africa market,          Holding exhibitions to introduce Iranian commodities to the South African market,          Identification of those Iranian goods that can secure a guaranteed place in the South Africa market,</p>
WO Strategies	<p>Offering quality goods to the South Africa market in order to improve Iran's place in this country's market,          Establishing Iranian trade centers in South African major cities like Johannesburg,</p>

WT Strategies	Strengthening the bank and insurance relations between the two countries, Provision of services and facilities to merchants and companies of South Africa for better presence in Iranian markets and fairs, Decreasing the bureaucracy and implementation of agreements, Consolidation of sea lines between the two countries to increase the bilateral trade interactions, Creating a direct air line between the two countries,
Combined Strategies	Using South Africa's regional and trans-regional status in line with south-south cooperation, Planning and programming for implementation of the agreements, Building a positive image for Iran to counter threats, Signing a free trade and trade preference agreement between the two countries, Strengthening bank relations and establishing a joint bank, Offering quality goods to the South African market, Establishing an Iranian trade center in South Africa

Source: Bakhshi, 2009: 57-58 and Masudi, 2010: 145-147.

### Conclusion

The African continent, with its own geographic, economic, cultural and political characteristics has been turned into an influential actor in the post-cold war era and the time of regionalism. In this continent, South Africa has played a key role and is changed from an isolated state into an emerging regional power within less than two decades. Adopting a descriptive-analytical method and the SWOT model, this article has explored Iran's relations with the Africa continent and maintains that taking into consideration the effectiveness, geopolitical weight and political role of South Africa, relations with this country has had major achievements for Iran; including facilitating relations with other African states. The two countries have a common understanding about many regional and international issues and therefore can expand their cooperation and together improve economic and political regionalism in the framework of the Society of the Indian Ocean Littoral States, south-south cooperation and also the nonaligned movement. The potentials for expansion of bilateral relations are further expandable in other areas including provision of mutual strategic needs to oil and food stuff and also making mutual investments. The two countries have also common political views and can support each other in international agencies and develop cooperation in regional and international organizations. There are other facts that provide further

opportunities for expansion of cooperation between the two countries. Iran and South Africa are both regional states, there are trade, cultural and political agreements between them, there is a dependable market in both countries for sales of their products and there is willingness for regional cooperation. At the same time, there are impediments including geographical distance, lack of adequate knowledge about the capacities for cooperation, intense competition with third parties, non-implementation of many of the agreements resulting in diminished trust, complicated bureaucracy, state centrism of the plans and programs posed by Iran, inactivity of the joint chamber of commerce, lack of Iranian banks branches in South Africa and not using other countries experiences. Measure have to be taken in order to improve relations including utilization of South Africa's regional and trans-regional status as the voice of the south, acting as a transit route for export of South Africa's products to the countries neighboring Iran, finding a better place in South African markets through advertisement, decrease of bureaucracy and implementation of the agreements, strengthening of bank relations and establishing a common bank to better materialize the objectives.

It is also necessary to take into account the increasing role of regions in world politics. Regional integration can lead to economic development, gradual integration into the world economy, utilization of trade benefits, political and economic structural reforms, security-building, increase in bargaining power, and the reception and distribution of information. Today South Africa and other regional powers have become important political and economic actors and can offer Iran enough incentives to expand its relations with them. These incentives include, inter alia, expansion of south-south cooperation, preventing unilateralism and decreasing United States and Europe pressures on Iran. It should also be taken into account that emerging powers may adopt different or contradictory policies in order to be accepted by great powers and continue their development.

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