

**ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE REPORT**



**THE DAY AFTER**

**US-ISRAEL  
WAR  
AGAINST  
IRAN**

**07 April 2026**



**ROUND TABLE SPONSOR**

Brigadier Qasim Kayani

Director, Keystone Capstone and Pinnacle Programmes Branch

**REPORT COMPILED BY**

Ms Rafia Ashar

Assistant Research Associate

Keystone Capstone and Pinnacle Programmes Branch

**Disclaimer**

The discussions and report are obligatory to 'Chatham House Rules', therefore, cannot be quoted. The statements, facts and opinions by speakers do not imply the official policy of National Defence University.

**Published by**

Keystone Capstone and Pinnacle Programmes Branch,  
Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis,  
National Defence University, Islamabad

# *Conversations*



@Foothills

## ROUNDTABLE OVERVIEW

The Roundtable (RT) discussion on “The Day After: US-Israel War against Iran - Implications for the Globe, Region, and Pakistan” was held on Tuesday, 7th April 2026 by the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research, and Analysis (ISSRA) at the National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad. The event convened a distinguished group of participants drawn from diverse professional backgrounds, including senior policymakers, diplomats, military officials, academicians, strategic analysts, economists, senior journalists, and representatives from civil society.

The discussion sought to critically examine the multi-dimensional implications of the US-Israel war against Iran and to provide a comprehensive assessment of the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape. It fostered a candid and informed dialogue among experts, enabling the exchange of nuanced perspectives on the conflict while identifying both the challenges and potential strategic opportunities for Pakistan.

To complement the qualitative depth of the expert-led dialogue, a structured questionnaire was administered to participants to capture measurable trends and collective views on the crisis. This report integrates the outcomes of the survey polls with a summary of the proceedings and an overall strategic assessment.

The deliberations were organised around four key questions:

1. What were the underlying reasons for the US-Israel nexus to initiate this war against Iran?
2. More than one month into the conflict, is the US-Israel nexus achieving its stated objectives, or has the situation developed otherwise? (Who currently holds the upper hand?)
3. What will “The Day After” (post-ceasefire scenario) look like?
4. What are the implications for Pakistan, and how effectively has Pakistan navigated the evolving crisis so far?

Given the strategic importance of the topic amid an ongoing conflict, this report captures areas of broad consensus as well as points of divergence, in accordance with the Chatham House Rule.

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Sr. No	Names	Designation
<b>Chair</b>		
1.	Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad	DG ISSRA
<b>Speakers</b>		
2.	Mr Haroon Sharif	Former Minister of State & Chairman Board of Investment
3.	Ms Nasim Zehra	National Security Expert
4.	Rear Admiral Javaid Iqbal Khan	President NIMA (National Institute for Maritime Affairs)
5.	Mr Iftikhar Firdous	Founder & Editor of Khorasan Diary
6.	Mr Rahman Azhar	Broadcast Journalist & Lawyer
7.	Amb Naela Chohan	Former Diplomat
8.	Dr Mariam Fatima	International Affairs Expert
9.	Mr Majid	Member National Security Division (NSD)
10.	Mr Mushahid Hussain Syed	Former Senator & Cabinet Minister
11.	Amb Ashraf Jehangir Qazi	Former Diplomat
12.	Mr Ather Imran Nawaz	Chief Executive Officer & Director of Sybrid Private Ltd
13.	Mr Kashif Mateen Ansari	CEO, Sachal Energy Development Ltd
14.	Vice Admiral Khan Hasham Bin Siddique	Former Diplomat & Military Person
15.	Brig Rehan Mushtaq	Former Military Person
16.	Ahmed Hayat Lak	Managing Director, Oil & Gas Development Authority (OGDCL)
17.	Amb Asif Durrani	Former Diplomat
18.	Lt Gen Aamir Riaz	Former President National Defence University (NDU)

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*The RT deliberations provide a consolidated assessment of the evolving conflict, its strategic implications for Pakistan and policy guidelines for stakeholders. The key findings are:-*

### **Underlying Reasons for the War**

- The conflict is driven by overlapping strategic, ideological, civilizational, and economic motives.
- The war reflects broader great-power competition (choke energy supplies and eliminate China's support base), multipolar transition and erosion of the rule-based international order.
- Iran's independent posture challenges US-Israeli dominance in the region; Israel seeks neutralisation of Iran.
- Control of Strait of Hormuz and energy supply chains remains a central economic and strategic driver.

