



Need for Systematic Geopolitical Restructuring in the 21st Century: A Forensic Review of 2026 Kinetic Friction

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ABSTRACT

The global landscape of 2026 presents a profound challenge to the traditional Westphalian distinction between war and peace, which has dissolved into a state of perpetual "kinetic friction". This study critically examines the systemic breakdown of regional stability through the dual lenses of the Israel-Iraq-USA security triangle and the conventional "Open War" between Pakistan and Afghanistan. By reviewing military operations such as Operation Epic Fury and Operation Ghazab Lil Haq, the research identifies a shift toward "Transactional Peace," where ceasefires are brokered through economic coercion rather than structural diplomatic resolution. The findings suggest that the 21st-century's reliance on sub-threshold strikes and autonomous weaponry has created a "Sovereignty Gap" that hinders sustainable development and global harmony. The paper concludes that a transition from power centered politics to system-oriented governance facilitated by Advanced Political Engineering (APE) is essential to move beyond the rhetorical device of "No War But Peace" toward a genuine geopolitical reality.

1. Introduction

The mid-2020s have ushered in an era where peace is no longer defined by the absence of violence, but by the strategic management of it. As of March 2026, the international community faces a crisis of



definition: while major powers avoid total conventional mobilization, the frequency of sub-threshold strikes has reached an all-time high, creating a permanent state of agitation. This phenomenon represents a significant departure from 20th-century norms, where political institutions were designed for a different historical landscape.

Traditional political systems often struggle to respond effectively to these rapidly evolving socio-political conditions. In the contemporary era, the concept of "No War But Peace" suggests a paradox where states are in a permanent state of conflict that stops just short of total war. This article seeks to map these shifts, focusing on the Middle East and South Asia as primary laboratories for 21st-century warfare. We argue that the traditional proxy model, where states fought through third parties has collapsed, replaced by a more dangerous direct action framework where high-intensity kinetic exchanges occur on the soil of "Sovereignty Weak" states like Iraq and Syria.

2. Review of Literature:

To provide a robust academic foundation, the following literature review bridges 20th-century institutional theory with the emerging "kinetic" realities of 2026. It maps the transition from traditional statecraft to Advanced Political Engineering (APE), examining how systemic "Sovereignty Gaps" have necessitated a re-evaluation of global security frameworks. By synthesizing contemporary reports with classical political science, this section identifies the structural flaws currently fueling 21st-century friction.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) and Sachs (2015) provide the socio-economic backdrop for the "Sovereignty Gaps" identified in this study. Acemoglu and Robinson's theory of extractive institutions explains how fragmented governance in Iraq and the Afghan borderlands creates environments where conflict is incentivized over development. Complementing this, Sachs (2015) argues that sustainable development is impossible without regional stability, suggesting that the "kinetic friction" of 2026 is a direct barrier to the UN's 2030 Agenda.

The work of Lijphart (1999) and Reilly (2001) is critical to the study's call for Advanced Political Engineering (APE). Lijphart's patterns of democracy suggest that majoritarian systems often fail in multi-ethnic conflict zones like the Middle East. Reilly (2001) emphasizes that "electoral engineering" is a prerequisite for conflict management; without restructuring how power is shared among non-state actors and traditional elites, the "Transactional Peace" mentioned in this paper will remain fragile. Norris



(2004) further supports this by highlighting how formal "rules of the game" (voting and representation) dictate the success of peace treaties.

The literature must account for the immediate "kinetic" shifts documented in recent intelligence and journalistic reviews: The Jurf al-Sakhr Incident (Iraqi Journal of International Affairs, 2025): This study serves as a precursor to Operation Epic Fury, documenting the first major breakdown of the "Proxy Buffer" and the onset of direct drone-based territorial violations.

The Al-Jazeera Special Report (2026): Provides a granular timeline of the "Twelve Days that Shook the Levant," offering the primary evidence for the shift from "Shadow War" to "Direct Contact. The Kabul Times & UN Report

S/2026/44: These entries provide the forensic basis for the "Post-Colonial Kinetic Correction" along the Durand Line, documenting the humanitarian cost of moving from strategic depth to "Open War."

