The BRICS equation behind the Israel-Iran conflict

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"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world..."
—W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

Mainstream media coverage of the Israel-Iran conflict often pivots on proxies, retaliation, and regional instability. Analysts debate whether Tehran's reach into Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq crosses Israel's red lines or whether Israel's preemptive strikes serve as deterrence or provocation. But such readings obscure the deeper shift underway: the erosion of a US-led unipolar world order and the contested rise of a multipolar alternative. The latest escalation—particularly following direct US strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities based on questionable intelligence—must be understood not merely in regional terms but as part of Washington's broader effort to derail BRICS+ and the geopolitical realignment it symbolises.

Between 2024 and 2025, BRICS expanded, joined by countries including Iran, the UAE, Egypt, and Ethiopia as members, and Vietnam as a partner country. BRICS+ now represents 44 percent of global GDP (by purchasing power parity) and 56 percent of the world's population. What began as a rhetorical coalition has matured into a formidable bloc with institutional ambitions. Of late, Washington's renewed push to finalise a trade and security agreement with Vietnam is no coincidence. There is a method in the apparent madness: fragment BRICS from within, contain China's influence, and reassert US leverage over strategic trade routes and supply chains. In this light, the Israel-Iran conflict is not an isolated flashpoint but a calculated disruption—part of a wider effort to arrest the momentum of multipolarity before it takes structural root.

BRICS—initially Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—was long dismissed in the West as rhetorical. But in recent times, it has begun building parallel institutions to challenge Western dominance.

Among its most ambitious aims is de-dollarisation—reducing global dependence on the US dollar in trade and finance. This strikes at the foundation of America's economic and geopolitical power. Washington's leverage, enforced via sanctions and institutions like Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) and the IMF, is deeply rooted in the dollar's primacy. Iran's BRICS accession, therefore, is not symbolic; it is strategic. It signals a path for sanctioned states to break free from the architecture of Western economic coercion.

Long the poster child of US sanctions, Iran has survived through creative oil trade mechanisms and strategic ties with Russia and China. But BRICS membership gives Iran more than endurance—it grants legitimacy. With the option to trade outside the dollar system—especially with China, India, or Gulf economies—Iran gains leverage and economic insulation.

Equally important, BRICS offers a diplomatic umbrella. Tehran can now reframe itself not as a pariah, but as a pillar of Global South resistance to neocolonial order. And here lies the paradox for Washington: the more it tries to isolate Iran, the more it risks binding BRICS members closer together in mutual defiance.

Israel, while not a BRICS member, plays a pivotal role in defending US hegemony. Beyond being a regional ally, it serves as a forward base to project US power and trial strategies of containment in the Middle East, especially towards Iran.

Israel's targeted assassinations and airstrikes, often justified as preemptive defence, also serve a larger agenda: to provoke Iran into retaliating, thereby justifying its continued isolation and obstructing its integration into blocs like BRICS. The April 2024 assassination of high-ranking Iranian commanders in Damascus underscores this logic. It wasn't just a tactical strike; it was a disruption of diplomacy itself.

Netanyahu's rhetoric—essentially issuing his own "fatwa" for regime change in Iran, echoed theatrically by Trump—reflects not confidence but desperation. The strategy is no longer about negotiation or deterrence but elimination. It is an attempt to stall the rise of a post-American global order.

The inclusion of Iran and major Gulf oil exporters into BRICS ruptured the illusion that US military and financial patronage ensured alignment. These states signalled an interest in diversifying their strategic options, posing a fundamental threat to American global dominance.

This is why the Israel-Iran conflict now functions as more than a regional war. It is a disruption tactic, driving wedges into BRICS. The UAE and Egypt—though now members—remain heavily reliant on US defence systems. A full-scale conflict involving Iran forces these countries into a dilemma: support BRICS cohesion or retreat into the safety of US patronage.

US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met in Washington, DC on July 7, 2025, just over two weeks after the US president ordered the bombing of Iranian nuclear sites in support of Israeli air strikes. PHOTO: **REUTERS**

The most recent flare-up began with Israeli strikes on Iran's nuclear sites. Lacking the munitions needed to breach Iran's fortified facilities, Israel's campaign faltered until the US intervened with bunker buster bombs. This joint assault shattered the myth of Israeli self-sufficiency and signalled Washington's readiness to escalate beyond deterrence.

It also sends a chilling message to the Global South: efforts to create alternative global alignments will be met not just with economic sabotage, but with deliberate destabilisation. The US is signalling that the cost of challenging unipolarity is not merely financial, it is existential.

The Israel-Iran conflict is not simply about borders or nuclear enrichment; it is about who defines global legitimacy. For Washington, the goal may not be to "defeat" Iran outright but to bog it down, thereby weakening BRICS coherence. A cornered Iran complicates unity within the bloc, keeps India cautious, China distracted, and Gulf states ambivalent.

