

Beyond the Battlefield the 2026 US–Israel–Iran Conflict and the Reconstruction of the Global Order

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ABSTRACT

The 2026 United States–Israel–Iran conflict represents a significant test of contemporary international security because its effects extend beyond the immediate theatre of war into nuclear governance, maritime security, energy markets, international law, humanitarian protection, economic resilience, information systems and the architecture of global diplomacy. This study examines the conflict as a multidimensional systems crisis rather than solely as a military confrontation. It asks how regional warfare produces cascading consequences across interconnected global systems and what the conflict reveals about the changing structure of international order. The study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary research design combining conflict-system analysis, documentary analysis, international-security theory, political economy, human-security analysis and international-law perspectives. Current institutional and reputable media sources are used to establish a dated evidence base, while the paper distinguishes documented facts, attributed claims and analytical interpretation. The study develops an original seven-domain analytical model—the GSFEN Global Stability Framework—covering military security, nuclear security, maritime and energy security, economic security, human security, legal-institutional security, and diplomatic-information security. The analysis finds that the conflict demonstrates strong interdependence among these domains: disruption in maritime access affects energy and trade; economic pressure interacts with political bargaining; interruption of nuclear verification increases uncertainty; civilian harm affects legitimacy and recovery; and information competition influences escalation management. The paper concludes that contemporary conflict analysis requires a systems approach capable of connecting military events with economic, legal, technological, humanitarian and diplomatic outcomes. The proposed framework offers a basis for comparative research, policy analysis and future longitudinal studies.

Keywords: United States; Israel; Iran; international security; nuclear governance; Strait of Hormuz; energy security; human security; international law; sanctions; geopolitics; diplomacy; global order.

INTRODUCTION

The study of war has traditionally privileged military capability, battlefield performance and the balance of power. Those variables remain indispensable, but the 2026 United States–Israel–Iran conflict demonstrates why they are no longer sufficient as the sole basis for understanding contemporary international crises. A missile launched in the Middle East can affect an energy market thousands of kilometres away. A disruption in a nuclear inspection regime can change the risk calculations of governments that are not parties to the conflict. A maritime incident in the Strait of Hormuz can alter insurance costs, shipping patterns and inflation. Civilian infrastructure damage can create humanitarian requirements that persist long after military operations have changed. In this sense, the conflict is not only a war between states and armed actors; it is a stress test of interconnected systems.

On 28 February 2026, the United States and Israel began a major series of strikes against Iran. The UK House of Commons Library recorded that the stated objectives included action against Iran's nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes and political change in Tehran. Iran responded with attacks against Israel, US forces and sites in regional states. The conflict subsequently expanded into a sustained confrontation

involving maritime restrictions, attacks on military and civilian infrastructure, economic measures and repeated diplomatic initiatives [1].

The conflict is particularly important for international research because it sits at the intersection of several major debates. In security studies, it raises questions about deterrence, preventive action and the sustainability of high-intensity air and missile warfare. In nuclear studies, it raises questions about verification, continuity of knowledge and the consequences of military attacks on nuclear infrastructure. In international political economy, it demonstrates how war can affect energy prices, shipping, inflation and public expenditure. In international law, it raises questions about the UN Charter, self-defence, proportionality, civilian protection and maritime navigation. In peace studies, it raises the problem of converting battlefield pressure into a durable political settlement.

The conflict also matters because the Strait of Hormuz has become a central strategic variable. Reuters reported on 16 September 2026 that only four vessel crossings were detected in the strait on the preceding Tuesday, compared with a ten-day average of 18, although the report cautioned that some vessels may have transited with transponders disabled [2]. The significance of this disruption extends beyond the combatants because Hormuz is a critical route for global oil and liquefied-natural-gas movements. The maritime problem is therefore simultaneously a security problem, an economic problem and an international-governance problem.

At the same time, the nuclear dimension has become more uncertain. A September 2026 statement by France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States to the IAEA Board of Governors said that Iran had provided no information during the reporting period on the status of declared nuclear facilities and material and that IAEA inspections had not resumed at declared facilities since June [3]. This statement represents the position of the four governments and should be distinguished from an independent determination of every underlying fact. The significance for research, however, is clear: when technical verification is interrupted, uncertainty becomes a strategic variable.

The economic consequences are also substantial. Reuters reported on 15 September 2026 that the Congressional Budget Office estimated US war costs at approximately \$38 billion through 1 August and projected that costs could rise by about \$3 billion per month depending on the conflict's intensity [4]. The same reporting linked the conflict to pressure on munitions inventories and higher energy prices. These estimates are time-specific and should not be treated as a final accounting. Nevertheless, they demonstrate how military operations can create fiscal and industrial consequences extending beyond the battlefield.

This article therefore advances a central proposition: the 2026 US–Israel–Iran conflict is best understood as a systems crisis in which military, nuclear, maritime, economic, humanitarian, legal and diplomatic processes interact. The purpose is not to identify a political or military winner. It is to establish an analytical structure through which scholars can examine how regional conflict produces global consequences.

The article makes three contributions. First, it integrates several research traditions that are often examined separately. Second, it proposes the GSFEN Global Stability Framework as a seven-domain model for measuring conflict effects without reducing complex outcomes to a single score. Third, it develops a research agenda for scholars examining conflict, energy security, nuclear governance, sanctions, human security and the future of international order.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Existing commentary on the conflict is often organised around immediate military events, official statements, casualty claims, weapons systems or diplomatic developments. Such approaches are valuable for rapid reporting but can fragment the underlying causal picture. A missile exchange may be studied by military analysts; oil-market disruption by economists; nuclear verification by technical experts; civilian harm by humanitarian organisations; and legal claims by international lawyers. The fragmentation creates an analytical problem: the conflict's most consequential effects often occur at the boundaries between these domains.

A second problem concerns temporal compression. Because information is generated continuously, analysts may focus on the most recent event and overlook cumulative effects. A six-month conflict can change military inventories, public finances, shipping behaviour, diplomatic relationships and humanitarian conditions in ways that are not visible in a single daily news cycle.

A third problem is evidentiary uncertainty. Active conflicts generate incomplete, contradictory and strategically framed information. Scholarly work therefore requires a transparent distinction between verified evidence, institutional assessments, party claims and analytical inference. Without that distinction, academic writing can unintentionally reproduce wartime narratives as facts.

The research problem addressed by this article is consequently: how can scholars construct a coherent framework for analysing a contemporary regional war whose effects simultaneously operate across military, nuclear, maritime, economic, humanitarian, legal and diplomatic systems?

