

## **An International Relations Analysis**

### **From Oil Shock to Health Crisis: Pakistan's Mediation in the US-Israel-Iran War**

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#### **Abstract**

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the ongoing US-Israel-Iran war, which began on 28 February 2026. It examines the conflict through multiple lenses: military escalation, economic disruption (particularly the near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz), the unfolding humanitarian and health crisis, and the diplomatic role of Pakistan as a mediator. Drawing on empirical data from international organizations and scholarly literature on International Relations and peace and conflict studies, the article argues that the war represents a fundamental breakdown of the liberal international order and a catastrophic failure of preventive diplomacy. It concludes with policy recommendations for de-escalation, humanitarian relief, and long-term regional security architecture.

**Keywords:** Iran war; Strait of Hormuz; humanitarian crisis; Pakistan mediation; international political economy; peace and conflict studies; global health security.

#### **Introduction**

On 28 February 2026, the United States and Israel launched coordinated military strikes against the Islamic Republic of Iran, triggering a war that has now entered its second month. What began as a targeted campaign against Iran's nuclear and military infrastructure has rapidly escalated into a multi-front regional conflagration, with Iranian retaliatory strikes reaching Israel, Gulf States, and US military installations across the Middle East. The conflict has

already claimed thousands of lives, displaced millions, and caused the most severe disruption to global energy supplies since the 1973 oil embargo.

This article seeks to answer three interrelated questions: (1) what are the dynamics of the current war and its economic consequences? (2) How has the conflict affected public health and humanitarian conditions in the region? (3) What role can Pakistan, as a non-belligerent state with ties to all major parties, play in mediating a resolution? By integrating International Relations theory, empirical data, and public health analysis, the article aims to contribute to scholarly and policy debates on conflict resolution, humanitarian intervention, and the future of regional security in West Asia.

## **2. The Conflict: Escalation, Strategy and Stalemate**

### **2.1 Military Dimensions**

The war has been characterized by simultaneous air campaigns, missile exchanges, and maritime confrontation. By day 34 of the conflict, USA and Israeli forces had carried out more than twenty strikes in the Tehran area alone, alongside operations in Isfahan and Mashhad, with critical infrastructure, including the Pasteur Institute in Tehran deliberately targeted. Iran has responded with large-scale barrages of ballistic missiles and drones aimed at Israel, US command facilities in Bahrain and Kuwait, and energy infrastructure across the Gulf (Pakistan Today, 2026).

The military balance remains precarious. The US has surged its largest force to the region since 2003, including two aircraft carrier strike groups, amphibious ready groups, and soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division (Clark & Stein, 2026). Simultaneously, the White House has signaled contradictory intentions: while President Trump has threatened to “bring them back to the Stone Age”, he has also indicated that military objectives are “near completion” (Melimopoulos, 2026). Rosemary Kelanic of Defense Priorities notes that “actions speak louder than words and the US is still sending more forces” to the region, suggesting a continued risk of escalation that “would get the US into a deeper mess, probably wouldn’t end the war, would be costly, and would prolong the conflict” (Clark & Stein, 2026).

### **2.2 Regional Proxies and Spillover**

The conflict has expanded beyond Iran’s borders. Hezbollah has launched longer-range Scud-type missiles from Lebanon against Israeli military sites, while the Houthis have signaled

readiness to close the Bab el-Mandab Strait. The UAE has been intercepting incoming missiles and drones, and tankers off the coast of Qatar have been struck. This widening geographic scope transforms what began as a bilateral confrontation into a genuine regional war, with profound implications for global security. The escalating US-Israeli military campaign against Iran, including strikes on a medical research center, bridge, and steel plants, has deepened regional instability, triggered global economic shocks (oil price spikes, inflation, food security risks), and stalled diplomacy, with Iran rejecting US ceasefire claims and demanding UN action to protect the Strait of Hormuz. Despite appeals for de-escalation from the UN, China, and Gulf states, the conflict continues to widen, threatening a broader war and disrupting global supply chains (Melimopoulos, 2026).

