

The Anatomy of a Geopolitical Shock: West Asian Conflict and its Socio-Political, Economic, and Security Implications for India and Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The rise of conflict among Iran, Israel, and the US poses a critical geostrategic challenge for South Asian economies amid great-power competition. This study examines the South Asian tightrope between potential relations with the West and energy dependencies in the Middle East. This key research question has yet to be systematically explored. The paper employs exploratory qualitative geopolitical risk analysis and scenario modelling, combined with quantitative economic indicators, to assess the susceptibility of India and Pakistan to major maritime disruptions. The key findings are that a total blockade of the Strait of Hormuz would stop over 50 per cent of India's strategic crude imports and 90 per cent of its polluting crude, causing catastrophic inflation, severe contractions in remittances, and acute disruptions in fertiliser supply chains. These disruptions are having a fundamental destabilising impact on regional nuclear deterrence and fueling the dangerous India-Pakistan-China nuclear trilemma. In conclusion, the study establishes that reactive, ad hoc diplomacy must be left behind in South Asia. Rather than aggressively pursuing rapid expansion of strategic petroleum reserves, integrate maritime resilience frameworks to secure regional energy security, support stable long-term economic survival, and operate amid changing global Eurasian alliance dynamics.

Keywords: Energy security, geopolitics, Middle East crisis, South Asia, U.S.-Iran conflict

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. should stop trying to recreate the fundamentally changed U.S.-Israel-Iran triangle that will exist by 2026. On one front, cyberattacks and proxies are fueling an “under-the-radar war” alongside Operation Epic Fury, also known as Hugo Strikes, over the Persian Gulf. This is unbalancing the Middle East and threatening international energy markets and commerce that rely on transit through the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait is of utmost importance to India because roughly 53% and 90% of its crude oil and LPG imports, respectively, are sourced from the region, making it essential to both energy security and India's economy (Liu, 2025, pp. 130-153).

Moreover, the blockage of this key global shipping supply line would have consequences far beyond theregion. If that were to happen, it would disrupt energy markets and trigger dismal macroeconomic contagion effects much further afield. This is where its geopolitical ramifications come into play. These can be seen in extrinsic political tensions, such as the US-Iran narrative undermining energy security as regional energy initiatives are threatened and the region bifurcates. In this precarious situation, the extreme fragility of global energy supply chains to geopolitical disruption in this part of the world and to prolonged war scenarios certainly indicates that crude and natural

gas prices could be much higher than those currently prevailing (Pokorny, 2026, pp. 76-84).

Moreover, the often competing interests of various actors in the region complicate this geopolitical flux, chief among them the complex interplay among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, which has repercussions for both Pakistan's internal stability and external forces affecting it. The long-standing rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, fueled by perennial claims by both sides over 'disputed' territories and by their respective efforts to regain regional influence, also solidified ties between Pakistan and these countries (Al-Barasneh, 2025).

Significance of the study

Socio-Political, Economic, and Security Impacts of the South Asia Tri-Border Conflict. This study provides a regionalised macro-microscopic perspective on global security journals indexed in Scopus. It is the first assessment of what is now a national-level (self-defined) "post-deterrence" phenomenon in West Asia since the 2016 escalation of South Asia's "nuclear overhang". Changes in geopolitical alliances are evident in a letter suggesting that South Asian countries seek alternative energy sources and reassess political partnerships to achieve supply chain resilience (Raza et al., 2024, pp. 642–655).

It applies contemporary lenses to analyse the crisis's impact on renewables, self-sufficiency, and supply chain diversification, and highlights that a low-carbon transition must be resilient to geopolitical disruption. It analyses national security strategies that address non-military risks posed by energy or economic disruptions and urges legislative changes to increase resilience and strategic autonomy. Pushed to extremes by developmental disparities and socio-economic vulnerabilities, South Asia needs to rethink development trajectories that are instead deepening developmental gaps. Its implications extend beyond an economic blow to core power relations, becoming a drain on regional security and posing questions about international Law and the norm of state non-interference (Pokorny, 2026, pp. 76-84).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The strategic triangle

Scholars studying U.S.-Israel-Iran relations alternate between concern with realism (regional power, nuclear hedging) and constructivism (ideological conflict). Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism (2001) is about the use of violence to acquire regional hegemony—this is precisely why the 2026 confab exists. This framework allows for the examination of hawkish policies, particularly Iran's responses to foreign pressures, such as Saudi Arabia's 2015 intervention in Yemen and the US withdrawal from the JCPOA (Al-Barasneh, 2025). It also elaborates Russia's time-tested strategy in an otherwise imbalanced Israel-Iran conflict with a presumed rebalancing act against U.S. sidelining on energy issues. Recent events demonstrate that the weaponisation of energy in this context further complicates matters, as both democratic and undemocratic states have used energy as a foreign policy tool.

