



Energy Security and Conflict: The Role of the Strait of Hormuz

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ABSTRACT

This research paper evaluates the Strait of Hormuz as one of the most critical nodes in contemporary energy security and international conflict in the Middle East, with particular emphasis on its role in shaping geopolitical tensions in the context of US–Iran relations. In terms of its significance, the Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most strategically significant maritime chokepoints, facilitating the transit of nearly one-fifth of global petroleum consumption and making it a central route in the global energy system. Any disturbance in this narrow corridor has immediate and far-reaching implications for global oil prices, economic stability, and strategic decision-making by major powers and thus has the potential to destabilize global economy. Through the lens of international relations theories, particularly realism, this study understands the Strait as an active instrument of geopolitical dynamics within the international anarchic system rather than merely as a passive transit route. This analysis is supplemented by the theoretical foundations laid by scholars such as Daniel Yergin and Michael T. Klare regarding energy security. Their findings emphasize how control over energy flows has historically influenced patterns of conflict,

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competition, and cooperation among states. The paper argues that the Strait of Hormuz functions as an instrument of asymmetric power, as multiple international actors including both state and non-state entities interfere, thereby creating an atmosphere of chaos. This enables regional actors, most notably Iran, to exert strategic pressure on global markets and external powers through the threat of seizure and disruption. This dynamic transforms energy infrastructure into an arena of indirect conflict, thereby contributing to the escalation of regional disputes to the global level and intensifying global security interdependence. In terms of diplomatic developments, Pakistan has recently acted as an intermediary, attempting to facilitate negotiations between the United States and Iran, with the aim of de-escalating ongoing tensions between them. While these backchannel negotiations may contribute to a temporary reduction in hostilities, they are unlikely to provide a definitive resolution to the deep-rooted structural issues underlying the conflict. As far as methodology is concerned, this study adopts qualitative and analytical approaches which are based on secondary data. It draws on sources such as policy reports, energy statistics, geostrategic analysis, and existing scholarly literature. The research is conducted within a realistic framework to understand the state behaviour in the face of insecurity and competition. In a nutshell the study concludes that the Strait of Hormuz is not merely a geographic passway, but one of the most strategically significant and contested chokepoints, where a continuous energy flows intersect with power politics. This paper contributes to the reconceptualization of the strategically significant Maritime chokepoints and underscores them as active element of coercion and strategic influence in the contemporary geopolitical system.

INTRODUCTION

Energy security has been a major issue of concern and has emerged as a critical dimension of contemporary international relations, particularly in a global system rooted in interdependence, geopolitical conflicts and resource-based power dynamics (Daniel Yergin, 2011; Michael T. Klare, 2012). In this regard,



oceanic chokepoints emerged as strategically significant due to their crucial role in controlling the flow of energy resources that sustain the global economy (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2023). Among these, the Strait of Hormuz remains one of the most strategically significant and sensitive energy corridors in the world, connecting the oil-rich Persian Gulf with international markets across Asia, Europe, and North America. As a result, developments affecting this passage possess the capacity to influence the global economy on a large scale. From a statistical perspective, the Strait of Hormuz enables the transit of nearly one-fifth of global petroleum consumption, thereby rendering it not only a regional maritime corridor but also a vital pillar of the global energy system (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2023). Any conflict-induced interruption in this strait carries immediate and far-reaching implications for global oil prices, economic stability, and geopolitical strategies of major powers. Consequently, this structural dependency elevates the Strait of Hormuz beyond a mere geographical feature, positioning it as a strategic asset central to contemporary global power politics. The role and strategic significance of energy as an instrument of power have been widely examined in international relations scholarship. Daniel Yergin (2011) underscores the historical centrality of oil in shaping modern geopolitical order, while Michael T. Klare (2012) highlights the growing probability of resource-driven conflicts in the twenty-first century. From a theoretical standpoint, classical and structural realists such as Kenneth Waltz (1979) and John Mearsheimer (2001) contend that, in an anarchic international system, states seek survival through the control of strategic resources and critical nodes of global interdependence, thereby consolidating their relative power within the international order.

