

BRICS does not escape the impact and consequences of the US and Israel's military actions against Iran

Riaan Eksteen Ph.D.

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The BRICS platform was established during a leaders' summit of Brazil, Russia, India, and China in Russia on 16 June 2009. South Africa joined this political organization the subsequent year, in 2010. In January 2024, the following states became members: Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Iran. The Group's leaders convene yearly to enhance economic and geopolitical cooperation and coordination among member states. Additionally, to establish a geopolitical coalition capable of countering the dominance of Western-dominated global institutions, like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Over time, more precise objectives in this context began to emerge. BRICS promotes the shift towards a multipolar world in which developing nations can assert their interests and substantially influence global power dynamics, including the reconfiguration of the UN Security Council.

[Refer to the note at the conclusion of this article for further information on BRICS.]

Before the military operations conducted by the US and Israel against Iran in June 2025 and from 28 February 2026, geopolitical tensions were influencing intra-group dynamics. Russia's military operations against Ukraine have been ongoing for four years. In recent months, several members have taken actions that are fundamentally incompatible with BRICS's values, leading the group to take some blows. India finalised an extensive trade pact with the United States. Subsequently, Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, undertook an official visit to Israel. Subsequently, Trump extended a formal invitation to Modi to participate in the US Board of Peace. If Delhi ultimately joins while other BRICS members decline to engage, the perception of a divided Global South may intensify, with India aligning more closely with the frameworks that govern, influence, and dominate the United States. Indonesia has essentially emulated India's model. This nation finalised a trade accord with the US and was then included in the Board of Peace. Indonesia's growing engagement with Washington generates other potential sources of tension within the Group, particularly

with China, Russia, and Iran. BRICS may already be apprehensive that its anti-hegemony stance may be diluted as a consequence. Jakarta's participation in the Board of Peace strengthens the belief in Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran that Indonesia may align with the United States' views in BRICS discussions on security issues related to Gaza and Iran. The recent assaults on Iran from 28 February 2026 would certainly leave BRICS disenchanted. Given its involvement in BRICS, Iran undoubtedly expected tangible support from the other member states. South Africa has consistently reiterated its stance on the violation of international law and the United Nations Charter. Measured utterances and declarations have been articulated from many sources. This has been of negligible benefit to the Iranians.

Iran cannot anticipate assistance from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as fellow partners in BRICS, particularly following its missile assaults on targets within these nations, many of which were civilian institutions. The UAE openly accuses Iran of treason. There are now calls for the West to help these two and other Gulf governments in maintaining resilience while Iran perpetrates havoc through nearly 2000 missile and drone assaults against the UAE. This illustrates Iran's will to internationalise the crisis to intensify pressure on the White House to halt activities. A potentially catastrophic strategy may involve transforming the affluent Gulf states into failed states by dismantling the desalination facilities that sustain their water resources. Numerous entities, including the UAE, have previously experienced such attacks. The facilities are vulnerable targets, and deficiencies in potable water will have an instantaneous and catastrophic effect.

The reactions of Iran's two geostrategic allies in BRICS, China and Russia, likely disappointed Iran. Russia and China own considerable commercial interests in Israel and the Gulf nations. This engagement complicates alignment with Iran under the prevailing conditions. Russia and China have issued vehement statements but have taken no tangible actions. Their replies have lacked coordination. They have effectively forsaken Iran and rendered no support. The Russian discourse about Iran lacks substance. Air defence systems previously supplied to Iran, similar to those provided to Venezuela, have proven ineffective during crucial moments. When Russia sought military weaponry from Iran for deployment against Ukraine, Iran provided the systems. Nevertheless, Russia now has no interest in inciting the United States by providing Iran with armaments. Its own requirements in Ukraine and its own interests

are prioritised. The strikes on Iran, which increased oil prices, bolstered a primary source of revenue for the Kremlin, facilitating Putin's ongoing military operations in Ukraine. For Russia, the soaring oil prices represent a considerable economic boon at a pivotal juncture. The Kremlin is capitalising on this chance.