Research Questions

- How does the 2026 US–Israel–Iran conflict transform from a regional military confrontation into a global systems crisis?
- What mechanisms connect military escalation with energy, trade and macroeconomic effects?
- How does interruption of nuclear verification affect strategic uncertainty and escalation management?
- How should civilian protection and human security be integrated into strategic conflict analysis?
- What international-law questions are generated by the use of force and maritime restrictions?
- How do sanctions, blockades and economic pressure interact with diplomatic bargaining?
- What does the conflict reveal about the changing architecture of global order?
- How can the GSFEN Global Stability Framework support comparative and longitudinal conflict research?

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the 2026 conflict as a multidimensional international-security case.
- To identify the mechanisms through which regional military action creates global economic and security spillovers.
- To examine nuclear verification and uncertainty as components of escalation risk.
- To analyse the strategic significance of the Strait of Hormuz and energy interdependence.
- To integrate human-security and international-law considerations into conflict analysis.
- To examine sanctions, military expenditure and economic resilience as strategic variables.
- To propose an original seven-domain framework for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

The theoretical literature on international security has long debated whether states pursue security primarily through material capabilities, institutional cooperation, economic interdependence or identity and perception. Realist approaches emphasise power and strategic competition; liberal institutionalism emphasises institutions, rules and cooperation; constructivist approaches emphasise norms, identities and social meanings. The present study does not attempt to replace these traditions. Instead, it argues that a systems approach can usefully connect them.

The concept of security itself has expanded. Human-security scholarship challenges the assumption that the state is always the sole unit whose security matters. Energy-security research demonstrates that physical supply, infrastructure and market stability can influence national security. Critical infrastructure research shows that interdependent networks can transmit shocks. Nuclear-security scholarship demonstrates the importance of verification and information continuity. Peace research highlights the difference between ending violence and addressing the political structures that sustain conflict.

The 2026 conflict provides a particularly useful case because all these dimensions are visible at once. The war involves high-end conventional weapons but also drones, maritime systems and information operations. It involves nuclear questions but also the practical problem of inspectors losing access. It involves sanctions and blockade measures but also global energy-market effects. It involves legal arguments but also humanitarian consequences.

The literature therefore suggests that the central analytical unit should not be the weapon or even the state alone. It should be the relationship among systems. A systems perspective asks what happens when one node changes and how that change propagates through connected nodes.

This paper adopts the concept of strategic interdependence to describe that condition. Strategic interdependence exists when the security choices of one actor materially affect the options, costs or vulnerabilities of other actors through shared infrastructures, markets, institutions or information systems. The concept does not imply harmony. Interdependence can increase vulnerability as well as cooperation.

Theoretical Lens: Strategic Interdependence

Strategic interdependence can be represented as a chain: military action → infrastructure disruption → market response → domestic economic effects → political pressure → diplomatic adjustment → military adaptation. The chain is not deterministic. At every stage, institutions, technology, geography and policy choices can interrupt or amplify the process. The value of the concept lies in making these linkages visible.

Domain	Primary research concern	Illustrative 2026 indicator
Military	Escalation, force sustainability	Strike intensity, inventories, defensive capacity
Nuclear	Verification and uncertainty	IAEA access, material continuity
Maritime/Energy	Flow of strategic commodities	Hormuz crossings, oil/LNG movement
Economic	Costs and spillovers	War expenditure, prices, sanctions
Human	Civilian welfare and resilience	Casualties, displacement, infrastructure
Legal/Institutional	Rules and accountability	UN action, legal claims, investigations
Diplomatic/Information	Conflict management	Talks, mediation, narratives, verification

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative interdisciplinary research design. It is a documentary and analytical study rather than a primary survey or experiment. The empirical material consists of publicly available institutional reports, official statements, conflict-monitoring data and reputable news reporting available as of September 2026.

Source selection follows four principles. First, primary or institutional sources are preferred for official positions, legal documents, nuclear safeguards and policy statements. Second, reputable secondary sources are used to establish time-sensitive developments and to cross-check major events. Third, contested claims are attributed to their source rather than presented as independently verified fact. Fourth, numerical claims are treated as dated observations rather than timeless facts.

The analysis proceeds in four stages. Stage one establishes the conflict timeline. Stage two maps the seven security domains. Stage three identifies cross-domain causal mechanisms. Stage four uses the resulting evidence to construct the GSFEN Global Stability Framework and derive a research agenda.

The study does not claim to independently verify every battlefield event. This limitation is material because access to conflict zones can be restricted and data can be revised. The paper therefore avoids false precision and focuses on mechanisms that can be supported by documentary evidence.

No human participants were recruited for this study, and no personal data were collected. Accordingly, the study does not require human-subject ethical approval. The article should nevertheless be subjected to the target journal's editorial and plagiarism screening procedures before submission.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding One: Regional War Has Become a Global Systems Event

The first finding is that the conflict's consequences cannot be geographically contained. The clearest mechanism is maritime disruption. When commercial vessels avoid or reduce passage through Hormuz, the immediate effect is a reduction in regional maritime activity. The second-order effect is higher transport and insurance risk. The third-order effect is potential energy-price pressure. The fourth-order effect is macroeconomic pressure in importing economies.

Reuters' 16 September reporting provides a concrete snapshot: four detected vessel crossings on the preceding Tuesday compared with a ten-day average of 18. The same report noted that the strait previously carried roughly one-fifth of global oil and liquefied-natural-gas flows [2]. Even with uncertainty caused by vessels switching off transponders, the data show how conflict can reduce the visibility and predictability of a critical global flow.

The systems implication is important. A state does not need to be attacked directly to experience a security consequence. An energy-importing state can be affected through prices; an insurer through risk exposure; a manufacturer through input costs; and a central bank through inflation. The geography of harm therefore becomes much larger than the geography of combat.

Finding Two: Nuclear Uncertainty Has Become a Strategic Variable

The nuclear dimension illustrates how uncertainty can become an independent source of risk. On 10 September, the UK government published a Quad statement stating that the IAEA had not received information from Iran regarding the status of declared nuclear facilities and material during the reporting period and that inspectors had not accessed declared facilities since June [3]. The EU separately expressed grave concern over the suspension of cooperation [5]. These statements represent the positions of the respective governments and regional institutions; their analytical significance lies in the reported loss of verification continuity.

Verification is not merely an administrative function. It allows external actors to distinguish between what is known and what is assumed. When access is interrupted, uncertainty expands the range of possible scenarios. In strategic environments, decision-makers may respond to the upper end of that range rather than the most likely scenario, particularly when the perceived cost of being wrong is high.

This produces a difficult paradox. Military action may be justified by its proponents as necessary to prevent or reduce nuclear danger, while the disruption of nuclear facilities and inspection access can simultaneously make post-conflict knowledge more difficult to obtain. The empirical question is whether future verification can restore continuity and confidence. The theoretical question is whether preventive military action can unintentionally increase the information deficit it seeks to overcome.