### **3. The Economic Earthquake: Oil, Inflation and Global Recession**

#### **3.1 The Strait of Hormuz: A Chokepoint Weaponized**

The single most consequential economic development of the war has been the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which approximately 20 per cent of the world's oil supply and liquefied natural gas normally passes. The US-Israeli war on Iran has triggered a severe global economic shock within its first month, sending oil prices above \$100 per barrel, disrupting supply chains for helium and fertilizer, and causing financial market turmoil with major indexes nearing correction territory. The near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz has led to fuel rationing in countries like the Philippines and Pakistan, while rising jet fuel prices have crippled air travel. Economists warn of potential 1970s-style stagflation, a combination of high inflation, stagnant growth, and rising unemployment. Although President Trump frames the war as necessary to counter Iran's threats, the conflict's economic fallout is spreading worldwide, and its duration may ultimately depend on how long the global economy can endure the strain (News Desk, 2026).

Iran has imposed tolls on all shipping through the waterway, charging approximately \$2 million per vessel, while prohibiting American and Israeli ships entirely. The global energy trade faces a permanent and potentially transformative shift following approval by Iran's parliamentary security committee of a proposal to charge tolls on all ships traversing the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical waterways. Under the plan, confirmed by Iranian state television, Iran would impose "financial arrangements and rial toll systems" while asserting its "sovereign role" over the strait, in cooperation with Oman. The proposal also includes a

complete prohibition on American and Israeli vessels, as well as any ships from countries that impose sanctions on Iran. Iranian parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf has declared that the strait will never return to its pre-war status, signaling a permanent shift in regional maritime governance. The financial implications are staggering, with reports indicating that ships could be charged approximately \$2 million per passage, potentially generating \$600 million monthly from oil tankers alone, an annual revenue comparable to that of the Suez Canal. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar revealed that Iran has already permitted twenty Pakistani-flagged commercial vessels (at a rate of two per day) to traverse the strait, with similar exemptions granted to Russia, India, China, and Iraq. The United States has strongly condemned the move, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio declaring it "illegal, unacceptable, and a danger to the world" following G7 meetings, while G7 foreign ministers collectively called for restoring safe and free navigation. Since the war began, traffic through the strait has declined by over 90%, causing oil prices to surge dramatically and creating severe shortages in oil-dependent Asian countries. Approximately 2,000 ships remain stranded, unable to move until the crisis is resolved, a situation the world can ill afford to perpetuate (Kakde, 2026).

The **impact** has been immediate and severe. Between 27 February and 30 March, oil exports from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain declined from 12.323 million barrels per day to 7.833 million barrels, a 36.4 per cent decrease. The resulting revenue loss for Gulf economies exceeded \$15 billion for oil alone, and surpassed \$50 billion when LNG disruptions and other sectors are included. The International Energy Agency has described this as "the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market" (Cagatay & Kabakci, 2026).

### 3.2 Global Price Shock and Recessionary Pressures

Global oil prices have skyrocketed. Brent crude rose from approximately \$70 before the war to \$112.57 by late March, with West Texas Intermediate at \$99.64. In the United States, the national average petrol price reached \$3.98 per gallon, up from \$2.98 in February. Oxford Economics warns that a prolonged war could push markets beyond a price shock into severe physical shortages. Their modelling indicates that a 79 per cent rise in Brent prices has so far reduced global oil demand by only 2.4 million barrels per day, reflecting a short-run price elasticity of approximately 0.03. "For every 1 per cent increase in price, consumption falls by

just 0.03 per cent,” the report notes. Crucially, “diesel is the biggest issue”; its demand underpins freight, agriculture, construction and industrial activity, and “these sectors cannot easily switch fuels or cease operations” (News Desk, 2026).

