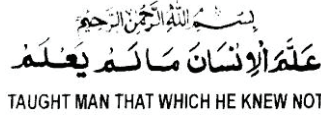




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A Periodical of INSIGHTS

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E9 Quarterly is a periodical publication of the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University, Islamabad, the premier security and strategic studies institution. It is a compilation of INSIGHTS occasionally written by the research community. These briefs explore new dimensions of subjects related to Pakistan's national security, focusing on practical and objective solutions to problems for the benefit of respective stakeholders. All INSIGHTS appearing in E9 Quarterly undergo a rigorous selection process and are meticulously edited by our esteemed senior faculty members, ensuring their quality and reliability.

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E9 QUARTERLY

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Preface

Area Study Centers (ASCs) are specialised research institutions affiliated with top-level public universities of Pakistan. These ASCs were established in 1975 under the Act XVI 1975 of the Parliament and are funded by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), with a focus on studying regions (America, Europe, China, Russia, and Central Asia) that directly impact Pakistan's national interests. ISSRA at NDU also addresses contemporary global and regional issues, thereby necessitating effective collaboration between the ASCs and ISSRA.

In this context, an effort was made by ISSRA to involve various ASCs to formulate a cumulative approach towards trending global and regional issues, utilising the varying regional expertise. Six ASCs in Pakistan were approached to establish a mechanism for future collaboration in this regard, which culminated in MOU-level collaboration between ISSRA and the ASCs.

In this backdrop, an MOU signing event was organised at ISSRA on 29th January 2026, which was attended by the following:

- Center for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.
- Area Study Center for Middle East & Arab Countries, University of Balochistan, Quetta.
- Area Study Center for Far East & South East Asia, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.
- Area Study Center for Africa, North & South America, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.
- Area Study Center (Russia, China & Central Asia), University of Peshawar.
- Area Study Center for Europe, University of Karachi, Karachi. (online representation for non – MOU collaboration)

To commemorate this important event, ASCs were requested to forward their latest research for publication in a special edition of E9 Quarterly. ASCs provided support and shared their latest research on contemporary topics, which have been included in this special edition of E9 Quarterly to cater for the intellectual thirst of potential academia, scholars, students, and general readers.

PICTURES GALLERY





Editorial Note

The National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, is playing a vital role in promoting joint research collaboration with the Area Study Centres of various national universities. Such cooperation would not only enhance research capacity and policy-oriented analysis but also contribute to a deeper understanding of international affairs, security studies, regional dynamics, and area-specific developments.

In this context, research insights forwarded by Area Study Centres of various public sector universities are compiled to publish a special edition of *E9 Quarterly*. All *INSIGHTS* included in this edition are intellectually stimulating and offer valuable perspectives on contemporary geostrategic issues.

Our first Insight *Regional Trends (Central Asia) Within the Evolving Global Order* analyses the evolving regional dynamics of Central Asia within the context of the changing global order, particularly after the Russia-Ukraine War. The paper identifies key challenges, including geopolitical instability, climate change, and governance issues, that are shaping the region's future trajectory.

An Insight *Escalation in the Middle East: Impacts of the Iran-U.S.-Israel Conflict on Pakistan* discusses the regional escalation of the Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict and its multidimensional implications for Pakistan. It argues that the conflict has expanded into a broader regional crisis, threatening global energy flows and stability in the Gulf. The study highlights Pakistan's strategic dilemma of balancing ties with the U.S., GCC states, and neighbouring Iran.

Another Insight, *Contemporary Dynamics of Africa in the Global Order: An Economic Perspective*, examines Africa's evolving position in the global economic order, highlighting its transition from marginalisation to increasing strategic relevance.

The Insight *Geopolitics of Crisis: The US–Iran War and Pakistan’s Role in a Changing Global Order* explores the geopolitical implications of the US–Iran War within a shifting global order, emphasising its impact beyond the Middle East into South Asia. The insight concludes that Pakistan’s balanced foreign policy could enhance its role in an increasingly multipolar world.

Another Insight titled *Whither European Man? Into the Next Quarter of the 21st Century* examines how Europe has progressed from the focal point of international order to a besieged space between the colossi of Asia and America. It identifies major trends currently shrouding the continent.

An Insight *Pakistan’s Role in Middle Eastern Geo-Politics amid the Israel–Iran War* discusses the ongoing Israel–Iran war as a historic moment that has reshaped the geopolitics of the Middle East and the dynamics of global politics. This insight aims to illustrate the nation's diplomatic initiatives, economic pressures, security issues, and the options available to decision-makers.

Our last Insight, titled "Implications of Iran-US War on East Asian Political & Security Order," argues that the Iran–US war has consequences far beyond West Asia, particularly for the political and security order of East Asia.

We hope this publication will enable our esteemed readers to maintain a comprehensive understanding of the evolving geopolitical landscape, particularly the ongoing US/Israel–Iran conflict and its implications for the wider region.

Regional Trends (Central Asia) Within the Evolving Global Order

Dr Muhammad Shafi Afridi and Abdul Haseeb

Abstract

This INSIGHT analyses the evolving regional dynamics of Central Asia within the context of the changing global order, particularly after the Russia-Ukraine War. It argues that the war has weakened Russia's traditional dominance as a security and economic guarantor, prompting Central Asian states to diversify their security partnerships and trade routes. The study highlights China's growing influence, along with increased engagement from Türkiye, Iran, and Gulf states. It also emphasises emerging intra-regional cooperation among Central Asian republics. Finally, the paper identifies key challenges such as geopolitical instability, climate change, and governance issues shaping the region's future trajectory.

Keywords: Central Asia, Russia-Ukraine War, Regional Dynamics, Security Diversification, Geopolitics.