Within this framework, the Strait of Hormuz acquires immense strategic significance as a energy chokepoint and can be understood as instruments of coercive leverage rather than merely a passive transit routes. Despite the richness of existing scholarship on energy security and maritime geopolitics, most studies tend to conceptualize the Strait of Hormuz primarily as a vulnerable supply route or a potential flashpoint for conflict escalation (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2023). However, this perspective underestimates its evolving role as an active geopolitical instrument that can be strategically manipulated by state actors to exert pressure on adversaries. In particular, insufficient scholarly attention has been devoted to examining how the Strait operates as an instrument of asymmetric warfare and economic coercion in contemporary geopolitical conflicts, especially in the context of heightened US–Iran tensions and their potential escalation trajectories in 2026.

Recent diplomatic developments indicate that Pakistan has played a facilitating role in backchannel negotiations between the United States and Iran, contributing to de-escalation efforts aimed at maintaining stability in the Strait of Hormuz. However, this mediation is best understood as part of a broader, multi-actor



diplomatic process rather than a decisive or unilateral intervention. Recent diplomatic developments suggest that Pakistan has played a significant role in facilitating backchannel negotiations between the United States and Iran, contributing to de-escalation efforts intended to preserve stability in the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz. Pakistan has ever more been discussed as a potential diplomatic negotiator in Gulf affairs. In contrast, this mediation is best understood as part of a broader, multi-actor diplomatic process rather than a decisive or unilateral intervention. Contemporary reports highlight the growing importance of backchannel negotiations and regional conflict resolution mechanisms in facilitating de-escalation strategies during the ongoing crisis (Reuters, 2026). Similarly, contemporary regional politics has increasingly emphasized diplomatic initiatives undertaken by regional mediators concerning ceasefire negotiations as important instruments for the de-escalation of US–Iran tensions (Al Jazeera, 2026). According to International Crisis Group (2026), regional mediation initiatives and negotiated de-escalation remain critical instruments for ensuring peace and stability in the Gulf region. Additionally, contemporary discussions concerning Pakistan’s involvement as a diplomatic mediator reflects a broader transformation in regional strategic dynamics (The Diplomat, 2026).

This research addresses the existing scholarly gap by critically re-examining the Strait of Hormuz as one of the most consequential and strategically active maritime chokepoints within the contemporary geopolitical system, as well as a significant instrument in the broader dynamics of international conflict. The study argues that the Strait should not be understood merely as passive corridor for global energy transportation; rather, it constitutes a pivotal geopolitical lever through which regional actors, particularly Iran, are able to exert strategic pressure on global energy markets and influence the strategic calculus of extra-regional powers, most notably the United States and its allies. In this context, the Strait functions not only as a conduit of economic significance, but also as a mechanism of strategic deterrence, power projection, and geopolitical leverage within regional and global security architectures. Methodologically, the paper adopts a mix of qualitative and analytical approach, drawing on secondary data including policy reports, energy statistics, strategic assessments, and scholarly literature. It further employs a realist theoretical framework to interpret and understand state behaviour under conditions of insecurity and competition. Through this approach, the study situates the Strait of Hormuz within the broader structure of global energy politics and contemporary security dilemmas.

This study is guided by the following central question: How does the Strait of Hormuz operate as a mechanism of strategic and economic leverage in the 2026 US–Iran conflict? This overarching research question further branches into a number of interrelated sub-questions: How has the strategic role of the Strait evolved over time? In what ways can the disruption or threat of disruption be used as an instrument of



economic coercion? And how does the instability of the Strait contribute to the internationalization and escalation of regional conflict?