Finding Three: Military Sustainability Is Also an Economic Question

The third finding is that high-intensity warfare must be analysed through the economics of sustainability. Reuters reported on 15 September that the Congressional Budget Office estimated the US war had cost approximately \$38 billion through 1 August and could cost around \$3 billion per month depending on intensity [4]. The report also described strain on munitions stockpiles. These are estimates and should be updated as new CBO or government information becomes available.

The significance is broader than expenditure. Modern air and missile defence requires sophisticated interceptors, sensors, command systems, logistics and industrial replenishment. If consumption is faster than production, the strategic problem becomes partly industrial. A state may possess advanced technology while still facing a finite inventory constraint.

This suggests a distinction between technological superiority and sustained technological availability. Researchers should therefore measure not only what a state can deploy but how rapidly it can replace what it consumes. The concept is particularly relevant to future high-intensity conflicts where precision munitions and air-defence interceptors are expensive and production cycles are long.

Finding Four: Economic Coercion Produces Both Strategic Pressure and Externalities

Economic coercion is a central part of the conflict system. Reuters reported in early September that Iranian oil exports had fallen sharply under the combined effects of sanctions and the US naval blockade, with the report describing severe pressure on Iran's access to foreign currency [6]. Such pressure can reduce the financial resources available to a government, but it also produces effects that extend to domestic prices, imports and third-country commercial relationships.

The scholarly challenge is to distinguish intended effects from externalities. A sanction may be designed to reduce state revenue, while a shortage of foreign currency may simultaneously affect medicine, food, industrial inputs and household purchasing power. Humanitarian exemptions can mitigate some effects but may be complicated by banking restrictions and private-sector over-compliance. The conflict therefore supports a research agenda on economic coercion that measures distributional effects rather than only macroeconomic aggregates. It also raises the question of whether severe economic pressure changes a state's bargaining behaviour, hardens political positions, or produces incentives for informal trade. These outcomes should be investigated empirically rather than assumed.

Finding Five: Human Security Is a Strategic Variable

Civilian protection should not be treated as an appendix to strategic analysis. Civilian deaths, injuries, displacement and infrastructure damage affect the social conditions under which political settlements can succeed. A destroyed hospital is simultaneously a humanitarian problem, an infrastructure problem and a post-conflict reconstruction problem.

Humanitarian evidence in an active conflict requires special care. The UK House of Commons Library cautioned that casualties and reports of specific events can be difficult to verify because of restricted access and communications [1]. This reinforces the need for triangulation and clear attribution. Advocacy organisations may document serious incidents, but their findings should be distinguished from independently adjudicated legal determinations.

The human-security approach also broadens the meaning of recovery. Recovery includes restoring electricity, water, healthcare, schools, housing, livelihoods and environmental safety. If these systems remain damaged, the cessation of military strikes may not translate into meaningful security for civilians.

This finding supports a policy principle: humanitarian protection and post-conflict planning should be incorporated into strategic decision-making before hostilities end. Waiting until a ceasefire is signed can create avoidable delays in reconstruction and social recovery.

Finding Six: International Law Becomes More Important, Not Less, During War

The conflict has generated competing legal arguments about the use of force, self-defence, sovereignty and maritime action. The House of Commons Library's background briefing records that the US stated its actions were consistent with self-defence under the UN Charter, while Iran condemned the strikes as unlawful and invoked its own right of self-defence [1]. These are competing governmental positions, not findings by a judicial body.

International law requires separation of questions that are often merged in public debate. The legality of resorting to force is one question. The conduct of hostilities is another. The treatment of civilians, the choice of targets, precautions, proportionality and distinction are governed by international humanitarian law once an armed conflict exists. Maritime measures introduce further legal questions involving navigation, blockade and protection of neutral shipping.

The research implication is methodological: legal analysis should begin with the applicable rule, identify the relevant facts, assess evidentiary uncertainty and then explain competing interpretations. It should not infer illegality or legality solely from the political identity of the actor involved.

Finding Seven: Information Has Become Part of the Battlespace

The contemporary conflict demonstrates that information is both evidence and an instrument of war. Governments release operational claims, militaries publish footage, journalists report rapidly, social-media users circulate images and artificial intelligence can accelerate the production of synthetic content. The result is a high-speed environment in which claims can reach millions of people before independent verification occurs.

For researchers, the central challenge is not simply misinformation but epistemic competition: different actors attempt to establish competing descriptions of reality. A scholarly response requires source provenance, timestamping, geolocation where appropriate, comparison of independent sources and transparent treatment of uncertainty.

The use of AI creates additional concerns. Synthetic audio, manipulated imagery and automated text can make verification more difficult, while AI-assisted analysis can also help researchers process large volumes of open-source material. The same technology can therefore increase both information capacity and information risk.

A future conflict-research methodology should include an information-integrity layer within its design. Researchers could code official claims, subsequent corrections, independent verification, media repetition and social-media reach to examine how narratives evolve over time.

Finding Eight: Diplomacy Is a System, Not an Event

The conflict demonstrates that diplomacy cannot be treated as a single meeting or ceasefire announcement. Negotiations operate through repeated signalling, mediation, verification, incentives and enforcement. The June 2026 memorandum involving US and Iranian negotiators, mediated by Pakistan according to parliamentary reporting, attempted to connect nuclear, missile, sanctions and maritime questions [7]. Its subsequent deterioration demonstrates the difficulty of sustaining arrangements when core security interests remain unresolved.

A durable settlement requires credible implementation. Parties need to know what happens after a violation, how disputes are investigated, what sanctions relief means in practice, how maritime access is verified and how nuclear inspections resume. Without these mechanisms, even a formally negotiated agreement can remain fragile.

Third-party mediation can reduce communication barriers, but the mediator must have sufficient access and credibility. Middle powers can sometimes play roles unavailable to great powers because they maintain

relationships with multiple sides. The study therefore recommends more systematic research into middle-power mediation as a component of global security governance.

Finding Nine: The Conflict Provides Evidence of Networked Multipolarity

The conflict should not be interpreted solely through a binary great-power lens. Different states possess different forms of leverage. The United States possesses substantial military and financial capabilities. Israel possesses advanced military and intelligence capabilities. Iran possesses geographical leverage, missile and drone capabilities and influence across regional networks. Gulf states possess energy infrastructure and diplomatic relationships. China has economic influence and energy interests. European states have diplomatic, economic and institutional roles. Middle powers can provide mediation channels.