Oxford Economics estimates that a prolonged conflict could create an unprecedented crude oil shortage of around 12 per cent of global consumption, triggering widespread rationing and a global recession, slowing world GDP growth to 1.4 per cent in 2026. The International Monetary Fund has warned that global economic growth would be 0.3 to 0.4 percentage points lower if oil prices averaged \$85 a barrel in 2026, a threshold already far exceeded (Aris, 2026).

### **3.3 Impacts on Pakistan and the Global South**

Pakistan, like many developing nations, has been severely affected. The government implemented a shortened workweek, closed schools for two weeks, and mandated public-sector employees to work from home to ration oil. Across Asia, consumers in the Philippines and India face hours-long queues for fuel as governments ration dwindling supplies. Fertilizer shortages, resulting from disrupted supply chains threaten agricultural productivity and food security in the coming months, compounding existing vulnerabilities. One month into the US-Israeli war on Iran, the global economy is experiencing cascading disruptions that extend far beyond the immediate conflict zone. Oil prices have surged past \$100 per barrel, up from \$70 pre-war, with Brent crude reaching \$112.57, triggering fuel rationing in countries like the Philippines and Pakistan, while US gas prices flirt with \$4 per gallon the highest since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of the world's oil and LNG passes, has created what the International Energy Agency calls "the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market." The ripple effects are widespread: financial markets are cracking, with the Dow and Nasdaq 100 halfway to bear market territory; supply chains for helium (critical for AI semiconductor chips) and fertilizer are under strain; and jet fuel prices have nearly doubled to \$197 per barrel, forcing airlines like Qantas and Air India to raise ticket prices while stranding tourists across the Middle East. Economists warn of potential 1970s-style stagflation, a crippling combination of high inflation, economic stagnation, and rising unemployment, as the Federal Reserve faces the dilemma of whether to cut rates to ease a recession without fueling further inflation. While President Trump frames the war as necessary to counter Iran's ballistic missiles and nuclear program, and some analysts like Apollo's Torsten Sløk believe the "Iran shock" may not be large enough to derail

US economic tailwinds from AI and tax cuts, the International Energy Agency's Fatih Birol cautions that "no country will be immune" if the crisis continues. Ultimately, resolving these global disruptions will require a peace deal between the US, Israel, and Iran (News Desk, 2026).

#### **4. The Silent Wound: Humanitarian and Health Crisis**

##### **4.1 Casualties and Displacement**

The human toll of the war has been staggering. According to the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region data (17 March 2026), over 1,440 deaths and more than 18,700 injuries had been reported in Iran, with an additional 886 deaths and 2,105 injuries in Lebanon. By early April, Iranian casualties exceeded 1,900 dead and 21,000 wounded, according to Red Cross estimates (WHO, 2026). Displacement figures are equally alarming. Between 600,000 and 1 million Iranian households representing up to 3.2 million people have been temporarily relocated inside the country. In Lebanon, over 945,000 people have been uprooted, with 132,100 living in overcrowded collective shelters. The UN reports that 1,801 children and 4,150 women are among the casualties reported by the Iranian Health Ministry. The US-Israeli war on Iran has triggered a severe humanitarian crisis, with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies warning that medical supplies are dwindling and needs are "exponentially increasing" as over 1,900 people have died and 21,000 have been wounded. Diplomatically, France, Russia, and China have blocked a UN Security Council resolution that would authorize military force to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, opposing any language permitting the use of "all necessary means." Meanwhile, Iran has hardened its position, demanding recognition of its sovereignty over the strait as a condition for ending the war. Despite US military claims of destroying 90% of Iran's missile potential and eliminating Supreme Leader Khamenei, Tehran has launched large-scale retaliatory strikes across the region, catching Pentagon officials off guard. While President Trump has signaled willingness to compromise on reopening the strait if main military objectives are achieved, the diplomatic impasse persists, and the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate (Serohina, 2026).