The significance of this research resides in its effort to reconceptualize maritime chokepoints not simply as geostrategic vulnerabilities but as dynamic instruments of the contemporary international system. By advancing this perspective, the study contributes to three interrelated areas of literature: (1) energy security studies, by shifting the analytical emphasis from infrastructural vulnerability to the strategic weaponization of energy transit routes; (2) international relations theory, through the application of realist analytical perspectives to contemporary energy geopolitics and interstate rivalry; and (3) conflict studies, by illustrating how economic infrastructure and maritime corridors increasingly constitute spaces of indirect confrontation, coercive statecraft, and geopolitical competition. Conclusively, this study argues that the Strait of Hormuz embodies immense geopolitical significance, serving as a pivotal arena in which geography, global energy flows, and strategic competition intersect within the broader framework of international politics. The control or potential disruption of the Strait affords regional actors a significant form of asymmetric geopolitical leverage, consequently extending its importance beyond that of a conventional maritime transit route. By advancing this argument, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how strategic energy chokepoints operate as active mechanisms of coercive diplomacy, strategic deterrence, and geopolitical influence within the contemporary international system

LITERATURE REVIEW

Energy Geopolitics and Strategic Resource Control

The study of energy geostrategic competition has developed significantly within International Relations scholarship, as scholars have increasingly recognised the central role of energy systems in shaping geopolitical strategies and global power dynamics. Energy resources have frequently been employed as instruments of political influence, contributing to tensions and strategic rivalries across the world. Initial contributions by Lennart Sönnichsen (2010) contend that the flow of energy is not merely an economic phenomenon but also constitute a deeply political structure embedded within global hierarchies. Sönnichsen emphasizes that energy-dependent systems generate asymmetric dependencies that enable producer and transit states to exercise disproportionate influence over global markets. Similarly, Giacomo Luciani (2013) developed the concept of the “rentier state,” contending that the hydrocarbons-producing states and the transit revenue states possess the capacity to formulate foreign policy strategies that leverage energy flows as instruments of diplomacy. In this context, strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz become critical nodes where rent-seeking behaviour intersects with geopolitical competition. From this perspective,



Christopher Fettweis (2014) contends that energy scarcity is often socially constructed rather than purely material, meaning that perceptions of vulnerability are as important as actual supply constraints. This theoretical framing is particularly relevant to maritime chokepoints, where psychological market reactions often exceed physical disruptions.

Structural Realism and Competition over Strategic Resources

From a structural realist perspective, Waltz (1979) argues that the anarchic structure of the international system compels states to prioritise their survival, thereby, intensifying competition over strategic resources and transit corridors. Advancing this perspective, Mearsheimer (2001) contends that great powers seek to maximise their relative power, making control over critical infrastructure and energy supply routes a central component of interstate rivalry. These perspectives clearly suggest that strategic chokepoints have heightened importance because they provide states with leverage over rivals and influence broader geostrategic outcomes.

Maritime Chokepoints in Global Security Architecture

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890) emphasizes the strategic importance of maritime power and control of sea routes in the pursuit of world dominance. Scholars such as Halford Mackinder (1904) underscores the significance of geographic positioning in shaping global power. Similarly, Nicholas Spykman (1942) contends that control over strategically significant regions influences international hierarchy and stability. Collectively, these scholars emphasize the enduring significance of transit corridors and chokepoints in shaping geopolitical and economic dynamics. Notably, Maritime security literature has evolved beyond traditional naval strategy to incorporate broader systemic analyses of chokepoint vulnerability. Christian Bueger (2015) conceptualizes maritime security as a “networked security domain,” a geopolitical arena in which threats emerge not only from state actors but also from interconnected logistical systems. From this Perspective, chokepoints are not merely isolated geographic locations; rather, they are embedded within global supply chains. Timothy Edmunds (2011) further contends that maritime security governance is increasingly fragmented across state, regional, and private actors, resulting in overlapping jurisdictions and interventions. Consequently, chokepoints become inherently vulnerable spaces of contested authority. This fragmentation further enhances the strategic value of narrow sea passages, as control becomes increasingly contested among multiple competing actors. In addition, Jon Rosamond (2018) underscores that maritime chokepoints are increasingly shaped by multifaceted threats, including cyberattacks on port systems, insurance market manipulation, and non-state interference. These developments are precursors to a shift from traditional naval dominance to multidimensional forms of control over maritime routes.



