

Violent Unilateralism and the Struggle for Security in West Asia

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ABSTRACT

The provision of security as a global public good should constitute the foundational normative commitment of any functioning international order. The emergence of a multipolar world, spearheaded by China's sovereign modernization and the growing capacity of Global South states to pursue development on their own terms, has opened structural possibilities for realising this commitment. US-led violent unilateralism poses the central challenge to global security. Building on Georgi Dimitrov's foundational theorisation of fascism this paper locates violent unilateralism as its contemporary expression. Violent unilateralism operates through the exploitation of internal vulnerabilities to isolate and undermine sovereign formations before turning to the next target. West Asia concentrates this logic most acutely; from Gaza and Lebanon to Syria and Iran. This in turn requires thinking across three dimensions: internal, the consolidation of developmental sovereignty to foreclose the vulnerabilities sequential targeting exploits; institutional, the construction of alternative international institutions grounded in sovereign equality; and strategic, a critical reconsideration of the multipolar order's current posture under conditions of sequential pressure.

TAGS:

Multipolarity; United States; West Asia; US Violent Unilateralism

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, four wars have reshaped West Asia: the genocide in Palestine, the destruction of southern Lebanon, the fall of the Syrian state, and the multi-phase assault on Iran. Each is usually told as a regional story that involves the instrumentalization of Sunni–Shia division, the contest between Saudi Arabia and Iran for influence across the Arab Iranian state system, or the brittleness of states whose institutions could not hold. Read one at a time, through the region's own fault lines, these wars appear as discrete regional crises. Read together, against the global transformation unfolding around them, they instead disclose what the regional frame keeps out of view. The decades since 2008 have seen a slow exhaustion of the US-led unipolar order and the consolidation of a multipolar formation with the weight to act outside its terms. That shift reopened the possibility the post-World War II order had foreclosed since decolonization: security grounded in the sovereign equality of states, available as an entitlement of political existence rather than dispensed selectively to the aligned. This aspiration goes back to the Non-Aligned Movement and the New International Economic Order, whose dismantlement took place via debt and military interventions. What marks the present is that the formations carrying the demand for sovereign security possess, for the first time, the weight to sustain it.

The historical moment that opens this possibility, however, is also the one that carries its most concentrated violent negation, and West Asia is where the negation falls hardest. This essay reads the four wars as the local expression of this ongoing global confrontation and treats it as a security question (who is secured, by what means, and at whose expense). It proceeds in four sections: locating the question within the critical study of security; naming the form the violence takes, which I call *violent unilateralism*; tracing the regional machinery and the sequence that carries it from Palestine to Iran; and asking whether the multipolar world that made the opening possible can defend it.

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SECURITY FOR WHOM

The critical study of security begins from a question the mainstream spent most of a century holding at arm's length: security for whom, and at whose expense? From within the region itself, the question has been posed most directly by the Beirut School of critical security studies—the collective agenda set out by Abboud et al. (2018)—which treats (in)security from the standpoint of the region's own populations. The Beirut School approaches security as contested and mutable relationships, placing the political economy of violence and external intervention at the center, not the margins, of the analysis. Of course, this tradition extends from a longer current. Ken Booth's (1991) argument that real security is a synonym for emancipation—the removal of the structural constraints that prevent people from living lives they would freely choose—supplies its normative horizon. Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey (2006) also provide its sharpest hinge, arguing how the mainstream field has been able to imagine the Global South playing two main roles: as a source of threats or as a recipient of security delivered from outside. What remained almost unthinkable is the possibility that the South could become a producer of security. That third role is the analytical key of this essay in relation to West Asia. As the essay argues, the formations targeted across the region are producers of security; they have built, at enormous cost, their own capacities for developmental and political autonomy, and that production is the reason for their destruction.

I take security here in a deliberately specific sense: the condition under which a people can pursue self-determined development free from external coercion. Its referent is the population and its sovereign capacity. Security in this sense is co-constitutive with autonomous development, and it is indivisible, since one state's security built on another's insecurity is domination under a different name. While the United Nations Charter once institutionalized this promise, for the Global South it has functioned largely as aspiration. In practice, security under the US-led unipolar order operates as what economists call a club good (Coyne and Davies 2007); provisioned to states inside the hegemon's orbit and withheld, often by force, from those who pursue autonomy. The works of scholars from the Third World Approach to International Law (see Anghie 2005; and others) show this selective provision to be an intentional, structural feature of the system's design. The formal language of sovereign equality has coexisted since 1945 with an institutional order that reproduces hierarchy through one respectable vocabulary after another, from trusteeship and the mandate system to the responsibility

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to protect (R2P), each reformulation updating the words that keep the selectiveness invisible.