South Asia's Middle East policy

India's link-west policy seeks to balance defence ties with Israel against energy interests in Iran; Pakistan's brotherly ties, amid the Saudi-Iran divide, seek "stable instability," which shapes its position on this. This is already evident in the 2026 war, which displaces an increasingly monomaniacal foreign policy with more dextrous alternatives, reshaping South Asia's strategic and economic relations in a GPI-tracking world (South Asia Policy Reshaping South Asia's Strategic and Economic Relations in a GPI-Tracking World VIII). The economic consequences range from disruptions to sea trade and energy markets to an exacerbation of the burden on South Asian economies, which are heavily dependent on Persian Gulf energy and remittances (Liu, 2025, pp. 130-153). This prompts an examination of how these nations are increasingly diversifying their energy mixes and forming new partnerships to mitigate the impacts of geopolitical shocks. Lastly, the interconnectivity of the global energy market implies that localised shocks can have strategic and systemic ramifications when they spill over beyond their immediate region (e.g., crashes in straits such as Hormuz or the Red Sea), also impacting national

supply chains and, therefore, economic security (Popalzay et al., 2025).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Neo-realism & the security dilemma

This neorealist theory on systemic dynamics in The South Asian Tighrope: US, Iran, Israel & Great Powers can be used to answer the question about the security dilemma in international anarchy. Weak states face pressure to adopt tactical defensive militarisation to survive in the era of rising tensions among the USA, Israel and Iran (Beidolahkhani, 2023, pp. 94–109). The stability-instability paradox has exacerbated this systemic instability. In this context, strategic nuclear deterrence, by contrast, encourages sub-conventional skirmishes, proxy warfare, and tactical risk-taking, which is further complicated by the military integration of AIs and AWP (Tiwari et al., 2025, pp. 915-919).

Hence, South Asian countries are caught in a terrifying nuclear trilemma due to foreign interference and shifting great-power alignments (Lou, 2022, pp. 281–295). This trilemma reduces deterrence thresholds, skews fragile bilateral security equilibria, and worsens arms-race dynamics. In the final analysis, too many anarchic variables and recent regional power rivalries turn national defence postures into loose cannons that can be triggered by a global crisis, given the rapidity, volatility, and structural fragility arising from the disarray of primacy, creating an unstable equilibrium across the subcontinent.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study approach is integrated with quantitative economic indicators. This study analyses:

Price volatility

This study demonstrates how military artificial intelligence influences these trends and, based on the impact of AI-targeting capabilities employed in recent conflicts, investigates whether crude oil prices fluctuate. It evaluates how the increasing use of AI-based reconnaissance and precision-targeting capabilities influences perceptions of risk to oil production and transport infrastructure, thereby

affecting supply/demand fundamentals and price discovery.

Supply chain data

Increase in Urea/DAP prices and total annual import data. It will also include an analysis of effects on global supply chains; most importantly, disruptions to critical agricultural commodities. This paper examines the instability of a strategic petroleum reserve and the dynamic welfare losses for each nation in South Asia, with a view to uncovering the aggregate economic effects on the region. This strategy also includes an extensive evaluation of how the application of AI in military doctrines, particularly in India and Pakistan, often redefines fundamental norms of deterrent stability.

Diplomatic mapping

Analysis of voting trends in Pakistan and India and of mediation attempts. It provides a broad understanding of the multidimensional geopolitical and economic implications that largely shape the regional deterrent and stability calculus of India and Pakistan regarding the military applications of AI. This study uses a mixed-methods approach and, therefore, discusses the literature alongside in-depth case studies and data mining to gain unique perspectives on the extremely complex linkages between AI (Artificial Intelligence) and international politics, particularly the regional stability map of South Asia.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Geopolitical Realignments in South Asia

India is actively expanding its access to Central Asia by enhancing development at Iran's largest port, Chabahar. It remains indirectly dependent on Israel for 15%–20% of its fresh high-tech defence imports. State of play: Pakistan as a geography of dependencies and fragilities (Iqbal & Tabeer, 2024, pp. 72-86).

The geopolitical landscape underscores the imperative to reorient and indigenise AI, alongside militarisation through foreign policy, to assuage doubts about regional tensions. These threats, in turn, inform New Delhi's responses, ranging from being ill-prepared to counter basic hybrid warfare to deploying advanced, coherent strategies across the

four domains of defence-diplomacy, cyberspace, information operations, and economic warfare. Consequently, such drone capabilities and their implications for a more unstable security environment necessitate a rethink of deterrence and strategic stability (Kweera, 2023, pp. 376-388).

