

US-Iran-Israel Conflict

Paul A. Adekunle¹, Matthew N. O. Sadiku², Janet O. Sadiku³

¹International Institute of Professional Security, Lagos, Nigeria

²Roy G. Perry College of Engineering, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX, USA

³Juliana King University, Houston, TX, USA

ABSTRACT

The conflict is deeply rooted in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, driven by five interlocking factors such as: the US-Iran nuclear standoff, Israel's security doctrine against Iranian nuclearization, US "maximum pressure" sanctions, Iran's regional proxy network, and competition over Gulf energy transit through the Strait of Hormuz. After the 2018 US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and years of sanctions, tensions intensified with a 12-day Iran-Israel war in June 2025 and failed nuclear talks in February 2026. On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched *Operation Epic Fury*, marking the first joint strikes on Iranian nuclear and missile infrastructure. Iran responded by closing the Strait of Hormuz, attacking US bases in Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, and receiving targeting support from Russia and China. By July 2026, nine consecutive nights of US strikes had occurred, with 17 US service members killed and an estimated \$113.3 billion in US war costs. The conflict demonstrates how unresolved remote causes from 1953-1979, combined with post-2002 nuclear diplomacy failures, transformed a shadow war into interstate war. This paper looks at the pros and cons of the conflict with a feasible possible solution to the impasse.

How to cite this paper: Paul A. Adekunle | Matthew N. O. Sadiku | Janet O. Sadiku "US-Iran-Israel Conflict" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-10 | Issue-4, August 2026, pp.1034-1040, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd141958.pdf



Copyright © 2026 by author (s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



KEYWORDS: *US-Iran-Israel relations, nuclear program, Strait of Hormuz, maximum pressure, Middle East security, terrorism, nuclearization, maximum pressure, proxy expansion, Operation Epic Fury.*

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East entered a new phase of interstate war in 2026 as decades of hostility between the United States, Iran, and Israel escalated from proxy competition and economic sanctions to direct military strikes, as shown in Figure 1. What started as a diplomatic and nuclear dispute transformed into a regional conflict involving missile attacks on US bases, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and the joint US-Israel operations against Iranian nuclear facilities. By July 2026, the confrontation had resulted to 17 US military fatalities, an estimated \$113.3 billion in US expenditures, and the most serious disruption to global oil shipping since the 1970s, as shown in Figure 2.

The roots of this conflict are deep. US-Iran relations have been "mostly adversarial since the 1979 Islamic Revolution", beginning with the 1953 CIA-backed coup, the 1979 hostage crisis, and the 1984

designation of Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism. After 2002, constraining Iran's nuclear program "took precedence in U.S. policy", this led to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its 2018 collapse when the Trump administration withdrew and imposed "maximum pressure" sanctions. Israel entered the equation as a central actor due to its doctrine of preventing a nuclear Iran and its ongoing conflict with Iranian-backed groups across the region. Iran, in turn, built a network of regional proxies and deepened partnerships with Russia and China, which US officials later accused of providing targeted data for strikes on US assets.

The immediate trigger for war came in two stages. First, a 12-day Iran-Israel war in June 2025 drew Washington into direct defense of Israel, as shown in Figure 3. Second, the failed nuclear negotiations in Geneva in February 2026 led to *Operation Epic Fury*

on February 28, 2026: the first joint US-Israel strikes on Iranian nuclear and missile sites. Iran retaliated by closing the Strait of Hormuz in March 2026, attacking a container ship, and launching missiles at US installations in Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman. There was a brief ceasefire in June 2026 which collapsed in July, ushering in nine consecutive nights of US strikes.

The US-Iran-Israel war is not an isolated event but the culmination of remote causes from 1953-1979 and past causes from 2002-2023, including nuclear diplomacy failures, sanctions, and regional proxy competition. The understanding of these layers is essential to assess the conflict's implications for Gulf security, global energy markets, and US foreign policy [1-7].

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The US-Iran-Israel conflict is the product of over 70 years of shifting alliances, revolutions, and security rivalries. This is divided into 4 phases, which are [2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9]:

1. The Alliance Era: 1953-1979

Before 1979, the US and Iran were strategic partners, and Israel had quiet ties with the Shah.

A. 1953 CIA-M16 Coup: The US and UK helped overthrow Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and restored Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This created lasting Iranian resentment of US interference in domestic politics.

B. US-Iran Partnership: The US was Iran's main arms supplier and also provided Iran with its first nuclear reactor in 1967 under the "Atoms for Peace" program.

