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The United States' Strategic Challenges and Constraints in the Third Imposed War

1. Katayon. Sarlak^{1*}: Department of Political Science, CT.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

*corresponding author's email: Katayon.sarlak@iau.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

The central question of this article is why the United States' material superiority, air and missile capabilities, and technological advantages have failed to achieve objectives such as changing Iran's behavior, weakening its political structure, or bringing about regime change. The study's central hypothesis is that Iran's strategic model, which is based on asymmetric warfare, modular defense, strategic depth, and identity capital, has severely constrained the United States' ability to convert tactical successes into strategic gains. Using a qualitative and comparative approach, the article examines the military, geopolitical, and perceptual dimensions of two cases: the 2003 Iraq War and a hypothetical scenario of confrontation with Iran. The findings indicate that the United States' reliance on rapid military operations, coalition-building, information warfare, and technological superiority encounters structural obstacles in the Iranian context. On the one hand, the dispersion of centers of power, decentralized command networks, the deployment of low-cost drones and missiles, and indigenous deterrence capabilities increase the United States' operational costs. On the other hand, Iran's geographical depth, identity-based cohesion, historical memory of resistance, and regional connections reduce the likelihood of a rapid collapse of its defensive structure. Furthermore, the vulnerability of the infrastructure of the United States and its allies in the region, particularly in relation to the Strait of Hormuz and energy and logistics supply chains, increases the level of risk for Washington and its partners. The findings also point to the erosion of US soft power, the declining legitimacy of its official narratives, and its diminishing capacity for coalition-building in West Asia. Overall, the article argues that confrontation with Iran demonstrates the limitations of US military hegemony and the emergence of a regional order in which hard power alone is insufficient to impose political will.

Keywords: *Third Imposed War, United States, asymmetric warfare, strategic depth, soft power, modular defense.*

Introduction

The concept of the "Third Imposed War" in Iran's strategic discourse extends beyond a conventional military confrontation and describes a hybrid war in which the United States seeks to alter Iran's behavior or political structure. A comparative examination of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 indicates that, at that time, the United States achieved its military objectives in less than three weeks by relying on overwhelming air and ground superiority. Under present conditions, however, the United States has encountered a "wall of resistance" in which tactical successes, such as air strikes, have not translated into strategic achievements, including regime change or



structural behavioral change. The central question is why the instruments of US military power no longer possess their former effectiveness in this conflict.

Theoretical Foundations: From Neorealism to Soft Power

This study is founded on three theoretical pillars:

Asymmetric Warfare Theory

When no balance of power exists between the parties to a conflict, the weaker party exploits the adversary's vulnerabilities to increase its costs exponentially (1).

Asymmetric warfare theory, as one of the principal foundations of modern security studies, reflects the dynamics of conflicts in which the parties operate at profoundly unequal levels in terms of material power, technological infrastructure, organizational capabilities, and economic resources (2). Within this model, because the weaker actor lacks the capabilities required for conventional and symmetrical confrontation, it avoids direct engagement and instead designs alternative strategies intended to neutralize or offset the material power disparity (3). This theoretical framework enables analysts to explain the behavioral logic of non-state actors or states with comparatively limited military capabilities when confronting global military hegemonies.

According to the fundamental assumptions of this theory, material and military weakness does not necessarily imply unconditional surrender or strategic defeat on the battlefield. The asymmetric actor seeks to influence the balance of resolve and costs rather than merely the balance of military hardware. By prolonging the conflict, increasing human casualties, and imposing an attritional financial burden on the stronger party, it challenges the latter's political will and domestic legitimacy to continue the war (4). Accordingly, victory is redefined: the principal objective shifts from the traditional destruction of the enemy's armed forces toward undermining the hegemon's political motivation to maintain its presence in the theater of conflict.

One of the critical operational principles of asymmetric warfare doctrine is the identification and targeting of the adversary's strategic vulnerabilities. Despite possessing advanced offensive and defensive systems, military hegemonies remain highly vulnerable to dispersed and precision attacks because of the complexity of their logistical structures, their considerable dependence on maritime supply chains, and their concentration in fixed regional bases (5). By avoiding confrontation with the adversary's strengths, such as its conventional air force, the asymmetric actor directs its attacks toward lines of communication, global energy arteries, and remote installations, thereby directly disrupting the security balance.

High mobility, continuous surprise, and the implementation of dispersed and decentralized tactics constitute other prominent characteristics of this approach. The operational structures of asymmetric actors have evolved from conventional hierarchical models toward autonomous cellular networks, described in contemporary military literature as "network warfare" (6). Such force distribution creates a target-identification crisis for the adversary's defensive systems and compels it to expend costly interceptor munitions against inexpensive targets. Consequently, the cost of interception for the superior military force may be several dozen times greater than the cost of the projectile launched by the asymmetric actor.

At the strategic level, asymmetric warfare entails shifting the battlefield from technologically advantageous domains toward unfavorable geographical and human environments. Asymmetric actors commonly select insular environments, densely populated urban areas, or mountainous terrain as their operational settings because these

environments neutralize the adversary's advantages in surveillance and long-range firepower (7). By depriving the hegemon of persistent surveillance and precision-targeting capabilities, this approach directs the war toward conditions in which indigenous and ground forces acquire significant tactical superiority and seize the operational initiative.

In the contemporary era, the emergence of modern and inexpensive technologies, including unmanned aerial vehicles, light cruise missiles, cyberwarfare instruments, and smart naval mines, has qualitatively transformed this theory. Scholars categorize this transformation as "hybrid warfare" (8). Modern and cost-effective weaponry enables actors with limited capabilities to establish active deterrence with relatively modest budgets and, on a broader scale, to threaten the security of commercial shipping routes or strategic airspace in critical chokepoints, thereby generating reciprocal deterrence.