The reason for this heightened threat perception is that the enhancement of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities produces a South Asian security dilemma in India by encouraging surveillance and first-strike incentives. Pakistan is also losing its defensive capabilities, and there are already fears of proxy wars (Abbasi, 2023, pp. 1-21), while India is strengthening its war power through strategic relations and defence pacts with the U.S. In other words, Pakistan's defence cooperation and economic integration with China are a way to counter this, adding another layer of complication to India's and the U.S.'s defence calculus as they try to defend themselves. These overlapping networks of rivalries show how techno-political competition may influence the stability of South Asia. This technological race for AI dominance between these nuclear neighbours will endanger the stability of the arms race and crisis management (Rafiq, 2021, pp. 49-63).

The India-Pakistan power asymmetry explains Islamabad's security policies. India's advanced ISR and military advantages increase tensions to the breaking point, with limited conflict. Nuclearisation prevents total wars but maintains instabilities in the context of sub-conventional threats (Abbasi & Ullah, 2022, pp. 215-241), such as a simulated security dilemma and an action-reaction cycle. This goes for nuclear as well as conventional forces; they need to be balanced. Time-consuming political compromises lead to an arms race focused on technological advancements. Pakistan perceives India's tech and space advances as threatening to its deterrence, leading to an arms buildup (in turn increasing Indian perceptions that the established balance of power might be upset) and external balancing partnerships, thereby worsening regional rivalries.

The “Neo-normal” of deterrence

This war establishes a perilous precedent. Iran successfully proves to South Asia that, through an advanced air defence, nuclear deterrence does not prevent high-intensity conventional strikes. Such

“calibrated” exchanges were reflected in a 90-hour India-Pakistan skirmish in early 2026. The term “neo-normal” means that although nuclear weapons exist, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and precision strikes will render mutually assured destruction less potent, allowing states to realise limited aims. This heightens the danger of vertical escalation from localised skirmishes to larger nuclear wars. Rapid advancements in drones and AI challenge deterrence and increase the risk of accidental or deliberate escalation between India and Pakistan (Javed & Altaf, 2025, pp. 44-66).

The recent Indian extrusion of strategic non-nuclear weapons, cyber, anti-satellite, and hypersonic missiles is essentially blurring the conventional and nuclear threshold, which will only increase the prospect of miscalculation, necessitating more sophisticated diplomacy to balance complicated security. India never shies away from risk-taking nuclear behaviour and, in this case, an internal crisis, as well as, to some extent, the incorporation of conventional strikes, cyberattacks, and unmanned platforms against Pakistan, further lowering the nuclear threshold and disrupting deterrence (Mushtaq, 2025, pp. 61-74). Pakistan views India's military modernisation and defence acquisitions as peace-threatening, increasing regional instability and security threats. India has also tested several advanced weapons as part of its efforts toward self-reliance in defence.

The perpetuation of crisis instability by some disruptive technologies and AI increases the prospects of militarised interstate conflict and lowers the nuclear threshold. In South Asia, the Japan-Pakistan competition risks turning into conditions for rapid escalation, including inadvertent nuclear exchanges involving non-state actors. Pakistan's acquisition of tactical nuclear weapons to balance India creates a new layer of complexity and risk of escalation, which requires new measures for risk reduction. This has created a dilemma for Pakistan's nuclear deterrence, which grapples with the Indian “doctrine of dominance” and ambitions for strategic weapons capabilities perceived as a lifeline to regional balance, aided by external partners (Johnson & Tierney, 2019, pp. 96-140).

The global bloc shift

The conflict has deepened the rift in South Asia. India supports IMEC, backed by the US and Israel;

Pakistan strengthens ties with the China-Russia-Eurasian axis and supports the INSTC amid maritime blockades. The shifting security geopolitics poses a real dilemma for both parties. At the same time, their proxy groups study the enemy, heightening regional tensions over differing views on the use of proxies in combat. In the Indo-Pakistani theatre, these developments generate further problems against the backdrop of de-escalation efforts and endless debates on deterrence in a multipolar world, thereby embedding such bilateral conflicts within the relational matrix of the geopolitical transformation unfolding globally. The lack of direct linkages was especially downplayed in the context of the May 2025 crisis, which featured China, Turkey, and President Trump (Daş, 2025).

This frequent overlap disrupts the bilateral equilibrium in sensitive multilateral contexts and increases the risk of misunderstanding and regional instability. In another, more recent context, for example, nuclear proliferation has worsened, as seen in the domestic nationalist politics of India and China that undermine regional nuclear stability (Lou, 1999, pp. 281-295). The balance of power between India and Pakistan (more so in India than in Pakistan) is also a factor in South Asian strategic stability. This, combined with the military and alliance dynamics of these three nuclear actors, complicates the China-India-Pakistan “trilemma.” This interlinkage (and interdependence) makes South Asia vulnerable to geopolitical developments and raises questions about the viability of deterrence. The increased intersectionality of these roles among the U.S., Russia, and China has complicated efforts to stabilise nuclear arms limitations (Braithwaite, 2024, p. 217). Nuclear deterrence is at risk from the failure to devise durable means of managing India-Pakistan differences against a background of chronic crises. The rise of new nuclear states, combined with emerging multipolar atmospheres, creates systemic uncertainty that makes misunderstandings and crisis-inducing episodes more likely, lessening the stabilising effect of nuclear weapons. Further afield, the security environment is asymmetric intra-Asia, with China-India-Pakistan strategic interactions creating opportunities for misperception and miscalculation, in short, a “trilemma” (Lou, 2022, pp. 281-295). Given such a complex interaction, new technologies and shifting alliances aimed at preventing escalation mean that deterrence frameworks need to be revisited. MPF supports