Yet this approach is a double-edged sword. The more openly the US and Israel target Iran, the more they risk galvanising anti-Western sentiment across the Global South. The fragmentation they seek may ironically foster deeper BRICS solidarity, uniting states weary of Western double standards and coercive diplomacy.

The 2025 BRICS Summit in Rio unfolded under intense geopolitical pressure. Intended to showcase an emerging multipolar consensus—emphasising economic cooperation, peace advocacy, and systemic alternatives to US dominance—it also exposed the fragility of that project. Brazil, as host, walked a diplomatic tightrope: championing Global South solidarity while safeguarding its deep economic ties with the US and EU. The absence of China's and Russia's top leadership created a symbolic vacuum, muting the bloc's collective challenge to Western hegemony.

Nonetheless, the summit reaffirmed BRICS's ambition to contest the Western monopoly over global economic governance. Delegates condemned the resurgence of protectionism, particularly the Trump administration's unilateral tariffs—policies framed as national security measures but seen as instruments of economic coercion, reinforcing a unipolar order that subordinates trade and financial systems to US strategic interests. In response, BRICS leaders emphasised the need to build alternative institutions aligned with the priorities of the Global South. This includes expanding the New Development Bank to reduce reliance on Bretton Woods institutions, and accelerating non-dollar trade settlement mechanisms to protect against the vulnerabilities of a dollar-dominated system.

These initiatives reflect more than a rejection of Western conditionality. They assert economic agency against the weaponisation of interdependence that sustains US global influence. Yet the summit also revealed how internal divergences and external pressures—particularly military escalation in the Middle East—continue to strain BRICS's coherence. The bloc's ambition remains clear, but so too does its susceptibility to fragmentation, precisely the fault line Washington seeks to exploit.

Washington's efforts to slow the pace of multipolarity through regional destabilisation may offer short-term gains. But long-term, they risk deepening the legitimacy crisis of US leadership and driving more nations towards BRICS, not away from it.

To view this as a local flashpoint is to miss the larger stakes. This is a front line in the struggle over the future of international order. And despite its contradictions, BRICS is no longer just a symbol. It is a contender that now packs an unmistakable punch.

Why global crises are pushing the world towards renewables

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It's hard to look at the news today without seeing energy in the background of almost every crisis. Whether it's the war in Ukraine, the standoff between Israel and Iran, or the slow militarisation of the Arctic, energy isn't just lurking in the background—it's right at the centre. The urgency to move away from fossil fuels and into renewables isn't just about climate change anymore. It's also about security, survival, and staying ahead of the next big disruption.

Let's take the Middle East as a starting point. The recent escalations between Israel and Iran are not just ideological or territorial; they're wrapped up in energy infrastructure, shipping lanes, and strategic dominance. The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow stretch of water that sees nearly 20 percent of the world's oil traffic, remains one of the most fragile arteries in the global energy system. Every drone strike, missile test, or naval drill adds more uncertainty. In *The Prize*, Daniel Yergin captures just how often oil has played the lead role in shaping military decisions, and that hasn't changed. If anything, it's become more blatant.

The same applies to the Russian war in Ukraine. Russia's leverage over Europe wasn't just military but also about gas. Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy in *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* break down how Moscow used its energy exports as a blunt political tool. Europe learnt the hard way how dangerous dependency on a single supplier can be. That bitter experience jolted the EU into fast-tracking wind, solar, and hydrogen infrastructure, with the aim to stop being so easily cornered in addition to being pro-climate.

But it's not just big state actors. Energy tensions are flaring up in Africa, too. In *The Looting Machine*, Tom Burgis explains how foreign companies and domestic elites turned oil fields into conflict zones, making the argument that energy wealth often brings more guns than good. As major powers like China and the US extend their presence in the continent to secure oil, gas, and rare earth minerals, the push for homegrown renewables has started to feel like a long-term exit strategy from endless interference.

There's also a growing sense that fossil fuel politics are just too volatile to rely on. Meghan O'Sullivan, in *Windfall*, shows how the shale revolution reshaped global diplomacy, but even she notes that the US's new energy independence didn't reduce militarisation—it simply moved it elsewhere. Military ships now guard LNG routes, and US energy policy has begun to look more like energy defence. That's not a sustainable way to run the world, and policymakers know it.

So, beyond reducing carbon, the argument for renewables is also about getting out of the way of conflict. In *The Geopolitics of Renewables*, editor Daniel Scholten makes an important point: renewables are less centralised and harder to use as political leverage. You can't blockade the sun or sanction the wind. Countries that rely on solar panels and batteries don't have to strategise over pipelines or shipping routes. That's incredibly appealing at a time when supply chains are being disrupted and alliances are fraying.

But here's where it gets complicated. While the logic for renewables is strong, the path is anything but easy.