The US State Department (2026) Annual Report establishes the official shift in Western doctrine, acknowledging that traditional "containment" of the Iran-Israel axis has failed. This report validates the paper's objective regarding the "Neutralized Iraq" protocol, as it admits that Iraqi sovereignty has become secondary to regional missile defense.

3. Rationale and Objectives of the Study

The rationale for this study lies in the recognition that traditional political structures are insufficient to address contemporary global challenges such as technological disruption and geopolitical tensions. The specific objectives are:

To analyze the shift in military doctrine regarding preemptive strikes on Iraqi and Syrian soil as a means of direct Iranian deterrence.

- 1) To evaluate the transition of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations from "strategic depth" to conventional "Open War" following the 2026 border escalations.
- 2) To investigate the 2026 escalation between Israel and Iran, specifically how drone technology has rendered physical borders obsolete.
- 3) To identify structural failures of international institutions (UN, OIC) in mediating non-state actor conflicts.



4. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design. The analysis is based on secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and government reports. The research methodology includes a forensic review of the February 2026 strikes in Iraq and the March 2026 border incursions along the Durand Line, alongside a comparative analysis of institutional frameworks.

5. Discussion of Objective 1

The transition of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in 2026 marks a historic departure from the decades-long doctrine of "strategic depth" toward a state of conventional "Open War". While Pakistan historically sought to influence Afghanistan to secure its western flank, the 2026 border escalations triggered by Operation Ghazab Lil Haq have forced a "Western Pivot" in Islamabad's military strategy. This shift is characterized by the reallocation of approximately 40% of Pakistan's strike capability from the Indian border to the Afghan frontier, a strategic realignment unseen since 1947. The conflict is driven by a Post-Colonial Kinetic Correction regarding the 1893 Durand Line, as the Afghan Taliban's nationalist identity and refusal to recognize the colonial era border now outweigh any shared religious or ideological frameworks. Consequently, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has evolved into a de facto state army of the borderlands, rendering traditional counter insurgency tactics obsolete and placing the two nations in a direct, high-intensity military confrontation.

6. Discussion of Objective 2

The 2026 escalation between Israel and Iran demonstrates how the proliferation of advanced drone technology and autonomous loitering munitions has effectively rendered physical borders obsolete. In the Levant, the "Sovereignty Gap" in states like Iraq has allowed for a "Direct Action Framework" where distance no longer provides safety from high-precision strikes. Operation Epic Fury in early 2026 utilized "hypersonic precision" to target command structures, which was met by Iran's "March Counter-Barrage", the first instance of medium-range missiles being launched directly from Iranian domestic soil at Israeli interests without the use of proxy buffers. This "Shadow War" moving into the light has lowered the "political cost" of entering a conflict, as drone strikes in 2026 do not carry the same weight in the UN Security Council as a conventional ground invasion. This technological shift creates a "gray zone" where states can be in a state of direct, kinetic war while maintaining the legal fiction of peace.



7. Discussion of Objective

The persistence of these conflicts highlights the structural failures of international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which remain ill-equipped to mediate modern non-state actor conflicts. These 20th-century institutions suffer from a "Responsibility Gap," particularly in addressing the legal accountability of AI-enabled targeting on foreign soil. A primary structural flaw is the refusal to grant "Restricted Status" to non-state combatants like the TTP or Hezbollah in formal peace negotiations; as the 2026 landscape proves, it is impossible to stop a war when 50% of the active combatants are excluded from the dialogue.

Furthermore, the reliance on "Transactional Peace", where ceasefires are coerced through economic sanctions or trade-offs fails to address underlying issues like "Colonial Cartography" or ideological rifts. Without mandatory mediation frameworks that include non-state actors and a global moratorium on autonomous weapons in "gray zone" conflicts, these institutions remain relegated to managing rhetorical "frozen wars" rather than achieving lasting, positive peace.