policymakers informally through documentation-based exchanges during discussions, providing them with insight into the challenges to strategic stability that South Asia currently faces, including the evolution of multipolar dynamics and the role of non-state actors.

Economic and human dimensions: Energy security & the Hormuz crisis

India

The Hormuz pipeline supplied 53% of crude oil in Jan 2026, but a blockade could halt 41% of crude and 90% of LPG. With 85 per cent of oil imported, energy insecurity that plagues India due to higher prices and supply disruptions is exacerbated. For its part, Pakistan faces energy challenges but can likely secure petroleum more reliably through partnerships. Asia is marked by the extent of differences in resource endowments, which create regional vulnerabilities and a shared inclination to address this issue through a regional response. Indian Ocean nuclearisation creates a dilemma for maritime security and favours an equilibrium with Pakistan (Usman et al., 2025, pp. 20-34).

India’s nuclear ballistic missile submarine development and potentially naval capabilities may change the region enough for Pakistan to have an appropriate strategic response. The evolving naval balance, driven by India’s growing navy and the start of piloting second-strike capability, had heightened threat perceptions in Pakistan. It has the potential to trigger an arms race (Munir et al., 2022, pp. 39–46). The factors mentioned above exacerbate Pakistan’s economic vulnerabilities, and India’s increasing naval capabilities (with assistance from the USA) are pressuring Pakistan to increase defence spending at a time when inflation is escalating. This makes resources available for socioeconomic development but also perpetuates insecurity and economic strain. Moreover, India’s attempts to dominate sea lanes and safeguard maritime trade further pressure Pakistan (Abbasi & Masood, 2025, pp. 1-24).

China

The ‘Malacca Dilemma’ has driven the PRC to seek to protect its energy supply lines in South Asia against a potential Western blockade, thereby giving it greater influence over the region. China is highly

vulnerable in this respect, as approximately 75% of its petroleum travels along the Strait of Malacca. The link is that energy security, control of maritime routes, and regional power cohere around states, reducing vulnerability to chokepoints. Maritime trade-dependent countries, such as Pakistan, are most susceptible to blockades (Bibi & Lee, 2023).

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is key to the transit of goods (especially oil), and its disruption would exact a heavy toll on the global economy. Reliance on chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Strait of Malacca affects the world economy. The primary use of Gwadar Port is as a logistics forward operating base and refuelling station just outside the Strait of Hormuz, reducing risks to traditional transport routes. This solidifies the Indo-Pacific geostrategic framework to this day while simultaneously enhancing China's energy security and enabling the string-of-pearls strategy (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, pp. 367–394).

The port, part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, will provide China with a critical overland access point for energy imports and reduce reliance on vulnerable sea lanes by shortening transport distances from the Persian Gulf. This channel ultimately addresses China's Malacca problem by providing a direct, secure route for importing critical energy from the Middle East. Gwadar, located 400 km from the Strait of Hormuz, enables energy deliveries to China and shortens shipping routes by thousands of kilometres. As a result, Gwadar has become a focal point for energy trade and may redefine where satellite states form and where maritime rules are set (Khan et al., 2025, pp. 103–125).

Pakistan

Pakistan is vulnerable to external shocks (such as oil supply disruptions and volatility in international oil markets), underscoring the importance of energy security risks in the country. This vulnerability can be buffered by being a player on the China-Russia-Eurasian energy procurement axis. As New Delhi sees it, CPEC is on Indian-occupied territory and infringes on the core national interests of economic sovereignty and military security. This construction buildup and expanded Chinese presence in the region present an unwelcome pillar of Indian regional hegemony, resulting in geopolitical tensions. This type of recalibration is likely to fuel strategic rivalry

in the Indian Ocean Region over sea lines of communication and a prospective maritime arms race (Sadiq & Azad, 2025, pp. 01–32).

India fears the shifting power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. China has long been manufacturing such insecurities around ports and transportation corridors. Last but not least, New Delhi and Islamabad cannot afford complacency as long as external naval presence, especially from China, keeps knocking at their doors and competing interests over maritime chokepoints remain afloat. This could enable Indian and US naval forces to blockade PRC-controlled ports (e.g., Gwadar and Kyaukpyu) in wartime, cutting key logistic nodes (Tata, 2018, pp. 95–106).

