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The salient impact of the Iran war on the african continent

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Abstract

This article examines the multidimensional impacts of the direct military confrontation between the United States, Israel, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, initiated on February 28, 2026. Despite the geographical distance of the conflict, African nations are experiencing systemic shocks across economic, security, and diplomatic domains. The analysis highlights the critical vulnerability of net oil and fertilizer importers (Kenya, Egypt, Sudan) following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the rerouting of maritime trade via the Cape of Good Hope. Furthermore, the study explores the reactivation of Iranian-backed proxy networks, notably Hezbollah, as an asymmetric security threat within West African territories. Finally, it addresses the “diplomatic turmoil” faced by African states within multilateral organizations (UN, OPEC, OIC), arguing that the 2026 conflict serves as a catalyst for a necessary shift toward African strategic autonomy in a fragmented global order.

Keywords: Africa-Iran Relations, Economic Resilience, Energy Security, Geopolitics, Hezbollah, Strategic autonomy, Strait of Hormuz, Supply chains.

The salient impact of the Iran war on the African continent.

The present direct conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran officially commenced on 28 February 2026, with a substantial wave of coordinated airstrikes against Iranian territory. In relation to the preliminary strikes, the United States and Israel initiated large-scale offensives targeting Iranian missile infrastructure, nuclear facilities, and military leadership in Tehran and throughout the nation.[1] This course of action was precipitated by the determination of Washington and Jerusalem that diplomatic efforts had reached an impasse, and that Iran's nuclear program represented an imminent global threat.

In response, Iran has effectively restricted or closed the Strait of Hormuz, precipitating widespread energy crises. The price of Brent crude has surpassed $105 per barrel, representing the highest price since July 2022. This 2026 conflict follows a brief direct confrontation in June 2025, known as the Twelve-Day War, which ended in a U.S.-brokered ceasefire that collapsed in early 2026.[2]

Despite the geographical distance of this conflict from the African continent, its implications are global in scope and have a direct effect on African nations. It is posited that three areas may be susceptible to impact: namely, (I)the economic, (II)security, and (III)diplomatic domains.

I- Economic

In terms of economic implications, the 2026 Iran war on Africa is likely to result in significant energy shocks, a surge in living costs for oil-importing nations, and the potential for a windfall for the continent's primary oil producers[3].

The impact of this phenomenon is not uniform among major (A) importers and (B)exporters. The following is an overview of the ways in which some of these countries are affected.

A- Net Importers

Since the early 2023, cooperation between Iran and Africa has been increasing especially as the economic sector is concerned. According to various sources, Iran exportations have reached up to 625 million dollars during the first half of the year 2025 and products such as iron, cement or bitumen, urea, and industrial oil are the most traded to Africa[4]. The main market is composed of countries such as Kenya, South

[1] Britannica, Editors. *2026 Iran War.* Britannica, "Middle Eastern History". March 14, 2026.

[2] Elena, Voss. *Brent Crude Surges to $112 as Fresh Supply Fears Drive Oil Rally.* Ad Hoc News. March 5, 2026.

[3] Chris Olaoluwa, Ògúnmọ́dẹ̀dé. *Africa Is Already Feeling the Impact of the Iran War.* World Politics Review. March 8, 2026.

[4] Clement, Therme. *Iranian ambitions in Africa: an ideological, security and economical presence*. Notes de l'Ifri, December 2022.

Africa, Ghana and Somalia etc. For instance, before 2013, South Africa was relying on Iran oil which covered up to 25-30% of its national needs and even though American sanctions have greatly reduced Iranian oil export in the country, it has not completely ceased. Even if they do not represent a significant portion of the market in Africa, some African countries still import Iranian oil products and they are likely to be affected by the present direct war occurring in the middle-east. South Africa, Kenya, and Egypt, are confronted with substantial escalations in prices. Notably, the cost of energy and transportation constitutes between 15% and 25% of their consumer price indices, a phenomenon that has been described as "catastrophic" by some observers[5].

It observed that the conflict has a significant impact on direct importers of Iranian oil products from Africa, but equally on countries that do not necessarily depend on Iran but on other countries in the Middle East for the importation of oil and other products. This is due to the instability that the conflict has caused in the region especially the attacks undertaken by Iran towards US allies and strategic trade routes in the Middle East. Countries such as South Africa, and Congo are already experiencing an increase in the price of fuel of about 25% and this will have a negative impact on all the economy[6].