This distribution of capabilities is better described as networked multipolarity than as a simple transfer of power from one state to another. Actors can cooperate in one issue area while disagreeing in another. They can also use different types of leverage at different stages of a crisis.

The implication for international-relations scholarship is that future models should measure multiple forms of power: military, economic, technological, geographic, institutional, diplomatic and informational. A state with limited military power may still have substantial leverage through geography or energy. Conversely, a state with exceptional military capability may face constraints in diplomacy or economic sustainability.

Cross-Domain Causal Pathways

A central analytical value of the case is that it reveals pathways rather than isolated consequences. A missile strike, for example, is a military event at the point of impact, but its consequences may move through several institutional and economic systems. Damage to an energy installation can affect production; reduced production can affect export availability; altered expectations can change shipping insurance; higher insurance costs can influence freight rates; higher freight rates can raise import prices; and higher import prices can feed domestic inflation. The original military event therefore becomes one element in a chain of secondary and tertiary effects. The concept of strategic interdependence is useful precisely because it captures these chains without assuming that every consequence is automatic or equally strong.

The same logic applies to nuclear governance. When inspectors lose access to facilities, the immediate consequence is an information deficit. That deficit can then influence intelligence assessments, diplomatic bargaining, sanctions decisions, military planning and public risk perception. The causal mechanism is therefore not simply nuclear capability; it is uncertainty about capability, location, material status and institutional access. This distinction is important because uncertainty can alter behaviour even where the underlying material situation has not changed proportionately. In international security research, the informational condition surrounding a capability can be as consequential as the capability itself.

Maritime security provides a third pathway. A disruption in a strategic waterway does not need to stop all shipping to create global effects. A reduction in traffic can increase transit times, insurance premia, rerouting costs and precautionary inventory holdings. Some actors may have alternative routes, strategic reserves or different contractual arrangements, while others may have limited resilience. The same shock can consequently have unequal effects across countries, firms and households. This is why global systemic analysis should combine aggregate indicators with distributional analysis.

These pathways also explain why conflict analysis should resist simple linear narratives. The relationship between military intensity and economic impact is not necessarily proportional. A relatively limited incident at a strategically important chokepoint can generate a disproportionate market response, while a larger attack in a geographically contained area may produce a smaller international effect. Strategic importance is therefore partly a function of network position. Critical infrastructure, financial centres, maritime passages, data networks and diplomatic institutions can have effects that exceed their physical size.

The study consequently treats the conflict as a networked system. The seven domains in the proposed framework are analytically distinct but empirically connected. The purpose is not to create a single score for

the conflict. Rather, it is to make causal questions visible: Which military events alter energy availability? Which economic measures affect diplomatic bargaining? Which verification gaps increase uncertainty? Which humanitarian pressures influence political legitimacy? Which information failures increase escalation risk? These questions provide a basis for future quantitative testing and comparative research.

Comparative Lessons from Earlier Conflicts

Historical comparison can clarify what is distinctive about the 2026 conflict without assuming that earlier wars are direct equivalents. The 1990–91 Gulf War demonstrated the strategic significance of energy infrastructure, coalition warfare and the security of Gulf maritime routes. It also illustrated the importance of international institutional legitimacy and collective decision-making. The 2003 Iraq War highlighted the long-term consequences that can arise when military success is separated from post-conflict political order. The Libya intervention of 2011 illustrated the difficulty of translating limited military objectives into stable political outcomes. The war in Ukraine since 2022 has demonstrated how sanctions, energy markets, industrial mobilisation, drones, information operations and alliance networks can become integral to modern warfare. Each comparison illuminates a different mechanism.

The 2026 US–Israel–Iran conflict adds a distinctive combination of variables. First, it combines direct great-power military participation with a highly consequential nuclear-verification problem. Second, it places an internationally important maritime chokepoint at the centre of the conflict system. Third, it unfolds in an environment of extensive sanctions, financial interdependence and rapid digital information circulation. Fourth, it occurs after years of technological development in drones, precision weapons, satellite observation, cyber operations and artificial intelligence. These features make the case valuable for researchers interested in how contemporary conflict differs from earlier industrial-era models.

Comparison also cautions against deterministic claims. The fact that a previous war produced prolonged instability does not establish that the same outcome must follow in another case. Institutional design, domestic politics, regional alliances, economic conditions and diplomatic arrangements differ. Comparative analysis should therefore identify mechanisms rather than copy conclusions. For example, the lesson from Iraq may be framed as a question about the relationship between military objectives and post-conflict governance, rather than as a prediction about Iran. Similarly, the lesson from Ukraine may concern industrial and economic sustainability rather than a claim that the conflicts are strategically identical.

A comparative matrix can therefore be constructed around mechanisms: maritime chokepoint exposure, nuclear verification, sanctions intensity, external coalition involvement, civilian infrastructure vulnerability, information warfare, post-conflict governance requirements and third-party mediation. Applying the same variables across cases can improve cumulative knowledge. The GSFEN framework is designed to support precisely this approach. It creates common analytical categories while allowing case-specific indicators to remain distinct.

The broader lesson is methodological. Researchers should not ask only whether the 2026 conflict resembles an earlier war. They should ask which mechanisms recur across conflicts, under what conditions, and with what consequences. Such an approach avoids historical analogy becoming rhetorical analogy. It also increases the possibility that findings from the current conflict can contribute to a more general theory of contemporary strategic interdependence.

International Law, Sovereignty and the Use of Force

The legal dimension requires careful separation of several questions. The first concerns *jus ad bellum*: under what circumstances may a state lawfully use force against another state? The UN Charter establishes a general prohibition on the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of states, subject to recognised exceptions including Security Council authorisation and the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence in response to an armed attack. The application of these rules to an active conflict depends on facts, necessity, proportionality, attribution and the legal position advanced by the

states involved. An academic analysis should therefore distinguish the existence of a legal argument from a final legal determination.

The second question concerns *jus in bello*, or international humanitarian law. Once an armed conflict exists, parties remain bound by rules governing distinction, proportionality, precautions in attack and the protection of civilians and civilian objects, subject to the applicable treaty and customary-law framework. These rules are analytically separate from the legality of initiating force. A state cannot establish the legality of an initial resort to force simply by demonstrating that particular attacks were conducted in accordance with humanitarian-law requirements; conversely, disagreement over *jus ad bellum* does not remove the obligation to comply with international humanitarian law.

The third question concerns maritime conduct. The Strait of Hormuz has a special legal and strategic character because it is an international maritime chokepoint connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the wider Indian Ocean. Questions concerning transit, navigation, interdiction, protection of commercial shipping and the use of force at sea involve the law of the sea as well as the law governing armed conflict. The legal assessment of any particular maritime incident must therefore begin with the precise facts, the status of the vessel, the location, the nature of the conduct and the applicable legal regime.