First, there's the issue of raw materials. You can't build solar panels, wind turbines, or electric cars without rare earth minerals like lithium, cobalt, and neodymium. And those are mostly found in countries with fragile governments or unstable politics. The push to extract more "green minerals" is causing new friction as well, often with local communities who don't want their land turned into another extractive frontier.

There's also the supply chain problem. In *Cobalt Red*, Siddharth Kara details how the mining of cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo, much of it done under brutal conditions, feeds the global renewable energy boom. It's a sobering reminder that clean energy doesn't always mean clean practices. Transitioning to renewables might lower carbon, but it doesn't automatically fix exploitation or inequality. In fact, it could make them worse if left unchecked.

Then there's the geopolitical shift. As renewables grow, new energy powers are emerging, and that's unsettling for traditional players. Some experts argue that solar, wind, and electric vehicles will wipe out the fossil fuel industry faster than most people expect. But transitions that fast rarely go smoothly. Petro-states—countries whose economies are built on oil and gas—aren't going to fade quietly. In fact, many are doubling down on fossil exports while they still can. That desperation could lead to more aggression, not less.

Even democratic states are feeling the pressure. The US and its allies are now racing to build domestic renewable supply chains, often at high cost and with little room for error. In *The Power Surge*, Michael Levi explains how US energy strategy is full of contradictions: it wants to be green, independent, and dominant all at once. That kind of balancing act is hard to pull off, especially when politics at home are so polarised.

And what about the people on the ground? The shift to renewables often comes with real economic pain for fossil fuel workers, especially in regions that depend on coal or oil. Experts warn that unless the energy transition is deliberately designed to be fair and inclusive, it could deepen inequality and fuel backlash. We have already seen glimpses of that in protests from miners in Poland to pipeline workers in the US.

There's also the question of grid stability. Renewable energy is intermittent: the sun doesn't always shine, and the wind doesn't always blow. In *The Grid*, Gretchen Bakke dives into the messy, technical challenges of keeping power systems running with high levels of renewables. Without massive investments in storage, smart grids, and demand management, blackouts could become more frequent.

So yes, the rush to renewables is necessary, but it's also messy, uneven, and politically charged. The idea that we can simply swap oil for solar and keep everything else the same is a fantasy. The transition will change who holds power, who gets rich, and who gets left behind.

But here's the thing: the status quo isn't working either. Wars over oil, gas diplomacy, and supply disruptions have already shown us how fragile and dangerous the current system is. Energy has always been tied to conflict. Maybe the best reason to go green isn't just the planet—it's to stop fighting over it.

In the end, renewables won't fix all our problems. But they might help us avoid a few of the worst ones. And right now, that feels like a future worth chasing.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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12 Sports spot
13 Declaration signer
15 Some amount of
16 Had lunch
17 Scot's denial
18 Russian range
20 Composer of patriotic marches
23 Vacation spot
27 Trick
28 Some sheep
29 Flag features
31 Flexes
32 Brainy
34 "So that's it!"
37 Flamenco cry
38 Ga. neighbor
41 Declaration signer
44 River vessel
45 Traded
46 Antlered animals
47 Texas A&M player

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3 Pallid
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8 Light gas
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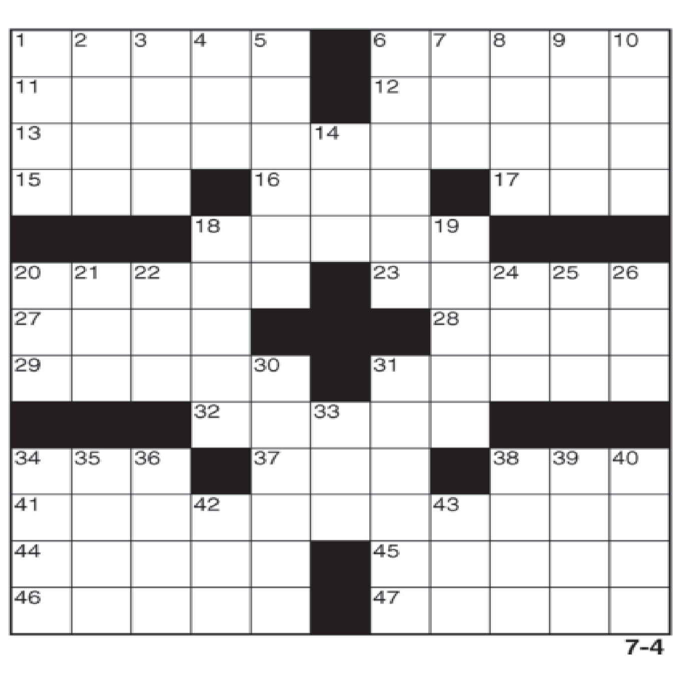

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SATURDAY'S ANSWERS

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