### **More than One Month into the Conflict, Who Holds the Upper Hand?**

- The conflict has entered a likely strategic stalemate, with no decisive victory for either side.
- Iran has gained leverage through asymmetric war, particularly by disrupting Strait of Hormuz.
- US-Israel objectives remain largely unmet despite limited tactical gains.
- The expansion of the conflict into military, tech, info, and eco domains has made outcomes more complex and less decisive, while simultaneously increasing costs for all actors involved.

### **Post-ceasefire Scenario**

- Any ceasefire is likely to be fragile and may evolve into a prolonged low-intensity conflict rather than a stable peace.
- The Strait of Hormuz is likely to remain central in shaping a delicate strategic equilibrium among the actors.
- The Middle East security architecture and the broader global order may shift towards multipolarity, with weakening Western cohesion.
- The post-war landscape is likely to be characterised by middle powers, continued global eco disruption, and persistent socio-economic internal pressures within the region and Iran.

### **Implications for Pakistan**

- The crisis presents both risks and opportunities for Pakistan to enhance its regional role while managing complex diplomatic balancing.
- With possible erosion of US global hegemony as outcome of war, it is likely to reinforce Pakistan's strategic alignment with China with functional relations with US.
- Need to re-think war fighting strategy with reliance on tech-driven asymmetric warfare.
- Necessitates domestic resilience in energy, economy, and food security for internal stability.
- Stress on Sectarian cohesion and possible spill over of migrants from Iran.