The fourth question concerns economic coercion. Sanctions may operate through domestic legislation, executive measures, multilateral decisions or other mechanisms. Their legality, legitimacy and humanitarian effects vary according to their design and legal basis. Researchers should avoid treating all sanctions as a single instrument. Financial restrictions, export controls, secondary sanctions, asset freezes and maritime enforcement mechanisms can have different legal foundations and different distributional effects. A serious analysis should therefore identify the instrument before evaluating its consequences.

Finally, international law functions not only as a constraint but also as an institutional language through which states communicate claims and counterclaims. Public legal arguments can shape diplomatic coalitions, institutional responses and post-conflict negotiations. This makes legal analysis part of strategic analysis. The study therefore treats law as one of the seven interacting domains rather than as an external appendix to security studies.

Nuclear Verification, Deterrence and Strategic Uncertainty

Nuclear verification occupies a distinctive place in the conflict system because it links technical information to political decision-making. Verification institutions seek to establish facts about declared nuclear material and activities, while states interpret those findings within broader security assessments. When access is disrupted, the result is not automatically evidence of a prohibited activity. Rather, the evidentiary environment becomes less complete. That distinction is essential for rigorous scholarship because an information gap and proof of a particular activity are not equivalent propositions.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards system is designed to provide assurance regarding the peaceful nature of declared nuclear activities and to detect indications of diversion where its legal authorities permit. The effectiveness of safeguards depends on access, reporting, monitoring equipment, sampling, information exchange and cooperation. During conflict, these conditions can deteriorate. Facilities may be damaged, personnel may be displaced, equipment may become inaccessible and communication channels may be interrupted. The institutional challenge is consequently both technical and political.

Deterrence theory adds another layer. Strategic deterrence depends not only on weapons but on beliefs about capabilities, intentions, survivability and credibility. Uncertainty can therefore have ambiguous effects. In some circumstances, uncertainty may encourage caution because decision-makers cannot confidently estimate the adversary's capability. In other circumstances, uncertainty may encourage preventive or pre-emptive action because leaders fear that waiting will increase future risk. The direction of the effect depends on context, perceptions and available communication channels.

This suggests that nuclear risk reduction should include information-preservation mechanisms. Emergency arrangements for inspection records, remote monitoring where technically feasible, protected data repositories, rapid communication between technical experts and political authorities, and agreed procedures for restoring access after hostilities could reduce the duration of uncertainty. Such measures do not resolve the underlying political dispute, but they can limit the informational consequences of conflict.

The conflict therefore demonstrates a broader principle: in high-risk security environments, verification is itself a form of infrastructure. Just as damaged electricity networks can reduce economic capacity, damaged verification networks can reduce the capacity of international institutions to distinguish fact from uncertainty. Future research should model verification continuity as a strategic variable rather than a purely technical matter.

Energy Security, Global Markets and Distributional Effects

Energy security is often discussed in terms of aggregate supply, but the 2026 conflict illustrates why distribution matters. A disruption in a major producing region can affect countries differently depending on their import dependence, storage capacity, refinery configuration, access to alternative suppliers and ability to absorb higher prices. Wealthier economies may have greater fiscal capacity to subsidise consumers or release strategic stocks, while lower-income importers may face sharper pressure on food, transport and electricity costs. The same global price movement can therefore create different domestic consequences.

The Strait of Hormuz is particularly important because of the volume and concentration of energy flows associated with the region. Recent reporting indicates that visible ship crossings have fallen sharply below the recent ten-day average, although transponder-off movements make the precise level of traffic uncertain. This is a useful example of how conflict research should communicate uncertainty rather than convert incomplete observations into absolute statements. The relevant analytical point is that a sustained decline in observable traffic increases uncertainty around supply chains and logistics even before a complete physical closure occurs. □cite{Reuters,2026a}

Energy-market expectations can amplify physical disruptions. Traders and firms price anticipated scarcity, insurance costs and future logistical constraints. Consequently, prices can move before actual supply shortages reach consumers. This creates feedback loops between expectations and behaviour. Firms may build inventories, reroute cargoes or secure alternative contracts, which can reduce immediate vulnerability but also increase demand elsewhere. Governments may release reserves or negotiate alternative supply routes. These responses can dampen or redistribute the shock rather than simply eliminate it.

The distributional dimension is also relevant to political stability. Higher fuel and transport costs can increase household expenditure, raise production costs and intensify pressure on governments. In economies with limited fiscal space, energy-price shocks can constrain spending on health, education and social protection. The strategic consequences therefore extend beyond energy ministries. They involve central banks, finance ministries, humanitarian agencies, businesses and households.

For researchers, the implication is to move from a single indicator of oil price to a multi-indicator energy-security dataset. Relevant variables could include benchmark crude prices, LNG prices, freight rates, insurance premia, shipping volumes, refinery utilisation, strategic-stock releases, alternative-route capacity and household energy burdens. Such a dataset would allow scholars to test which mechanisms most strongly mediate the relationship between conflict and economic welfare.

Economic Coercion, Fiscal Sustainability and Military Industrial Capacity

Modern conflict is constrained by production as well as battlefield performance. Precision-guided weapons, air-defence interceptors, drones, surveillance systems and replacement platforms depend on industrial supply chains. A state can possess a technologically advanced force while still facing constraints if expenditure rates exceed replenishment capacity. This distinction between capability and sustainability is particularly important in prolonged conflict.

Recent reporting based on Congressional Budget Office estimates placed U.S. war-related costs at about \$38 billion through 1 August 2026 and indicated that costs could rise by roughly \$3 billion per month depending on the intensity of operations. The same reporting described pressure on some munitions inventories. These figures should be interpreted as estimates, not as a complete accounting of the economic cost of the conflict, and the reported projections depend on assumptions about future operational intensity. cite {Reuters,2026b}

Fiscal sustainability has at least four dimensions. The first is direct government expenditure. The second is opportunity cost, because resources allocated to military operations cannot simultaneously be allocated to other priorities. The third is industrial replenishment, including the ability of manufacturers to expand output. The fourth is macroeconomic impact, including energy prices, inflation, interest rates and public debt. These dimensions interact but should not be conflated.

Economic coercion creates a parallel problem. Sanctions and export restrictions can impose costs on a target state, but their effectiveness depends on enforcement, evasion opportunities, alternative markets, domestic adaptation and the political objectives being pursued. Coercive measures can also produce spillovers for third countries and firms. Researchers should therefore distinguish between intended coercive effects, actual behavioural responses and unintended humanitarian or market effects.

A more complete research model would measure both sides of the economic relationship: the cost imposed on the target and the resilience or cost experienced by the imposing coalition and third parties. This does not require treating the parties as morally equivalent; it is simply necessary for causal analysis. A policy can be strategically intended while still producing measurable externalities. Understanding those externalities can improve future policy design and humanitarian safeguards.

Human Security, Civilian Protection and Post-Conflict Recovery

A systems analysis of war is incomplete if civilian welfare is treated as a residual category. Human security approaches direct attention to people facing threats to life, health, livelihood, food, water, shelter and personal safety. In a conflict involving energy infrastructure, telecommunications, ports, refineries and urban centres, the civilian consequences can arise indirectly as well as directly. Damage to infrastructure can interrupt services even when the infrastructure itself is not the immediate object of attack.

Humanitarian analysis also requires methodological discipline. Active conflicts generate competing casualty figures, incomplete access and rapidly changing displacement patterns. Researchers should identify the source, date and methodology of each estimate and avoid presenting preliminary numbers as settled facts. Independent verification is particularly difficult where access is restricted. The appropriate scholarly response is transparent uncertainty rather than false precision.

The concept of civilian resilience should complement protection. Resilience includes the ability of communities and institutions to maintain essential services under stress and to restore them after disruption. Electricity, water, hospitals, schools, telecommunications and transport are not merely social services; they are components of societal stability. Their restoration can reduce secondary mortality, displacement and economic disruption.

Post-conflict recovery should therefore be considered before hostilities end. Recovery planning may involve humanitarian access, reconstruction finance, sanctions sequencing, infrastructure assessment, nuclear monitoring, maritime arrangements, detainee issues, refugee return and political dialogue. The order in which these issues are addressed can influence the durability of a settlement. A ceasefire that stops kinetic attacks but leaves critical governance and infrastructure questions unresolved may not produce durable stability.

For international development and peace researchers, the conflict offers an opportunity to connect security studies with recovery studies. The central question becomes not only how wars end, but how societies transition from high-risk confrontation to institutions capable of managing disagreement without renewed violence.

Information Integrity, Artificial Intelligence and Epistemic Security

The information environment has become a strategic domain in its own right. Governments, militaries, journalists, researchers and civilians simultaneously produce and consume information during conflict. The speed of digital circulation can create an environment in which an unverified claim reaches millions before professional verification is possible. This can affect public perceptions, market behaviour and diplomatic decision-making.

Artificial intelligence increases both capacity and risk. Automated translation, satellite-image analysis, pattern recognition and data fusion can improve research and operational awareness. At the same time, generative systems can facilitate synthetic audio, manipulated images, fabricated documents and persuasive but false narratives. The key research issue is therefore not whether AI is good or bad, but how it changes the cost and speed of producing information and the difficulty of verifying it.

The concept of epistemic security is useful here. It refers to the capacity of institutions and societies to maintain reliable processes for distinguishing evidence, inference, allegation and propaganda. A strong epistemic-security system does not require certainty about every event. It requires transparent classification of confidence levels and source quality. For example, a researcher can distinguish a directly observed event from an official claim, a secondary report and an analytical inference.

Academic publishers have a particular role. Conflict scholarship should preserve source provenance, publication dates, archived documents where lawful, and clear distinctions between verified information and interpretation. Authors should avoid relying on social-media posts as primary evidence unless the post itself is the object of analysis and its authenticity can be established. Where images or videos are used, researchers should consider geolocation, chronology, metadata and independent corroboration.

The conflict therefore supports an expanded concept of information warfare research. Information is not simply another weapon; it is also the evidentiary environment within which all other domains are studied. Improving information integrity consequently improves the quality of research on military, economic, humanitarian and legal consequences.

Diplomacy, Mediation and the Architecture of a Durable Settlement

Diplomacy during active conflict is often misunderstood as a binary choice between war and negotiation. In practice, diplomatic activity can perform several functions simultaneously: crisis communication, prisoner arrangements, humanitarian access, deconfliction, sanctions bargaining, nuclear monitoring, maritime security and preparation for a broader settlement. Different channels may operate at different levels and with different degrees of publicity.

Third-party mediation can be especially important where direct communication is politically costly. Mediators may provide venues for exploratory talks, convey proposals, clarify red lines and design confidence-building measures. Their effectiveness depends on access, credibility, leverage and the willingness of the parties to use the channel. A mediator cannot manufacture agreement where the underlying interests remain irreconcilable, but can reduce informational and procedural barriers.

A durable settlement also requires sequencing. A ceasefire may need to be accompanied by monitoring arrangements; monitoring may need access; access may require security guarantees; and security guarantees may depend on reciprocal commitments. Nuclear issues, sanctions relief, maritime arrangements and humanitarian access can therefore become linked. The challenge for negotiators is to create a package in which each side can identify sufficient benefits and safeguards to sustain implementation.

The conflict also demonstrates the importance of regional diplomacy. States that are not direct combatants may nevertheless possess leverage because of geography, energy routes, financial networks, religious or political relationships, or their ability to host negotiations. This reinforces the concept of networked multipolarity. Global order is shaped not only by the largest military powers but also by states occupying strategically valuable network positions.

Future research should therefore map diplomatic networks rather than count only formal negotiations. A network approach could examine which states communicate with which actors, through what channels, with what frequency and with what institutional purpose. Such analysis could reveal how informal diplomacy contributes to crisis management even when formal negotiations appear stalled.

Networked Multipolarity and the Changing Global Order

The phrase 'global order' should be used carefully. The conflict does not by itself prove that a new international order has replaced the previous one. However, it provides evidence of an increasingly networked distribution of influence. Military power remains important, but energy infrastructure, financial systems, diplomatic access, technology, industrial production, geography and institutional legitimacy also shape strategic outcomes.

Networked multipolarity differs from a simple multipolar balance in which several great powers possess comparable capabilities. Instead, different actors may dominate different networks. One state may have exceptional military reach; another may control a critical energy route; another may provide financial infrastructure; another may host diplomatic negotiations; and another may possess manufacturing capacity that becomes important to the conflict economy. Influence is therefore distributed by function as well as by aggregate power.

This perspective has implications for international institutions. Multilateral organisations may become more important during periods of strategic fragmentation because they provide procedures through which states can coordinate despite political disagreement. At the same time, institutions may face pressure when major powers disagree over mandates, enforcement or legitimacy. The tension between institutional interdependence and geopolitical competition is therefore likely to remain a central feature of international relations.

The conflict also raises questions about the future of strategic autonomy. States may seek greater domestic capacity in energy, defence production, digital infrastructure, food systems and critical minerals. Such policies can increase resilience but may also fragment markets and duplicate infrastructure. The resulting trade-off is not simply between globalisation and isolation. It is between different forms of interdependence: concentrated dependence, diversified dependence and strategic self-reliance.

