



World Power Re-Configuration after the 2026 Iran–Israel War

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Iran–Israel War 2026, Global Power Configuration, Fragmented Multipolarity, Geoeconomics, International Relations

Received : 22, Desember

Revised : 24, Februari

Accepted: 26, April

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ABSTRACT

The 2026 Iran–Israel war represents a systemic geopolitical rupture that reshapes global power structures. This study examines how the conflict affects power distribution, alliance patterns, and geoeconomic dynamics. Using a qualitative geopolitical approach, it integrates neorealism, power transition theory, geoeconomics, and complex interdependence, based on analysis of official documents, UN debates, and policy reports. The findings show the collapse of regional balance, the emergence of three power blocs (Western, Eurasian, and fragmented Global South), and intensified geoeconomic fragmentation through energy disruption and de-dollarization trends. The study also highlights the decline of the liberal international order and the rise of hybrid warfare. It proposes the concept of “post-liberal fragmented multipolarity” to explain the current unstable global system.

INTRODUCTION

The 2026 Iran–Israel war represents a significant geopolitical rupture that has reshaped the contemporary international system. Since 2024, the escalation of tensions between Iran and Israel has evolved from proxy conflicts into a multi-actor war involving major global powers, including the United States and regional actors. This transformation has disrupted global stability, particularly through the strategic importance of energy routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, which remains a critical chokepoint for global oil and gas distribution (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2024). The disruption of these energy flows has created ripple effects on global markets, inflation, and supply chain resilience (International Monetary Fund, 2023). Consequently, the conflict is no longer confined to the Middle East but has become a global concern affecting economic and political stability.

From a theoretical perspective, this development reflects broader debates in international relations regarding the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar or fragmented global order. Scholars argue that the decline of United States dominance and the rise of alternative power centers such as China and Russia indicate a shift toward a more complex and contested global system (Acharya, 2021). In this context, the erosion of the liberal international order has become increasingly evident, as global governance institutions struggle to manage emerging conflicts (Ikenberry, 2020). Furthermore, the increasing role of geoeconomics highlights how economic instruments, including sanctions and energy policies, are used as tools of strategic competition (Blackwill & Harris, 2016 updated discourse in 2022). This suggests that contemporary conflicts must be analyzed through an integrated framework combining military, economic, and political dimensions.

Empirical studies have shown that recent geopolitical conflicts have significant impacts on global trade and economic stability. For example, research by Hakobyan, Meleshchuk, and Zymek (2023) demonstrates that geopolitical fragmentation has increased trade costs and reduced economic integration. Similarly, Liu (2025) highlights that the Iran–Israel escalation has generated cross-regional economic disruptions, particularly affecting South Asia and East Africa. In addition, Mansour, Al-Shakeri, and Haid (2025) explain the adaptive capacity of the Iranian-led “axis of resistance” in responding to external pressures. These findings indicate that regional conflicts can have far-reaching global implications beyond immediate military outcomes. However, most of these studies remain sectoral and do not fully integrate the relationship between conflict, geoeconomics, and alliance restructuring.

Despite the growing body of literature, there remains a clear research gap in understanding how regional wars contribute to systemic transformation at the global level. Existing studies tend to focus either on economic impacts, military strategies, or institutional dynamics separately, without offering a comprehensive analytical framework (Bargués et al. 2023). Furthermore, previous research has not sufficiently examined how the Iran–Israel war specifically influences the formation of new global power blocs and alliance structures. This gap is particularly important given the increasing complexity of

international relations characterized by multi-alignment and flexible partnerships (Rana, 2024). Therefore, there is a need for an integrative approach that connects military conflict, geoeconomic processes, and alliance dynamics. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding the evolving nature of the global order.