This brief paper examines the regional trends in Central Asia within the evolving global order and regional dynamics. The key dynamics of the Central region is its location being at the crossroads of Western and Eastern blocks, its proximity with two global powers, China and Russia, and as a potential source of oil, gas, and rarely found metals (Adnan and Fatima 2015) And last, the longing of the West to have access to the region to contain Sino-Russian influence. Russia continues to see Central Asia as its sphere of influence for several reasons, including geographical contiguity, bilateral trade, migration, and a shared Soviet legacy.

Russia has maintained dominance in Central Asia as both the security and economic guarantor of the region through regional treaties, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Only a few weeks before the start of the Russia-Ukraine War in February 2022, Russia deployed CSTO troops to Kazakhstan, the first-ever deployment of any combat force to restore peace and order. There is also an increasing tendency in the region towards intra-regional cooperation, especially following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War in February 2022. A reflection of intra-regional attempts in the 6th Consultative Gathering, attended by the presidents of five republics on August 9, 2024, in Astana, Kazakhstan. This forum signifies among Central Asian states to collectively tackle regional challenges (Times 2024, Kazakhstan n.d). However, since the start of the Russia-Ukraine War on February 24, 2022, and the involvement of major global powers, both Western Europe and the US, have been increasingly shaping emerging trends in Central Asia. This brief paper argues that the Russian-Ukrainian War is increasingly shaping the regional dynamics of Central Asia, affecting bilateral relations with Russia, trade, security, and intra-regional cooperation. Therefore, it is imperative to analyse the Russia-Ukraine War and its implications on the region.

The Russian-Ukrainian War is increasingly shaping the regional dynamics of Central Asia, affecting bilateral relations with Russia, trade, security, and intra-regional cooperation.

Russian-Ukrainian War: Regional Implications

Diplomatically, the Russia-Ukraine War put Central Asian countries in a difficult position. On one hand, they maintain relations with Russia, but on the other, these five states have avoided endorsing Russia's war in Ukraine. The stance reflects an independent position and undermines Russia's position in the region.

Diversification of Security

Russia, which has been serving as the primary security guarantor of Central Asia, is diminishing in that role as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine, its shifting focus to the Ukrainian and western region to consolidate its position. Thus, the perception of Russia as a potential source of influence in the region is eroding among the Central Asian states.

For the Central Asian states, it looks risky to over-depend on Russia for security. This reality compels the Central Asian states to diversify their security needs by engaging other states, such as China and Türkiye, and Europe (Barrios, et al. 2026). Central Asian countries appear to be increasingly engaging with other partners in the security sphere. Thus, in the evolving regional configuration, the Central Asian states are adopting a policy of diversifying their security away from Russia.

Diversification of Trade

The war led the Central Asian states to diversify their trade relationships and establish transit routes that bypass Russia. Central Asian republics are trying to balance Russia's influence by collaborating with Türkiye, Europe, and China (Nurgaliyeva 2016). The Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline from Turkmenistan to China through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan is one example (Olmos 2023), and TAPI is an example of trade diversification (Naz and Riaz 2024). Both projects bypass Russia. Since 2023, the trade between China and the five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) has touched approximately US\$89.4 billion, 20–25% of the region's total international trade (Bank 2023, (IEA) n.d).

Opportunities for China

The war in Ukraine has strained Russia's regional engagement, creating opportunities for China to deepen its influence in Central Asia. China has made a remarkable rise over the past two decades and has consolidated its position as one of the most important partners for Central Asia, particularly in economic terms, but increasingly in security, too (Drost, Cretti and Giersbergen 2025, ESCE 2025).

Moreover, via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China guarantees nearly 40–50% of major infrastructure projects within the region and stands as the biggest purchaser of Turkmenistan's natural gas, 70–80% of Turkmenistan's natural gas exports (Bank 2023, Overview: n.d).

Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Iran and the Gulf States

These states are also interested in the region and engaged in trade with Central Asian states. Türkiye and Azerbaijan, through connectivity and the Turkic world, Iran, due to its strategic location and ethnic and linguistic ties to Tajikistan, and the Arab Gulf states are investing in the energy sector.

The Taliban Regime Strengthened Ties

Since the US left Afghanistan, Central Asian states have strengthened their ties with the Taliban. This pragmatic policy adopted is in the republics' interests, either for stability or for practical concerns such as water flows and security.

Russia, a Systemic Factor

The Russian influence in the region appears to be weakening but remains very present, and Russia can be considered a systemic factor in the region.

Future Challenges for the Region

Despite the new realities, in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine War, as discussed above, the Central Asia region still has to navigate certain likely scenarios or challenges:

- If there is little likelihood of a lasting ceasefire in the Russia-Ukraine War or no end to it, the conflict will continue to impact the region with economic risks.
- Instability threats in the Southern part of Central Asia could be fuelled by raised tensions and random fighting between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- Climate change is an acute challenge and danger for the Central Asian region, as the region's economy may be threatened by long droughts.
- A region dominated by autocracies, uncertain succession, pressures on political opposition and on restraining free media, and episodes like democratic reverting in Kyrgyzstan, the sole official democracy, may have an impact on the socio-political instability of the region.

Conclusion

To conclude, the current regional trends of Central Asia are influenced by the Russia-Ukraine War. The war is increasingly impacting Russia's traditional role as the region's security guarantor and as a trade partner. The Central Asian states seek alternative trade and business avenues beyond Russia, including China, Türkiye, Iran, and Azerbaijan. Moreover, this changed environment also led the Central Asian states to pursue intra-regional efforts to build more robust regional unity. However, there are still lurking challenges, especially the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, the unstable southern region of Central Asia, the breakdown of Pakistan and Afghan Taliban relations, climate change, and challenges of reconciling authoritarianism with the democratic model in the region.