The broader research agenda is consequently to understand how global networks adapt under conflict pressure. Which networks are most resilient? Which are most vulnerable to disruption? Which actors gain bargaining power from network centrality? Which institutions can absorb shocks without losing legitimacy? These questions extend the analysis beyond the 2026 conflict and make the case relevant to wider debates about international order.

A Research Agenda for 2026–2030

The conflict creates an unusually rich agenda for future scholarship. First, researchers should build longitudinal datasets that combine conflict events with energy, trade, financial, humanitarian and diplomatic indicators. Such datasets should preserve the original publication date and later revisions so that scholars can study how knowledge changes during an active conflict.

Second, scholars should examine distributional effects. National averages can conceal substantial differences among households, regions and industries. Research on energy-price shocks should therefore examine income groups, transport dependence, food prices and employment effects. Similar work can be undertaken on sanctions, remittance channels and supply-chain disruptions.

Third, nuclear-security research should investigate verification continuity under wartime conditions. Questions include which monitoring technologies remain functional after infrastructure damage, how inspection records can be protected, and how technical confidence can be communicated when physical

access is temporarily unavailable. These are practical problems with major theoretical implications for deterrence and escalation.

Fourth, information-integrity research should develop reproducible methods for analysing conflict narratives. Researchers could compare official statements, satellite imagery, commercial shipping data, humanitarian reports and independent media. AI-assisted methods can support this work, but the research process should retain human verification and transparent audit trails.

Fifth, comparative research should apply the GSFEN framework to other conflicts and crises. The aim should not be to prove that every conflict has the same seven dimensions, but to test whether the framework helps identify recurring interactions. Comparative application can reveal which domains are universal, which are case-specific and which require additional indicators.

Sixth, scholars should examine post-conflict settlements as dynamic systems. Instead of measuring success only by the absence of major fighting, future studies could track restoration of essential services, monitoring access, refugee return, trade normalisation, institutional legitimacy and recurrence of violence. This would connect conflict studies with development, public policy and peacebuilding research.

Finally, researchers should consider the ethics of studying live conflicts. The pressure to publish quickly can encourage overreliance on preliminary information. Academic quality requires resisting that pressure where evidence is uncertain. The most valuable scholarship may not always be the fastest; it is the work that remains useful after the news cycle has changed.

THE GSFEN GLOBAL STABILITY FRAMEWORK

Based on the preceding findings, this article proposes the GSFEN Global Stability Framework (GGSF) as a research instrument for analysing conflicts whose consequences move across interconnected systems. The framework is intentionally non-ranking: it does not produce a single score for a conflict or declare a winner. Instead, it provides seven domains and measurable indicators that researchers can track over time.

Domain	Core question	Potential indicators	Data sources
Military security	What is changing in force and escalation dynamics?	Strike frequency; missile/drone use; air-defence consumption; force posture	Official releases; conflict datasets; satellite analysis
Nuclear security	How much is known and verifiable?	Inspection access; material continuity; facility status; safeguards reporting	IAEA; UN; government statements
Maritime/energy	Are strategic flows stable?	Ship crossings; oil/LNG flows; insurance; freight; rerouting	AIS data; IEA; EIA; shipping datasets; Reuters
Economic security	What costs and spillovers are emerging?	War expenditure; inflation; prices; sanctions; trade	CBO; IMF; World Bank; national statistics
Human security	How are people and essential systems affected?	Deaths; injuries; displacement; hospitals; schools; utilities	UN agencies; NGOs; health ministries
Legal/institutional	How are rules and institutions functioning?	UN resolutions; investigations; legal positions; access	UN; IAEA; courts; governments
Diplomatic/information	Can escalation be managed and verified?	Talks; mediation; agreements; corrections; narrative trends	Governments; mediators; media archives

How the Framework Can Be Used

The framework can be used longitudinally. A research team could record monthly observations for each domain and identify whether deterioration in one domain precedes deterioration in another. For example, researchers could test whether reductions in maritime traffic correlate with energy-price volatility or whether restoration of diplomatic contacts correlates with changes in military activity. It can also be used comparatively. Researchers could apply the same seven domains to the 1990–91 Gulf War, the 2003 Iraq War, the 2011 Libya conflict, the Russia–Ukraine war and future crises. Comparative analysis would reveal which mechanisms are case-specific and which are recurrent features of contemporary warfare.

Finally, the framework can be used for policy dashboards. Governments and international organisations could monitor not just battlefield activity but the condition of energy flows, humanitarian infrastructure, legal institutions and diplomatic channels. Such a dashboard could provide early warning when a conflict is moving from a contained military crisis to a systemic shock.

Empirical Timeline of the 2026 Conflict

Date/period	Development	Analytical significance
28 Feb 2026	US and Israel began major strikes against Iran	Beginning of current conflict phase [1]
March 2026	Iranian retaliation and regional expansion	Conflict crossed national boundaries [1]
11 Mar 2026	UN Security Council adopted resolution concerning attacks and navigation	Institutional response to regional spillover [1]
April 2026	Conditional ceasefire and mediation efforts reported	Evidence of diplomacy alongside conflict [1]
June 2026	US–Iran memorandum reported with mediation role for Pakistan	Attempt to link nuclear, sanctions and maritime issues [7]
June onward	IAEA access to declared Iranian facilities remained disrupted	Verification continuity became a major issue [3]
Aug 2026	Parliamentary briefing described continuing Hormuz restrictions	Maritime disruption became prolonged [7]
Early Sep 2026	Reports described severe pressure on Iranian oil exports	Economic coercion intensified [6]
9 Sep 2026	IAEA Board action concerning Iran's safeguards file reported	Nuclear governance entered a new institutional phase [8]
15 Sep 2026	CBO cost estimate reported at about \$38bn through 1 Aug	Fiscal and military-sustainability dimension [4]
16 Sep 2026	Reuters reported four detected Hormuz crossings on preceding Tuesday	Global maritime-flow risk remained acute [2]

Research Implications

The first research implication is the need for cross-disciplinary datasets. Security scholars should collaborate with economists, maritime researchers, nuclear scientists, humanitarian specialists and legal scholars. A shared dataset could link conflict events with economic and humanitarian indicators.

The second implication is the importance of reproducibility. Researchers should archive the date and source of every major claim because live conflict data can be revised. Where possible, researchers should publish coding rules, inclusion criteria and uncertainty estimates.

The third implication concerns causal inference. Correlation between military events and energy prices does not automatically establish causation. Researchers should control for OPEC decisions, global demand, inventory levels, financial-market expectations and unrelated geopolitical developments.