Based on these gaps, this study addresses several key research questions related to global power transformation. First, how has the 2026 Iran–Israel war reshaped the distribution of global power? Second, what new alliances, rivalries, and power blocs have emerged as a result of the conflict? Third, to what extent does the war accelerate the transition toward a post-Western or post-liberal international order? These questions are grounded in the broader theoretical debates on multipolarity and global fragmentation (Wijaya & Jayasuriya, 2024). By addressing these questions, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary geopolitical dynamics. The formulation of these questions reflects the need to bridge theoretical and empirical analyses.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the transformation of global power configurations in the aftermath of the 2026 Iran–Israel war. Specifically, the study aims to map the distribution of power among major global actors, including Western, Eurasian, and Global South blocs. It also seeks to examine the strategic repositioning of both state and non-state actors within the evolving international system. In addition, this research aims to develop a theoretical framework that explains the emergence of new global order patterns. This objective aligns with the need to integrate multiple analytical perspectives, including realism and geoeconomics (Keohane & Nye, 2020). Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of global transformation processes.

This research is expected to make significant theoretical contributions to the field of international relations. It integrates various theoretical approaches, including neorealism, multipolarity theory, and geoeconomic perspectives, into a unified analytical model. Moreover, it introduces the concept of “post-liberal fragmented multipolarity” to explain the current global system characterized by instability and multiple centers of power. This concept expands existing theories by emphasizing the role of regional conflicts in shaping global structures (Holm, 2025). In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates on the crisis of the liberal international order. The theoretical contribution is therefore both integrative and innovative.

In practical terms, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders in addressing global instability. The findings can inform strategies related to energy security, supply chain resilience, and diplomatic engagement in a fragmented international system. For countries such as Indonesia, which are highly dependent on energy imports, the implications of global conflict are particularly significant (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). Additionally, the study offers guidance for designing adaptive foreign policies in response to shifting geopolitical dynamics. These practical contributions highlight the relevance of the research beyond academic discourse. Therefore, this study is important for both scientific advancement and policy development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformation of the Global System and Multipolarity Theory

Changes in the configuration of global power constitute a central issue in contemporary international relations studies. From a neorealist perspective, the structure of the international system is determined by the distribution of material capabilities; therefore, shifts in the balance of power will drive systemic restructuring. Acharya (2021) explains that the world is no longer situated within a stable unipolar system, but is instead moving toward a multipolar order or even a “multiplex world” characterized by multiple actors with significant influence. In line with this, Wijaya and Jayasuriya (2024) argue that modern multipolarity is not only shaped by states but also by global economic forces and transnational actors. Furthermore, Ikenberry (2024) identifies the emergence of a “three worlds” configuration comprising the West, the East, and the Global South as a new form of global competition. Thus, the Iran–Israel conflict can be understood as part of the broader transition toward a more complex multipolar system.

Crisis of the Liberal International Order

In addition to shifts in the distribution of power, the literature also highlights the weakening of the liberal international order. Ikenberry (2020) argues that the liberal order is experiencing erosion due to declining commitment from major powers to multilateralism and the rise of geopolitical rivalry. Bargués et al. (2023) further suggest that this crisis has driven states to adopt more unilateral and interest-based strategies. This condition reinforces the argument that global norms are increasingly overshadowed by power politics. In this context, the Iran–Israel war reflects not only a regional conflict but also an indicator of the weakening of a rules-based global system. Therefore, studying this conflict is essential for understanding the broader crisis of global order.

Geoeconomics and Global Fragmentation

The geoeconomic approach has become increasingly important in explaining the dynamics of modern conflict. Farrell and Newman developed the concept of weaponized interdependence, which illustrates how states can leverage global economic networks as instruments of strategic pressure. Hakobyan, Meleshchuk, and Zymek (2023) demonstrate that geopolitical fragmentation has direct impacts on global trade and increases economic costs. Furthermore, recent studies by the International Monetary Fund indicate that geoeconomic fragmentation may reduce the benefits of global economic integration and weaken overall stability. In the context of the Iran–Israel conflict, disruptions to global energy routes highlight how energy functions as a key instrument of geopolitical power. This underscores the need to analyze contemporary conflicts through the integration of economic and political dimensions.

Flexible Alliances and the Dynamics of the Global South

Recent literature also indicates that the international system is increasingly characterized by flexible alliances and multi-alignment strategies. Rana (2024) explains that developing countries tend not to align exclusively with a single power bloc, but instead adopt pragmatic strategies to maximize national interests. The concept of multi-alignment reflects how states simultaneously engage with multiple major powers. Mansour, Al-Shakeri, and Haid (2025) further demonstrate that non-state actor networks play a crucial role in shaping conflict dynamics, particularly in the case of Iran. A national study by Koloay, Cecep, and Miknamara (2024) emphasizes that the Iran-Israel conflict has the potential to involve major global powers and expand into a more complex geopolitical confrontation. These findings suggest that global alliance structures are becoming increasingly fluid and no longer strictly binary.