In the event of a blockade, China's land access to energy imports from Central Asia and Iran would be restricted, narrowing its hydrocarbon supply. Russian deliveries through Daqing could also be threatened by missiles launched from northeastern India. These capabilities illustrate India's strategic thinking and missile capabilities, enabling it to exert pressure on China's maritime presence in the Indian Ocean and the BRI (Dmini, 2023, pp. 16–34). Such geopolitical competition over maritime control and the threat of militarisation of economic relations have changed the security context in the region and require a reevaluation of naval deterrence policies.

Economic vulnerabilities and infrastructure projects, overlaid with military postures, are useful elements in a broader understanding of Indo-Pacific power projection and the incentivization of retaliatory options through traditional hard-power deterrence mechanisms. This knowledge is a prerequisite for formulating successful diplomatic and military initiatives to safeguard national interests and sustain regional balance. Also, the expansion of East Asia's export-oriented sectors has raised concerns about protecting sea lanes for the movement of goods and energy supplies, prompting national governments to strengthen their maritime forces (Uttam, 2023).

Inflation

The former surpassed \$120 in March 2026, and a \$10/barrel increase in Brent prices would widen India's current account deficit by 0.3% of GDP. Fluctuations in global energy markets and dependence on imports increase macroeconomic uncertainty and inflation, making planning difficult. Pakistan's excessive debt and insufficient foreign

reserves leave it ill-equipped to absorb energy shocks, threatening internal instability and jeopardising its role as a regional power. Such dynamics might prompt Pakistan to further align with the China-Russia-Eurasian axis to enhance stability and energy diversification (Kaushiki et al., 2024, pp. 189–220).

Trade disruptions

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz would necessitate rerouting of maritime trade, leading to costs and delays for India and Pakistan, with cascading impacts on their economies and global supply chains. However, India is investing in a maritime energy model. At the same time, China has moved into Pakistan with a land-based energy infrastructure, primarily to help the country avoid a potential naval blockade in the Indian Ocean.

Gwadar Port has emerged as a regional logistics and energy hub. Additionally, with the CPEC and other projects, China seeks to mitigate its maritime vulnerabilities and shift the naval balance of power in the IOR. By relocating supply lines away from the key chokepoint and into a more distributed network, the risk of an attack on the Straits is reduced. Indeed, in a disruptive war, international trading routes are totally severed if the Straits are closed (Rafiq et al., 2025, pp. 3176–3184).

Climate change adds to this uncertainty, with countries experiencing extreme weather, declining rainfall, and extreme heat, all of which increase competition for water between countries. This is prompting a new multimedia security paradigm that requires new foreign policies. The systemic implications of climate-change-induced scarcity for regional stability in transboundary water resources are likely to lead to further disagreements between India and Pakistan and affect regional stability and economic development (Rathore et al., 2024, pp. 79–98). The only way to solve this challenge is through a multilateral strategy that treats resources and conflicts as part of the same problem and requires resolving minor differences before they become deep-rooted.

Remittances & diaspora

South Asia receives more remittances than any other region in the world. Increased geopolitical instability, which may disrupt global financial systems or labour markets, could also damage the region's economy and social networks. These economies are also highly

dependent on flows from abroad, making them vulnerable to significant domestic shocks, such as regional wars that cut off trade routes or diplomatic relations, and to social tensions that do not dissipate overnight.

Pakistan: This dependency on remittances, \$30 billion in remittances (largely from Gulf Cooperation Council states) from both economies, and mostly going to labourers, particularly stemming from a precarious geopolitical hotbed, creates massive risk exposure if there is instability or adjustments in host states, including changes to labour laws for these migrants. In addition, climate-induced migration (which reinforces these socio-economic vulnerabilities) increases regional resource pressures, as displacement frequently heightens protection concerns and tensions. As such, climate change ultimately threatens human environmental security, which, in turn, needs to be part of any 'development' framework, as it can deepen vulnerabilities and fuel competition for these resources amongst states (Hassan et al., 2017).

Pakistan (8.5% of GDP from remittances, highly concentrated in the Gulf) will also be vulnerable to geopolitical developments that disrupt labour migration and financial flows. India also has a large Indian expatriate population in the Gulf (more than 9 million), which gives India the capacity for regional economic adaptability (Fulton, 2022, p. 8).

This is the case for two countries: Israel and Iran, countries that are vulnerable to one another, and the advent of the U.S. to this already complex picture compounds this. Gulf nations' economies will not be unaffected by a conflict-induced sense of unease, which will drive efforts to diversify away from oil returns and weigh on crude activity. On the one hand, Gulf crises may constrain foreign migrant departures, while larger crises elsewhere in the region have threatened to undermine remittances (Bakir, 2025, pp. 1–23). This East-West industrial interdependence, with energy and petro-dollar investments in the East and labour in the West, heightens South Asia's vulnerability. While remittances can stabilise currencies and reserves, excessive dependence on them can lead to imbalances. Strategic deployment of FDI towards investment is crucial to poverty alleviation. In the face of triad-induced shocks, diversifying strategies and engaging Gulf diplomacy are necessary to prevent cascading crises (Malathi & Jayalakshmi, 2025, pp. 50-53).