The subdued Chinese reaction was a revised, less confrontational iteration finalised after many amendments. Diplomatic sources in Beijing confirmed that no severe criticism was to be directed at the US and Israel. China and India do not possess a cohesive perspective on the dispute. China condemned the infringement of Iran's sovereignty; however, India, as the current chair of BRICS, adopted a more cautious stance. There was significant apprehension over Iran's reprisal strikes. Consequently, corporate and governmental capital interests in all three states supersede ideological South-South unity.

The absence of a unified BRICS response is significant, as more divergent perspectives within BRICS are becoming apparent. The failure to defend or assist a member engaged in blatantly perilous activities is perhaps the most detrimental setback to BRICS' credibility thus far, particularly in light of its self-stated objective of terminating US hegemony.

The lack of institutional cohesiveness reveals a vulnerability within BRICS. Eleven members with varied interests in the Middle East render even fundamental unity on Iran challenging. The group's inability to respond effectively to assaults on a member state has compromised BRICS' discourse on sovereignty and resistance to Western interventionism. It fails to exhibit strategic autonomy. Certain members are leveraging the crisis to advocate for greater security collaboration within BRICS. Others persist in oscillating between Washington and Beijing/Moscow. The quiet and evident differences within BRICS indicate the Global South's ambivalence. The group risks being perceived as a loosely organised entity with a constrained ability to respond under pressure. BRICS may see additional repercussions if these military efforts further undermine Tehran without the organisation assuming any significant joint responsibility. The absence of a joint statement or demonstration of solidarity is a clear indication that the conflict may be challenging BRICS's cohesion, compelling its members to confront a disquieting question: Is it feasible to promote and establish a new world order, as sought by BRICS, without ideological alignment among all members?

Consequently, BRICS confronts substantial implications for its future and geopolitical structure. The primary structural consequence of the assaults on Iran will be a hastened reconfiguration of global alliances. As geopolitical rifts within the Group intensify – evidenced by Brazil's humanitarian discourse, India's military acquisitions favouring Israel, China's self-interested pragmatism, and Russia's pursuit of its own objectives – the tension between members' economic connections to the US and Israel across various domains and the Group's ambition for dedollarization engenders a precarious anomaly that the Group cannot easily acknowledge, much less disregard.

The situation in Iran profoundly affects BRICS members and their collective posture towards Israel and the United States. The latter continues to be a crucial external influence in ascertaining whether BRICS develops into a cohesive alternative force or persists as a loosely structured alliance for the Global South. Trump's stance on BRICS will be key. While objectives aimed at US institutions or those associated with the nation persist, and are coupled with unrestrained discourse about them, specific BRICS initiatives, particularly those centred on de-dollarization, may be obstructed by tariffs, secondary sanctions, and financial coercion. The United States' supremacy in essential resources, including market access and the dollar system, will influence the feasibility of intensified BRICS collaboration, potentially affecting the progress or stagnation of initiatives such as development finance and South-South trade. BRICS may discuss overhauling the global order and other grand ideas, but it lacks the cohesion and institutions necessary to sustain, much less protect, one of its own members. The members collaborate when their interests align, but swiftly separate when disputes jeopardise commerce, energy resources, or ties with Washington. Notwithstanding the discourse on a multipolar international order, the Bloc remains a disparate economic consortium of nations and lacks a cohesive strategic alliance.

The Group now confronts the specific task of formulating a strategy to redefine the significance of BRICS, transforming it from a potential rival to Western institutions into a Group that considers others' perspectives.

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My article, “Should BRICS be taken seriously?”, published by the Athens Institute on 6 March 2026, discusses the above and additional relevant aspects in more detail, as well as the various steps Trump has taken against BRICS over trade relations with Iran.

<https://www.athensjournals.gr/politics/2026-2-1-3-Eksteen.pdf>

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Dr. Eksteen's 27-year tenure in Foreign Affairs encompassed a period in Washington, D.C., ambassadorial positions at the UN in New York and Geneva, and service as ambassador to six countries. He is presently a research fellow at two universities in South Africa. 28 of his publications have already been published in journals in both South Africa and internationally. He is a member of the South African Academy of Science and Arts. His memoirs, *Beyond Diplomacy*, were published in October 2022.