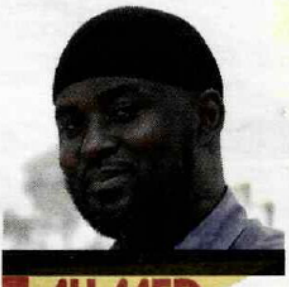
Why the Iran crisis matters for Africa



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The Iran crisis is not a distant Middle East drama; as a geopolitical expert writing from Kampala, I see its shocks already landing on African soil. Escalating hostilities between Iran, Israel, and the US risk creating global volatility that will test Africa's security, economy and diplomacy, and Uganda is not spared.

Starting with security. The Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Strait of Hormuz are strategic choke points: roughly a third of seaborne oil transits those waterways. Iran and its proxies have demonstrated a willingness to target shipping and overseas bases, turning ports and logistical hubs into potential flashpoints. For East Africa, that raises direct risks to maritime commerce and to facilities hosting foreign military assets in Djibouti, Somalia, and Eritrea, with possible knock-on effects for regional trade routes and insurance costs.

Economically, the transmission channels are clear and measurable. A major disruption that pushes Brent crude up by $20-50 per barrel would quickly increase African import bills. Many African governments already allocate large shares of revenue to debt servicing, often 25-35% in highly stressed cases. A stronger US dollar and heightened risk perceptions could push emerging-market bond yields higher by several hundred basis points, significantly raising refinancing costs and shrinking fiscal space for development spending, just as governments need to cushion households from rising prices.

For Uganda, these risks are particularly immediate. As a net importer of refined petroleum, the country is highly exposed to global fuel price volatility, with spikes quickly feeding into transport and food costs, thereby intensifying inflationary pressures.

Uganda also hosts nearly two million refugees, representing one of the largest refugee populations in Africa, and this places sustained pressure on public resources. If international donors reprioritise funding towards migration pressures in the Mediterranean or crises in the Middle East, Uganda could face notable humanitarian funding gaps.

Recent disruptions in the Gulf airspace, including airport closures in Dubai and across Jordan and Bahrain, further expose Uganda's economic links to the region. Many Ugandan traders depend on Dubai for goods, whilst Gulf countries host migrant workers who send approximately 35% of Uganda's $1.6b in annual remittances, flows that are vital for household incomes and foreign-exchange stability.

There are also diplomatic and political implications. African states will be pressed to choose sides between Washington and Tehran, or will face pressure from Moscow and Beijing. That dynamic complicates the position of African countries already in the uncomfortable position of balancing principle against pragmatism. For Uganda, maintaining a non-aligned, rules-based posture will be important in order to preserve development partnerships across multiple capitals.

Human security and social cohesion cannot be overlooked. Imported inflation driven by energy shocks hits the poor hardest. In Uganda, where food constitutes a large share of household spending, even single-digit increases in headline inflation can push millions into vulnerability. Sectarian tensions in the Middle East have previously catalysed local radicalisation episodes elsewhere; vigilance and community resilience programmes are, therefore, necessary to prevent spill-over into inter-faith tensions at home.

Policymakers should enhance regional security co-operation by scaling up maritime surveillance in the Western Indian Ocean and strengthening intelligence co-ordination amongst East African coastal states to safeguard shipping lanes and ports.

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