B- Net Exporters

It is anticipated that major oil-producing nations such as Angola and Nigeria will experience an augmentation in export revenues. However, Nigeria's economic resilience remains contingent upon its substantial reliance on imported refined petroleum. In addition to the oil disturbances, we take into account disruptions with regard to shipping and trade. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz[7] and the ongoing tensions in the Red Sea have compelled vessels to seek alternative routes, such as the Cape of Good Hope. The aforementioned circumstances have precipitated an escalation in freight costs and insurance premiums for African trade. The revenue of the Suez Canal, owned and operated by Egypt, is at risk as vessels circumvent the Bab al-Mandab Strait. Moreover, the Continent will experience a reduction in financial pressures and debt obligations. A global "flight to safety" has occurred, which has resulted in the strengthening of the US dollar, the weakening of African currencies, and the increase in the cost of servicing dollar-denominated debt.

[5] Macdonald G. Obudho. *Consumer Price Indices and Inflation Rates.* Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. May, 2025.

[6] Rene Awambeng. Africa and the War in Iran: how does the petrol chock threatens economies, supply chains and household welfare? Financial Afrik. 9th March 2026.

[7] Hormuz most commonly refers to the Strait of Hormuz, a vital maritime chokepoint, or Hormuz Island, a unique geological and historical site in Iran

An examination of financial indicators reveals a notable increase in bond yields in both Kenya and South Africa, indicating a potential tightening of financial conditions in these regions. This situation also has an impact on investment and remittances.[8] Regarding investment, wealthy Gulf nations (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar) may reevaluate or delay over $100 billion in planned African investments in order to focus on domestic repairs and security.[9]

On remittances, a considerable number of African migrant workers in the Gulf are confronted with the challenge of job insecurity, a situation that has the potential to disrupt the vital income flows to countries such as Kenya and Uganda. Analysts have identified several countries as particularly at risk due to high import dependence or existing economic strain: namely Sudan, The Gambia, Central African Republic, Lesotho, Zimbabwe.[10]

The food production of numerous African countries is contingent upon the importation of fertilizers from the Gulf via the Strait of Hormuz. According to experts, African countries that rely on imported fertilizers and allocate a significant portion of their household income toward food expenses are particularly susceptible to supply chain disruptions resulting from the war in the Middle East. The conflict has had a substantial impact on trade through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical shipping route not only for oil and gas but also for fertilizers, which are produced in substantial quantities in the Gulf region.

It is noteworthy that African countries are among the most reliant on sea-based fertilizer imports from the Middle East. According to a recent report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 54% of Sudan's fertilizer is transported via this method. The figures for Somalia and Kenya are 30% and 26%, respectively.[11] It is estimated that approximately one-third of seaborne trade in fertilizer, a vital agricultural input for productivity improvement, is transported through the Strait of Hormuz.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), African economies are particularly vulnerable and face elevated levels of uncertainty during periods of significant economic downturns. The underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon include a high degree of reliance on foreign markets, the volatility of commodity exports, substantial debt levels, and the inadequacy of infrastructure.

[8] Obudho. Consumer Price Indices and Inflation Rates. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

[9] Cathrin, Schaer. *No more big spenders: Iran war to dent Gulf state investment*. Deutsche Welle (DW). “Conflicts/Saudi Arabia”. March 14, 2026.

[10] *Iran War Sends Shockwaves Through African Fuel Market and Economies*. Asharq Al-Awsta. March 17th,2026.

[11] United Nations. *Strait of Hormuz Disruptions*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. March 10th, 2026.

Rama Yade, the senior director of the Atlantic Council's Africa Center and former French Minister, has asserted on X that the rise in oil prices poses "serious economic challenges" for numerous governments across the African continent. This has the potential to prompt governments to either increase subsidies or pass on the associated costs to consumers, a scenario that could give rise to social and political pressures.

II- Security

With respect to the realm of security, infrastructures and individuals of Western interest or provenance may become targets of terrorist groups or other entities with ties to Iran. These groups have expressed a willingness to retaliate against the United States and those they perceive as collaborating with them. One such group that has its roots in the African soil is the Hezbollah, a Shiite militant group and political party that functions as Iran's most powerful proxy.

The African continent, particularly the regions south of the Sahara, is distinguished by a considerable prevalence of states that are either failing to function adequately or are ungoverned to a significant extent. Hezbollah capitalized on the available opportunity to establish a more robust organizational presence in Africa, a strategy that would ultimately prove instrumental in achieving its broader geopolitical objectives. The Islamic Republic of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps has established a strategic alliance with Hezbollah, leveraging the vast expanse of the African continent to advance the interests of Iran. In light of the United States' increasing engagement on the African continent in pursuit of international Salafi jihadists affiliated with Al-Qaeda, it is imperative to consider the historical role of Hezbollah and the recent activities of both Hezbollah and Iran on the African continent.

