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## Expounding the geopolitical dimensions and interests of Iran's presence in the Horn of Africa

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### Abstract

The Horn of Africa is the name of a region in the east of the African continent, which is adjacent to the sea spaces of the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb and the Red Sea, and it protrudes into the Gulf of Aden in the form of a tongue. This region has long had geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economics value and importance, and because of these values, regional and extra-regional actors have always tried to be present and active in it. In the past few years, Iran has always been one of the countries present in this region, especially in its maritime spaces, despite the reduction or termination of relations with the countries of the Horn of Africa and the consequent reduction in activities. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate and analyze the reasons of the problem from a geopolitical point of view. This research deals with the geopolitical explanation of the reasons for Iran's presence in the Horn of Africa and the water

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and coastal areas of this region with a descriptive-analytical method and an inferential approach and content analysis, using library resources. The main question is, within the framework of geopolitical concepts, what are the most important requirements for Iran's presence and activity in the Horn of Africa? The results of the research show that the most important geopolitical reasons for Iran's presence and activity can be seen as the security of maritime traffic, the presence of competing actors and the neutralization of some hostile actions, the geo-economic potential of the Horn of Africa, and the issue of influence and territorialization.

During the recent years and approximately since 2015, Iran's bilateral relations with most of the countries of the Horn of Africa have suffered a reduction or interruption of political and diplomatic relations due to various reasons. Before 2015, there were good relations between Iran and the countries of Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti, but since then, mainly due to the hostile and interventionist actions of Iran's foreign and regional rivals, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia and offering and granting financial aid to Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti in exchange for severing ties with Iran, these countries decided to cut ties and currently, despite the active presence of this country in the maritime spaces of the Gulf of Aden to fight against piracy. Iran's effective role in the Horn of Africa has decreased. Of course, in recent years, the approach of the foreign policy of the 11th and 12th government in the Islamic Republic has also become more and more important, and one of the reasons for the reduction of Iran's presence or weak presence in the Horn of Africa is related to this issue; This means that since the beginning of the 11th and 12th governments, the development of relations with African countries, including countries in the Horn of Africa, has not been a priority in the foreign policy of these governments.

In this regard, the most important challenges facing Iran in recent years in this region can be the occurrence of piracy - which has been a challenge for many other countries in the world; The low level of relations or the disconnection of Iran's relations with the countries of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea Basin; The presence and influence of Iran's competitors in the countries of the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, the Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa; And the absence or weakness of a specific strategy and plan in relation to the Horn of Africa and its coastal areas in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, which each has affected Iran's presence and activity in positive or negative ways.

At the core of each of these factors, geopolitical components play a role. In the factor of "providing the security of maritime traffic and countering

the phenomenon of piracy", the formation of patterns of "cooperation" and "competition" between governments to fight piracy and their empowerment, the geopolitical roots of the formation and growth of pirates, Iran's "geopolitical affiliation" To the Horn of Africa as a spatial and geographical complement to take advantage of strategic, economic and commercial advantages on the other side of the borders, Iran's effort to increase its "geopolitical weight" and create a "geopolitical balance" with other actors active in the Horn of Africa through an almost independent presence In the fight against piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Bab al-Mandab and conveying the message of strategic and operational power in fighting this phenomenon to the world, it is one of the geopolitical characteristics of this factor.

The factor of "the presence of competing actors in the Horn of Africa and the neutralization of some of their hostile actions", geopolitical features such as the formation of the pattern of "competition" and "geopolitical competition" between actors active in the Horn of Africa with Iran, the "geopolitical construction" of Iran's influence and influence in this region As a threat from competing or hostile actors, Iran's attempt to increase its "geopolitical weight", create and maintain "geopolitical balance" with competitors and move in the direction of "geopolitical superiority", and create a "geopolitical challenge" and a "geopolitical isolation" strategy. » It has rivals of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Horn of Africa.

In the factor of "economic and geo-economic potentials of the Horn of Africa region", "geo-economy" is defined in the conceptual framework of geopolitics, Iran's "geo-political and geo-economic belonging" and a kind of "geo-political and geo-economic dependence" towards the Horn of Africa and the maritime spaces of this region to meet the needs in trade and economic exchanges with other countries using its maritime routes and optimal use of this geo-economic capacity by drawing and implementing a "geo-political strategy" can play a role in economic and commercial development and promotion of "geo-political weight" and creating "geo-political balance" with competitors be

And finally, in the factor of "increasing the sphere of influence and territorialization", promoting the authentic teachings of the pure Islam of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and issuing the values of the Islamic Revolution with the aim of helping governments and nations to strengthen their independence and confront the domination system of a specific "geopolitical code" of the republic. Iran is Islamic in foreign policy, and Iran is trying to influence and "territorialize", increase "geopolitical weight" and create "geopolitical balance" with rivals in the Horn of Africa, which have a geopolitical

nature.

In this framework, it seems that for Iran to make optimal and effective use of the geopolitical and geoeconomic capacities of the Horn of Africa region and to be more active in this region, it is necessary for the Islamic Republic of Iran to consider the following plans and strategies:

1. Permanent and continuous military presence in the maritime spaces of the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea to protect the security of its sea routes and commercial ships;
2. Establishing and developing relations with the coastal countries of the Horn of Africa, i.e. Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Ethiopia in various political, economic, cultural, scientific and... dimensions;
3. Efforts for regional cooperation and convergence, especially the formation of maritime alliances with friendly countries with common interests;
4. Developing a targeted plan and strategy regarding presence and activity in Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular;
5. Having an all-round readiness to deal with the threats and conspiracies of official and unofficial competing actors and enemies in the maritime and coastal areas of the Horn of Africa.

**Key words:** Africa; Iran; Horn of Africa region; geopolitics.