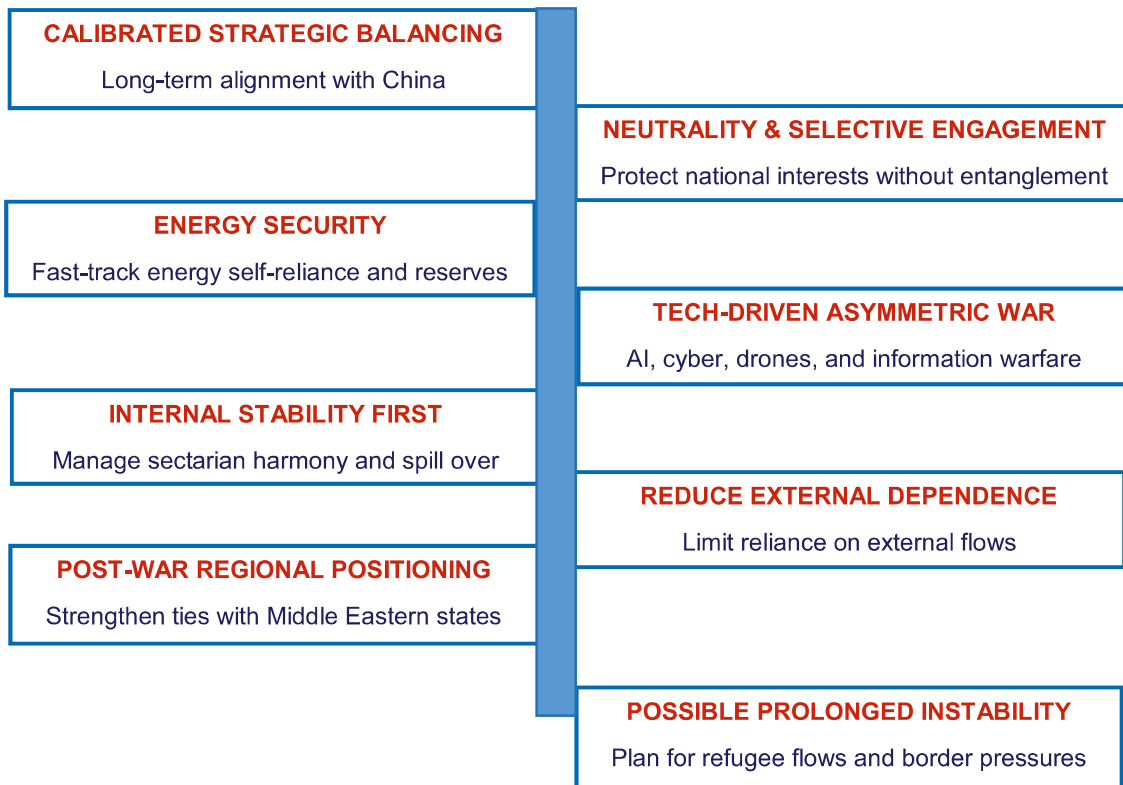
## Outcome of Survey Polls

1	CONFLICT OWNERSHIP & STRATEGIC DRIVERS	2	WAR OBJECTIVES VS OUTCOMES	3	CONFLICT TRAJECTORY & ESCALATION	4	PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC POSTURE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>47% view the war as jointly controlled by US–Israel</li> <li>41% see it as Israel-led with US support</li> <li>58.8% identify geopolitical drivers (energy routes, chokepoints, China factor)</li> <li>41.2% highlight ideological motives (Greater Israel narrative)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>47.1% identify regime change as the primary objective</li> <li>23.5% each point to military degradation and Hormuz control</li> <li>58.8% describe outcomes as a “mixed bag”</li> <li>29.4% view the war as not very successful</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>47.1% expect termination before June 2026</li> <li>23.5% remain uncertain</li> <li>17.7% foresee prolonged conflict</li> <li>0% expect US boots on the ground</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>58.8% favour neutrality</li> <li>41.2% support mediation/facilitation</li> <li>58.8% support wartime retaliation logic</li> <li>35.3% oppose closure of Strait of Hormuz</li> </ul>
	→ Indicates a structurally driven conflict shaped by power politics and strategic competition		→ Reflects a clear gap between strategic intent and actual outcomes		→ Suggests a contained but uncertain conflict with potential for prolongation		→ Highlights a cautious, balanced approach combining neutrality with selective engagement

**→ OVERALL TREND SIGNAL ←**

→ Inconclusive war + resilient Iran + constrained US–Israel success + cautious Pakistani balancing

## Policy Guidelines



## SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

### *Underlying Reasons for the US-Israel Nexus to Initiate the War against Iran*

*A range of perspectives emerged from the expert panel discussion; speakers approached the issue from different angles and their insights collectively point toward several recurring themes. The following key themes have been identified:*

- **Israel's Ideological, Territorial, Religious and Civilizational Objectives:** Israel's motivations are rooted in ideological imperatives, anchored in “Greater Israel” framework to expand and neutralise regional threats. A central aim is to systematically decimate Iran's military capabilities, strategic depth, and regional influence to a level where it ceases to pose a credible threat for decades. US benefiting from controlled instability, has been drawn into the conflict through its deep strategic alignment with Israel.
- **Control of Energy Chokepoints and Global Supply Chains:** The Strait of Hormuz forms a critical chokepoint, carrying approximately 20-25% of global oil and LNG flows, nearly 85% of which are destined for Asian markets. The confrontation also extends beyond crude oil to vital supply chains involving LNG, helium, fertilizers, and other strategic commodities. Through targeting Iran, the US-Israel nexus aims to assert control over global energy routes and reshape important segments of the international economic architecture.
- **Multipolar Transition, Erosion of Order and Long-Term Strategic Design:** The conflict reflects a deeper transformation towards complex multipolar system, transiting from proxy conflicts to direct confrontations. It underscores a growing erosion of international law/norms, normalisation of pre-emptive strikes, publicly acknowledging regime change and open discussions on territorial reconfiguration. The instability itself functions as a strategic tool for US, exercised through control of critical assets, disruption of competitors, use of proxies, narratives, and ideological leverage.
- **Contest for Global Hegemony:** The conflict is fundamentally rooted in intensifying great power competition to reshape the balance of power. It appears to be a continuation of the dynamics observed during Russia-Ukraine War, reflecting a broader pattern of strategic confrontation. At its core, the objective seems to disrupt the emerging alignment of Russia-China-Iran to prevent consolidation across the Eurasian landmass.
- **Iran as an Independent Challenger to US-Israel Hegemony:** The apparent reason for US-Israel war appears to neutralise Iran, having world's 2nd largest oil and 3rd largest gas reserves, continues to exist as an independent force challenging their supremacy in the Middle East. Along with Palestine, it remains the last major resistance to the establishment of a new Middle East order in which Israel is fully normalised, recognized and integrated.