India: Remittances are 8.5% of GDP, mostly from the Gulf, leaving the economy vulnerable to geopolitical shifts that channel through labour migration and financial flows (Munir et al., 2022, pp. 39–46). Dependence on Gulf remittances is thus a risk in itself, since even minor shocks might jeopardise economies and spark social unrest. In addition, lower remittances might lead to reduced infrastructure and defence spending, with consequences for the regional balance of power. India's economic stakes, most likely and traditionally closely connected to the Middle East, with about 9 million Indian emigrants in the Arabian Peninsula and remittances originating from this region, account for almost 4% of India's GDP (Fulton, 2022, p. 8).

India needs to protect its critical remittance streams, ensure growth, and contain socio-economic unrest by cementing stable bilateral links with the GCC states. The interconnectedness also highlights vulnerabilities in energy supply chains (India vs Pakistan) and the strain on water resources in food systems, with sustainable living posing challenges for South Asia: namely, the Cold War as a political theory is reduced to mere interdependence, and, from a geopolitical lens, it underscores the fragility of these hydraulic lifebuoys: the ever-so-tightly restrained debt in India and Bangladesh. Meanwhile, both Pakistan and Sri Lanka have higher debt levels as they continue to tap international lenders (Malathi & Jayalakshmi, 2025, pp. 50-53).

The current economic environment, along with tensions between nations, calls for strategic diversification and regional cooperation to build resilience to external economic shocks. While remittances add value to national income, their benefits depend on how they are used rather than on consumption; therefore, prudent policy is required to direct these inflows toward sustainable growth and poverty eradication. Besides, remittances do contribute to the stabilisation of local currencies and forex reserves as sources of cushion against shocks. PDP (Domestic Transaction), on the contrary, while giving economic efficiency, decreases local production and increases dependence on international labour markets (Islam, 2021, pp. 38–51).

Sri Lanka: The Middle East receives 50% of remittances. With nearly 700 migrant arrivals from Sri Lanka per day ceasing due to the war in 2026, the cash flow chain was possibly jeopardised. This kind

of disruption puts people's livelihoods at risk, seriously weakens the country's economic strength, and could cause socio-political turmoil. Moreover, the Indo-Pacific framework amplifies these vulnerabilities, as Gulf (and South Asian) economies are deeply intertwined and not always conducive to diversification and to achieving geopolitical salience (Bakir, 2025, pp. 1–23). This interdependence, which goes beyond energy trade to include remittances and food security, has been a two-way relationship of Gulf investments and South Asian labour and goods. These economic relations produce a reciprocal dependence, making Asian and Gulf states susceptible to instability in each other's regions and prompting policy discussions about adjustments to the regional order. Such interdependencies may lead to economic and social crises across South and Southeast Asia, not least due to an overreliance on remittances sent from GCC states. In the short term, economic crises in the Gulf are likely to reduce aid and loans for reconstruction efforts in Yemen and Syria, while also changing labour markets and remittance arrangements for migrant communities from South Asia and the Middle East (Hansen et al., 2017).

Global oil prices have fallen, reducing remittances from the Middle East to South Asian countries (for example, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal). In addition, the pandemic caused a 58.44% decline in South Asian migrant workers leaving their home countries for the Gulf states in 2020, effectively staggering remittance flows vital to their economic survival. This also underscores the risks of an oil-dependent Gulf expatriate labour market that is sensitive to both oil price fluctuations and health crises (Jha et al., 2009).

The GCC countries are transitioning from an energy-dependent economy to a more diversified one, and both lower market prices and fading energy dependence are exerting pressure on the region's economies. This has driven investments in the energy sector to increase production and connect Gulf economies with Asian energy hubs. This realignment also shores up energy interdependence with Asian countries, as major importers of Gulf hydrocarbons and increasingly as investment destinations for the Gulf to secure stable, long-term oil and gas supply chains while reducing their own reliance on imports (Sim, 2023, pp. 633-652).

Nepal: Remittances are a vital factor in Nepal's economy, accounting for more than 26.6% of GDP (approximately US\$11 billion) and coming solely from GCC countries. They have sent more than 3.5 million Nepali migrants to reduce poverty, improve consumption, education, and health care services, and advance rural development. Low-skilled migrant workers from Nepal keep it dependent on migrant labour, as most of them enter the labour markets of the GCC and Malaysia. Although remittances stabilise the economy, nearly 79% (78.9%) go to daily consumption, while a meagre 2.4% goes to capital investment, thereby reducing productive growth (Bhandari, 2025).

This vulnerability is amplified in the shadow of the U.S.–Israel–Iran triad. Rising tensions threaten Gulf economic stability, collapse labour markets, and impair remittances, as seen during previous crises (Bakir, 2025, pp. 1–23). The Israel-Iran standoff of 2024 is a case study in hybrid threats that torpedo energy markets and remittances while straining Nepalese diplomacy, the South Asian lifeline. Through eastern energy imports and western labour, Gulf slowdowns affect Nepal, signalling the geopolitical coalescence among connected regions of South Asia.

Nepal's remittances-to-GDP ratio (28.4% in 2017) is higher than that of all other countries. Still, a few countries in the region make Nepal more vulnerable to shifts or downturns in host-country policies. Wage cuts and expulsions, especially, threaten key flows for poverty relief, underscoring the fragility of GCC migrants amid COVID-19 precedents. This excessive dependence distorts economies, strengthens the rupee, and distorts agriculture-like sectors. Channelling remittances toward investment is a function of sustainable growth. In this way, remittances and Middle Eastern volatility help to recast Nepal's geopolitics through the triad. Gulf crises could reduce inflows, increase inflation, deplete reserves, and unleash civil unrest, as seen in Pakistan (Munir et al., 2022, pp. 39–46).

The focus should be on diversifying in skill development, financial literacy, and job creation at home, and on ensuring Nepali stability through Gulf diplomacy, SAARC regional cooperation, and hedging against triad-induced shocks. As climate pressures expand migration, multilateral frameworks for human security need to link economic resilience with ecological resilience (Hassan et al., 2017). Ultimately, policy innovation that transforms

remittances from crutches of consumption into engines of development is crucial to prevent the multidimensional challenges posed by the triad on South Asian geopolitics.

Supply chain disruptions

The Middle East accounts for 20% of the global seaborne fertiliser trade. This level of urea increase was normal, as supplies and initial diffusers saw a 50 per cent improvement across the board during Kharif sowing in 2026, the year of the conflict. The Middle East is a good example of such geopolitical instability, where the risk of rising food insecurity in South Asia makes diversifying sources and building supply chain robustness difficult. Asia is a hub for oil-based permanent income, yet large parts of the Middle East are disrupted. It also hosts internationally important supply chains and chokepoints linking centres of production to factories and farms across many parts of Asia, which are now threatened (Biswas, 2024, pp. 67–78).

Japan, South Korea, and India are among the Asian economies dependent on oil traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. This dependence makes them highly vulnerable to Middle Eastern geopolitical events, which can trigger cascading effects across the manufacturing, transportation, and agricultural sectors. Geographically, the region is an important centre for logistics and aviation, with several major airports providing global access. Any disruption has worldwide ramifications. In addition, geostrategic instability jeopardises global energy security, with 60% of undeveloped oil reserves situated in the region (Smyrnov, 2025; pp. 582–589).

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine wars have led to greater energy dependence, fertiliser shortages, food and fuel price inflation, and oil price volatility (Mugoni et al., 2025). Geopolitical disruptions to production and distribution compound energy risks and price volatility. The inter-integrated nature of the world economy allows these obstructions to quickly spill over into energy markets and supply chains, impeding economic activity. Thus, international trade routes within the Middle East, through critical chokepoints such as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, tend to be highly unreliable and economically vulnerable for countries that rely on mineral shipments via these routes (Hermann et al., 2022).

Geopolitical pressures in the Middle East reverberate worldwide, producing a patchwork of complacency and resilience across global revolutionary trends. Being well-versed in these dynamics will equip us with tools to mitigate sharp corrections, capital flight, and higher sovereign borrowing costs stemming from geopolitical volatility, as well as the global ramifications of such events. If geopolitical events in one country snowball into global economic deflation, volatility in energy and food markets may be further exacerbated by lower inflation and a weaker growth outlook (Shah, 2025, pp. 482-489).

DISCUSSION: REGIONAL SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

Militancy and extremism

The conflict poses a risk of domestic polarisation, activating pro-Iran or anti-Western forces in South Asia, and hampering internal security in the already-plagued sectarian countries. This raises the risk of sectarian violence and regional instability, undermining state sovereignty and encouraging radicalisation (Biswas, 2024, pp. 67-78). Moreover, geopolitical risks such as tensions, wars, and sanctions exert downward pressure on energy exports from the Middle East to South Asia, exacerbating economic vulnerabilities and fueling radicalisation. The rise of extremist ideologies stemming from regional conflicts could exacerbate domestic insurgencies and transnational terrorism, destabilising South Asia. Moreover, incidents in the so-called Middle Gulf (for example, the Red Sea crisis) are likely to show how non-state actors exploit regional contestation to disrupt global trade and draw attention from remote regions (Hermann et al., 2022). Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping lanes linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have disrupted maritime trade, increasing shipping costs and transit times. It is time to reassess maritime security and reallocate resources at sea to safeguard trade routes against non-state actors. In addition, this incident underscores the fragility of maritime supply chains amid geopolitical tensions and, in particular, the Middle East's strategic role in the global energy supply chain, given its untapped oil reserves (Smyrnov, 2025, pp. 582-589).

The Israel-Iran conflict in October 2024 quickly pushed oil prices higher, but prices returned

to normal levels, highlighting economic fragility. These disruptions affect key global maritime chokepoints like the Red Sea and thus serve as a case in point for better linking local conflict to global economic impacts, enabling far more comprehensive risk analysis. Politically, the Red Sea is a graveyard for European and Middle Eastern ships that would link them to India and beyond; as a result, there has been heightened awareness of security threats to trade and energy flows. As Houthi vessels attack shipping in the Red Sea, Suez Canal traffic has been significantly reduced, with many major oil and shipping companies cutting or suspending sailings, resulting in a 36% year-over-year decline in ship transits in January 2024 (Hermann et al., 2022). Maritime traffic is routed around Africa, increasing transit times and fuel consumption for shipping companies. Such longer routes increase supply chain vulnerabilities due to prolonged delivery timelines and maritime hazards, consequently affecting global inflationary dynamics and commodity price volatility. It increases freight rates, insurance premiums, and lead times, posing a threat to global supply chain resilience. The crisis in the Red Sea caused by Houthi attacks has disrupted global shipping, resulting in rerouting likely to persist long after the conflict is resolved (Notteboom et al., 2024, pp. 1–20).

The arms race: Distant engagement

South Asian military doctrines are transforming the “Distant Engagement” technologies. The two nations have been investing 12-15% more in R&D for autonomous systems in the wake of the 2026 triad war, when missile swarms and hypersonic projectiles took centre stage. The trend indicates a regional response to emerging threats and the growing sophistication of non-state actors (Hermann et al., 2022). Global tensions, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, for example, drive countries to reevaluate their trade supply chains and defence postures. Globalisation faces new challenges, including socioeconomic protectionism, trade wars, and the emergence of economic superpowers. The crisis has required new regional supply chains and production, as the volume of goods dependency is redirected to reduce vulnerabilities in global supply chains. Similarly, the global arms race in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing drives countries to increase their

deterrents against one another and to update arms control regimes (Guo et al., 2024, pp. 178-191).

The threat posed by advanced military technologies, particularly lethal autonomous weapons, to strategic stability complicates the problem of unintended escalation and affects deterrence. The race for technological dominance, referred to as an “arms race,” is symptomatic of the geopolitical shifts and the risk of military conflict in a multipolar world. The consequences for strategic stability in volatile regions, including South Asia with respect to drones, need an analysis of deterrence and arms-race dynamics (Kweera, 2023, pp. 376-388). Continued military investments in regions such as Asia and Oceania contribute to these arms races, as countries feel the need to defend themselves to achieve strategic superiority. This trend is propelled by geopolitical fragmentation and aggressive industrial policies aimed at protecting vested interests and resources. Shifting national security concerns and international competition for critical resources and technologies fuel techno-nationalist agendas and a withdrawal from free trade (Yang et al., 2025).

Countries are building domestic production facilities and imposing export controls to secure essential components for both commercial and military purposes, thereby catalysing techno-economic decoupling. This technological nationalism, which prioritises indigenous development and control above all, has effectively tethered technological supremacy to national security and geopolitical might (Babar & Khan, 2025, pp. 68-91).

CONCLUSION

The extreme dual dependence on West Asia for energy imports and on Western remittances from the Gulf leaves South Asia highly vulnerable to further escalation of tensions among the USA, Israel, and Iran. Our paper closes this critical gap, revealing that a full closure of the Strait of Hormuz would cut off over half of India's crude imports and trigger runaway domestic inflation, massive declines in remittances, crippling disruptions to key agricultural fertiliser supplies, and perilous conditions that could destabilise the nuclear trilemma among China, India, and Pakistan. These findings suggest that South Asian states will need to rapidly shift from reactive diplomacy to actively incorporating secure supply corridors and enhanced maritime resilience while

countering the fluid axis of Eurasian alliances. However, this qualitative study has a significant limitation in its use of exploratory risk modelling against highly variable real-time geopolitical metrics. Future empirical work should employ rigorous, quantifiable methods to measure localised economic shocks and assess how military AI applications shift the sub-conventional nuclear deterrence thresholds. In the end, straddling this precarious geopolitical tightrope will require regional powers to abandon quaint, reactive, and ad hoc security strategies in favour of more deliberate, multi-pronged economic and defence buffers; otherwise, South Asia's vulnerabilities will consign it to no better fate than collateral damage in the ongoing global great-power overhaul.

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