##### **4.2 Attacks on Healthcare and Health System Collapse**

The war has witnessed systematic attacks on medical infrastructure, a grave violation of International Humanitarian Law. WHO has verified 18 attacks on healthcare in Iran since 28 February, resulting in 8 deaths among health workers? In Lebanon, 28 attacks have caused 30

deaths and 35 injuries. Iranian health ministry data indicate 23 deaths and 112 injuries among healthcare workers. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has warned that medical supplies in Iran are dwindling. Maria Martinez, head of the IFRC delegation, stated: “The need for medical assistance in Iran is growing exponentially. Stocks of trauma kits and other gear could run low if the war persists. Resources are not unlimited”. Strikes on pharmaceutical facilities, including the Pasteur Institute – have further degraded the country’s public health capacity (Xinhua, 2026).

### **4.3 Environmental and Secondary Health Impacts**

The escalating Middle East conflict has triggered a multi-layered public health emergency, with over 1,440 deaths and 18,700 injuries in Iran, 886 deaths in Lebanon, and more than 945,000 displaced, while access to healthcare is severely hindered by facility closures, movement restrictions, and a concerning pattern of verified attacks on medical personnel and infrastructure, including a reported strike on a Kabul rehabilitation facility killing over 400 people. Environmental health risks are also rising due to strikes on energy and desalination infrastructure, releasing toxic pollutants and threatening water supplies for millions. Despite the WHO's active response, funding remains critically low (only 37% funded), and the organization urgently calls for de-escalation and increased humanitarian support. Strikes on energy infrastructure have released toxic hydrocarbons and particulate matter across Iran and the Gulf, increasing the risk of acute respiratory and cardiovascular illness. Damage to desalination plants threatens the water supply for millions, raising concerns about water-borne diseases. WHO health emergency appeals for the Eastern Mediterranean Region remain only 37 per cent funded, highlighting a critical gap in the international humanitarian response (WHO, 2026).

## **5. Pakistan’s Mediation Role: Realism and Opportunity**

### **5.1 Strategic Positioning**

Pakistan has offered to host negotiations between the US and Iran to end the ongoing war, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stating that Islamabad stands ready to facilitate "meaningful and conclusive talks" subject to concurrence from both parties. This follows Iran's suggestion that messages from "friendly countries" indicated a US request for negotiations. Pakistan's army chief reportedly held undisclosed talks with US negotiators in Oman weeks prior, and discussions for a potential meeting are reportedly at an advanced stage. However, the war

continues to take a severe toll on global economies, with energy price surges and rising uncertainty dampening economic activity. Amid the escalating conflict, Pakistan has emerged as a key diplomatic mediator. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has declared Islamabad “ready to host negotiations” to end the war, stating: “Pakistan welcomes and fully supports ongoing efforts to pursue dialogue to end the WAR in the Middle East, in the interest of peace and stability in the region and beyond”. Pakistan’s army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, has reportedly held meetings with US negotiators in Oman, utilizing Pakistan’s unique position as a state with warm relations with both Washington and Tehran (Gulf Times, 2026).

## **5.2 Mediation Mechanisms**

Pakistan has hosted quadrilateral talks involving Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia – all key regional stakeholders. The backchannel communication has been credited with securing Israel’s removal of senior Iranian officials from its target list. In a phone call lasting over an hour, Sharif apprised Iranian President Pezeshkian of Pakistan’s diplomatic outreach, engaging the US and “brotherly” Gulf and Islamic countries. Pezeshkian, while appreciating Islamabad’s sincere efforts, stressed the need to “build trust in order to facilitate talks and mediation”. Pakistan's mediation efforts between the US and Iran risk serving US-Israeli interests rather than achieving genuine peace, as any ceasefire may merely allow Washington and Tel Aviv to regroup for further military action against Tehran. While Pakistan basks in attention from hosting quadrilateral talks with Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, it overlooks that Israel, which maintains a nuclear triad of up to 400 warheads, has a long-standing policy of preemptively destroying regional nuclear facilities (Iraq 1981, Syria 2007, Iran now), and the Pakistani bomb remains a target after Iran's. Pakistan's history of assisting the US from CENTO to facilitating Kissinger's secret China trip to proxy wars in Afghanistan has repeatedly ended in betrayal, including the 1971 dismemberment of Pakistan and the current Taliban-driven conflict on its borders. Rather than ingratiating itself with Washington, Pakistan should recognize that Israel's paranoid nuclear monopoly strategy will not be assuaged by recognition, and that US-Israeli attacks on Iran will not cease until Tehran is bent to their will (Niazi, 2026).