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Escalation in the Middle East: Impacts of the Iran–U.S.–Israel Conflict on Pakistan

Dr Jahanzeb Rind

Abstract

This INSIGHT analyses the regional escalation of the Iran–U.S.–Israel conflict and its multidimensional implications for Pakistan. It argues that the conflict has expanded into a broader regional crisis, threatening global energy flows and stability in the Gulf. The study highlights Pakistan’s strategic dilemma of balancing ties with the U.S., GCC states, and neighbouring Iran. It further examines economic vulnerabilities, particularly oil imports and remittance dependency. The insight concludes that Pakistan must adopt a cautious, mediatory approach to avoid spillover effects and maintain regional stability.

Keywords: Middle East Escalation, Iran-US-Israel Conflict, Foreign Policy, Energy Security, Regional Stability.

The current war between U.S./Israel on one side and Iran on the other side, started on 28th February, 2026 and with a short span of time has engulfed the whole region. The completely illegal attacks by the U.S. and Israel that started the war and the sudden death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei have shocked the world. Many analysts and scholars knew that the huge military buildup by the U.S and threats by Israel towards Iran and the impossible demand placed on the Iranian nuclear program and ballistic missiles would lead to war. However, even after a week since the war began, the Trump administration is scrambling to answer the actual causes of the war and is facilitating between words of ‘regime change’, ‘stop Iranian nuclear program’, ‘destroy its missile program’, and so on. There are real concerns that once again, the Israeli government, under Benjamin Netanyahu, had coalesced the United States to attack another Middle Eastern country.

Trump himself used the word ‘obliterated’ for the Iranian Nuclear sites in the twelve-day war that began in June 2025. So if the Iranian Nuclear Program was obliterated in June, why is Iran being attacked again on the pretext of building Nuclear weapons?

The attack on Iran has led to an Iranian response that has seen Iranians attacking the U.S bases in the Gulf countries with drones and missiles. It was known beforehand that in case of an attack on Iran, Iran would respond by attacking the GCC countries. The war has changed into a regional war, and there are fears that Yemen and Iraq may join the war, while Hezbollah in Lebanon has already entered the War in support of Iran. The Iranians have managed to stop the flow of oil

Pakistan has achieved its historical diplomatic victory and successfully brought the warring countries to the negotiation table.

through the Strait of Hormuz and have hit several oil tankers in the strait, raising real concerns worldwide because 20% of the world’s oil supply passes through the strait. There are fears that Iran might hit the water and energy infrastructure of the GCC countries, and it will create a real-world crisis.

The war in Iran has put Pakistan in a precarious position. Pakistan has close links with GCC countries, especially with Saudi Arabia, with which it signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement on 17th September, 2025. Pakistan cannot take sides in the war because Iran is a close neighbour and Pakistan shares a 900 km-long border with Iran. There is a real concern about the oil supply. Pakistan imports most of its oil from the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, and in 2024, it imported \$11.8B of oil from GCC countries (deepbreez).

An estimated 3.5m to 4m Pakistani workers are in GCC countries, and their remittances amount to a record \$38.3 B during the 2025 fiscal year (Arab News). Uncertainty about the war and attacks on GCC countries can seriously disrupt remittance flows. Pakistan badly needs those foreign remittances, and any disruption could strain its foreign currency reserves and trigger a balance-of-payments crisis.

It is estimated that 20% of Pakistan's population is Shia, and the war in Iran can create deep uncertainty in the population. Immediately after the war began, crowds of protestors began attacking the U.S. consulate, in which at least 23 people died in the country (Reuters).

Pakistan has recently established good relations with the Trump administration, and it may be difficult for Pakistan to take sides in the war. The Trump administration may ask Pakistan to align with the U.S. or the GCC countries. Pakistan cannot antagonise the U.S as Pakistan has concerns about its own Western border with Afghanistan. The recent skirmishes with the Taliban along the 2600 km-long border have put the two countries on edge. The U.S. and Israel have begun aiding the Kurds in Iran to start an insurgency against the Iranians. If they began to aid the Baloch tribes in the Sistan and Balochistan provinces, it may encourage the insurgents in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. Pakistan has to ensure that there are no major spillover effects of the war on Pakistan. So Pakistan has to remain vigilant on its Western and South-Western borders. The border with Iran can be a promising economic corridor for Pakistan, as Iran has rich oil reserves and Pakistan has a strong oil demand. There is a huge amount of informal economy being practised, and if it is converted into formal trade, it can provide a bilateral economic benefit. This can only be done if a proper diplomatic initiative is taken, as Iran is currently facing not only economic sanctions but also war with the USA. Pakistan has played a significant diplomatic role in bringing the conflict parties to the negotiation table, and it's a great achievement, as Iran and the USA initially halted their fight for two weeks. This diplomatic victory can be translated into bilateral economic trade between Iran and Pakistan.

Pakistan has played a very rightful role in mediating between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

This time around, Pakistan has achieved its historical diplomatic victory and successfully brought the warring countries to the negotiation table. It's a great milestone for Pakistan's image in the international community. Pakistan has been using its good offices to help resolve the conflict between the U.S. and Iran, as it has good relations with both countries.

Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shahbaz Sharif, has already called on both Saudi Arabia and Iran, and many GCC states, to decrease the tensions in the region and recently, brotherly countries of the Middle East were in Islamabad for developing negotiations among conflicting countries.

The two-week initial truce is a great opportunity for peace in the region, and fingers are crossed for permanent peace. This goodwill gesture by Pakistan and its peace efforts send a clear message that Pakistan wants peace in the region and is always willing to offer its services for global peace and progress.