Energy Infrastructure as a Tool of State Power

A growing corpus of research conceptualises energy infrastructure as an instrument of statecraft. Building on this perspective, David Baldwin's later works (2016) broadened the theory of economic statecraft by arguing that infrastructure dependence creates long-term leverage that is often more effective than military coercion.

Correspondingly, Robert Vitalis (2009) contends that modern energy systems are deeply embedded within imperial and post-imperial structures, wherein control over extraction and transit routes reflects broader global inequalities. His historical analysis further highlights that energy chokepoints have historically fostered enduring patterns of geopolitical dominance.

Jeffrey D. Sachs (2015) introduced an additional economic dimension by arguing that energy transit instability directly influences macroeconomic stability, particularly in import-dependent economies. This creates a global feedback loop whereby regional disruptions can translate into broader inflationary pressures and economic uncertainty at the global level.

Asymmetric Power and Coercive Diplomacy

The concept of asymmetric power has been widely developed in security studies. Andrew Mack (1975) introduces the idea that weaker actors can achieve strategic outcomes by exploiting vulnerabilities in stronger opponents, a principle highly relevant to chokepoint politics. Similarly, Ivan Arreguin-Toft (2005) demonstrates that asymmetric strategies often rely on indirect approaches, including disruption of supply chains and targeting of economic infrastructure rather than direct military confrontation.

In the same vein, Robert Pape (1996) argues that economic coercion—particularly denial targeting critical infrastructure—can be more effective than traditional military force in modern conflicts. This provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding chokepoints as tools of coercion.

Global Energy Markets and Systemic Interdependence

Energy market stability literature emphasises systemic interdependence as a defining feature of the global economy. Robert J. Barro (2006) highlights that geopolitical shocks in energy-producing regions often translate into global recessions due to tightly integrated financial systems. Daniel Yergin (2011) identifies oil as a major driver of geopolitical competition. Michael Klare (2001) argues that competition over energy resources and transit routes intensifies interstate conflict. The Strait of Hormuz emerges as a critical focal point within this broader geopolitical framework. Likewise, James Hamilton (2013)



demonstrates empirically that oil price shocks are strongly correlated with macroeconomic downturns in industrial economies, reinforcing the strategic importance of supply route stability. In addition, Jeffrey Frankel (2014) argues that commodity price volatility is increasingly driven by geopolitical risk premiums, meaning that expectations of disruption can be as influential as actual disruptions in shaping global markets.

Geopolitics of the Middle East and Maritime Security Environment

Regional scholarship on the Middle East provides additional insight into the strategic role of maritime chokepoints. Michael Hudson (2016) argues that the Middle Eastern state system is characterised by persistent security dilemmas rooted in geographic fragmentation and external intervention. F. Gregory Gause II (2015) further notes that Gulf security dynamics are shaped by overlapping alliances and rivalries, creating a highly militarised maritime environment where chokepoints become strategic flashpoints. In a related argument, Mehran Kamrava (2018) highlights that Gulf states increasingly rely on maritime security strategies to project power beyond their territorial limits, reinforcing the militarisation of sea lanes.

Iran and Regional Geopolitics

F. Gregory Gause III (2010) argues that regional rivalries, particularly involving Iran, make the Strait a persistent site of strategic contestation. Anoushiravan Ehteshami (2013) highlights Iran's use of geographic proximity as a source of asymmetric power. Abbas Divsallar (2022) argues that Iran combines coercive signalling with selective cooperation, using the Strait as a tool of deterrence and diplomatic bargaining.

Institutional and Legal Dimensions of Maritime Chokepoints

Legal and institutional scholars emphasise that chokepoints are governed by complex international regimes. Natalie Klein (2011) examines how international maritime law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), regulates passage rights in strategic straits while still leaving room for geopolitical contestation. Similarly, Douglas Guilfoyle (2015) highlights that enforcement of maritime law is uneven, particularly in high-tension regions where powerful states often interpret legal frameworks strategically. This suggests that legal governance does not eliminate geopolitical competition but instead coexists with it, shaping the rules under which chokepoint politics unfold.