This essay carries further what the Beirut School opens; and it supplies a structural account of how that insecurity is produced—a materialist theory of imperialism in crisis—and dialectically locates the alternative the region's producers of security have been building with the question of multipolarity.

THE FORM VIOLENCE TAKES

The US-led unipolar order is, at its core, a system of capital accumulation whose reproduction depends on the continued subordination of peripheral economies, enforced through interlocking mechanisms: the dollar–Treasury architecture that recycles global surpluses (Desai 2013), the conditionality regimes of the international financial institutions, and the technology-denial regimes that preserve Northern monopolies over advanced production (Hickel 2022). The standing possibility of military destruction gives every softer instrument its force: the always-available alternative that makes economic compliance rational (Capasso and Kadri 2025). The insecurity of the periphery is therefore a product of securing the order, the routine output of its normal functioning. A Global South state bound in a condition of dependent development, its industrial capacity extended on condition of remaining firmly inside the Western security orbit, does not constitute a threat because the direction of accumulation remains externally set. A state that achieves developmental sovereignty, by contrast, becomes a structural threat through its own independence and, more consequentially, through the demonstration it offers everyone else; proof that subordination is a political condition, maintained by force, and open to change.

That demonstration has been most consequential in China's trajectory, at a continental scale. A nation of over a billion people subjected to a century of humiliation under Western and Japanese imperialism has achieved comprehensive modernization while holding sovereign control over its developmental path, shifting the conditions under which every other formation calculates the pursuit of sovereign development (Kadri 2021). Around it a broader formation has consolidated—BRICS expansion to a majority of the world's population, the Belt and Road's infrastructure financing free of structural-adjustment conditionality (X. Xu and Li 2025), and payment mechanisms that erode dollar leverage (Gao Bai 2024)—anchored by states with the weight to sustain resistance to the instruments that dismantled the Non-Aligned Movement.

The order's response has taken two different forms. Toward China the dominant instruments remain economic and technological (ranging from tariffs, semiconductor

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controls, and decoupling) coercive measures conducted within recognizable international frameworks. Toward West Asia the response has taken the form of open, sustained, escalating military destruction, conducted without multilateral legitimation and in systematic defiance of the legal norms the same order claims to uphold. This difference is what *violent unilateralism* names (Capasso and Kadri 2025). The concept draws on Georgi Dimitrov's theorization of fascism as the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, and most imperialist elements of finance capital (Dimitrov 1935). In other words, fascism is the political form capital adopts once accumulation through consent is exhausted, where the openness of the violence registers exhaustion (see also Capasso 2026). Read through Giovanni Arrighi's account (2005) of the passage from dominance-through-hegemony to dominance-without-hegemony, *violent unilateralism* is the form this transition takes when the hegemon confronts formations whose sovereign trajectories threaten to demonstrate that subordination can change. In defying international law, *violent unilateralism* exposes an order that fails in reconciling its projected universality with the selective coercion on which it depends (Gill and Doutaghi 2026).

THE REGIONAL MACHINE

The level of terroristic and genocidal violence witnessed in West Asia stem from the unique articulation that this region has with the world economy, specifically through two channels that set it apart from other peripheries: oil and war (Hanieh 2023; Kadri 2015). Hydrocarbon revenues are recycled through the petrodollar system into US Treasury instruments and weapons purchases, generating autonomous development for no one but the order they finance, while war operates as a domain of accumulation in its own right (Kadri 2023). Three interlocking formations keep this double channel running under US patronage, and together they form a machine that converts any assertion of regional sovereignty into a target.