## **5.3 Limits and Challenges**

Pakistan’s mediatory potential, however, is constrained. Iran demands international guarantees that any ceasefire will not be followed by renewed US-Israeli pressure. Trust between Tehran and Washington remains “at zero”, as Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has stated.

Moreover, the inclusion of Saudi Arabia, a party whose oil installations have been attacked by Iran, complicates the dynamics, raising questions about whose interests the mediation serves. From an International Relations perspective, Pakistan's mediation can be understood through the lens of hedging behaviour, a middle power leveraging its strategic ambiguity to enhance its regional standing while avoiding direct entanglement in great-power rivalry. The outcome of these efforts will test whether Pakistan can translate its relational assets into tangible diplomatic success (Melimopoulos, 2026).

## **6. International Relations Analysis: Competing Paradigms**

### **6.1 Realist Interpretation**

From a classical realist perspective, the war represents a continuation of the security dilemma in West Asia. Iran's pursuit of nuclear capability, its ballistic missile program, and its network of regional proxies (Hezbollah, Houthis, and Iraqi militias) have been perceived by Washington and Tel Aviv as existential threats. The US-Israeli pre-emptive strike doctrine, analogous to Israel's 1981 attack on Osirak and 2007 strike on Syrian nuclear facilities, reflects a consistent realist logic: when diplomacy is perceived to have failed, force becomes the instrument of last resort. Yet the realist framework struggles to explain the apparent lack of a coherent exit strategy. As Kelanic observes, it is "hard to discern a strategy" from White House messaging, with mixed signals about escalation versus withdrawal. Despite President Trump's claims that Operation Epic Fury is nearing completion and the US will leave Iran "very soon," the deployment of two Marine Expeditionary Units (totaling approximately 17,000 additional troops) and amphibious ready groups to the region suggests the US may instead be preparing for escalation. Military analysts identify several potential ground operation options under consideration, including seizing Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium via a risky airborne mission, capturing Kharg Island (through which 90% of Iran's oil passes) as a bargaining chip, or taking control of strategic islands in the Strait of Hormuz, specifically Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands, which form Iran's "arch defence chain" and allow Tehran to choke global shipping. However, experts warn that amphibious assaults on these islands would be extremely high-risk operations, requiring air cover and facing constant harassment from Iranian drones and missiles, potentially resembling a "tragedy like Gallipoli." While the White House sends mixed signals between diplomacy and military action, the continued buildup of

forces indicates a real chance of further escalation that could prolong the conflict and deepen the US military quagmire (Clark & Stein, 2026).

## **6.2 Liberal Institutional Critique**

Liberal institutionalists would argue that the war represents a catastrophic failure of preventive diplomacy and multilateral institutions. The UN Security Council has been paralyzed by great-power divisions; the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) remains defunct; and regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council have proved incapable of mediating the crisis. The absence of effective international institutions has allowed bilateral military logic to prevail over collective security mechanisms.

## **6.3 Constructivist and Postcolonial Perspectives**

Constructivist and postcolonial IR scholars would highlight the discursive framing of the war. Trump's rhetoric "bring them back to the Stone Age", reproduces colonial tropes of civilizational hierarchy, delegitimizing Iran's sovereignty and its people's right to self-determination. Simultaneously, Iran's framing of the war as an "existential defense" against Western imperialism resonates with postcolonial narratives of resistance. The war, in this view, is not merely a conflict over nuclear programs or oil it is a clash of identities, histories, and worldviews (Clark & Stein, 2026).