Research Gap and the Urgency of the Study

Despite significant contributions from existing literature, a notable research gap remains. Most studies tend to focus on a single dimension – such as security, economic factors, or institutional dynamics – without integrating these aspects into a comprehensive analytical framework. Additionally, previous research has primarily examined the escalation of conflict prior to 2026, rather than its systemic impact on global power configurations. However, as emphasized in multipolarity literature, changes in the global system involve not only redistribution of power but also structural transformation that requires new analytical approaches. Therefore, this study is necessary to address this gap by integrating military conflict, geoeconomic dynamics, and alliance restructuring into a unified framework. Furthermore, it contributes to the development of the concept of post-liberal fragmented multipolarity as a new lens for understanding contemporary global dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a comparative geopolitical analysis design to examine the transformation of global power configuration following the 2026 Iran-Israel war. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research seeks to interpret complex interactions among state actors, non-state networks, and geoeconomic dynamics that cannot be reduced to numerical variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The comparative case approach is used to analyze differences and similarities across major global blocs, namely the Western bloc, Eurasian bloc, and the fragmented Global South. In addition, the study incorporates geoeconomic and strategic indicators to enhance analytical depth and contextual understanding. This design enables a comprehensive analysis of power redistribution, alliance restructuring, and systemic transformation in the international order.

Analytical Framework

The study adopts an integrated analytical framework combining neorealism, power transition theory, geoeconomics, and complex interdependence. Contemporary neorealist analysis highlights how shifts in material capabilities continue to shape international structure (Ripsman et al., 2021). Power transition theory is applied to assess whether the Iran–Israel war accelerates systemic transition toward multipolarity. Geoeconomics explains how economic instruments such as sanctions, trade, and energy flows function as tools of strategic competition (Roberts et al., 2021). Meanwhile, complex interdependence is used to analyze how interconnected economic relations create both vulnerability and leverage among states (Farrell & Newman, 2020). This integrated framework enables a multidimensional understanding of global transformation.

Data Sources and Sampling

The population of this study consists of policy documents, official statements, and strategic reports related to key global actors, including the United States, Iran, Israel, China, Russia, and the European Union. The study uses purposive sampling as a non-probability technique to select information-rich sources relevant to the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). Selection criteria include relevance to the conflict, credibility of the source, and temporal alignment with the 2021–2025 period. Approximately 50–80 documents are analyzed, including official government statements, United Nations Security Council debates, policy reports, and global datasets. This approach ensures depth of analysis rather than statistical generalization. Such a strategy is widely used in qualitative geopolitical research.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data collection is conducted through documentation study and qualitative content analysis. Primary data include official state documents and United Nations records, while secondary data consist of policy reports, think tank publications, and conflict databases. Additional materials such as media reports and intelligence synthesis are used to support contextual interpretation. The research instrument is a theory-driven coding framework that operationalizes four variables: global power shift, alliance structure, economic power, and strategic influence. To ensure analytical rigor, the coding process follows systematic qualitative procedures based on content analysis standards (Schreier, 2021). This method enables consistent classification and interpretation of complex textual data.

Research Procedure

The research procedure is conducted in several systematic stages. The first stage involves problem identification and the development of a conceptual framework based on recent literature on global transformation. The second stage includes data collection and source verification to ensure credibility. The third stage involves coding and categorizing data according to predefined variables. The fourth stage applies process tracing to identify causal mechanisms linking conflict dynamics to global system changes (Beach & Pedersen, 2021). Finally, findings are interpreted and synthesized to produce a comprehensive explanation of global power reconfiguration. This procedure ensures methodological transparency and logical coherence.