The first of these three interlocking formations is the Israeli settler-colonial state, whose war economy rests on externally funded military expenditure, weapons-export revenue, and the revalorization of confiscated land, and whose internal reproduction requires the permanent fragmentation of its regional environment. Since 1948 the formation has conducted operations against almost every neighbor in a rhythm that tracks the moments when regional unity or autonomous development came within reach (Dana 2024). The second formation is the Gulf petrodollar monarchies, which anchor the region in the dollar system through surplus recycling. A portion of that surplus is channelled into Wahhabist and Salafist networks, whose spread across Arab societies

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has dissolved the class-based and nationalist formations that once carried developmental projects. In their place stands a sectarian and tribal identity that displaces the class solidarity on which autonomous development rests (Samara 2024). The third interlocking formation is the comprador regimes, whose accumulation depends on external circuits and whose survival depends on external patronage: they import rather than produce, export capital to Western institutions rather than circulate surplus at home, and supply the ground-level counter-revolutionary violence that air power and money require local forces to deliver (Ibid.). The wars on Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen ran on exactly this division of labor- the imperial center providing the air campaign, intelligence, and financial siege; the monarchies financing the proxies; the comprador states supplying the territory, the cover, and in several cases the fighters (Capasso and Elkorghli 2024). The same arrangement governs the four wars that follow, though there it operates in sequence rather than in parallel.

ONE AT A TIME

The way *violent unilateralism* moves through this machine has a name in US strategic planning: sequential targeting. The doctrine answers what its authors call the "simultaneity problem" – the recognition that US military and political resources cannot confront several major adversaries at once, and that a decisive contest with China requires clearing the secondary theaters first (Mitchell 2020). Its solution is to take on adversaries one at a time, isolating each from its regional allies before turning to the next, so that when the principal challenge arrives the supporting formations are already dismantled. The lineage is traceable to Elbridge Colby, its principal architect, who co-founded the Marathon Initiative in 2020 as the vehicle for the strategic-sequencing framework and was confirmed as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in April 2025, two months before the 12-Day War with Iran (Losier 2025). This continuity places the connection between West Asian operations and US posture toward China on the record as documented policy. The doctrine works in two registers. It is anticipatory, manufacturing the conditions for each strike over years. It also works from the inside out; sanctions weaken productive capacity and empower comprador formations, proxy networks and information operations sharpen social contradictions, and military destruction then lands on a body already weakened from within. What follows takes the four wars in turn, asking of each what security it had built, how the division of labor operated to dismantle it, and what its dismantling prepared.

Palestine. Over more than a century of Zionist colonization, Palestinian developmental aspiration has confronted a colonial formation built around its denial: land dispossession foreclosing an independent productive base, occupation subordinating

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the economy to Israeli interests, and the conversion of Gaza after 2007 into a laboratory for weapons and population-control technologies later marketed internationally as "battle-tested" (Loewenstein 2023; Dana 2024). The Al-Aqsa Flood of October 2023 ruptured the architecture of normalization closing around that denial and, whatever one makes of its strategic calculus, accelerated a sequence already in preparation (Walker and Said 2023). The genocide that followed is the most acute contemporary expression of *violent unilateralism*. By mid-2025 the Gaza Ministry of Health had recorded over 62,000 killed, more than 17,000 of them children—a proportion of child fatalities the UN described as without precedent in modern conflict (OCHA 2025). The International Court of Justice found it plausible in January 2024 that Israel's conduct fell within the Genocide Convention, a finding confirmed by successive orders (ICJ 2024). The US vetoed binding ceasefire resolutions on at least five occasions—consistently against fourteen votes in favor—while congressional appropriations across two administrations transferred over \$18 billion in military assistance (Hartung 2025); when the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants in November 2024, Western states declared they would not enforce them (ICC 2024). Within the sequence the assault performs three functions: it eliminates the most symbolic node of Palestinian anti-colonial resistance, exhausts the formations' capacity to support one another before subsequent strikes, and breaks the will to resist across the region by making the price of independence explicit (Capasso and Kadri 2025). The second function is the one that carries the sequence forward. With the capacity for mutual support depleted and regional coordination under sustained pressure, the ground for targeting Lebanon was laid.