## *Is the US-Israel Nexus Achieving Its Objectives or Otherwise? (Who Has the Upper Hand?)*

*Under this theme, the panel offered multi-layered analysis of the evolving military, economic, technological, and geopolitical dimensions of the conflict.*

- **Strategic Stalemate and the illusion of Quick Victory:** US-Israel nexus finds itself in a clear strategic stalemate. The expectation of a swift administration change or decisive military success has failed to materialise, revealing fundamental miscalculations in planning and a profound underestimation of the war's complexity.
- **Iran's Escalation Dominance and Asymmetric Leverage:** Despite lacking matching conventional military, Iran displayed upper hand in terms of escalation dynamics. Operating from a position of absolute commitment and zero intention of retreat, Iran has been able to impose disproportionate costs and inflict significant damages on stronger opponents, has emerged as a decisive asymmetric advantage.
- **Structural Limitations of US Grand Strategy:** This war appears to be part of US' larger design to disrupt China's rise & strategic partnerships, projecting that china cannot reliably protect its allies. Despite all these endeavours, there appears to be increasing acknowledgement in US' strategic community that full containment of China is no longer feasible. The conflict thus exposes the structural limitations of US grand strategy, both in the Iranian context and in the wider contest for global primacy.
- **Israel's Selective Gains and Enduring Strategic Shortfalls:** Israel has secured certain expansionist and strategic objectives in the region, most notably in Syria. Nevertheless, it has failed to achieve decisive dominance over Iran.
- **The Transformation of Modern Warfare and Diffused Outcomes:** The battlefield has expanded far beyond conventional military domains with enhanced reliance on AI, cyber warfare, drones and info-ops. This evolution has enabled relatively weaker states to mount asymmetric challenges against superior powers; outcomes have diffused and difficult to measure success, rendering the war significantly more prolonged and complex.
- **Internal Dynamics in Iran:** Iran seems to be facing ideological and societal pressure, with declining support for the ruling clergy, giving rise to sporadic regime-change movements. However, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other structures remain largely intact, indicating that any meaningful internal transformation may be gradual and slow.
- **Economic Pressures and Global Spillover Effects:** On the economic front, the war has produced sharp global spill overs: oil prices have surged, inflationary pressures have intensified, and the probability of a worldwide recession has risen dramatically from approximately 5% to 30-33% showing severe economic fallout that is likely to affect all actors.

### *What would “The Day After” (post ceasefire) look like?*

*In examining the likely post-ceasefire scenario, the panel analysed how the regional and global landscape may evolve once active hostilities subside. The discussion highlighted several possible trajectories shaped by geopolitical, economic, and security considerations.*

- **Fragile Ceasefire and Prolonged Low-Intensity Conflict:** The fragile ceasefire may not ensure lasting stability resulting into a strong probability of turning into a prolonged low-intensity conflict. A sustainable resolution appears impracticable without the establishment of a structured architecture of engagement with Iran; in its absence, any ceasefire may remain inherently fragile and temporary.
- **Centrality of Geography and Strategic Chokepoints:** The Strait of Hormuz, rather than enabling outright dominance, may produce a fragile strategic equilibrium being vital for both sides. For Iran, it is an existential lifeline tied to survival and strategic reserves, while the US views it through a national security lens to assert dominance in the region; consequently, Iran is unlikely to concede control without significant costs, making any durable settlement complex and dependent on delicate negotiation.
- **Remaking of the Middle East Security Architecture:** Post-ceasefire period is expected to signify the role of key middle powers (Turkey, Egypt, KSA, Pakistan) leading the regional politics with support from China and Russia. The emerging order may evolve along two trajectories: one reinforcing US-led dominance with dependent regional structures, and the other moving toward a multipolar regional architecture driven by middle powers. The continued turbulence may also trigger internal ideological and economic pressures, potentially accelerating a reset of the regional system.
- **China's Irreversible Strategic Ascendancy:** The conflict is expected to accelerate China's emergence as a pre-eminent energy superpower and the principal diplomatic protector for states across the Global South, allowing to expand its influence without direct confrontation. This rise is widely viewed as irreversible, supported by internal cohesion and doctrines like “One China”. Through sustained investments in renewable energy technologies and diversified alternative supply routes, China has substantially reduced its strategic vulnerabilities, thereby strengthening its overall post-war geopolitical position.
- **Erosion of Global Governance and the Rules-Based Order:** The post-ceasefire era is likely to witness further erosion of UN's role. The breakdown of the rule-based order implies that traditional understandings of geography and power are no longer applicable. Rather than emerging as a neutral, the new global system will largely reflect strategic designs already set by major powers, prioritising spheres of influence, transactional alignments, and raw power realities over multilateral principles.