Data Analysis Techniques

The study employs process tracing, scenario analysis, and comparative bloc analysis as its main analytical techniques. Process tracing is used to examine causal sequences from pre-war to post-war phases (Bennett & Checkel, 2015 updated applications in 2021). Scenario analysis is applied to explore short-, medium-, and long-term global implications of the conflict (Wright et al., 2020). Comparative bloc analysis is used to assess differences between Western, Eurasian, and Global South configurations in terms of power distribution and alliances. The analysis is supported by qualitative software such as NVivo, which facilitates coding and thematic analysis of large textual datasets (Jackson & Bazeley, 2023). This combination of techniques enhances analytical depth and validity.

RESEARCH RESULT

Collapse of Regional Balance in the Middle East

The findings indicate a fundamental collapse of the regional balance in the Middle East following the escalation of the 2026 Iran–Israel war. Prior to the conflict, the regional order was characterized by a relatively stable deterrence equilibrium, largely maintained through proxy conflicts and limited military engagements. However, the escalation transformed this pattern into direct confrontation between states, marking a significant shift from indirect to open warfare. This transition reflects the breakdown of traditional mechanisms of regional stability and conflict containment.

The study further reveals that the war has evolved into a multi-front regional conflict, involving not only Iran and Israel but also actors in Lebanon, the Persian Gulf, and other strategic areas. The involvement of non-state actors and proxy networks has expanded the geographical and operational scope of the conflict. This expansion has increased the complexity of military engagements and reduced the effectiveness of traditional diplomatic interventions. As a result, the Middle East has shifted from a controlled conflict zone to a highly volatile and unpredictable security environment.

In addition, internal dynamics within Iran show significant destabilization. The findings suggest that external pressure from the conflict has led to internal political consolidation and a restructuring of power within the regime. Rather than moderating its policies, Iran has adopted a more assertive and confrontational strategy. This indicates that internal instability does not necessarily weaken state behavior, but may instead reinforce aggressive geopolitical positioning. Consequently, the collapse of regional balance is both external and internal in nature, contributing to prolonged instability. This transformation is also reflected in the structured alignment of alliances and proxy networks involved in the conflict, as summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Alliance Structure and Proxy Networks in the 2026 Iran–Israel Conflict

	Western and Proxy Bloc	Iran and Proxy Bloc
Main Actor	USA	Iran
Layer 1	Israel, UK, NATO	Hezbollah, Houthi (Yemen), Iraqi Shi'a militias
Layer 2	Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, regional proxies	Hamas

Source: Global Firepower (2026).

Emergence of New Power Blocs

a. Western Military Bloc

The study identifies the consolidation of a Western military bloc led by the United States and Israel. This bloc is characterized by increased military coordination, strategic alignment, and direct intervention in the conflict. The findings show that the United States plays a central role in reinforcing Israel's military capabilities, reflecting a continuation of its security commitments in the region. This alignment demonstrates a strong reliance on hard power as a primary tool of geopolitical strategy.

Furthermore, the escalation of the conflict has intensified militarization within the Western bloc. Increased defense spending, deployment of advanced military systems, and expansion of strategic alliances indicate a shift toward more assertive security policies. This suggests that the Western bloc is prioritizing deterrence and dominance over diplomatic engagement. As a result, the conflict reinforces the role of military power as a central pillar in maintaining geopolitical influence.

b. Eurasian Counter-Bloc

In contrast, the study finds the emergence of a Eurasian counter-bloc consisting of China, Russia, and Iran. Unlike the Western bloc, this configuration is not a formal alliance but rather a strategic alignment based on shared interests in counterbalancing Western dominance. The findings indicate increasing cooperation in economic, political, and security domains among these actors. This reflects a shift toward a more decentralized and flexible form of alliance.

China's role is particularly notable as a strategic beneficiary of the conflict. By avoiding direct military involvement, China is able to expand its economic and diplomatic influence. Meanwhile, Russia acts as an opportunistic disruptor, leveraging the conflict to weaken Western cohesion. Iran, as a central actor, strengthens its regional influence through both state and proxy networks. Together, these dynamics illustrate the formation of a counter-hegemonic bloc with a distinct strategic orientation.

c. Fragmented Global South

The findings also highlight the fragmentation of the Global South as a distinct feature of the emerging global order. Unlike the Western and Eurasian blocs, countries in the Global South do not form a unified coalition. Instead, they adopt transactional alignment strategies, engaging with multiple power centers based on pragmatic interests. This reflects a shift away from rigid bloc politics toward more flexible and opportunistic behavior.