Lebanon. The Lebanese Islamic resistance emerged directly from an act of Israeli military violence, the 1982 invasion and occupation of the South, from which Hezbollah consolidated as a national force (Saad 2019). From its earliest phase, resistance was inseparable from the developmental aspirations of populations the confessional state had abandoned to the economic margins. This is how military capacities accompanied the constructions of schools, hospitals, reconstruction programs, and agricultural investment across the South and Beqaa. They constituted the material developmental alternative the *muqawama* built as its social foundation (Kanaaneh 2024). The 2000 liberation of the South—the first Israeli withdrawal in the region achieved without negotiated settlement—showed what sovereign security capacity could deliver, and the failure of Israel's 2006 campaign to reverse it deepened the resistance's legitimacy (Saad 2019). The 2022 maritime boundary agreement made the logic of this relation further explicit. Lebanon accessed its offshore gas because the resistance's deterrence made unilateral seizure costly. The confessional structure of Lebanese politics, engineered through decades of external colonial manipulation, supplied the vulnerability violent unilateralism cultivates. A system constitutionally incapable of unified sovereign

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decision allows a national-liberation formation to be framed as sectarian and isolated diplomatically long before military operations begin. Simply put, confessionalism is what made the isolation possible before a single strike was launched. The 2024 operations reached well beyond the elimination of senior leadership across multiple tiers of command, including the secretary-general and his designated successor within days of each other (Kobeissi 2026). Over the September–October campaign, Israeli strikes killed more than 3,700 people, displaced over a million, and destroyed hundreds of towns and villages across the South and the Beqaa (Asi 2026). They had been prepared and timed to the requirements of the broader sequence long before October 2023 furnished their public justification, and the November 2024 ceasefire left operations continuing into 2026. With the resistance's deterrence under severe pressure, the pathway to Syria and Iran lay open.

Syria. Syria is the most fully documented expression of the sequential lifecycle, unfolding across fifteen years from the identification of exploitable contradictions to comprehensive sovereign elimination, and the clearest case of the regional machine operating against a state that had built substantive developmental sovereignty. By the late 2000s Syria ranked above Egypt and Morocco on the Human Development Index among non-oil economies, produced ninety percent of its medicines domestically, and housed ICARDA's globally significant seed bank (Dahi 2021). Ba'thist land reform had cut the landless share of the agrarian workforce from sixty to thirty-six percent, assembling the cross-class coalition on which the social contract rested (Hinnebusch 1995). This model was inseparable from Syria's posture of *mumana'a*, its principled refusal of US-Israeli plans (Matar and Kadri 2019). Nonetheless, the neoliberal restructuring of the mid-2000s, driven by IFI pressure and comprador class interest, eroded the social contract and the resistance posture at once, sharpening the inequalities the machine would weaponize. Each pillar then assumed its role: the Gulf financed proxies and the networks that recoded class grievance as sectarian antagonism (Samara 2024); comprador intelligence services operating through Amman and southern Turkey ran the weapons and personnel flows (Van Wagenen 2025; Thomason 2024); and the US Caesar Act of 2020 extended secondary sanctions to any third party transacting with the state, rendering reconstruction structurally impossible (US Congress 2019). GDP more than halved between 2010 and 2022, per capita income fell to \$830—below the low-income threshold—and poverty reached sixty-nine percent (Dahi 2021; World Bank 2024). The December 2024 fall of Damascus was the military crystallization. Within hours Operation Bashan Arrow destroyed an estimated seventy to eighty percent of Syria's remaining strategic capacity, Israeli forces seized the buffer zone established by the 1974 Disengagement Agreement, and Netanyahu declared the agreement void. By late 2025 over six hundred Israeli strikes had been recorded inside

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Syria, averaging nearly two a day (ACLED 2025). The land corridor linking the resistance formations was severed, the deterrence that had made a direct assault on Iran costly was broken, and the principal target stood exposed.

