

South Africa: ANC-led government roiled by Iran war

Jean de Jager
5 March 2026

South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) is desperately clinging to its policy of non-alignment, following the war launched against Iran by the United States of America and Israel. Just as it did after the attack on Venezuela and kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro

In a statement the ANC expressed “deep concern at the escalating tensions in the Middle East” and conveyed its condolences to “the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran following reports of the passing of their Supreme Leader”. The ANC then called on all parties to “exercise maximum restraint”, follow international law and Article 51 of the United Nations Charter which “provides for self-defence only in response to an armed attack, and does not permit anticipatory self-defence based on assumption or conjecture”.

The ANC is incapable of even characterising a criminal war carried out by Washington and Tel Aviv. Indeed, the statement does not mention the United States or Israel once.

Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei did not just pass, as the passive wording of the ANC say, he was murdered alongside his daughter, grandchild, daughter-in-law and son-in-law.

The ANC's response is calculated to minimise the hostility it has been facing from Washington over its warm relations with Iran, which characterized the Biden administration and has only intensified since Trump returned to power.

Trump's South African Ambassador appointee Leo Brent Bozell III submitted his letter of credence the day before the attack. In his statement to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee he vowed to “communicate our objections to South Africa's geostrategic drift from non-alignment toward our

competitors, including Russia, China and Iran”. He has also been tasked with “press[ing] South Africa to end proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice”.

Last year, Chief of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), General Rudzani Maphwanya met with his Iranian counterparts and was quoted by Iranian media expressing support for Iran's international positions, including backing Hamas and Hezbollah.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa denounced Maphwanya and emphasised that foreign policy is dictated by government and not the military. Despite this, in January a BRICS-Plus naval exercise, *Will for Peace*, was carried out even after Ramaphosa ordered the removal of the Iranian ships.

The Democratic Alliance (DA), ANC's main partner in the ruling coalition Government of National Unity (GNU) has been forthright in their support for the war against Iran. While no official statement was released, the *Daily Maverick* quoted DA Spokesperson for International Relations Ryan Smith who said after the attack, “Iran is a rogue state which has repeatedly defied international law, violated nuclear treaties and funded proxy organisations which have divided and destabilised societies around the world.”

Referring to the crackdown on anti-government protests late-last year and earlier this year, Smith went on, “The current theocratic dictatorship in Iran is also responsible for the most brutal massacre of innocent civilians in recent history. These countries are the single biggest threat to the international rules-based order and liberal democracies such as our own”.

Smith's comments underscore the political divide within the GNU. On one side you have the naked supporters of American imperialism, represented most

strongly in the DA. On the other, there is the ANC which mouths opposition against imperialism but at every turn seeks compromises with it in order to secure investment for the South African bourgeoisie and especially patronage for the benefit of the Black elite on which it is based.

The war on Iran comes after Washington inaugurated a new era of colonial rule, with the attack on Venezuela. This era was formally announced by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference in February.

Rubio lamented the decline of Western empires “accelerated by godless communist revolutions and by anti-colonial uprisings” and called for an alliance with Europe that is “not paralysed into inaction by fear — fear of climate change, fear of war, fear of technology”.

The attack on Iran is Washington putting this perspective into practice.

Speaking at the Africa Energy Indaba in Cape Town on Wednesday, Ramaphosa called for African nations to move towards energy self-reliance, diversification and increased security. “Africa is already experiencing the impact of escalating conflict in the Middle East, with strains on supply chains and higher energy prices. Now we are going to be a victim of conflicts that are taking place far away from where we are,” Ramaphosa told the attendees.

These comments come after Washington bombed Nigeria in December last year, which the largest oil producer on the continent. Nigeria is South Africa’s largest source of crude oil at approximately 36 percent.

The closure or conversion of major domestic refineries such as SAPREF and Engen has made South Africa more reliant on refined petroleum imports and vulnerable to shipping disruptions.

Iran has responded to the attack by Israel and the US by closing the Strait of Hormuz, and bombing energy infrastructure in many of the countries South Africa imports refined petroleum from: Oman at 26 percent, Saudi Arabia at 15.8 percent, the United Arab Emirates at 15 percent and Bahrain at 8.5 percent. In total, 65.6 percent of South Africa’s refined petroleum import suppliers are at risk in the war on Iran.

Ramaphosa’s comments about energy independence betray a concern that rising fuel costs and the general increase in the cost of living may spark widespread

protests and strikes in South Africa. But preventing war and its costs from decimating the working class, requires South African workers to unite in a struggle against imperialism together with Iranian workers and the workers of every other country in a fight for Socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact