



By: TA | AP Brief

South Africa investigates Iran's participation in naval drills off its coast



South Africa launched an investigation over the **participation of Iranian warships** in naval drills off its coast after reports that organizers ignored the president's instructions that the ships only take up observer status so as not to inflame tensions with the United States.

The investigation announced by the Defense Ministry came a day after the U.S. criticized South Africa's move to host Iranian ships off the coast of Cape Town this week for joint drills that also included the Chinese, Russian and United Arab Emirates navies.

In a statement posted on X, the U.S. Embassy in South Africa said it was "unconscionable that South Africa welcomed Iranian security forces as they were shooting, jailing, and torturing Iranian citizens engaging in peaceful political activity" — a reference to the ongoing **protests in Iran** and a bloody crackdown by authorities that has **killed more than 2,600 people**, according to the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency.

The U.S. Embassy said it had noted with concern reports in the South African media that President Cyril Ramaphosa's instruction that Iran only have observer status in the drills may have been flouted by South Africa's Defense Ministry or its military officials.

The Trump administration has been critical of South Africa over its diplomatic **ties with Iran**, citing them as an example of South Africa taking what it called an anti-American stance in its foreign policy. South Africa says it follows a neutral, non-aligned foreign policy and is open to diplomatic discussions with Iran.

It's not clear what Ramaphosa ordered over the drills. The president hasn't commented on the issue, and his spokesperson didn't immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

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The Defense Ministry said in its statement that Defense Minister Angie Motshekga ensured Ramaphosa's instructions were "clearly communicated to all parties concerned" without detailing what they were.

The investigation would find out if Ramaphosa's instructions were "misrepresented and/or ignored," the Defense Ministry said.

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The South African armed forces said Iran sent two warships to take part in the drills, while the AP saw a third Iranian warship anchored in a harbor in Simon's Town, near Cape Town alongside Chinese and Russian warships.

The drills, which were due to end Friday, were led by China and organized under the BRICS bloc of developing nations. South Africa, China and Russia are longtime members of the bloc, while Iran joined in 2024 and this week's naval drills were its first with BRICS.

The expanding BRICS group was created as a counter to perceived U.S. and Western dominance of the global economy and international institutions and has often been used by China and Russia as a forum to criticize the West.

South Africa's ties with the U.S. have plummeted since U.S. President Donald Trump returned to office, with his administration also making baseless claims that South Africa's government is allowing the violent persecution of its **white minority** Afrikaner people in order to seize their land.