Iran. The assault on Iran began with the 1979 revolution, which ruptured the petrodollar compact that had bound Iran to imperial accumulation under the Shah, and continued through the Iran–Iraq war of 1980–88, prosecuted with US support for Baghdad as the first attempt to destroy the revolutionary state before it could consolidate. What Iran built across four decades of sanctions, assassination, and permanent threat stands as a demonstration that sovereign development is achievable under the conditions designed to prevent it (Ameli 2026). Like in the other theatres, sequential targeting operated here also through a doubled mechanism of dependency: external coercion and its internal relay. Comprehensive sanctions restructured domestic class relations, generating inflation and currency collapse while empowering the speculative and comprador formations whose accumulation depended on the distortions the sanctions produced (Jebraily 2026). The internal bloc was the formation through which external pressure was internalized and intensified. The "reformist" power bloc that consolidated under these conditions advocated an "economic surgery" of currency unification and subsidy removal that amplified the sanctions' impact and transferred macroeconomic risk downward onto households as the military phase approached (Jebraily 2026). US Treasury officials themselves linked this strategy to the manufacture of dollar scarcity and the street unrest it was designed to set off (Avcioglu 2026); the rial lost close to half its value and the household food basket roughly doubled in a year (IranWire 2026), converting economic distress into the protest cycles spreading across Tehran from late December. The 12-Day War of June 2025—the most intensive direct assault on Iranian territory since the 1980s—came after the regional encirclement was complete, and its failure to produce immediate collapse exposed the central miscalculation of the design. That is, a socially fragilized society is not thereby available to external coercion, and the attack recast a conflict over livelihood and governance as one over sovereignty and national survival (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2026). In December 2025 five thousand contract workers at the South Pars gas refinery in Bushehr province marched on the provincial governor's office in the largest organized labor action since the revolution, demanding enforcement of a job classification ruling their employers had ignored for decades (Doutaghi 2025a). Their chant—that stealing a worker's wage is a betrayal of the country—held exploitation and national sabotage to be the same thing, and the union publicly refused the attempts by US government accounts and Western-funded Persian-language media to recode the action as regime-change protest. This was the popular foundation—the *mostazafan* in the streets, neighborhoods, and mosques—that turned formal sovereignty into the material capacity to endure (Ameli 2026). When the

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military assault failed, the operation escalated to its most direct phase: on February 28, 2026 the US and Israel launched Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion, assassinating Supreme Leader Khamenei along with senior officials, striking nuclear and missile infrastructure, and inflicting mass civilian casualties. Iran answered with hundreds of missiles and drones against Israel, US bases across the Gulf, and regional infrastructure, closed the Strait of Hormuz, and triggered a global energy crisis. The appointment of a successor signalled institutional continuity in place of the cascade of elite defection the decapitation logic presupposed.

What draws these four formations into a single frame is a shared structural position. Each was attempting to build a form of sovereign development from below, people-centered, subordinating external economic relations to internal priorities. Each remained partial and internally contested. And each demonstrated that popular developmental sovereignty can be built under sustained imperial assault—the demonstration the accumulation model cannot absorb, and the evidence violent unilateralism is directed at destroying before it spreads. What remains to be asked is why the multipolar formation with the weight to interrupt that destruction did not.

THE MULTIPOLAR DILEMMA

A significant question remains: can the multipolar formation that reopened the possibility of sovereign development defend it? The record is uneven. The New Development Bank lends without the conditionality of Bretton Woods; alternative payment systems and bilateral currency arrangements have produced a partial de-dollarization that sanctions on Russia and Iran have only accelerated; the China-brokered Saudi–Iran rapprochement of 2023 displayed a regional diplomatic capacity no previous formation had managed; and South Africa's genocide case before the ICJ became the most significant legal mobilization against a genocide in the court's history. Across the same period, the rapprochement collapsed under post-October 7 escalation, the court's orders were openly violated, the Security Council was blocked by six US vetoes, and the principle of indivisible security articulated in China's Global Security Initiative (Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC 2023) found no operational expression in the one theater that most demanded it. The formation has assembled an economic and institutional architecture; it has yet to assemble a security architecture. That gap is the heart of the dilemma, and it follows from the formation's own composition.

What the formation lacks the cohesion to do is impose costs on *violent unilateralism*; to make the isolation of any single targeted node into a confrontation with the whole, to

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build legal mechanisms outside a Security Council whose veto guarantees impunity, and to apply collective economic measures, including sanctions on Israel and the states supplying it, that would make the costs of aggression symmetric. The material weight for such measures exist. However, the limit is set by the class composition of the formation's members, who are embedded in the circuits of global capital to sharply unequal degrees—the empirical expression of combined and uneven development (Desai 2013). Several of the larger members entered as developmental aspirants whose integration into the order's supply chains and financial institutions runs deep, their membership expressing sovereign aspiration more than rupture (Dahi and Demir 2025). Russia, pushed toward the formation by NATO encirclement and delinked further by sanctions, remains a hydrocarbon economy dependent on markets it does not control, and the Sino-Russian axis rests on economic asymmetry and divergent world-order visions. The divergence is sharpest in West Asia, where China sustains energy ties with Iran while deepening relations with the Gulf states whose financing and basing sustained the assault on Iran's regional position (Zhang 2026). Neither great power has imposed on Israel or its sponsors the costs collective action would require, because the external relationships that their own developmental circuits depend on set the ceiling.

