

## US Bombing of Iran Puts South Africa on Diplomatic Tightrope

The recent United States airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities have triggered a global diplomatic crisis and placed South Africa in a particularly difficult position. Despite the magnitude of the escalation, South Africa's political leadership has responded with notable caution. Prominent public figures and outspoken politicians remained silent through the weekend, while the ANC and DA, the country's two largest parties, have yet to issue formal statements.

President Cyril Ramaphosa eventually offered a carefully worded response, expressing "anxiety" over the US's entry into the conflict. The statement avoided direct criticism of either Washington or Tel Aviv and leaned on South Africa's familiar call for dialogue and peaceful resolution. While consistent with Ramaphosa's diplomatic style, the statement was widely seen as a minimal response to a crisis of global significance.

This hesitation reflects the complexity of South Africa's position. Pretoria maintains strong diplomatic ties with Iran, a fellow BRICS member and strategic partner, particularly following Iran's inclusion in the bloc in 2023. At the same time, South Africa's relationship with the United States remains fragile, especially after recent tensions involving President Trump's administration. An outright condemnation of the strikes risks damaging already strained ties with Washington.

Further complicating matters is the prominent role of Israel in the escalation. The strikes were widely understood to have been conducted at Israel's urging, and Trump's announcement concluded with the words "God bless Israel." This places Pretoria in an even more delicate spot. South Africa has been one of the most vocal critics of Israel's military actions in Gaza and has formally downgraded diplomatic relations with the country. To remain consistent with its stance on international law, Pretoria would be expected to issue a stronger response.

Reactions from South Africa's BRICS partners only heighten the pressure. China condemned the strikes in unambiguous terms, labeling them a violation of international law. Even Saudi Arabia historically at odds with Iran expressed deep concern over the developments. These responses further isolate South Africa's muted position and could undermine its standing within the bloc if it fails to respond more decisively.

As the international community reacts with a mix of condemnation, concern, and protest, South Africa's next move is critical. The government has long positioned itself as a voice for justice and a champion of multilateral diplomacy. In the face of this conflict, Pretoria must weigh its principles against realpolitik. What it decides in the coming days will not only shape its diplomatic credibility but could also define its role in an increasingly polarized

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international order.