The fourth implication concerns ethics. Open-source conflict research can expose vulnerable individuals, reveal sensitive locations or reproduce graphic material. Ethical protocols should therefore govern the use of geospatial imagery, casualty names and social-media content.

The fifth implication concerns longitudinal scholarship. Because the conflict is ongoing, an article published in September 2026 should be treated as a time-stamped analytical baseline rather than a final historical account. Future updates should identify what changed and which conclusions survived subsequent evidence.

Policy Implications

- Strengthen maritime resilience. International actors should develop coordinated mechanisms for commercial shipping alerts, emergency communication, route diversification, insurance support and protection of civilian navigation consistent with international law.
- Protect nuclear verification continuity. International institutions should maintain contingency mechanisms for preserving safeguards information and rapidly restoring access when security conditions permit.
- Integrate humanitarian planning into conflict strategy. Civilian infrastructure protection, medical access, water and electricity resilience, displacement planning and environmental monitoring should be included in crisis planning.
- Improve sanctions safeguards. Economic restrictions should be accompanied by transparent humanitarian exemptions, monitoring of unintended effects and mechanisms for legitimate trade where permitted.
- Build crisis communication channels. Direct and third-party communication mechanisms can reduce miscalculation and provide channels for maritime incidents, humanitarian arrangements and nuclear safety concerns.
- Develop information-integrity protocols. Governments and international organisations should distinguish confirmed information from preliminary claims and publish corrections quickly when evidence changes.
- Plan for post-conflict governance early. Reconstruction, sanctions relief, nuclear monitoring, maritime arrangements and regional security guarantees should be addressed during negotiations rather than postponed until after a formal settlement.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The principal limitation is the active nature of the conflict. Facts can change, datasets can be revised and access to affected areas can be restricted. The study therefore represents a dated analytical assessment rather than a final historical reconstruction.

A second limitation is source dependence. Some information comes from official statements that may reflect institutional interests. The study mitigates this by attribution and cross-source comparison, but it cannot eliminate source bias completely.

A third limitation is that the study does not provide an original quantitative causal model. The GSFEN framework is a conceptual and measurement framework that future researchers can operationalise statistically.

A fourth limitation is that the paper does not independently adjudicate disputed casualty or targeting claims. Such adjudication requires specialised investigations, access to evidence and, in some cases, judicial processes.

These limitations do not undermine the analytical value of the study; rather, they define the appropriate use of its conclusions. The paper should be read as a structured research baseline and a platform for subsequent empirical work.

CONCLUSION

The 2026 United States–Israel–Iran conflict demonstrates that the meaning of security has changed in an interconnected world. The battlefield remains central, but it is connected to maritime routes, energy systems, financial markets, nuclear verification, humanitarian infrastructure, legal institutions and information networks. The conflict's global significance arises from these connections.

The Strait of Hormuz illustrates the argument with particular clarity. A narrow maritime passage has become a global economic variable because disruptions in its operation can affect energy flows, shipping behaviour and prices far beyond the Gulf. Nuclear verification provides another illustration: when inspectors lose access and information continuity weakens, uncertainty itself becomes a security problem. The economic dimension provides a third: military expenditure and munitions consumption create constraints that can influence strategic sustainability.

The paper has argued that these are not isolated phenomena. They form a connected system. Military pressure can alter economic conditions; economic pressure can influence diplomacy; diplomatic failure can prolong military confrontation; humanitarian harm can affect legitimacy and reconstruction; and information uncertainty can intensify escalation risks.

The GSFEN Global Stability Framework responds to this complexity by organising analysis into seven domains: military, nuclear, maritime-energy, economic, human, legal-institutional and diplomatic-information security. Its purpose is not to rank actors or declare winners. Its purpose is to make complex relationships measurable and comparable.

For international researchers, the central opportunity is to move beyond event-by-event commentary toward cumulative, interdisciplinary evidence. Future studies should build datasets, compare cases, test causal mechanisms and evaluate whether diplomatic, economic and institutional interventions reduce systemic risk.

The broader conclusion is that contemporary international order is increasingly defined by interdependence. A regional war can become a global systems shock without becoming a conventional world war. Understanding that transformation is one of the central research challenges of twenty-first-century international relations.

The 2026 conflict therefore deserves to be studied not only for what happened on the battlefield, but for what it reveals about the systems that connect states, markets, institutions and human communities. The future of global stability will depend partly on whether those systems can absorb shocks, communicate under pressure and create pathways from military confrontation to durable political settlement.

Declaration of Originality

The author confirms that this manuscript is intended as an original scholarly contribution and is not knowingly under simultaneous consideration in substantially the same form elsewhere. All external sources are identified in the reference list. The final submission should be accompanied by the journal's required author declaration and any institutional consent required by the author's affiliation.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial conflict of interest arising from the subject matter of this article. Institutional affiliations are provided for identification and do not imply that the affiliated institutions endorse the analysis or conclusions of the manuscript.

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Data Availability

The study uses publicly available documentary, institutional and media sources. No human-subject dataset was collected. Source records should be retained by the author to support verification and subsequent revisions as the conflict develops.

Table 1. GSFEN Global Stability Framework: domains, indicators and research functions.

Domain	Core question	Illustrative indicators	Research use
Military security	How does force alter the strategic environment?	Strike intensity; air-defence activity; force posture	Conflict dynamics
Nuclear security	What is known, unknown or unverifiable?	Inspection access; monitoring continuity; safeguards reporting	Escalation analysis
Maritime/energy	How does conflict affect critical routes?	Ship crossings; oil/LNG flows; freight and insurance	Spillover analysis
Economic security	What are the fiscal and market effects?	War expenditure; inflation; trade; sanctions	Resilience analysis
Human security	How are civilians and essential services affected?	Displacement; casualties; service disruption	Protection/recovery
Legal/institutional	What rules and institutions govern conduct?	UN action; IHL claims; legal positions	Legitimacy analysis
Diplomatic/information	How do communication and narratives shape risk?	Negotiation channels; verified claims; media ecosystems	Crisis management

Table 2. Recommended evidence architecture for future studies of the conflict.

Analytical layer	Primary question	Evidence strategy
Event	What happened?	Timestamped primary and reputable secondary sources
Mechanism	How did it produce an effect?	Process tracing and cross-source comparison
Spillover	Who was affected beyond the direct parties?	Energy, trade, financial and humanitarian indicators
Institution	Which institutions mediated or constrained effects?	UN, IAEA, national and regional institutional records
Distribution	How were effects distributed?	Country, sector, household and regional data
Recovery	What conditions support de-escalation and reconstruction?	Settlement terms, infrastructure and governance indicators

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