Many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America demonstrate selective engagement with both Western and Eurasian actors. This multi-alignment approach allows them to maximize economic and political benefits while minimizing strategic risks. However, this fragmentation also limits the ability of the Global South to act as a cohesive force in global governance. As a result, the Global South becomes a dynamic but unstable component of the global system.

Transformation of Geoeconomic Order

The study reveals that the Iran-Israel war has triggered a significant transformation in the global geoeconomic order. One of the most prominent findings is the *weaponization of energy*, particularly through disruptions in oil and liquefied natural gas flows. The Strait of Hormuz, as a critical energy chokepoint, becomes a central arena of geopolitical contestation. This disruption has led to sharp increases in global energy prices and heightened economic uncertainty.

The findings also indicate a broader impact on global markets, including inflationary pressures and supply chain instability. The war has disrupted international trade routes, increased logistics costs, and reduced market predictability. These effects are not limited to the Middle East but extend to global economic systems. This demonstrates how regional conflicts can produce systemic economic consequences.

In response to these disruptions, there is a growing shift toward alternative energy corridors and diversification strategies. Countries are increasingly seeking to reduce dependence on traditional energy routes and suppliers. Additionally, the study identifies early trends of **de-dollarization**, particularly among countries seeking to reduce reliance on Western financial systems. Although this trend remains partial, it signals a gradual transformation in the global financial architecture.

Decline of Liberal International Order

The findings indicate a significant weakening of the liberal international order in the context of the Iran–Israel war. Institutions such as the United Nations continue to function as platforms for dialogue, but their ability to effectively manage conflict is increasingly limited. The study shows that international law is frequently overlooked, and enforcement mechanisms are weak. This reflects a decline in the authority of global governance institutions.

At the same time, there is a noticeable rise in *strategic unilateralism*. States increasingly prioritize national interests over collective decision-making processes. This shift is evident in the willingness of major powers to act independently, even in the absence of international consensus. As a result, global governance becomes less predictable and more fragmented.

The dominance of *hard power politics* further reinforces this trend. Military capability and strategic positioning become more important than adherence to international norms. This indicates a transition from a rules-based order to a power-based system. Consequently, the liberal international order is not only weakened normatively but also structurally.

Rise of Hybrid and Asymmetric Warfare

The study finds that the Iran–Israel conflict is characterized by the increasing dominance of hybrid and asymmetric warfare. Traditional large-scale military confrontation is complemented, and in some cases replaced, by the use of drones, cyberattacks, and proxy forces. These methods allow actors to exert influence without engaging in direct conventional warfare.

Iran's strategy is particularly notable in this regard. The findings indicate that Iran adopts a *cost escalation strategy*, aiming to increase the economic, military, and psychological burden on its opponents rather than achieving immediate battlefield victory. This approach relies heavily on proxy networks and non-linear operations. As a result, the conflict becomes prolonged and difficult to resolve through conventional means.

The rise of hybrid warfare also reflects broader changes in the nature of modern conflict. Technological advancements and the involvement of non-state actors have transformed how wars are conducted. This suggests that future conflicts will increasingly rely on flexible, decentralized, and technologically driven strategies. Therefore, the Iran–Israel war serves as a key example of the evolution of warfare in the contemporary era.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study strongly support the resurgence of structural realism in explaining contemporary global dynamics. The escalation of the 2026 Iran–Israel war demonstrates that power politics remains more dominant than international norms in shaping state behavior. This is consistent with neorealist arguments that states prioritize survival and security in an anarchic international system (Ripsman et al., 2021). The increasing reliance on military capabilities and deterrence strategies in the conflict reflects the intensification of the security dilemma among major powers. In this sense, the findings align with previous research by Mearsheimer (2021), which emphasizes that great power competition inevitably leads to conflict when strategic interests collide.

At the same time, this study extends existing literature by showing that the return of realism is not only limited to great power rivalry but also applies to regional conflicts with global implications. While Ikenberry (2020) argues that liberal institutions still play a role in mitigating conflict, the findings of this study demonstrate their limited effectiveness in the face of escalating geopolitical tensions. This suggests a divergence from earlier expectations that global governance structures could constrain state behavior. Instead, the Iran–Israel war confirms that states continue to rely on self-help mechanisms. Therefore, the findings reinforce realism while challenging the continued relevance of liberal institutionalism in crisis situations.