*What will be the Implications for Pakistan and an assessment of how effectively it has navigated the Evolving Crisis so far?*

*In evaluating the implications of the conflict for Pakistan, the panel examined the challenges and opportunities emerging from the evolving regional environment. The discussion also assessed how effectively Pakistan has navigated this complex situation so far.*

- **Opportunities for Strategic and Economic Positioning:** The ongoing conflict presents Pakistan with a significant strategic opportunity. Decisions taken during the current phase will be decisive in shaping Pakistan's long-term positioning within the new regional order. There is substantial potential to build key economic hubs such as Gawadar Port and Karachi to reclaim broader regional importance.
- **Diplomatic Balancing and Strategic Positioning:** Given the existing tensions and divergent alignments, maintaining balance between Iran & GCC countries may be increasingly complex necessitating nuanced and careful diplomatic maneuvering. Pakistan must continue to maintain functional relations with the US, yet it cannot rely solely on a policy of equidistant balancing, as US does not accept neutral balancing and will eventually press for clearer alignment. Pakistan's long-term strategic calculus must remain anchored in its partnership with China, which stands as the only credible and reliable major-power option; Pakistan cannot afford to compromise this foundational relationship, which is indispensable for both national security and sustained development.
- **Economic Vulnerability and Macroeconomic Pressures:** Pakistan's external economic position is expected to deteriorate in the post-war period. Rising global oil prices will impose a substantial additional burden on the import bill estimated at approximately \$1.5 billion at current levels, with the potential for further escalation. Concurrently, remittances are projected to decline by 10-15% due to economic slowdowns in host countries, exerting severe pressure on foreign exchange reserves. These external pressures may translate into sharp domestic consequences: poverty levels could increase by at least 30%, unemployment is likely to rise, and the annual influx of approximately 4 million new graduates into the labour market will face severely constrained job creation as economic growth slows to around 3%.
- **Energy Security and Structural Dependence:** Pakistan faces critical energy security challenges, given its heavy reliance on imported fuels and vulnerable maritime routes. This structural dependence significantly heightens Pakistan's exposure to geopolitical disruptions, making it imperative to diversify energy imports, renewed consideration of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and strategically develop Gawadar as an energy transit hub to enhance long-term resilience and security. Achieving energy self-reliance within the next 5 to 6 years will require accelerated domestic exploration, stronger storage capacity, and reduced external dependence.

- **Food Security and Supply Chain Risks:** Food security is likely to emerge as a major challenge for Pakistan in the post-war period. Increase in fertilizer prices and disruptions to global supply chains could significantly impact agricultural output and threaten long-term sustainability. Pakistan's heavy dependence on international trade routes and imported agricultural inputs leaves it highly exposed to external shocks, thereby underscoring the urgent necessity for supply diversification and the systematic development of domestic resilience mechanisms.
- **Technological and Strategic Adaptation:** Pakistan must prioritise the development of asymmetric capabilities, with particular emphasis on advanced technology, recognising that it cannot compete directly with major powers and must instead cultivate niche areas of comparative strength. This requires a fundamental rethinking of national structures, procurement systems, and overall strategic orientation to align with rapidly evolving technological and geopolitical realities.
- **Information Warfare and Narrative Challenges:** The role of media, fake news, and AI-generated narratives has become increasingly critical in shaping public perception and influencing the course of modern conflicts. Pakistan must proactively prepare for this new information warfare environment by developing robust capabilities in information management, narrative control, and strategic communication. Such preparedness is essential not only for managing domestic public opinion but also for effectively countering external disinformation campaigns in future crises.

# INTEGRATED STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

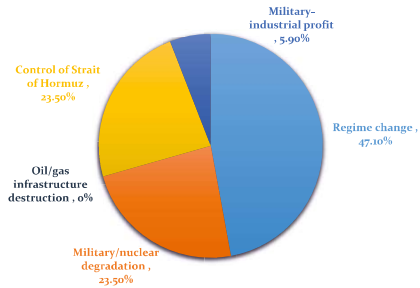
## Situation Assessment: Evolving Regional Conflict Environment

These findings are grounded in a quantitative analysis of questionnaire responses collected from participants (n=17), capturing structured perceptions across several key themes: the ownership and control of the war; the underlying reasons behind the US-Israel nexus in initiating the conflict; the core war objectives; the extent to which these objectives have been achieved; the anticipated timeline for conflict termination; the legitimacy of Iran's actions regarding the Strait of Hormuz and Pakistan's strategic response to the evolving crisis. The aggregation of these responses provides a data-driven empirical foundation, enabling systematic trend identification and informed strategic assessment within this briefing.