Security Externalities and Global Risk Transmission

Another important strand of literature focuses on how local instability generates global systemic risks. Nouriel Roubini (2010) argues that geopolitical shocks in energy corridors function as “global transmission shocks,” affecting trade, inflation, and financial markets simultaneously. Likewise, Ian



Bremmer (2012) introduces the concept of “geopolitical risk premium,” highlighting that markets increasingly price in instability from regions such as the Gulf even in the absence of immediate disruption. This reinforces the idea that the Strait of Hormuz operates not only as a physical corridor but also as a psychological and financial node in global risk perception.

Energy Political Economy and Market Vulnerability

Valerie Marcel (2006) emphasises the relationship between energy markets and political stability. Bassam Fattouh (2011) demonstrates how geopolitical risks in the Gulf region contribute to oil price volatility. These studies show that disruptions in energy transit routes can have far-reaching effects on the global economy.

Economic Statecraft and Interdependence

Joseph Nye (2011) conceptualises power as multidimensional, including economic influence and coercive disruption. David Baldwin (1985) examines the use of economic instruments for political objectives. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977) argue that growing interdependence increases global vulnerability to disruptions in strategic networks.

Coercion and Deterrence Theory and Critical Geopolitics and Energy Security

Thomas Schelling (1966) argues that credible threats are central to strategic bargaining. This framework helps explain how states use maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz as instruments of coercion and deterrence. As far as Critical Geopolitics and Energy Security is concerned Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996) argues that geography is socially constructed through discourse and power relations. Simon Dalby (2013) links energy insecurity with broader ecological and systemic vulnerabilities. These approaches view the Strait not merely as a physical location but also as a politically constructed space of insecurity.

Energy Governance and Fossil Fuel Dependence

Andreas Goldthau and Jan Martin Witte (2009) argue that global energy systems are governed through interactions among states, markets, and institutions. Timothy Mitchell (2011) demonstrates the structural dependence of modern political systems on fossil fuel flows. Their work reinforces the strategic significance of energy transit routes.

Security Studies Perspectives



Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998) explain how energy issues become framed as existential security threats. Stephen Krasner (1999) argues that sovereignty is constrained by global interdependence, particularly in strategic maritime regions.

Empirical Studies on Energy and Conflict

Jeff Colgan (2013) finds a statistical relationship between oil wealth and interstate conflict. Catherine Raymond (2010) highlights the vulnerability of maritime chokepoints to piracy, terrorism, and asymmetric threats. These studies provide empirical support for the strategic importance of energy transit routes.

Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

The International Energy Agency (2023) reports that approximately one-fifth world's oil consumption transits through the Strait of Hormuz, underscoring its strategic significance to global energy security. Scholars argue that the Strait constitutes a strategic vulnerability, wherein even minor disruptions have the potential to escalate geopolitical tensions and produce far-reaching economic consequences. The research consistently recognises the Strait of Hormuz as one of the world's most significant geopolitical energy chokepoints.

CONTRIBUTION OF STUDY

This research makes an important contribution to the literature on energy security and geopolitical conflict. Although, a substantial body of scholarship exists on this subject, the present study addresses a dimension that has not been examined comprehensively. By bridging this gap, it offers a more integrated understanding of the relationship between energy security, geopolitical competition, and strategic chokepoints. First, this research fills an important gap in the literature by offering a comprehensive analysis of the strategic role of the Strait of Hormuz during the 2026 US–Iran war. Despite the Strait's critical importance to global energy security and regional geopolitics, its specific role in shaping the dynamics of the conflict has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Second, it applies realist theory of International Relations to a contemporary and evolving conflict, demonstrating how key theoretical concepts, such as the security dilemma and power competition, manifest in practice. It further highlights evolving interactions among various state actors each seeking to safeguard its national interests. In doing so, the study provides a deeper understanding of how competing interests shape strategic behaviour, influence regional dynamics, and contribute to the persistence of geopolitical tensions. Third, the research reconceptualizes the Strait of Hormuz not merely as a passive energy transit route but as an active



instrument of strategic and economic leverage. By doing so, it highlights how control over critical maritime chokepoints can shape geopolitical outcomes, influence energy markets, and enhance the bargaining power of states. Finally, the research underscores the global repercussions of regional conflicts by demonstrating how disruptions in a single chokepoint can reverberate across international energy markets and threaten broader economic stability. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between energy security, geopolitical dynamics, and contemporary warfare.