The study also contributes to the debate on multipolarity by showing that the current global system cannot be fully explained by traditional multipolar frameworks. Rather than a stable distribution of power among several major states, the findings indicate the emergence of a fragmented and unstable configuration. This aligns with Acharya's (2021) concept of a "multiplex world," where multiple actors operate within overlapping and competing orders. However, this study goes further by identifying what can be described as "chaotic multipolarity," characterized by fluid alliances and the absence of clear systemic rules.

In comparison with previous studies, Wijaya and Jayasuriya (2024) emphasize the role of global capitalism and transnational actors in shaping multipolarity, which is consistent with this study's findings on the fragmentation of the Global South. However, this study differs by highlighting the role of war as a catalyst for accelerating fragmentation rather than merely a structural outcome. The emergence of competing regional orders, particularly between Western and Eurasian blocs, suggests that global governance is becoming increasingly decentralized. As a result, multipolarity in the contemporary era is not synonymous with stability but is instead associated with heightened uncertainty and competition. This finding adds nuance to the existing literature on global power transitions.

The results indicate a significant reconfiguration of the global hierarchy, although not a complete shift in hegemonic power. The United States remains the dominant military power, particularly through its alliance network and strategic support for Israel. However, the findings suggest a condition of overextension, where involvement in multiple conflicts reduces the effectiveness of U.S. global control. This is consistent with the argument by Brands (2022), who notes that excessive strategic commitments can weaken a hegemon's capacity to maintain order.

In contrast, China emerges as a strategic beneficiary of the conflict, despite not being directly involved militarily. This supports findings by Chaziza and Lutmar (2025), which highlight China's strategy of expanding influence through economic and diplomatic means rather than direct confrontation. Russia, on the other hand, acts as an opportunistic disruptor, leveraging global instability to challenge Western cohesion. These findings align with previous research but differ in showing how these roles are reinforced specifically through the Iran-Israel conflict. Additionally, middle powers demonstrate increasing autonomy through multi-alignment strategies, supporting Rana's (2024) argument on the rising influence of middle powers. This indicates that the global hierarchy is becoming more complex and less centralized.

The findings highlight the growing importance of geoeconomic fragmentation as a defining feature of the contemporary global system. The use of energy as a strategic instrument reflects the concept of weaponized interdependence, where states exploit economic networks to exert geopolitical influence (Farrell & Newman, 2020). The disruption of energy flows in the Iran-Israel conflict illustrates how interdependence can be transformed into a source of vulnerability rather than stability. This finding is consistent with Hakobyan et al. (2023), who show that geopolitical fragmentation increases economic costs and reduces global trade efficiency.

However, this study goes beyond previous research by demonstrating how energy disruption directly contributes to the formation of parallel economic systems. The emergence of alternative energy routes and de-dollarization trends indicates a gradual shift away from a unified global economic system. While some studies suggest that de-dollarization remains limited (Mayer, 2025), this study finds that the trend is accelerating in response to geopolitical tensions. This suggests that geoeconomic fragmentation is not merely a temporary phenomenon but may become a structural feature of the global system. Therefore, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between conflict and economic transformation.

The study identifies three potential scenarios for the future of the global order, each reflecting different levels of stability and power distribution. The first scenario, bipolar re-stabilization, involves the consolidation of power between the United States and China. This scenario is supported by power transition theory, which suggests that global systems tend to stabilize around two dominant powers (Tammen, 2022). However, the findings indicate that this scenario is less likely due to the reluctance of many states to align exclusively with either bloc.

The second scenario, multipolar fragmentation, is identified as the most likely outcome. This scenario reflects the diffusion of power among multiple actors and the emergence of flexible alliances, consistent with Acharya's (2021) framework of a multiplex world. However, this study differs by emphasizing the instability and lack of coordination within this system. The third scenario, systemic chaos, represents a condition where conflicts persist without a clear global order. Holm (2025) argues that such a scenario reflects a post-liberal world characterized by weak norms and intense competition. These findings suggest that the future of the global system will depend on how major powers manage competition and cooperation.