C. Israel-Iran Relations: Under the Shah, Iran and Israel had covert security and oil cooperation against Arab nationalism.

This era ended with the 1979 revolution that framed the US and Israel as enemies of the new Islamic Republic.

2. The Breakdown: 1979-2001

The 1979 Islamic Revolution transformed the relationship into open hostility.

A. 1979 Islamic Revolution + Hostage Crisis: Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah. 52 US diplomats were held hostage for 444 days. The US cut diplomatic ties and froze Iranian assets.

B. Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988: The US tilted towards Iraq. Iran accused the US of supporting Saddam Hussein.

C. 1984: The US designated Iran as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.

D. Israel Factor: Iran began supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon from 1982. Israel viewed Iran's anti-Zionist ideology as an existential threat.

The Congressional Research (CRS) notes that: "US-Iran relations have been mostly adversarial since the 1979 Islamic Revolution".

3. Nuclearization + Proxy Competition: 2002-2018

This period made Iran's nuclear program the central US-Israel concern.

A. 2002: Secret Natanz enrichment facility was revealed. "Attempting to constrain Iran's nuclear program took precedence in U.S. policy after 2002", as shown in Figure 4.

B. 2006-2013: UN and U.S. sanctions intensified over uranium enrichment.

C. 2015: The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

D. Proxy Expansion: Iran expanded support for armed factions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Gaza. US officials consistently identified this as "a significant threat to U.S. interests and allies".

4. "Maximum Pressure" to Direct War: 2018-2026

The collapse of diplomacy pushed the conflict toward direct confrontation.

A. May 2018: The Trump Administration withdrew from JCPOA, arguing it "did not address the broad range of U.S. concerns" and began "maximum pressure" to deny Iran revenue and force renegotiation.

B. 2020: US drone strike killed IRGC General Qasem Soleimani.

C. June 2025: 120 day Iran-Israel war. This was the first direct missile exchanges. US assisted Israel.

D. February 2026: After failed Geneva talks, the US and Israel launched *Operation Epic Fury* – joint strikes on Iranian nuclear sites.

E. March-July 2026: Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz, attacked US bases in Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar. By July 2026, 17 US troops were killed and the US conducted 9 nights of strikes.

It is to be noted that the US officials also cited Iran's "partnership with Russia and China" as a concern. By 2026, the US claimed Russia and China were providing Iran targeting data for US assets.

Why the involvement of Russia and China in the Conflict

Russia and China are involved in the Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict primarily because of their strategic, economic, diplomatic, and security interests, rather than being a former military allies of Iran. Both countries support Iran diplomatically while avoiding direct military confrontation with the United States or Israel. Some of these reasons include:

1. **Strategic geographical interests:** Both Russia and China are not fighting directly, but Iran's location makes it critical to their own security and economic goals. The US policy has long been concerned with Iran's role in Gulf energy security and regional stability which directly impacts China. Both Russia and China benefit geographically when the US is busy in the Gulf instead of Asia or Europe. A hostile US-Iran relationship means:
 - A. US naval forces stay in the Persian Gulf
 - B. Less US forces on Taiwan, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe
 - C. More room for Russia/China to expand trade and military ties in Eurasia [1-5].

In other words:

- Russia cares about Iran as a southern buffer + trade corridor to bypass the West.
 - China cares about Iran for oil, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) routes, and keeping Hormuz open.
2. **Energy security:** China is known to import significant quantities of oil from the Middle East, including Iranian crude. Therefore, a wider war could:
 - Disrupt oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz
 - Increase global oil prices
 - Threaten China's energy security and economic growth

For these reasons, China generally favors de-escalation while maintaining economic ties with Iran [10, 11].

3. **Economic and trade relations:** Both Russia and China use trade with Iran to bypass US sanctions, secure energy, and build an alternative to the US-led financial system. The 2026 war made these ties even more important vis-à-vis:
 - A. **Russia-Iran:** "Sanctions Economy Partnership" in the areas of energy trade, arms + military trade, transport corridor, and finance. The US officials in 2026 cited Iran's "partnership with Russia and China" as key to Iran sustaining its military despite strikes.

- B. **China-Iran:** "Oil for Infrastructure" as per oil trade, Belt and Road Investment, manufacturing trade, and finance. During the July 2026 Hormuz closure, China's main risk was oil disruption – as approximately 40% of China's crude passes through the Strait.