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Contemporary Dynamics of Africa in the Global Order: An Economic Perspective

Sarah Ahsan

Abstract

This INSIGHT examines Africa's evolving position in the global economic order, highlighting its transition from marginalisation to increasing strategic relevance. It argues that globalisation, trade integration, and digital transformation are reshaping Africa's economic landscape, despite persistent structural challenges such as debt, inequality, and commodity dependence. The study underscores the significance of the African Continental Free Trade Area in promoting regional integration and economic resilience. It further identifies opportunities arising from demographic growth, technological adoption, and rising foreign investment. The insight concludes that Africa holds strong potential to emerge as a key driver of future global economic growth if governance and structural reforms are effectively implemented.

Keywords: Africa Global Order, Economic Transformation, Trade Integration, Digital Economy, Structural Challenges.

The current position of Africa in the global order is complex. It has been at the margins of global politics and economics, but today Africa occupies a strategic space defined by demographic expansion, geopolitical competition, technological reforms, and resource abundance. Its states are navigating a shift in the international system characterised by economic uncertainty and digital transformation, to name a few. This essay examines Africa's evolving role in the global order through economic reconfiguration within the global system, focusing on structural challenges, trade integration, growth trends, and prospects.

Africa's integration into the global economy has evolved significantly over the past 20 years. Historically, the continent was largely shaped by colonial legacies that positioned Africa in a marginal position in global trade and the economic landscape. Additionally, Africa's economy heavily relies on commodity exports such as copper from Zambia, cobalt from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and oil exports from Nigeria and Angola, which exposes them to global price instability (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023; World Bank, 2024). Global issues like the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have also caused inflation and debt problems in the region.

However, recent developments in Africa suggest that the continent is becoming more involved in an economy driven by globalisation, regional cooperation, and the adoption of new technologies (International Monetary Fund, 2023; World Bank, 2024). This has led to recent economic developments

within Africa that suggest a shift toward greater participation in global markets. The current global order, characterised by

Africa's position in the world, despite its complexity, offers opportunities because of its natural resources, demographic advantages, and rapid urbanisation, which serve as a driving economic force.

evolving trade patterns and digital transformation, has created opportunities and challenges for African economies. This article investigates these dynamics by focusing on Africa's growth, trade patterns, and integration into global economic systems.

Africa's participation in global trade has increased, it remains relatively low compared to other regions. Most of Africa's exports are materials, while its imports are mostly manufactured goods. When a country is open to trade, it can lead to growth, especially when accompanied by institutional reforms and infrastructure development. Trade openness has been shown to positively correlate with economic growth, particularly when accompanied by institutional reforms and infrastructure development (Sowrov, 2024).

Similarly, the formation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) marks a prominent structural shift. If it is implemented effectively, it can reduce Africa's dependence on markets and strengthen regional trade (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2021; World Bank, 2020). As Africa's trade with the world increases, so does foreign investment in Africa, driven by resource extraction.

However, there is a shift towards investing in services, manufacturing and technology. Countries such as China and India are financing infrastructure and industrial projects in Africa (African Union, 2018; World Bank, 2020). The growing global trade pattern of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Africa has increased, which is driven by natural resource extraction. However, there is a gradual shift toward services, manufacturing, and technology sectors.

In this regard, the rapid digitisation of the economic landscape is also rapidly reshaping the African economy. New financial technologies, mobile technology and e-commerce platforms are increasing access to markets and financial services. E-commerce has the potential to increase productivity and support medium-sized businesses. However, there are still differences between urban and rural areas due to unequal access to digital technology (Liang et al., 2024). Africa's young population also presents an opportunity for technological innovation and entrepreneurship (SMEs).

Despite the progress Africa is making, it still faces challenges in the global economy. Many African countries face rising debt levels, with over half experiencing external liquidity challenges (World Bank, 2024). High debt servicing costs limit public investment in critical sectors such as education and infrastructure. Poverty and inequality are still problems in Africa despite economic growth.

Structural inequalities and population growth dilute the impact of GDP expansion on living standards (World Bank, 2024). Conflict and political instability also continue to challenge growth in some regions, discouraging investment and disrupting development initiatives.

However, Africa's position in the world, despite its complexity, offers opportunities because of its natural resources, demographic advantages, and rapid urbanisation, which serve as a driving economic force. Africa has significant mineral reserves that are important to the global energy sector. Its young population also presents an opportunity for creating a skilled workforce. Therefore, global corporations are increasingly recognising Africa's potential as a consumer market, particularly given its projected population growth to 2.5 billion by 2050 (Reuters).

To strengthen its position in the global order, Africa can further focus on the following areas:

- Economic diversification by reducing reliance on natural resources, promoting manufacturing and services.
- Regional integration by fully implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area to increase trade within African countries.
- Infrastructure development by investing in transport, digital systems and energy.
- Human capital development by improving education and skills to influence the demographic dividend.
- Good governance by strengthening institutions and reducing corruption.

With the right policies, Africa has the potential to become a major player in global economic growth in the coming years. Africa's economy reflects a mix of structural challenges and growth potential. While the continent is increasingly integrated into the global economy, its position remains constrained by vulnerabilities, including debt, institutional weaknesses stemming from political instability, and heavy dependence on natural resources. Notwithstanding, Africa's demographic growth, regional integration, and digital transformation offer opportunities for sustainable development. As the global order continues to evolve, Africa's role is likely to expand, making it a key player in shaping the global economy's future.

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Geopolitics of Crisis: The US–Iran War and Pakistan’s Role in a Changing Global Order

Dr Sadia Sulaiman

Abstract

This INSIGHT analyses the geopolitical implications of the US–Iran War within a shifting global order, emphasising its impact beyond the Middle East into South Asia. It argues that the conflict has exposed gaps in traditional alliances, particularly between the United States and Europe, while creating space for middle powers. The study highlights significance of Pakistan in the conflict due to the geographic landscape and diplomatic ties. The insight concludes that Pakistan’s balanced foreign policy could enhance its role in an increasingly multipolar world.