## **7. Peace and Conflict Studies: Lessons and Pathways**

### **7.1 Ripeness and Timing**

From the perspective of peace and conflict studies, the concept of "ripeness", the moment when parties perceive a mutually hurting stalemate and a way out – is crucial. Iran has stated that it has the "necessary will" to end the war, but insists on guarantees that the conflict will not flare up again. The US, for its part, has signaled that military objectives are near completion. Whether these conditions constitute a ripe moment for negotiation remains uncertain (Abdullah, 2026).

### **7.2 Track II Diplomacy and Civil Society**

The war underscores the importance of Track II (unofficial) diplomacy. Pakistan's backchannel communications, involving intelligence officials and military leaders, have kept channels open even as public rhetoric hardens. Civil society organizations, including the Red Cross, WHO,

and human rights bodies have documented violations and provided essential services, but their funding and access remain inadequate (Abdullah, 2026).

### **7.3 The Role of Diasporas and Transnational Networks**

Drawing on Chubb's (2018) concept of "adaptive activism", Iranian diaspora communities abroad have mobilized to raise awareness, document atrocities, and advocate for humanitarian relief. Transnational advocacy networks linking activists in Iran with supporters in Europe, North America, and Australia have amplified civilian voices and pressured governments to consider human rights dimensions in their policy responses (Abdullah, 2026).

## **8. Recommendations**

### **8.1 Immediate De-escalation**

Reopen the Strait of Hormuz immediately with internationally monitored guarantees for safe passage, potentially under UN or neutral state, for example, Omani, Qatari, Turkish supervision.

Humanitarian pause a temporary ceasefire to allow the WHO, the Red Cross, and other humanitarian actors to deliver medical supplies, evacuate the wounded, and repair critical infrastructure.

Resume US-Iran indirect talks with Pakistan, Oman, or Qatar as intermediaries, focusing initially on confidence-building measures (prisoner exchanges, de-confliction mechanisms).

### **8.2 Health and Humanitarian Response**

Protect healthcare workers and facilities; all parties must comply with International Humanitarian Law; the UN Security Council should adopt a resolution explicitly condemning attacks on medical infrastructure.

Fund the WHO's emergency appeal. The current 37 per cent funding level is grossly inadequate. International donors must provide at least \$500 million for trauma care, disease surveillance, and water and sanitation infrastructure.

Establish a regional health security fund under WHO auspices to address both immediate and long-term health consequences of the war, including mental health support for displaced populations.

### **8.3 Long-Term Regional Security Architecture**

Revive and expand the JCPOA framework; any future agreement must address not only nuclear issues but also ballistic missiles, regional proxies, and conventional force postures.

Institutionalize Pakistan's mediatory role. Islamabad should be formally recognized as a dialogue partner in the proposed "West Asia Security Dialogue", alongside Oman, Qatar, Turkey and the EU.

Develop a regional economic integration framework following the European Coal and Steel Community model, and energy and trade interdependence can reduce incentives for future conflict.

#### **8.4 Scholarly and Policy Contributions**

Priorities research on the climate-security-health nexus. The war has demonstrated how environmental damage, public health collapse, and violent conflict are inextricably linked; IR scholars must integrate these dimensions into their analytical frameworks.

#### **Conclusion**

The 2026 conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran marks a turning point in current international diplomatic relations. The war has illustrated how precarious global energy security is, how present conflict resolution processes fail to resolve disagreements, and how military action by big nations causes human casualties. The conflict causes an economic catastrophe in Pakistan while also providing the country with its first opportunity to strengthen foreign relations. The future of West Asian stability is dependent on two major factors: Islamabad's effectiveness in creating a durable truce through mediation efforts, and the global community's capacity to strengthen peacebuilding mechanisms by examining this calamity. The human costs have already surpassed estimates due to thousands of fatalities, millions of displaced people, and the long-term psychological damage on a whole generation. The Red Cross has issued a warning that the present situation in Iran has led to an exponential surge in medical requirements. The globe demands rapid response since the fight utilizes current resources.

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