- C. **Russia-China-Iran:** The "Trilateral Economic Bloc" as per:

- a. **BRICS + SCO:** All three are members. They use these groups to coordinate trade, loans, and alternatives to Western banks.
- b. **De-dollarization:** Push for trade in local currencies to reduce exposure to US sanctions.
- c. **Sanctions Evasion Networks:** Russia and China provide insurance, shipping, and banking for Iranian oil that the US tries to block.
- d. **War impact:** US strikes in 2026 raised oil to \$126/barrel. That benefits Russia and helps China get cheaper Iranian oil while hurting US allies.

Why it Matters in the Conflict

It matters because without Russian weapons and Chinese oil money, Iran's economy would most likely collapse under US sanctions. Therefore, with Russia and China, Iran can keep fighting and rebuilding. However, for Russia and China, this trade is also about weakening US economic power globally [1-5].

Russia trades weapons + transport for Iranian support, and while China trades oil + investment for energy security. Both Russia and China are making use of Iran to challenge US sanctions and dollar dominance.

4. **Military and security cooperation:** Russia and China in the conflict did not send troops. However, they have provided Iran with weapons, intelligence, and security support to help it withstand US strikes. These are through:

1. **Russia-Iran:** "Drones for Jets" Partnership in the areas of:
 - a. Weapons transfer
 - b. Joint exercises
 - c. Intelligence + space
 - d. Military advisors

The CRS lists Iran's "partnership with Russia" as a core challenge to US policy because it improves Iran's ability to threaten US forces.

2. **China-Iran:** "Security + Surveillance" Cooperation, which are in the areas of:
 - a. Naval cooperation

- b. Surveillance tech
- c. Intelligence sharing
- d. Security agreement

Worthy of note is that China's priority is in keeping the Strait of Hormuz open. Since approximately 20% of global oil passes there, including approximately 40% of China's crude imports.

3. Trilateral Cooperation: Russia + China + Iran, which is via:

- a. **Joint Naval Drills:** "Marine Security Belt" exercises in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman. Signals to the US that they can operate together.
- b. **Air Defense Networks:** In this case, Russia helps Iran integrate Chinese and Russian radar to detect US/Israel strikes.
- c. **Cyber + EW:** Sharing of jamming and cyber tools used against US drones and missiles.
- d. **Proxy support:** Iran uses Russian and Chinese weapons via proxies in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, keeping US forces tied down.

During July 2026, after Iran attacked US bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan and Oman, US officials said this coordination made US strikes "less effective" because Iran could resupply and re-target quickly.

V. Limits

Russia and China are avoiding direct war with the US. Their cooperation is therefore designed to:

- 1. Bleed US resources in the Middle East
- 2. Test US weapons and defenses
- 3. Show they can protect an ally without boots on the ground [1-5].

This shows the fact that:

Russia gives Iran weapons + satellite Intel.

China gives Iran surveillance + naval security.

Together they help Iran survive US pressure without starting WW3.

- 4. **Opposition to Western sanctions:** Russia and China oppose US sanctions on Iran not just to help Iran, but to challenge US financial power. They both turned the opposition into direct economic and diplomat support.

Why Russia and China Oppose Sanctions: The reasons are due to:

- a. Economic interest
- b. Anti-US hegemony
- c. BRICS/de-dollarization
- d. UN Security Council

CRS notes that US policy toward Iran is complicated by "Iran's partnerships with Russia and China" which undermine sanctions.

How they Opposed Sanctions During 2026: This is via:

Diplomatic Opposition

- 1. **UN Security Council:** Russia and China vetoed/opposed US and European resolutions for tougher sanctions after Iran's July 2026 attacks on US bases.
- 2. **Public statements:** Both called US strikes "illegal" and demanded sanctions relief as part of any ceasefire.

Economic Opposition

- 1. **Oil trade:** China continued to buy Iranian oil through "shadow fleet" tankers and paid in yuan, ignoring US secondary sanctions. This gave Iran approximately \$15-20B/year even during the war.
- 2. **Banking:** Trade is settled via China's CIPS system and Russian SPFS system instead of SWIFT.
- 3. **Insurance + shipping:** Russia and Chinese firms provided insurance and flagged tankers for Iranian oil exports.

Military/Strategic Opposition

- 1. **Arms sales:** Russia sold air defense and jets to Iran despite US sanctions.
- 2. **Targeting data:** US officials in July 2026 alleged Russia and China gave Iran satellite data on US warships and bases, helping Iran counter US strikes.

IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT

Without Russia and Chinese opposition, US sanctions would have collapsed Iran's economy within months. With their support:

- 1. Iran could fund missiles, drones, and proxies
- 2. Oil prices spiked to \$126/barrel in July, hurting US allies but helping Russia
- 3. The US had to fight a war while its main economic weapon – sanctions – was being bypassed.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

For Russia and China, Iran is a test of whether the US can still enforce sanction unilaterally. Their goal is also to build a parallel trade system where US sanctions don't work [1-5]. In other words, Russia opposes sanctions to protect arms sales and build anti-US trade routes. While China opposes sanctions to secure oil and expand yuan-based trade. Together

they use the UN, banks, and shadow trade to keep Iran alive during the war.

Preventing regional instability: The argument by both Russia and China is that US pressure on Iran would cause instability. Their approach is to protect Iran, push diplomacy, and keep oil flowing. In practice, this means supporting Iran while trying to avoid a wider war.

Russia's Approach: "Diplomacy + Balance of Power" by the use of:

- a. UN Diplomacy
- b. Arms control
- c. Transport + trade corridors
- d. Direct mediation

China's Approach: "Economic Stability + Neutrality" by:

- a. Keeping Hormuz open
- b. Economic incentives
- c. Neutral mediation
- d. Oppose sanctions

Shared Tactics in 2026:

1. Call for ceasefire
2. Sanctions Relief as Stability Tool
3. Military Exercises as "Deterrence"
4. Prevent Proxy Expansion [1-5].

Diplomatic support at the United Nations:

At the UN, Russia and China do not need to "convince" a majority every time. They use their power as **P5 veto members** + build coalitions with the **Global South** to block US/Israel moves and protect Iran. The core tools used are:

- a. Veto power in UNSC
- b. Draft resolutions
- c. BRICS + SCO Bloc
- d. Global South outreach
- e. Legal/Principle Arguments

What happened in 2026: During the "2026 Iran war" and Operation Epic Fury, as shown in Figure 5, there was –

1. **Blocking sanctions:** After Iran attacked US bases in Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan and Oman on July 18, the US pushed for new UNSC sanctions. Russia and China vetoed/delayed it, calling for an immediate ceasefire instead.
2. **Calling for investigations:** China and Russia asked for UN fact-finding missions on civilian damage, shifting focus from Iran's actions to US/Israel strikes.
3. **GA Resolutions:** In the UN General Assembly where there is no veto, they got support from approximately 120 countries for resolutions

demanding de-escalation and opposing use of force. The US and Israel were in the minority.

4. **Public statements:** Both ambassadors repeatedly said US strikes were "violations of the UN Charter" – a legal frame that gets support from non-aligned states.

Why Other Countries Supported Them:

1. **Energy security:** Gulf States + India + China do not want Hormuz closed. They back calls for ceasefire.
2. **Anti-Sanctions Sentiment:** Many countries face US secondary sanctions and see Iran as a test case.
3. **Avoid taking sides:** "Neutrality" resolutions let countries condemn war without condemning Iran or the US directly.

LIMITS

They can block UNSC action, but cannot pass pro-Iran enforcement resolutions because the US, UK, and France would veto. So the goal is "negative diplomacy": prevent, delay, and delegitimize US action, not create a pro-Iran UN force [1-5].

To sum it up, Russia and China make use of veto power + "sovereignty" language + BRICS/Global South votes to block US action at the UN and push for diplomacy over sanctions.

CONCLUSION

The US-Iran-Israel conflict demonstrates the complexity of modern geopolitical rivalries, where military, political, economic, and ideological interests are deeply intertwined. Despite the United States and Israel seeking to deter Iran's regional influence, missile capabilities, and nuclear ambitions through sanctions, diplomacy, and military actions, Iran has continued to adapt by strengthening its asymmetric capabilities and regional alliances. The conflict has therefore remained cyclical rather than conclusively resolved. The conflict has imposed significant humanitarian and economic costs, including civilian casualties, displacement, destruction of infrastructure, disruptions to global energy markets, and heightened insecurity across the Middle East. Tensions around strategic waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz have demonstrated how regional conflicts can rapidly affect global trade and energy prices. Sustainable peace will depend on renewed diplomacy, respect for international law, confidence-building measures, regional security cooperation, and constructive engagement among all stakeholders. International organizations and major powers also have important roles in facilitating dialogue, preventing further escalation, and promoting long-term stability.