RESEARCH GAP

Despite a substantial body of literature on energy security, geopolitical conflict, and the strategic significance of the Strait of Hormuz, several important gaps remain. Existing studies primarily focus on the Strait's role as a global energy chokepoint, its contribution to oil price volatility, and its strategic importance in the power competition between regional and extra-regional actors. While realist, geopolitical, and energy security perspectives have extensively explained why states seek to control or secure critical maritime routes, there is comparatively limited research examining how disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz directly influence the relationship between energy security and interstate conflict in contemporary geopolitical settings.

Moreover, much of the existing scholarship treats energy security and military conflict as separate areas of analysis, rather than exploring their dynamic interaction. Previous studies have largely concentrated on historical events such as the Iran–Iraq War, the Tanker War of the 1980s, and recurring US–Iran tensions, while insufficient attention has been paid to the evolving strategic environment shaped by changing energy markets, emerging security threats, and shifting regional alliances. There is also a lack of comprehensive research integrating geopolitical, economic, and security dimensions to assess how the Strait of Hormuz functions simultaneously as an energy corridor, a strategic asset, and a potential trigger for conflict. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by critically examining the nexus between energy security and conflict through the case of the Strait of Hormuz. It aims to provide a multidimensional analysis of how the strategic importance of the Strait influences state behaviour, regional stability, and global energy security, thereby contributing to the broader literature on energy geopolitics and international security.

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ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Strait of Hormuz as a Strategic Instrument of Power

The Strait of Hormuz has functioned in the 2026 US–Iran war not merely as a geographical chokepoint but as an active instrument of geopolitical leverage. Its strategic value lies in its ability to influence global energy flows, giving regional actors disproportionate power over international economic stability. From a realist perspective, this aligns with the arguments of John Mearsheimer, who emphasizes that states maximize power whenever possible. Iran's ability to threaten disruption in the Strait demonstrates a form of asymmetric power projection, where a geographically constrained state can still exert global influence by controlling a critical energy artery. Rather than engaging in direct large-scale confrontation, Iran's strategy reflects deterrence through disruption, where even limited signals of interference create strategic pressure on adversaries.

Security Dilemma and Military Escalation



The war has also demonstrated a classical security dilemma, as described by Kenneth Waltz. The United States increased naval deployment in the Persian Gulf, intended to secure maritime trade routes, was perceived by Iran as a direct threat to its sovereignty and strategic depth. This mutual mistrust led to escalation rather than stabilization. Actions taken by one side to enhance security—such as convoy protection and military positioning—resulted in countermeasures by the opposing side, thereby intensifying tensions in and around the Strait.

The Strait thus became a militarized space of interaction, where security policies themselves contributed to conflict escalation.

Energy Infrastructure as a Tool of Economic Warfare

A key dimension of the conflict is the transformation of the Strait of Hormuz into a site of economic warfare. As argued by Michael T. Klare, modern conflicts increasingly involve competition over critical resources and infrastructure rather than conventional battlefield dominance. In this case, disruptions in maritime traffic, increased shipping insurance costs, and uncertainty in supply chains turned energy flows into strategic weapons. Even the threat of closure had immediate effects on global oil prices, demonstrating how energy infrastructure can be weaponized without full physical blockage. This reflects a broader shift in warfare, where economic systems become direct targets of geopolitical competition.