The Hezbollah was established in 1982 with backing from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Iran provides substantial funding (estimated at $700 million–$1 billion annually), weapons, and training, with Hezbollah pledging loyalty to Iran's Supreme Leader.[12]

While technically operating in Lebanon, Hezbollah's leadership is closely tied to Iranian interests, with Iran playing a role in its restructuring since 2006. The Lebanese Hezbollah has been present in Africa for decades. During this time, the group has engaged in a variety of terrorist activities, including hijackings, assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings, which have occurred sporadically throughout the continent.[13]

[12] Credits. What Is Hezbollah? Council of Foreign Relations. March 2nd, 2026.

[13] Idem.

Hezbollah Foreign Relations Department officials have also been known to raise funds for the group, including in Africa, as noted in an October 2013 Financial Action Task Force (FATF) report on "Terrorist Financing in West Africa." The report in question exposed the illicit fundraising activities of several Hezbollah FRD officials in Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. These activities included the solicitation of donations, some of which were purportedly amassed through the use of intimidation and mafia-style extortion. The network also facilitated the transfer of funds to Hezbollah in Lebanon, leveraging businesses owned by the network to raise funds for the group. Furthermore, the network was implicated in the coordination of travel for Hezbollah officials on fundraising trips to the region. In one particular instance, the FRD representative in Senegal was also implicated in leading clandestine meetings aimed at devising strategies to augment Hezbollah's fundraising endeavors."[14]

III- Diplomacy

As of March 2026, the UN General Assembly had not yet passed a definitive resolution on the active war involving Iran. However, advocacy groups were currently urging the Assembly to demand an end to what they described as an illegal conflict.

Thus, we have seen that Europeans (even though they are divided amongst themselves) and Americans are divided on the conflict. The first group shows reluctance to be fully involved in the war, which causes the second group's wrath. The usual Western foes, i.e., China and Russia, have both adopted similar stances. Russia's approach toward the war in Ukraine can be characterized as cautious opportunism. The Kremlin strongly condemns U.S.-Israeli military actions. However, Russia has refrained from direct military intervention, instead assuming the role of a "backstage partner" by providing intelligence and technical assistance. Beijing has repeatedly criticized the U.S. and Israel's military strikes, characterizing them as violations of international law and Iranian sovereignty. It has maintained a cautious and officially neutral stance, prioritized economic stability and energy security while avoided direct military involvement.

Concomitantly, African nations may be confronted with the prospect of adopting both official and unofficial diplomatic positions regarding the war, akin to the circumstances that prevailed during the second Iraq war. While numerous countries on the continent tend to adopt a non-partisan stance, the weight of their

[14] Matthew, Levitt., John Lechner., *External Non-State Actors as A Source of Instability In West Africa: Hezbollah And Wagner/Africa Corps*. Counter Extremism Project. July, 2025.

voice could be used to exert leverage in support of one side or the other. In such circumstances, the phenomenon under consideration has the potential to engender both direct and indirect economic or political pressure. In the coming days, the General Assembly may find itself in a position to vote on resolutions that will indicate the ideological leanings of African countries. The potential for the use of hallway diplomacy as a means of manipulating the actions of other nations is a salient concern.

What makes this situation a diplomatic turmoil is in regards to the belonging to some African countries in multiple regional organization such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), or The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), or The League of Arab States (Arab League).

In conclusion, although the conflict may appear to be a direct confrontation of the ideas proposed by Samuel Huntington in The Clash of Civilizations, the present conflict between the USA, a Western power, and Iran, an impotent actor in the Middle East, has the potential to have far-reaching consequences. The ramifications of this conflict are deeply entrenched within the African continent, and observations suggest that the repercussions extend to the political, economic, and diplomatic domains.

Ultimately, the 2026 conflict is a brutal reminder that in a hyper-connected world, there is no such thing as a "local" war. For Africa, the fallout is a complex mosaic of crisis and opportunity: while oil-producing giants may see their coffers swell, the average citizen faces the suffocating weight of an energy-driven cost-of-living crisis. Beyond the balance sheets, the shadows of proxy militancy and "hallway diplomacy" threaten to turn the continent into a secondary theater for foreign agendas. As the United Nations debates and the Gulf's investment flows freeze, African leaders face a defining moment. They must decide whether to remain pawns in a wider geopolitical game or to leverage this turmoil to forge a more self-reliant, unified continental stance. In the face of this 2026 upheaval, silence is no longer a sanctuary; it is a risk.

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