PART: 1 - Nature and Control of the War	PART: 2 - Underlying Drivers behind the US-Israel nexus																
<p><b>Expert Panel: Whose war is it, who is controlling it?</b></p> <table border="1" style="margin-top: 10px; width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <caption>War Control Perceptions</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Israeli War supported by US</td> <td>41.20%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>US War supported by Israel</td> <td>11.80%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Joint War (Both Control)</td> <td>47.10%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	Israeli War supported by US	41.20%	US War supported by Israel	11.80%	Joint War (Both Control)	47.10%	<p><b>Expert Panel: What are the reasons for US-Israel Nexus for initiating the recent War against Iran?</b></p> <table border="1" style="margin-top: 10px; width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <caption>Reasons for US-Israel Nexus</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Geopolitical (hegemony, oil, markets)</td> <td>58.80%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ideological (Greater Israel)</td> <td>41.20%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>US domestic politics</td> <td>5.90%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	Geopolitical (hegemony, oil, markets)	58.80%	Ideological (Greater Israel)	41.20%	US domestic politics	5.90%
Category	Percentage																
Israeli War supported by US	41.20%																
US War supported by Israel	11.80%																
Joint War (Both Control)	47.10%																
Category	Percentage																
Geopolitical (hegemony, oil, markets)	58.80%																
Ideological (Greater Israel)	41.20%																
US domestic politics	5.90%																
Categories Explained	Categories Explained																
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Israeli War supported by the US:</b> Israel as primary driver, with US backing diplomatically, militarily &amp; politically</li> <li><b>US War supported by Israel (US controls it):</b> US as principal actor shaping and directing the conflict</li> <li><b>Joint War (Shared Control):</b> U.S and Israel jointly control the war from initiation to termination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Ideological Drivers (Greater Israel Project):</b> ideological ambitions aimed at regional dominance and neutralizing Iran as a core resistance actor</li> <li><b>Geopolitical and Economic Drivers:</b> war as part of a broader strategy to sustain global hegemony and controlling critical energy routes influencing global financial systems, reshaping Middle East's security architecture and indirectly constraining China's rise</li> <li><b>US Domestic Political Factors:</b> leadership pressures, reputational concerns, and distractions linked to domestic controversies</li> </ul>																
Key Trend	Critical Insight																
<p><i>The responses show no single dominant narrative, but a slight tilt toward shared control. A substantial proportion still sees Israel as the primary initiator and only a small fraction perceives the US as the sole controlling actor. Participants largely perceive this as a collaborative US-Israel strategic project, rather than a unilateral war.</i></p>	<p><i>The responses show clear dominance of geopolitical explanations suggesting that the conflict is primarily viewed through the lens of <b>global power competition</b>. A substantial proportion attributes the war to ideological drivers whereas only a very small fraction links the conflict to US domestic political factors. The war is primarily understood as <b>power politics and global control</b>, with ideology as a secondary driver.</i></p>																

### PART: 3 - Strategic Objectives of the War

**Expert Panel:** What are the war objectives of US-Israel Nexus?



#### Categories Explained

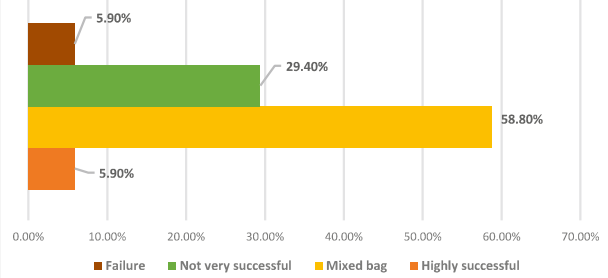
- **Regime Change:** intent to alter the current Iranian regime and align with Western and Israeli strategic interests
- **Degradation of Iran's Military/Nuclear Capability:** weakening Iran's defence capacity, including its military and nuclear potential
- **Destruction of regional oil & gas infrastructure:** Degradation of oil & gas supply infrastructure
- **Control of the Strait of Hormuz:** controlling the Strait of Hormuz to influence global oil and gas supply chains
- **Military-Industrial Profit Motive:** profitability of the US military-industrial complex

#### Key Trend

The responses indicate a clear dominance of regime change objective suggesting the conflict largely driven by long-term political restructuring. Strategic aims such as weakening Iran's capabilities and controlling the Strait of Hormuz highlight the importance of security and energy leverage. Economic motives remain secondary, while direct destruction of energy infrastructure is not seen as a priority. Participants view the war as **political (regime change) + strategic (Hormuz control)** rather than purely economic destruction.