Military forces alone is unlikely to provide a lasting solution; addressing the underlying political and security grievances remains essential for achieving durable peace in the Middle East. More information on the US-Iran-Israel conflict can be obtained in the books in [12-30] and the following related journals:

Middle East Journal

Iranian Studies

Israel Studies

International Security

Security Studies

Survival: Global Politics and Strategy

The Washington Quarterly

Foreign Affairs

Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly

Journal of Strategic Studies

The Nonproliferation Review

Bulletin of the Atomic Sciences

Arms Control Today

Journal of Arabian Studies

Russia in Global Affairs

China Quarterly

International Studies Quarterly

Middle East Policy

Journal for Social Science Archives

Journal of Social Science

Journal of Peace Research

Third World Quarterly

International Affairs (Oxford)

REFERENCES

- [1] Centre for Strategic & International Studies (2026), *Iran Update Special Report, July 18-19, 2026*. Institute for the Study of War.
- [2] Congressional Research Service (2024), *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*.
- [3] Congressional Research Service (2020), *U.S.-Iran tensions and implications for U.S. policy*.
- [4] Reuters (2026, July 19), *US renews strikes on Iran after at least two military personnel killed by Iranian attack*.
- [5] Wikipedia (2026), *2026 Iran war*.
- [6] Wikipedia (2026), *Prelude to the 2026 Iran conflict*

- [7] The Sun (2026, July 20), *Trump 'planning for return of all out war with Iran' as US unleashes ninth night of strikes*.
- [8] A. Papyan (2025), *Sanctions, strikes, and strategic narratives: A critical review of U.S. policy towards Iran (1979-2025)*. Zenodo.
- [9] Reuters (2016), *Timeline: U.S.-Iran relations from 1953 coup to 2016 sanctions relief*.
- [10] C. Russell (2026), *China imports the most energy, but is best placed on Iran*. Reuters, 3 March 2026.
- [11] S. Liu (July 23, 2026), *China refines snap up September Russian crude, eye Iranian oil as Mideast supply risks grow*, <https://www.reuters.com/china-refines-snap-up-september-russian-crude-eye-iranian-oil-as-mideast-supply-risks-grow>
- [12] Chatham House (2026), *Will the US-Iran ceasefire hold?*
- [13] Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (2026), *The fragile US-Iran ceasefire: Issues to watch*.
- [14] Chatham House (2026), *US-Iran ceasefire: What it means for Trump, Tehran, Israel and US allies*.
- [15] Reuters (2026), *Analysis: No deal, no exit – How US-Iran standoff risks fresh conflict*.
- [16] Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (2026), *The wars after the war: Why Israel and Iran may keep fighting*.
- [17] S. Kinzer (2008), *All the Shah's men: An American coup and the roots on Middle East terror*. (2nd ed.). Wiley.
- [18] R. Takeyh (2009), *Guardians of the revolution: Iran and the world in the Age of the Ayatollahs*.
- [19] B. Rubin (2014), *The Israel-Arab Reader: A documentary of the Middle East conflict*.
- [20] M. R. Gordon & W. J. Broad (2024), *The peril: The secret history of the Iran nuclear crisis*.
- [21] C. Clary & V. Narang (2023), *The fragile balance of terror: Deterrence in the new nuclear age*.
- [22] M. Kroenig (2018), *The return of great power rivalry: Democracy vs. autocracy from the ancient world to the US and China*.
- [23] K. M. Pollack (2013), *Unthinkable: Iran, the bomb, and American strategy*.

- [24] J. J. Mearsheimer & S. M. Walt (2007), *The Israel lobby and U.S. foreign policy*.
- [25] S. Ramani (2024), *Iran's rising strategic partnerships: Russia, China, and the New Middle East*.
- [26] M. N. Katz (2022), *Russia and Iran: A historical and geopolitical analysis*.
- [27] Institute for the Study of War (2026), *Iran Updates*.
- [28] International Atomic Energy Agency (2023-2025), *Verification and Monitoring in Iran*.
- [29] R. Takeyh (2023), Iran's strategy of deterrence, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 102, no. 4, pp. 45-58.
- [30] K. M. Pollack (2024), The new Middle East war: Implications for US policy, *Survival*, vol. 66, no. 2, pp. 23-41.



Figure 3. Twelve-day war
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve-Day_War



Figure 4. Nuclear program of Iran
Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_program_of_Iran



Figure 1: Middle East

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East



Figure 2. Strait of Hormuz

Source:

https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strait_of_Hormuz



Figure 5. 2026 Iran war

Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Iran_war