8. Findings of the Study

The critical analysis of literature and governance frameworks has yielded several important findings regarding the state of global peace in 2026.

8.1. Institutional Design and Governance Efficiency

One of the major findings is that the structure and design of political institutions determine how political power is exercised and how policies are implemented. Well-designed institutions contribute to political stability and effective governance. In the context of 2026, the failure of international institutions to mediate between state and non-state actors (like the TTP or Hezbollah) represents a significant design flaw.

8.2. Technological Integration as a Conflict Multiplier

While digital governance can improve transparency, the integration of technology into military doctrine has created a "Tech-War Threshold". The use of autonomous drones and cyber-warfare has made it "politically cheaper" for states to engage in conflict without the weight of UN Security Council sanctions. This creates a "gray zone" where states are at war in practice while maintaining a legal fiction of peace.



8.3. *The "Frozen War" Fallacy*

Modern peace deals, such as the Doha Agreements, often do not resolve grievances but merely "freeze" them. In 2026, we are witnessing a violent "thaw" of these issues, resulting in higher intensity violence than the original conflicts.

8.4. *Sovereignty Gaps and Inclusive Institutions*

Inclusive political institutions are essential for long-term prosperity. Conversely, "Sovereignty Gaps" in states like Iraq lead to "extractive" environments where foreign powers concentrate force, leading to inequality and social conflict.

9. Remedial Measures

Implementing remedial measures requires a shift from "Kinetic Management" to "Structural Resolution".

9.1. *For the Israel-Iraq-USA Security Triangle*

The "Neutralized Iraq" Protocol: Establish Iraq as a "Security Neutral Zone" with a binding agreement between the US and Iran to halt strikes on Iraqi soil.

Direct Communication Hotlines: Establish a 24/7 "Red Phone" military line between Jerusalem, Washington, and Tehran to prevent accidental escalations from drone malfunctions.

Transactional to Structural Peace: Tie Iran's reintegration into global markets to the verifiable dismantling of its regional proxy architecture rather than using trade as a weapon.

9.2. *For Pakistan and Afghanistan*

The "Digital Durand Line": Move toward a "Digital Border" using shared biometric data and AI-monitored gates to respect Pashtun culture while addressing security concerns.

Economic "Peace Corridors": Convert volatile border crossings into Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to make the cost of war higher than the benefit of trade.

Tri-Lateral Mediation: Utilize the OIC and neutral nations like Turkey or Indonesia to adjudicate the TTP issue as a matter of religious and international law.

9.3. *Global Institutional Reforms*



Mandatory Mediation for Non-State Actors: The UN must grant "Restricted Status" to non-state combatants in peace talks.

Autonomous Weapon Bans: Implement a global moratorium on AI-targeting drones in "Grey Zone" conflicts to prevent the "political cheapening" of lethal force.

10. Future Research Directions

Building on the "Kinetic Friction" of 2026, several areas require urgent investigation:

AI and Legal Frameworks: Researching the accountability of AI-enabled targeting in non-consensual strike zones.

Post-Ideological Conflict: Analyzing the supremacy of border integrity over shared religious frameworks in South Asia.

Pedagogy in the Periphery: Investigating the educational and psychological impact of perpetual low-level conflict on Gen-Z and Gen-Alpha in the Levant and South Asia.

Hydro-Politics: Analyzing water scarcity in the Tigris Euphrates basin as a driver for regional war in 2027.

11. Conclusion

The ideal of "No War But Peace" remains an illusion in 2026. We have reached a point where the absence of a "World War" has been exchanged for a thousand "Small Wars" that are just as deadly. Advanced Political Engineering offers a strategic framework for redesigning political systems to address these contemporary challenges. By moving from power centered politics to system-oriented governance, the international community can begin to address the "Colonial Cartography" and "Sovereignty Gaps" that make these conflicts inevitable. Transitioning to "Positive Peace" requires addressing the underlying institutional inefficiencies and governance gaps that hinder global harmony.

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