### PART: 4 - Assessment of War Progress and Outcomes

**Expert Panel:** How far is the US-Israel Nexus successful in achieving its objectives in war against Iran, so far?



#### Categories Explained

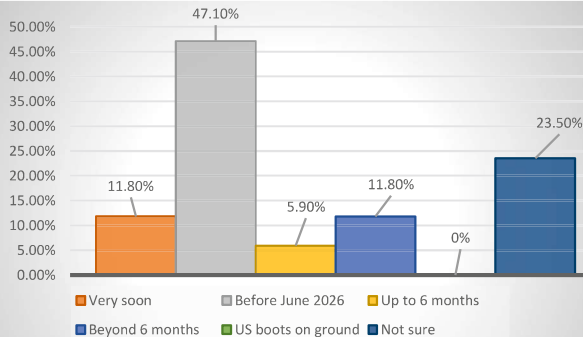
- **Highly successful:** largely successful, with key objectives being achieved
- **Mixed Bag:** mixed outcomes, limited gains exist but no decisive success has been secured.
- **Not very successful:** war has not been very successful, with most objectives remaining unfulfilled.
- **Failure:** war as a failure, hasn't delivered intended outcomes and may have produced negative consequences.

#### Key Trend

The responses suggest that the war outcomes are largely inconclusive, with a majority viewing the situation as a mixed bag. A significant share considers the effort not very successful, while only a small fraction sees it as either highly successful or a failure, indicating overall ambiguity rather than clear victory or defeat. There is **no consensus of victory**. The dominant view is **uncertainty and partial success**.

### PART: 5 - Conflict Trajectory and Termination Scenarios

**Expert Panel:** When is this episode of US-Israel War on Iran likely to terminate?



#### Categories Explained

- **Very soon (before 30 April 2026):** end very soon, indicating expectations of rapid de-escalation.
- **Not too soon but before (30 June 2026):** termination in the near term but not immediately
- **Will be prolonged up to six months (30 September):** conflict will extend moderately
- **Will go beyond six months (beyond 30 September 2026):** prolonged conflict due to unresolved complexities.
- **US boots on ground:** deployment of US ground forces
- **Not very sure:** uncertainty, ambiguity and unpredictability regarding the timeline of the war.

**Bottom Line:**

The responses show **no clear consensus on the timeline**, with the largest share expecting the conflict to end before June 2026, while others anticipate either quick resolution or prolonged continuation. A significant portion remains uncertain, reflecting ambiguity in predicting outcomes. Notably, no respondents expect US boots on the ground, suggesting belief in containment without full-scale escalation. Participants expect a **limited-duration conflict**, but uncertainty remains high.

**PART: 6 - Regional escalation and strategic implications**

**Expert Panel:** Is Iran justified in closing the Strait of Hormuz and attacking civil/ military targets in the Gulf States?



**Categories Explained**

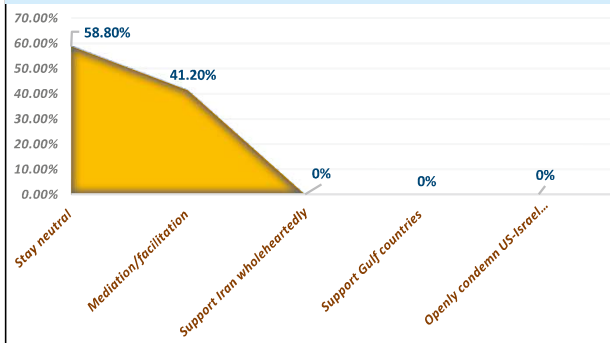
- **Yes (All is fair in war):** Iran is justified in taking any necessary action in a war setting
- **Should only hit military targets:** actions should be limited to military targets and avoid civilian harm.
- **Should not close Strait of Hormuz:** closing the Strait of Hormuz, highlighting the broader economic and global risks

**Critical Insight**

The responses reflect a clear leaning toward permissive wartime conduct, with a majority supporting the view that all actions are justified in war. However, a notable segment opposes closing the Strait of Hormuz, while only a small minority advocates limiting actions strictly to military targets. Participants are **divided but slightly pro-Iran's strategic response**, especially in wartime logic.

**PART: 7 - Implications for Pakistan and Strategic Response**

**Expert Panel:** How should Pakistan navigate this crisis?



**Categories Explained**

- **Stay neutral:** avoiding alignment with any side in a complex conflict environment.
- **Mediation/facilitation:** active diplomatic role/engage in mediation and facilitate dialogue
- **Other options:** assertive or alignment-based approaches, such as openly backing one side or taking a confrontational policy position.