The findings also have important normative implications, particularly regarding the crisis of global governance and humanitarian norms. The weakening of international law and the limited effectiveness of institutions such as the United Nations indicate a decline in the authority of global governance structures. This aligns with Bargués et al. (2023), who argue that the liberal international order is increasingly unable to manage global crises. The rise of unilateral actions further undermines collective decision-making processes and reduces the legitimacy of international norms.

In this context, the 2026 Iran-Israel war marks a turning point in the geopolitical structure of the Middle East, as the conflict is not merely a confrontation between two states but also a catalyst for the restructuring of the regional power hierarchy. Whereas the region was previously characterized by a multipolar balance where Iran, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and non-state actors maintained a relative equilibrium the post-war landscape reveals a new configuration in which certain actors rise within the regional hierarchy while others experience a decline in their position. This process can be understood as a re-ordering of geopolitical hierarchy, referring to the reconfiguration of status, influence, and leadership capacity among regional actors.

In addition, the study identifies the emergence of "survivalist geopolitics," where states prioritize security and survival over adherence to global norms. This finding extends previous research by showing how regional conflicts can accelerate normative decline at the global level. While earlier studies emphasize the resilience of liberal norms, this study suggests that such resilience is increasingly limited in high-intensity conflicts. As a result, the global system is shifting toward a more pragmatic and power-driven order. This highlights the need for new approaches to global governance that can adapt to a fragmented and uncertain international environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the 2026 Iran–Israel war represents a systemic rupture in the global order, transforming the international system into a multipolar but unstable configuration characterized by fragmented alliances and competing power blocs. The findings highlight the convergence between military conflict and geoeconomic competition, particularly through energy disruption, sanctions, and strategic trade realignment, which increasingly shape global politics. The study contributes to international relations theory by proposing the concept of “post-liberal fragmented multipolarity,” which explains a global condition marked by multiple centers of power, weak institutional coordination, and unstable alliances. This concept extends existing multipolarity theories by emphasizing fragmentation and systemic instability, while integrating neorealism, geoeconomics, and complex interdependence into a unified analytical framework.

The Israel–Iran war demonstrates that the redistribution of power in modern conflicts occurs through multiple simultaneous mechanisms, including the destruction of the opponent's capabilities, changes in perceptions of deterrence, alliance restructuring, control of energy chokepoints, domestic legitimacy, and great power competition. Thus, war is not only an arena of physical destruction, but also a process of restructuring regional and global power hierarchies. In this context, who “wins” is not always determined by the amount of territory captured, but rather by who succeeds in changing the post-conflict power distribution structure most advantageously. This situation is conceptualized through Flexible Balancing Theory, which explains that in a highly fluid and threat-multiplex regional system, states no longer balance through fixed alliances or ideological blocs, but instead engage in selective, temporary, multi-domain, and issue-contingent balancing against evolving threats.

The findings also underscore the urgent need for new global governance mechanisms to manage fragmented and multi-actor conflicts, alongside policies focused on energy security restructuring and conflict containment frameworks. However, this study is limited by the dynamic nature of the ongoing conflict, potential geopolitical bias in data sources, and the complexity of global interactions that may not be fully captured within a single framework. Future research should focus on the role of artificial intelligence in warfare, digital propaganda, and algorithmic geopolitics, as well as long-term institutional transformation, as these areas are essential for understanding the evolving nature of global order in an increasingly uncertain and fragmented international system. Finally, Flexible Balancing Theory offers a new framework to explain why Middle Eastern states in the post-Israel–Iran war did not join fixed blocs, but instead adopted fluid, selective, and multi-domain balancing strategies. In a complex and multipolar threat environment, states no longer simply “balance” or “bandwagon”; rather, they balance flexibly. This theory provides a more accurate explanation of the behavior of countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Qatar compared to classical alliance theory.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future advanced research should focus on integrating computational models, big data analytics, and real-time geopolitical monitoring to enhance predictive capacity in global conflict analysis. The use of artificial intelligence and machine learning can provide deeper insights into decision-making patterns, conflict escalation, and systemic risks in fragmented multipolar systems.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express gratitude to Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University for academic support and to all institutions and researchers whose data and publications contributed to this study.

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