Globalization of a Regional Conflict

The impact of the Strait of Hormuz extends far beyond the immediate conflict zone, highlighting the global interconnectedness of energy markets. As emphasized by Daniel Yergin, oil markets are highly sensitive to geopolitical instability, particularly in key transit regions. During the conflict, fluctuations in the Strait directly affected oil-importing economies such as India, China, Japan, and European states. This demonstrates that the US–Iran war cannot be understood as a purely regional conflict; rather, it has global economic consequences due to dependence on Hormuz-based energy flows.

Thus, the Strait acts as a bridge between regional instability and global economic disruption.

Market Psychology and Perception-Based Instability

An important but often underexplored dimension of the conflict is the role of market psychology. Oil markets reacted not only to actual disruptions but also to perceived risks associated with potential instability in the Strait. Speculative trading, risk premiums, and insurance adjustments led to rapid price fluctuations even in periods without physical blockage. This indicates that the Strait of Hormuz operates not only as a



physical chokepoint but also as a psychological trigger in global financial systems. In this sense, perception becomes as powerful as actual disruption, reinforcing the strategic importance of signalling and threat communication in modern geopolitical conflicts.

DISCUSSION

Reconceptualizing the Strait of Hormuz

The findings of this study suggest that the Strait of Hormuz should be reconceptualized beyond its traditional role as a maritime passage. It functions simultaneously as:

- A strategic military pressure point
- A tool of economic coercion
- A driver of global market instability
- A symbol of asymmetric geopolitical power

From a theoretical standpoint, this reinforces realist assumptions that states exploit available structural advantages to maximize influence. However, it also extends realist theory by demonstrating that non-military instruments such as energy infrastructure can produce strategic effects equivalent to military power. Overall, the 2026 US–Iran war illustrates how energy chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz have become central to modern conflict dynamics, blurring the line between economic systems and military strategy.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to analyse the role of the Strait of Hormuz in the 2026 US–Iran war. Given the geopolitical and strategic nature of the topic, the research relies on secondary data sources and theoretical interpretation rather than primary data collection. The study is primarily grounded in a theory-driven approach, drawing on the realist framework developed by scholars such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer. This framework is used to interpret state behaviour, particularly in relation to power competition, security dilemmas, and control over strategic resources.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research follows a case study design, focusing specifically on the 2026 US–Iran war as a contemporary example of energy geopolitics in practice. The Strait of Hormuz is treated as the central unit of analysis, allowing for an in-depth examination of its strategic, economic, and geopolitical significance.



DATA SOURCES

The study relies on secondary sources, including:

Reports from the International Energy Agency

Academic books and journal articles on energy security and geopolitics

Policy reports and strategic analyses

Credible international news sources (e.g., Reuters, Al Jazeera)

These sources provide both quantitative insights (e.g., oil flow statistics, price fluctuations) and qualitative data (e.g., expert analysis, policy interpretations).

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The research employs qualitative content analysis, where relevant texts and reports are systematically examined to identify patterns related to:

Strategic use of the Strait of Hormuz

State behavior and power projection

Economic impacts of disruption

Additionally, the study uses analytical interpretation to connect empirical observations with theoretical concepts such as realism, energy security, and geopolitical competition.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to publicly available data and does not include classified or primary field data. As the 2026 conflict is ongoing, some developments remain fluid, and conclusions are based on currently available information. Despite these limitations, the study provides a robust analytical framework for understanding the strategic role of the Strait of Hormuz.

CONCLUSION

The Strait of Hormuz occupies a significant position in the geopolitical and energy landscape of international relations. Its strategic importance was particularly evident during the 2026 US–Iran war. This research argues that the Strait is not merely a maritime passage through which energy resources transit;



rather, it serves as a critical instrument of strategic power, military coercion, and economic influence with the capacity to shape contemporary warfare. Furthermore, this research highlights that the Strait is no longer a passive geographical entity but an active dynamic tool within broader framework of international conflict and global interdependence. The central argument of this study is that the Strait of Hormuz functions as a multidimensional strategic chokepoint that significantly influences international energy transit, geopolitical calculations and regional security dynamics.