**Key Finding**

The responses show a **clear preference for strategic neutrality**, with a majority favouring not taking sides in the conflict. A significant portion supports an active diplomatic role through mediation and facilitation. There is no room for more assertive or alignment-based options, reflecting a cautious and balanced policy stance.

## TREND SUMMARY- CRITICAL INDICATORS AT A GLANCE

**1**

### CONFLICT OWNERSHIP & STRATEGIC DRIVERS

- 47% view the war as **jointly controlled by US–Israel**
- 41% see it as **Israel-led with US support**
- 58.8% identify **geopolitical drivers** (energy routes, chokepoints, China factor)
- 41.2% highlight **ideological motives** (Greater Israel narrative)

→ Indicates a structurally driven conflict shaped by power politics and strategic competition

**2**

### WAR OBJECTIVES VS OUTCOMES

- 47.1% identify **regime change** as the primary objective
- 23.5% each point to **military degradation** and **Hormuz control**
- 58.8% describe outcomes as a **“mixed bag”**
- 29.4% view the war as not very successful

→ Reflects a clear gap between strategic intent and actual outcomes

**3**

### CONFLICT TRAJECTORY & ESCALATION

- 47.1% expect **termination before June 2026**
- 23.5% remain **uncertain**
- 17.7% foresee **prolonged** conflict
- 0% expect **US boots on the ground**

→ Suggests a contained but uncertain conflict with potential for prolongation

**4**

### PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC POSTURE

- 58.8% favour **neutrality**
- 41.2% support **mediation/facilitation**
- 58.8% support **wartime retaliation logic**
- 35.3% oppose **closure of Strait of Hormuz**

→ Highlights a cautious, balanced approach combining neutrality with selective engagement

### → OVERALL TREND SIGNAL ←

→ **Inconclusive war + resilient Iran + constrained US–Israel success + cautious Pakistani balancing**

# KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS | EXPERT CONSENSUS

<p><b>CALIBRATED STRATEGIC BALANCING</b></p> <p>Preserve long-term alignment with China as core pillar</p> <p>Maintain controlled and functional relationship with the US</p> <p>Avoid over-reliance on balancing as a standalone strategy</p> <p>→ <b>Ensures strategic depth without dependency</b></p>	<p><b>STRICT NEUTRALITY &amp; SELECTIVE ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Maintain formal neutrality in the conflict</p> <p>Quietly position for mediation/facilitation roles</p> <p>Protect national interests without entanglement</p> <p>→ <b>Enables influence while avoiding exposure</b></p>
<p><b>ENERGY SECURITY AS NATIONAL PRIORITY</b></p> <p>Fast-track energy self-reliance and reserves</p> <p>Expand domestic exploration capacity</p> <p>Diversify routes beyond Strait of Hormuz</p> <p>→ <b>Reduces vulnerability to external shocks</b></p>	<p><b>ASYMMETRIC &amp; TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN CAPABILITY SHIFT</b></p> <p>Prioritise AI, cyber, drones, and information warfare</p> <p>Move beyond conventional defence thinking</p> <p>Build agile and adaptive strategic capacity</p> <p>→ <b>Aligns with future conflict dynamics</b></p>
<p><b>INTERNAL STABILITY FIRST</b></p> <p>Manage sectarian harmony and spill over risks from Iran</p> <p>Strengthen economic resilience against inflation and shocks</p> <p>Stabilise domestic socio-political environment</p> <p>→ <b>Internal strength as foundation for external policy</b></p>	<p><b>REDUCE EXTERNAL DEPENDENCE</b></p> <p>Limit reliance on foreign investment and external flows</p> <p>Strengthen domestic production and industrial base</p> <p>Focus on export resilience (textiles, energy)</p> <p>→ <b>Builds long-term economic sovereignty</b></p>
<p><b>POST-WAR REGIONAL POSITIONING</b></p> <p>Strengthen ties with Middle Eastern states</p> <p>Enhance diplomatic visibility and credibility</p> <p>Leverage geo-strategic location effectively</p> <p>→ <b>Positions Pakistan as a key regional actor</b></p>	<p><b>PREPARE FOR PROLONGED REGIONAL INSTABILITY</b></p> <p>Plan for refugee flows and border pressures</p> <p>Anticipate shifting alliances (Iran–Gulf dynamics)</p> <p>Develop long-term crisis management frameworks</p> <p>→ <b>Moves from reactive to strategic planning</b></p>

**PICTURE GALLERY**







**ISSRA**

INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS