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Analytical Review Article

**THE 2026 IRAN–US–ISRAEL WAR: CAUSES, LEGALITY,
AND GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES**

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Abstract

The 2026 Iran–US–Israel War emerged as a short-duration but high-intensity conflict that reshaped modern strategic thinking. Initiated on 28 February 2026 through coordinated US–Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear, military, and leadership targets—including the reported killing of Ali Khamenei—the conflict rapidly escalated into a regional and global crisis. This article critically evaluates available analyses to provide a structured understanding of the evolving crisis and its systemic implications.

Running title: Iran nuclear program, military escalation dynamics, hybrid warfare strategy

Keywords: Iran US Israel War 2026, Middle East conflict 2026, preemptive strike doctrine, international law violations,

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Introduction

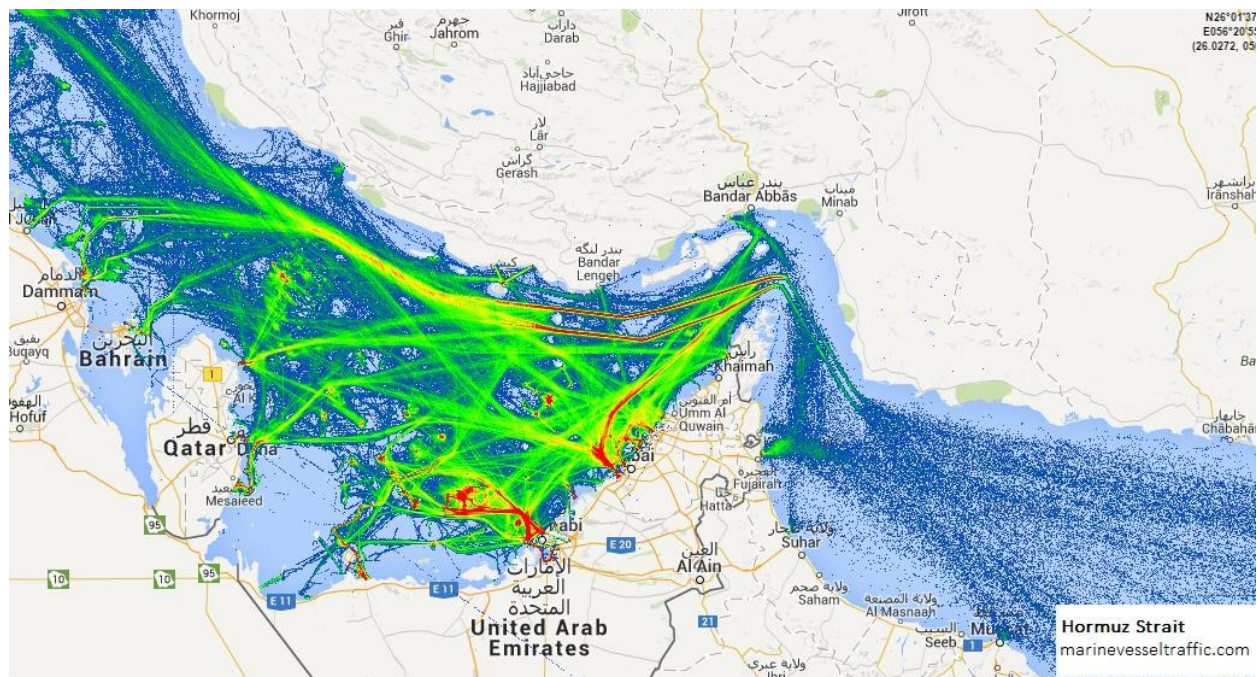
The intensification of hostilities between Iran, United States, and Israel in 2026 reflects long-standing geopolitical tensions rooted in ideological divergence, strategic rivalry, and regional security concerns. Historically, the Middle East has remained a volatile arena shaped by proxy conflicts, nuclear anxieties, and competing spheres of influence. The present escalation is particularly significant due to its potential to evolve into a broader regional or even global confrontation. This review critically examines the causes, legality, and consequences of this war through a multidisciplinary lens integrating political science, international law, and global economics.

Methodology

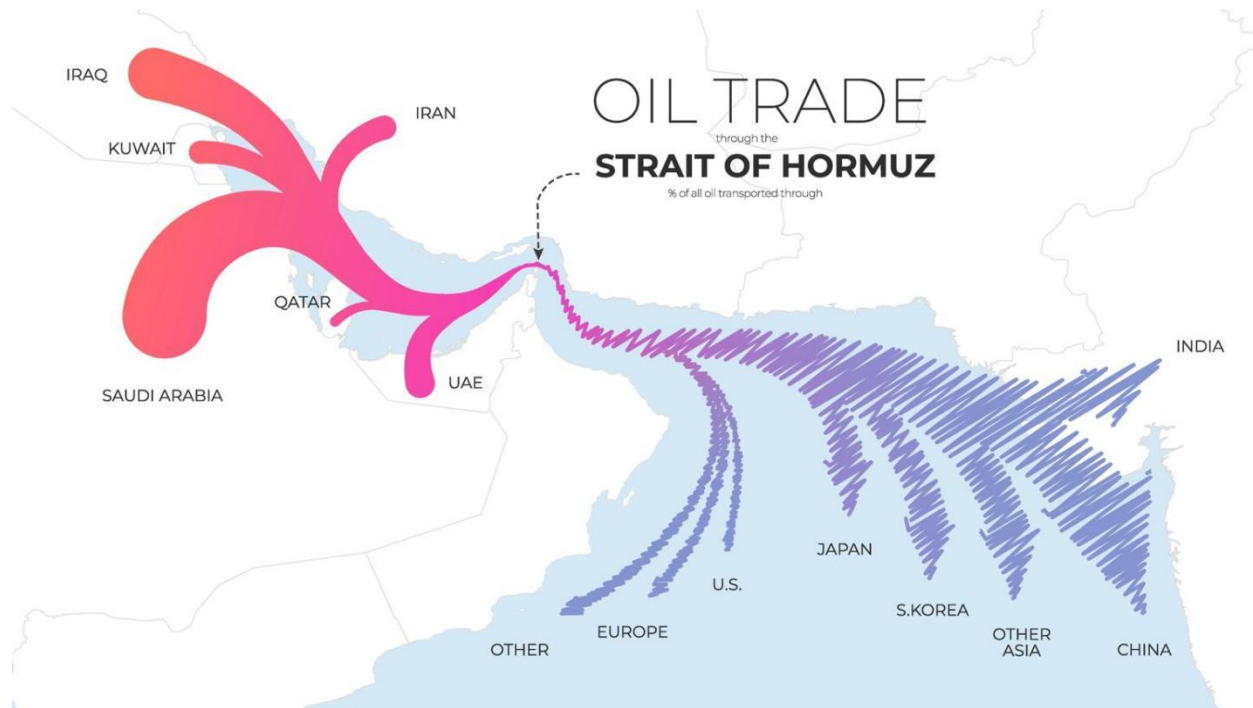
This review adopts a qualitative synthesis approach, drawing upon policy analyses, defense reports, international law frameworks, and geopolitical assessments. Data sources include institutional publications, think tank analyses, and contemporary media reports. Inclusion criteria focused on relevance to military escalation, legal justification, and global consequences, while speculative or unverified claims were critically filtered. Comparative thematic analysis was used to structure the findings.