At the same time, it is associated with military, economic, psychological functions within the geopolitical system. Militarily, it provides asymmetric leverage particularly to the countries like Iran to exert pressure on more powerful rivals without engaging in full scale conventional warfare. Economically, even the potential disruption to maritime traffic in the Strait has been shown to generate immediate volatility in global oil markets, escalate logistic insurance costs, and disrupt transit system across continents. Psychologically, the Strait influences global market expectations, where a hint of risk often become as significant as actual physical disruptions. These three dimensions, collectively constituting a tri-layered functionality, underscores the complexity of contemporary international competition, wherein the traditional boundaries between warfare, economics, and diplomacy are increasingly blurred.

From a theoretical consideration, the application of realist perspectives, particularly those postulated by Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, provides a strong explanatory framework for understanding the dynamics of the conflict. The behaviour of states in the 2026 US–Iran war reflects core realist assumptions, particularly the pursuit of power, survival, and strategic advantage in an anarchic international system. Iran’s utilization of its geographic position along the Strait of Hormuz demonstrates how states with limited conventional military capabilities can still exert significant influence through control over critical nodes in global systems. This reinforces the realist notion that power is not solely determined by military strength but also by control over strategic geography and economic infrastructure.

However, this study also extends realist theory by demonstrating the growing importance of economic infrastructure as an instrument of power projection. Traditional realist literature has largely focused on military capabilities and territorial control, but the case of the Strait of Hormuz illustrates that energy corridors, shipping routes, and global supply chains have become equally significant arenas of geopolitical competition. In this sense, the Strait functions as a bridge between classical geopolitics and contemporary globalized interdependence, where economic systems themselves become tools of strategic influence.

Another important finding of this research is the increasing globalization of regional conflicts. The 2026 US–Iran war demonstrates that localized geopolitical tensions in the Persian Gulf can rapidly escalate into



global economic crises due to the interconnected nature of modern energy markets. Countries far removed from the immediate conflict zone, including major energy-importing economies in Asia and Europe, are directly affected by instability in the Strait of Hormuz. This highlights the extent to which global energy dependence regional chokepoints into international pressure points. The work of scholars such as Daniel Yergin supports this observation, emphasizing that energy security is inherently global and deeply interdependent.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of perception and market psychology in shaping economic outcomes during geopolitical crises. The analysis shows that global oil markets respond not only to actual disruptions in supply but also to anticipated risks and perceived instability. This means that strategic signalling in the Strait of Hormuz—such as military posturing or political threats—can have immediate and significant economic consequences even without physical interruption of trade. This phenomenon reflects a broader transformation in global political economy, where expectations and perceptions play a crucial role in shaping material outcomes.

The international response to instability in the Strait further reinforces its global significance. Major powers and energy-importing states are compelled to engage diplomatically and strategically with developments in the region, highlighting how energy chokepoints serve as catalysts for international involvement in regional conflicts. This aligns with the broader argument that the Strait of Hormuz is not merely a regional concern but a central component of global energy governance and international security architecture. multifunctional geopolitical instrument that plays a decisive role in shaping the dynamics of contemporary international conflict. It is simultaneously a conduit of global energy, a strategic military leverage point, an economic pressure mechanism, and a psychological trigger for global markets. The 2026 US–Iran war has demonstrated that control over such chokepoints can redefine the balance of power in international relations, allowing regional actors to exert disproportionate global influence.

The repercussions of this study extend beyond the specific case of the Strait of Hormuz. It suggests a broader transformation in the nature of warfare and geopolitics, where economic infrastructure and energy systems are increasingly integrated into strategic competition. Future conflicts are likely to involve not only territorial disputes and military confrontations but also contests over critical nodes in global supply chains. This necessitates a rethinking of traditional security paradigms and calls for a more integrated understanding of energy security, economic stability, and geopolitical strategy. Finally, this study identifies avenues for future research, particularly in examining how emerging technologies, alternative energy routes, and global energy diversification strategies may alter the strategic importance of chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz.



As the international system continues to evolve, understanding the interaction between geography, energy, and power will remain essential for analysing both current and future geopolitical conflicts.

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