The same condition appears more acutely inside the region. The Gulf monarchies expand partnership with China (UAE–China trade reached \$86.7 billion in 2023), while hosting the US installations from which the regional assault is coordinated and recycling their surpluses through the dollar. The literature calls this hedging (Bakir and Al-Shamari 2025; Wang et al. 2025); while hedging describes the behavior, a class analysis explains its persistence across every crisis and against the monarchies' own stated aspirations. It is a structural reflex of formations whose accumulation depends on the order's financial circuits and security guarantees. The external and internal limits reveal themselves as one mechanism: the partial embeddedness that caps the formation's collective response abroad is the same condition that breeds, at home, the comprador formations imperialist assault cultivates and turns against the states it targets. The doubled dependency (external coercion and internal relay) that hollowed Iran from within is this single mechanism in its regional form. Whether *violent unilateralism* is itself beginning to move that condition is the live question. When the order demanded a choice, class and global structural position answered. For instance, Saudi Arabia accepted a BRICS invitation in 2023 and suspended its accession under US tariff pressure a year later. Yet as Israeli strikes reach Iranian soil directly and the Gulf finds its own position destabilized by a war it helped enable, the price of accommodation begins to climb toward the price of the sovereignty it was meant to avoid, and a hegemon that can no longer guarantee its clients' security narrows the

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ground on which hedging remains viable. The Bushehr mobilization in Iran is the most recent sign of the popular forces on which any resolution depends.

Even full cohesion leaves a significant question. Multipolarity is the structural outcome of combined and uneven development, the configuration that arrives when no single power can hold unipolar dominance (Desai 2013). Hence, multipolarity redistributes weight among states, and a security order resting on it alone would reproduce, at a larger scale, security as a club good provisioned to some and withheld from others. The substantive alternative is what the dependency and Bandung traditions called polycentrism: development built from below, on a class basis, subordinating external relations to popular priorities (Amin 1990; Yeros 2024). Given its political-economic basis, this is precisely the security the Beirut School's bottom-up commitment points toward, and what the four targeted formations were constructing. Polycentric content is generational and laid over decades, its bases cannot be reconstituted in months once destroyed, which is why violent unilateralism races to destroy it. The strategic problem is one of temporality, where violent unilateralism moves fast by design, multipolar construction has proceeded at a patient, long-horizon pace. Construction cannot be accelerated, though its defensive cover can. Whether the formation will deploy the weight it already holds returns us to the question of class composition. The second thread is solidarity. By its open character, *violent unilateralism* has produced solidarity across the Global South at a scale no previous Western intervention generated, and the isolation of the US at the General Assembly, the widening coalition behind the ICJ case, the mobilizations that made Gaza and Iran global reference points. The force of solidarity depends on the depth of the popular foundation beneath it, of the kind the Iranian response to the 12-Day War made visible, and on whether it acquires structure as well as depth. The specific question would require the principle of indivisible security the multipolar formation affirms to become operative enough, so that no node can be isolated and taken in turn. The Axis of Resistance has shown, at great cost, what that linkage looks like; whether the far larger formation acquires it remains, at the time of writing, genuinely open.

THE EXHAUSTION OF CONSENT

From a dialectical perspective, the wars across West Asia create a unity of opposites, since they register both a display and an exhaustion of imperialist force. While dominance-through-hegemony economizes on violence, dominance-without-hegemony must substitute violence for the consent it has lost, and each substitution deepens the loss it compensates for. This is why the strength on view and the depletion underneath

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are part of a single process observed at different depths, and why the depletion becomes legible first in the periphery, where dominance had never been economized in the first place.

The lesson the critical study of security has pressed for decades is that security organized as a club good is domination under a gentler name, and that emancipatory security requires the co-constitution of people-centered development from within and an international order grounded in sovereign equality from without, each the condition of the other's durability. The wars across West Asia evidence an attempt to destroy both at once, before the demonstration they represent can consolidate and spread. Whether the multipolar formation finds the political and ideological coherence to act on behalf of the formations being sacrificed in its name, before sequential targeting eliminates the foundations on which any alternative rests, is the central strategic question of this violent conjuncture. It remains a question that history will answer.

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