Main Body / Thematic Analysis

Causes of the Conflict

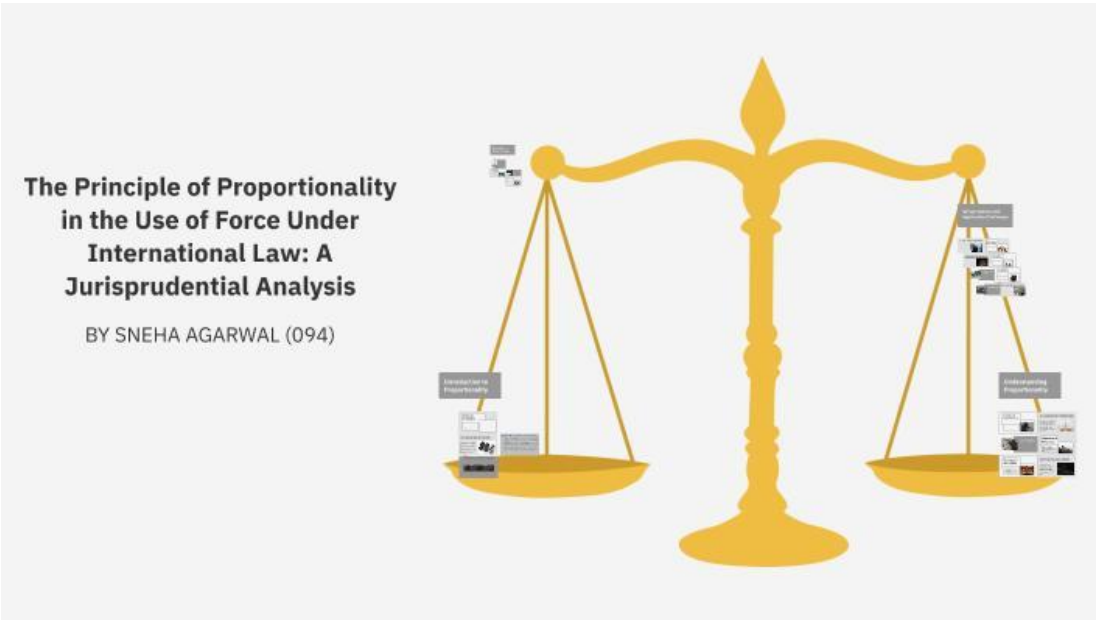


The origins of the conflict can be traced to multiple intersecting factors. Concerns surrounding Iran's nuclear program and alleged weaponization capabilities have intensified fears in Israel and the United States. The proliferation of proxy groups supported by Iran across the Middle East—including militias in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen—has contributed to an expanding security dilemma. Strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz further elevate tensions due to their critical role in global oil supply chains. Domestic political pressures and deterrence signaling have also amplified escalation dynamics, transforming localized disputes into direct confrontation.



Legal Analysis of the Conflict

The legality of the 2026 conflict remains highly contested under international law. Central to this debate is Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which permits the use of force in self-defense against an armed attack. Israel and the United States may justify their actions under anticipatory self-defense doctrines, particularly in relation to perceived nuclear threats. However, critics challenge the legitimacy of such pre-emptive strikes, emphasizing the principles of necessity, immediacy, and proportionality. Issues of sovereignty violations, civilian harm, and compliance with international humanitarian law—including the Geneva Conventions—remain central concerns.



Global Consequences

The global repercussions of the conflict are extensive. Disruptions in oil supply routes have caused volatility in global energy markets, impacting both developed and developing economies. Politically, the war risks polarizing international alliances and deepening geopolitical divisions. Humanitarian consequences include displacement, civilian casualties, and pressure on global aid systems. Additionally, the conflict accelerates militarization, including cyber warfare and advanced weapons proliferation, potentially reshaping global security architecture.

Comparative Insight Table

Dimension	Key Observations
Strategic Drivers	Nuclear deterrence, proxy warfare, regional dominance
Legal Status	Contested under international law
Economic Impact	Oil disruption, inflation, recession risk
Humanitarian Effects	Refugee crisis, infrastructure loss
Global Stability	Polarization, escalation risks

Future Prospects

Future research should explore hybrid warfare, cyber operations, and AI-driven military technologies. There is also a need to critically assess the effectiveness of international legal institutions in regulating pre-emptive conflicts. The evolving role of emerging powers and non-state actors in shaping post-war global order remains an important area for investigation.

Recommendations

Policy strategies should prioritize diplomatic de-escalation, reinforcement of international legal norms, and multilateral negotiations. Strengthening global energy resilience and supply

diversification is essential to reduce economic vulnerability. Enhanced humanitarian frameworks and accountability mechanisms under international law are necessary to protect civilian populations and uphold global governance standards.

Conclusion

The 2026 Iran–US–Israel war illustrates a complex intersection of geopolitical rivalry, legal ambiguity, and global systemic risk. While the immediate causes are rooted in security concerns and regional tensions, the broader implications extend far beyond the Middle East, influencing global economic stability, international law, and geopolitical alignments. The contested legality of military actions highlights the limitations of existing international frameworks in addressing modern conflict dynamics, particularly in cases involving anticipatory self-defense and non-state actors. Ultimately, the conflict underscores the urgent necessity for strengthened diplomatic engagement, reformed global governance mechanisms, and a renewed commitment to international legal principles to prevent future large-scale escalations.

Review Typology and Reporting

Review designs were classified into standard categories (scoping, umbrella, rapid, qualitative, and mixed-methods), with reporting aligned to established guidelines (PRISMA-ScR, PRIOR, PRISMA-RR, ENTREQ, and PRISMA/MMAT) to ensure methodological rigor and transparency.

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