Keywords: US–Iran War, Global Order Transformation, Pakistan’s Strategic Role, Middle East Geopolitics, Crisis Diplomacy.

South Asian and Middle Eastern geopolitics is transforming due to the US–Iran war that broke out in February 2026.¹ The war has sent shock waves through the international system, especially in places that are politically and geographically tied to the Middle East, such as South Asia that enjoys longstanding economic, political and socio-cultural ties with the Middle East, and cannot remain insulated from these developments.²

Of the South Asian states, Pakistan occupies a particularly complicated and pivotal position in this changing regional order. Pakistan’s geographic location, its joint border with Iran, its strategic relationship with the US and long-standing relations with Gulf countries position it at the bedrock of evolving geopolitical shifts.

Moreover, millions of Pakistani expatriates are based in GCC making region crucial for Pakistan economic stability via remittances and trade.³ Pakistan's mediating effort can be analyzed in the backdrop of these reasons.

In this context, the US–Iran conflict can be seen not just as reconfiguring specific regional security dynamics in the Middle East but also as feeding into more general global political

transformations. This article while explaining these transformations

Pakistan is one of the countries that could play a larger role in regional diplomacy due to its political ties and strategic importance.

analyses both challenges and opportunities that are created for Pakistan, particularly in redefining its diplomatic role in the Middle East and US.

Changing Global Order

The global political order has undergone significant changes after the US-Iran war. The growing diplomatic gap that is increasingly being filled by middle powers and the growing rift between the US and its traditional European allies are two particularly important developments.⁴

European countries were not in favor of US military attack on Iran. Germany, France, and Italy, which are NATO allies, expressed concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions and influence in the region,⁵ however, they are hesitant to support military interventions because of what happened in Iraq, Syria, and Libya before, which led to refugee crises and political instability at home.⁶

This hesitation has caused problems in the transatlantic alliance, which has long been one of the main parts of international order since World War II.⁷ The differences between Washington and European capitals show a bigger trend towards a more broken global system where old alliances are breaking apart. China and Russia, two of the world's most powerful countries, have mostly stayed out of the conflict and haven't tried to stop it or mediate between the two sides.

Both countries have spoken out against the escalation and called for diplomatic solutions, but they have been careful not to get directly involved in the conflict.⁸

Several Middle Eastern countries that have historically acted as mediators, like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, have also become deeply involved in the larger regional conflict.

Because they are involved, they can't be neutral middlemen between the US and Iran. This situation has provided chance for Pakistan to push for two weeks' ceasefire followed by 'Islamabad Talks' in April 2026 between the US and Iran.

Changing Middle East

This war has made the security situation in the Middle East precarious. There have been complicated rivalries and proxy wars in the area for a long time, but a direct fight between the US and Iran is a big step up. Iran's regional influence through allied groups and networks across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen has already been a source of tension for many Middle Eastern states. The war has intensified these tensions, raising the risk of wider regional confrontation and further militarization.⁹

The conflict has also made the economy in the area less stable. The Persian Gulf is one of the most important energy corridors in the world. Energy supplies are severely affected because of contested Strait of Hormuz. Higher oil prices, trade routes that are blocked, and more military activity are already having an effect on the economies of the entire world.

What this Means for Pakistan?

The changing geopolitical landscape has major effects on Pakistan's foreign policy and its role in the region. The conflict between the US and Iran provided Pakistan a chance to redefine its role in diplomacy and strengthen its strategic partnerships.

The current crisis has brought Pakistan's geopolitical importance back to the forefront after a few years of relative distance after the US left Afghanistan in 2021.

Washington is looking for trustworthy partners, especially since European allies don't want to support a full-scale military campaign.

Historically, US-Pakistan relations were based on working together on security issues. In the current situation, the relationship may change into crisis diplomacy, political dialogue, and mediation in the region.

Pakistan's strong political, economic, and military ties with Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates further elevates its position to play a crucial role in this conflict to end.¹⁰

However, Pakistan needs to be careful about how it interacts with many different groups, especially the US, Iran, China, and Gulf states. China is still Pakistan's closest strategic partner, and Beijing has strong trade ties with Iran. To keep these relationships from looking like they favor one side too much is a challenge in itself.

Conclusion

The ongoing war between the US and Iran is more than just a regional conflict; it shows that the global political order is changing in deeper ways. The growing divide between the US and its traditional European allies, the relative caution of major powers like China and Russia, and the involvement of Middle Eastern countries in the conflict have all led to a lack of diplomacy in the international system. Pakistan has used its leverage for a ceasefire between the two sides and initiate a dialogue between the two, however it needs to carefully maneuver the intricate regional complexities.

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Whither European Man? Into the Next Quarter of the 21st Century

Muhammad Ahsan

Abstract

This article evaluates the geopolitical environment of the Europe after World War-II. The message given in is, you will be respected only if you are powerful otherwise, you will be trampled down by your enemies and condescended to by your friends. This article appraises Europe from the aforesaid perspective. It identifies major trends currently shrouding the continent. Moreover, it asserts that nuclear weapons or a credible nuclear defensive umbrella will now be seen as a non-negotiable instrument to guard a nation's sovereignty. Moreover, European states may proceed in that direction as well.

Keywords: European Geopolitics, Decline of Multilateralism, Strategic Autonomy, Nuclear Deterrence, Rise of Nationalism.

We are in the year 2026. We have completed the first quarter of the 21st century. This point in time allows us to look back at past events and draw conclusions from this particular trajectory. Europe began the last century in an alarming state of fragmentation. The Prussia-led unification of the German heartland had brought the continent to the brink of industrialised warfare. Europe was the world's political centre of gravity. However, this centre of gravity was to collapse under its own weight and that too within merely two generations. Two extremely violent eras in the first half of the 20th century ended Europe's control of the rest of the planet.

The next fifty years transformed this hyper-nationalistic realm into a functional space of highly bureaucratic associations. The erstwhile trench warriors and street toughs, if they were still able-bodied, became law-abiding, pacific merchants. Borders became fluid. Travel was made swift and accessible. The entertainment industry blossomed. Sports were deliberately encouraged to keep violent and youthful passions restricted to the field of football. People were made to idolise soccer players, actors, and actresses. It was normal to follow a football team or a TV icon passionately. However, if the same emotional energy is directed towards a religious or a political figure, there is a danger that things could get out of control. Adoration for the nation-state surfaced only periodically during the Olympics or the World Championships.

Europe was the world's political centre of gravity. However, this centre of gravity was to collapse under its own weight and that too within merely two generations.

Thus, when a huge chunk of a nation's youth became engrossed in sports, entertainment, and adolescent philosophising and was no longer subject to paternal or religious constraints and oversight, the chances of a disciplined force of radicalism powered by youth mobilisation were successfully curtailed. Where racial and ethnic passions had still not cooled (Yugoslavia), they were eventually pacified through intense aerial bombardment.

Thus, Europe entered this century and the new millennium in the aforementioned state of technocracy. Now, its principal organ of representation worldwide was the European Union (EU). A Western European-led supranational mechanism, the EU augmented its membership with the accession of former Soviet states. Brussels was the medicine for the illnesses contracted during the Soviet occupation. Naturally, these same states also attained seats in the West's premier military alliance (NATO).

The first test of the Franco-German consensus in this century was the US's invasion of Iraq in 2003. The divisions within the continent came to the surface.

Paris and Berlin opposed the invasion, while countries such as Denmark, Poland, Hungary, Spain, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia openly stood with Washington.

Although European multilateralism could not stop American unilateralism, there was still no sign that we had reached a point of no return. The Russian threat from the East, as well as the lack of large, well-equipped standing armies, kept Europe firmly aligned with Washington.

The Iraqi episode was followed by socio-political unrest in the European neighbourhood. Political volatility in North Africa and the wider Arab world brought a wave of migrants and refugees to the continent's doorsteps. Then, terror incidents further pressured European governments. Meanwhile, financial crises in Southern Europe and the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union only added to the stress.

True, there were some positive developments for the EU as well. Bulgaria, Croatia, and the Baltic States became members of the eurozone, an instance of great significance given the economic downturns in the common currency area, such as Greece, Spain, and Cyprus. The Union also held its nerve and negotiated the terms of divorce with the United Kingdom from a position of strength. It was believed that the EU would further unravel after Britain's exit from the Union. However, the world witnessed the treatment the EU bureaucrats gave to the Prime Ministers of once-mighty Great Britain.

All in all, the coming years will test the definition of Europe and the European man, which was crafted amidst the ruins of the Second World War.

The following are the trends that are currently dominating Europe:

- The return of the nation-state/ the appearance of nationalist factions primarily being marshalled through cyberspace;
- The end of the USA as a European power/ the undermining of NATO/the retreat of the US from European defensive responsibilities/Increased interactions with Beijing;

- The UK is trying to realign itself globally after abandoning Europe.
- Europe aims to rearm itself, the dimensions of which now would be nuclear/The pursuit of an independent European nuclear deterrent/ growing US ambitions on Greenland; and
- The fears of Russian imperialism and revisionism.

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Pakistan's Role in Middle Eastern Geo-Politics amid the Israel–Iran War

Prof Dr Naheed S. Goraya

Abstract

The INSIGHT explores the ongoing Israel-Iran war as a historic moment that has reshaped the geopolitics of the Middle East and the dynamics of global politics. The battle is not limited to a local fight; it is changing the security goals, reshaping the alliance structures in the corridors of power, and causing economic uncertainty worldwide. Pakistan faces significant hurdles due to its 909-kilometre border with Iran and its inked security and defence agreements with the US and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan must adopt a careful, judicious approach to diplomacy in light of this volatile situation. This insight aims to illustrate the nation's diplomatic initiatives, economic pressures, security issues, and the options available to decision-makers.

Keywords: Israel–Iran War, Pakistan Foreign Policy, Strategic Balancing, Energy Security, Diplomatic Mediation.

Background: The Israel–Iran Conflict and Regional Transformation

There have always been intelligence operations, indirect proxy organisations, ideological rivalries, and the long-standing rivalry between Iran and Israel. However, the conflict's character has changed with the recent escalation into open confrontation, and the current situation is more dire, as it has damaged vital trade routes, such as the Strait of Hormuz, and drawn in major international powers, including the United States. The Middle East's conventional mediation dynamics have fluctuated, and new diplomatic actors have emerged amid the economic constraints imposed by uncertainties surrounding global oil supplies.

Pakistan's Strategic Position in Middle Eastern Geo-Politics

Pakistan's geo-strategic position makes it very significant and holds a unique position in this crisis due to several key factors. It shares a border with Iran, maintains strong relations with Gulf countries, has a strategic partnership with China, and continues to engage with the United States on security and economic matters.

Traditionally, Pakistan has maintained neutrality in Middle Eastern conflicts. However, the current war has made this approach more challenging and complex.

Today, Pakistan is being considered a credible partner for Iran. Looking at last year's Israeli and US attack on Iran, Pakistan was the only Muslim country that stood out by the outspoken and strong manner in which it showed solidarity with Iran and condemned the strikes on Iran. Iranian officials also visited Pakistan to strengthen relations.

Pakistan may successfully negotiate this challenging situation by maintaining its neutrality, carefully balancing its ties, and concentrating on internal stability.

So this relationship has really strengthened over time, particularly since last year. However, Pakistan had long-standing diplomatic relations with the Gulf Countries. The country has sent military advisors to help them. However, above all, 90-95% of Pakistan's oil imports come from these Gulf Countries.

The stakes are diplomatic, political, and military-the dimensions of Pakistan's relations with these Gulf Countries, together with the economic factor. Unless Pakistan gets its oil in, its economy will be hit for a six. Measures to conserve fuel and ensure there is enough flowing. Iran expects political support from Pakistan due to geographic and religious ties.

On the other hand, the United States and its allies expect Pakistan to cooperate in limiting Iran's influence. Balancing the expectations without affecting relationships is a major diplomatic test, placing Pakistan in the role of a balancing power rather than a partisan actor.

Pakistan as a Diplomatic Mediator

Pakistan has emerged as an unexpected diplomatic mediator. This shift has brought many actors, such as Turkey and Egypt, who have shown a willingness to facilitate dialogue and reduce tensions. Pakistan has a strong interest in preventing the conflict from escalating further, as instability in the region directly affects its own security and economy. This conflict, though in a far corner, is affecting everyone. Nevertheless, there are certain limitations to Pakistan's influence. However, it can encourage dialogue and create space for mediation while remaining supportive rather than decisive.

Economic Implications for Pakistan

Amidst the already prevailing economic challenges, the war has serious economic repercussions on energy security, inflation, and remittance reductions, affecting the country's foreign exchange. In addition to that, the current situation brings Pakistan under a strategic squeeze as cross-border security threats increase and the risk of refugee flow persists, eventually harming Pakistan's internal security if the tension escalates. However, the fact remains that as a nuclear-armed country, Pakistan is under constant international scrutiny. Its stance during such conflicts is closely watched, especially regarding issues of nuclear stability and non-proliferation.

Geo-Political Opportunities for Pakistan

Amidst challenges, the situation also offers certain opportunities for Pakistan. It is high time that Pakistan builds up its diplomatic image as a peace-oriented state by playing a constructive role. Indo- Israel alignments are very clear. A day before Modi's visit to Israel, Netanyahu stated that they would establish the '*Hexagon of Alliances*'. That shows their intentions to destabilise Muslim Countries and is part of their agenda. It can maintain its close ties with China on regional stability, leading to economic benefits. China has strategic interests, and this is where Pakistan can support cooperation between the US and China.

This position can help make India strategically irrelevant in the security calculus in the days to come. The country can emerge as a unifying voice in the Muslim world.

- **Policy Options for Pakistan:** Pakistan has several possible approaches:
 - **Option 1: Strict Neutrality:** Continue avoiding alignment with any side and focus on internal stability.
 - **Advantage:** Reduces risk
 - **Disadvantage:** Limits influence
 - **Option 2: Active Mediation:** Take a more proactive diplomatic role in facilitating negotiations.
 - **Advantage:** Enhances global standing
 - **Disadvantage:** Success is uncertain
 - **Option 3: Strategic Alignment:** Choose to align with either Iran or the US-led bloc.
 - **Advantage:** Clear direction
 - **Disadvantage:** High political and security costs
 - **Option 4: Multilateral Engagement:** Work with other countries to promote collective solutions.
 - **Advantage:** Shared responsibility
 - **Disadvantage:** Requires complex coordination

Recommendations

- The country needs to adopt a balanced diplomacy.
- Iran's border security should be more strict in terms of monitoring and coordination

- Strategies should be adopted to invest in alternative energy sources so that external shocks can be countered.
- The government must work/ adopt austerity measures to lessen the economic pressure through a sustainable approach.

Conclusion

Pakistan is unable to bear the financial burden despite having the greatest impact. Pakistan would eventually suffer the consequences of Iran's refugee issue, particularly at a time when things are already worse in Afghanistan. Pakistan may successfully negotiate this challenging situation by maintaining its neutrality, carefully balancing its ties, and concentrating on internal stability. Pakistan may be able to safeguard its interests and make a constructive contribution to regional stability if the situation is handled carefully.

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Implications of Iran-US War on East Asian Political & Security Order

Dr Majid Ali Noonari

Abstract

This INSIGHT argues that the Iran–US war has consequences far beyond West Asia, particularly for the political and security order of East Asia. It contends that the conflict has exposed the limits of US military credibility, intensified energy insecurity through the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, and heightened doubts among East Asian allies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The paper further suggests that these developments may weaken US hegemony, disrupt regional supply chains, and create greater strategic space for China in East Asia. Overall, the insight presents the war as a major geopolitical shock with serious implications for alliance politics, regional stability, and the future balance of power in Asia.

Keywords: Iran–US War, East Asian Security Order, US Hegemony, Strait of Hormuz, Energy Security.

The recent war between the US and Iran, called Operation Epic Fury and Operation True Promise IV respectively, is the continuation of the US-Israel 12-day war of July 2025, begun on 28th February 2026, when the US and Israeli air forces assassinated their Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and their top 40 commanders. Tehran retaliated with strikes on US bases and its assets, including defence systems and radars, and its allies, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. The war cost the US \$11 billion in the first week and has blocked the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting energy supplies and the supply chain of important commodities to global markets. The IRGC has employed asymmetric warfare and escalated the theatre of war to the entire region.

The Iranian government has issued an IRGC Decentralised Mosaic defence to counter the US threats with its most effective weapons, ballistic missiles, and UAVs. IRGC targeted the US bases and its infrastructure across West Asia, and reached as far as Cyprus and has also targeted the US carrier *Abraham Lincoln* positioned in the Indian Ocean.

The war was driven by the following objectives of the United States of America and Israel:

- To bring about regime change in Iran, as Washington and Tel Aviv viewed it as a major threat to their interests in the region.
- To end the nuclear programme and put a limit on the range of missiles of Iran
- End the proxy groups, i.e., Hezbollah, Hamas, and Houthis, as well as Iraqi militias of Iran known as the Axis of Resistance
- Normalisation of ties with the Gulf States under the Abraham Accord initiated during Trump's first tenure resulted in the normalisation of ties between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco during 2020-21.
- To end the Chinese influence in the region as Beijing does in the region.

The war did not achieve the desired results as it was not ended in 48-72 hours despite the assassination of political and military leadership, including the deaths of more than 3000 people and the destruction of Iranian infrastructure. The regime remained intact and elected Mojtaba Khomeini (the son of the deceased Supreme leader) as the new Supreme leader, and activated the decentralised Mosaic Defence, dividing authority to counter the enemy among 31 IRGC units: 30 in the provinces and 1 in Tehran. The Gulf States were betrayed as the US only defended Israel and left them to face the IRGC wrath. Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE were the most affected.

Energy crisis in the region will deepen as the largest importers of oil and gas in the Middle East are Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan.

Trump's popularity reached a low in the US. It emerged as a weak leader influenced by Zionist lobbies and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as his son-in-law Jared Kushner, Special Advisor Witkoff, and the Secretary of War Pete Hegseth.

His differences with NATO members have surfaced, and he has openly criticised them for not supporting the US in the war. IRGC constantly targets US 30 plus bases and its carrier ships, radars and satellites are destroyed, ending the US role as a guarantor of peace in the region. IRGC's closure of Strait of Hormuz is another US failure as the region provides 20% of global oil needs, one-fifth of the global LNG, 50% of sulphuric acid, 30% of global urea, 20% of ammonia and phosphate, 8% of aluminium, and 5 million tonnes of metal.

The asymmetric tactics of IRGC destroyed three THAAD systems in the region and five advanced US radars worth over US\$ 3 billion, attack on US\$ 13 billion worth US Abraham Lincoln carrier, and targeted the oil infrastructure in the region as well as closing down all communications including the airports, banks and European/western financial systems and has also drained the missile interceptors across the region. The Tehran's blockage of the Strait of Hormuz has halted energy supplies, raising global fuel prices to US\$ 119 on 9th March 2026. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz remains a major threat to US allies in East Asia, as Japan and South Korea are mainly reliant on Persian Gulf energy resources.

Impact of War on East Asian Political & Security Order

The US's continued wars may lead towards the end of US hegemony and influence across the globe as wars have stretched and exhausted its resources far beyond its limits. The production of the defence systems does not meet the requirements. This has serious repercussions, as ongoing Iranian attacks may prompt foreign investors to shift to other regions, including Singapore and East Asia. The removal of the Patriot and THAAD defence systems from South Korea to the Middle Eastern theatre poses a greater threat to the region's security. The East Asian allies viewed this as:

- The US is viewed as an unreliable partner against the threats from the regional states like North Korea, China, and Russia. The US defence industry is already short of missile interceptors, which may raise concerns in South Korea, the Philippines, Japan and Taiwan about the US commitment to defend them.
- The transfer of THAAD from South Korea despite its installation in 2017 faced the Chinese opposition may bring unpopularity in Seoul.
- The US high-tech weapons, including THAAD, Patriot and radars as well as carriers, did not ensure their victory, which raised concern among the East Asian allies as they considered Beijing and North Korea much stronger due to their ballistic missiles and drones being far superior and in great numbers. The US success ratio against this type of war is ineffective.
- China and its allies, North Korea, Russia, Pakistan and Iran, may choke the global trading points, including the Taiwan straits and the South China Sea (SCS), the Malacca Strait and the Indian Ocean, to threaten the US order in Asia and block the routes for any future movements.
- Energy crisis in the region will deepen as the largest importers of oil and gas in the Middle East are Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan. The regional allies, including Japan, which imports 90%, Taiwan's 70%, of LNG, South Korea, 70% of its energy, and India, 50% of its energy, come from West Asia. Energy disruptions will put pressure on Taiwan's semiconductor industry, disrupting supply chains. Beijing's 40% of global oil imports are halted, making a clear impact on industrial growth, and its supply of jet fuel to the US ally Australia is also halted, as Canberra imports 32% of its jet fuel from China.
- Trump's waiver of Russian oil may provide leverage to Russia to influence the outcome of the conflict.
- Despite East Asian states' increased trade with China, they perceived Beijing as a hegemonic power and formed QUAD, TPP, and other forums to counter China.

Beijing's continued policy of peaceful resolution of disputes, including the SCS disputes, provides an opportunity to resolve the issue, including the peaceful unification of Taiwan. The war in West Asia may give East Asian neighbours and others an insight into the need to review their policies to improve ties with Beijing rather than follow Washington's path of destruction.

Conclusion

The Iran-US war has remained unsuccessful in achieving its major objectives, as the regime in Iran has elected a new successor, and missiles, as the UAVs are now seen as a guarantee of peace in the region. This will lead to a new arms race in the region, as Arab monarchies will strengthen their own defence programmes rather than relying on the US and find someone else to fill the role of net security provider, i.e., Pakistan, backed by China and Russia. Meanwhile, Tel Aviv will continue to face resistance from the Axis of Resistance as they have come much stronger in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and even in Gaza.

The war affects the global geopolitical order, as the closure of Hormuz will have economic consequences for the global supply chain. The continued attacks will end the GCC states, including the UAE, as havens for investment. The rise in oil and gas prices, driven by inflation and global supply shortages, led to a crisis in the United States and East Asia. The US has fallen as an empire, and the trust as a guarantor of peace has vanished. Trump has ended NATO and divided the US and its European partners. The East Asian partners are no different, as they view this war as an extension of Netanyahu's Greater Israel plan rather than defending peace and democracy. The threat to East Asian allies posed by the US's non-existent defence systems and the military might of North Korea and China provides them with an opportunity to amend ties with the US, end the US hegemonic role in the region, and make China a new security guarantor and trade partner to the East Asian states.

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