An examination of this form of warfare in the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea demonstrates how a regional actor, by combining geography, inexpensive missile and drone capabilities, and a network of non-state allies, has confronted US naval hegemony with a tactical impasse (9). This impasse deepens when the attacking party, despite deploying its most advanced warships and defensive systems, becomes unable to ensure the long-term security of trade and energy transit and is consequently compelled to endure continuous and prolonged attrition in the region.

Ultimately, asymmetric warfare theory demonstrates that, in contemporary international relations and strategic studies, hard power alone does not guarantee political victory or the termination of war. The unequal distribution of material instruments of power can be counterbalanced in favor of the ostensibly weaker party through the intelligent use of geographical advantages, strategic patience, distributed doctrines, and inexpensive but effective technological instruments (10). The Third Imposed War therefore represents a clear manifestation of the effectiveness of asymmetric logic, in which US technological superiority has been neutralized by Iran's decentralized defense doctrine.

Strategic Depth

Strategic depth refers to a country's capacity to survive and sustain combat under critical conditions and encompasses both geographical and political dimensions (11).

In classical geopolitical and defense studies literature, "strategic depth" refers to the physical distance between a country's vulnerable outer borders and its vital industrial, demographic, command, and center-of-gravity areas (12). This geographical dimension enables a defender, when confronting external aggression, to employ tactical withdrawal and exhaust the invading forces across the territorial expanse, thereby gaining the time necessary to reorganize forces and establish an effective defense. In practice, extensive territory and natural terrain function as a geographical buffer that prevents the rapid collapse of the country's political-military structure during the adversary's initial attacks (13).

Nevertheless, in twenty-first-century security doctrines, strategic depth has transcended exclusively territorial and physical dimensions and has become closely connected to political and social components and networks of external allies (11). To survive a comprehensive crisis, a country requires "political depth," which ensures its ability to mobilize domestic resources, preserve social cohesion, and reproduce governmental legitimacy under pressure. In the absence of such social and identity capital, even the most extensive geographical territories cannot withstand the adversary's attritional and hybrid pressures and may ultimately collapse from within.

A further contemporary dimension of strategic depth is manifested in the form of “networked and regional depth.” Under this framework, an actor’s capacity for survival is defined beyond its formal borders and depends on the extent of its influence, coalition-building capacity, and the presence of allied or proxy forces in surrounding operational theaters (14). This extraterritorial depth enables an actor within the resistance axis to transfer the battlefield beyond its sovereign territory and contain threats at distant points of contact, thereby substantially increasing the cost of direct aggression against its homeland.

In the geopolitical analysis of Iran, the convergence of these three dimensions—geographical, political, and networked—has created a distinctive multilayered deterrence structure. Geographically, Iran’s territorial expanse, complex mountainous topography, particularly the Zagros and Alborz mountain ranges, and extensive access to long coastlines and numerous strategic islands in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman make the military paralysis of the country through rapid attacks virtually impossible (15). This extensive geographical space facilitates the distribution of passive defense infrastructure and the construction of underground missile and drone bases, thereby contributing to the survival of the command chain.

From the perspective of regional networks, Iran’s strategic depth extends from the Persian Gulf to the eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. This transnational presence, founded on ideological convergences and asymmetric alliances, ensures that any military action against Iran may encounter simultaneous and distributed responses throughout the region (16). This characteristic creates a serious challenge for US strategic calculations because even a limited military conflict with Iran possesses the potential to develop into a comprehensive regional crisis involving attacks against vital US interests in multiple locations.

Ultimately, strategic depth in its contemporary meaning constitutes a multilayered buffer against the hegemon’s strategies of sanctions, isolation, and military aggression. The combination of geographical flexibility, society’s identity-based resilience, and a transnational defense network has created conditions under which large conventional armed forces, such as those of the United States, cannot achieve their ultimate objective of behavioral or structural change through reliance on the traditional “shock and awe” model (17). Accordingly, Iran’s strategic resilience in the Third Imposed War demonstrates that this multidimensional depth has fundamentally transformed the balance of power in West Asia.

Soft Power: Joseph Nye

Soft power is the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion. The Third Imposed War illustrates the erosion of this power in the region.

Joseph Nye conceptualized “soft power” as the ability to influence the preferences of others through attraction, persuasion, and legitimacy rather than coercion or material payments (18, 19). From this perspective, soft power becomes effective when a political actor presents its culture, values, and foreign policy in a manner that encourages others to accept its preferences voluntarily. Soft power is therefore not merely a propagandistic instrument; rather, it constitutes part of a state’s strategic capacity to shape the international environment and reduce the costs of exercising influence (20). Within this framework, a country’s attractiveness derives not from its destructive capacity but from its credibility, trustworthiness, and consistency between discourse and conduct.

In Nye’s analysis, one of the principal foundations of sustainable soft power is the legitimacy of foreign policy and its consistency with declared values, because any discrepancy between moral claims and political conduct rapidly generates accusations of hypocrisy and erodes soft-power capital (20). In his formulation, few factors are

more damaging to soft power than hypocrisy. Accordingly, when a state presents itself internationally as a defender of order, human rights, or stability but in practice resorts to unilateral measures, wars lacking international consensus, or double standards, its normative appeal diminishes and its persuasive capacity among global publics and even formal allies weakens (19).

The Third Imposed War may be regarded as an example of the gradual erosion of soft power in the region because it demonstrated that, despite possessing military superiority, the United States faces considerable difficulty in persuading regional and international actors to recognize the legitimacy of its actions. When military operations intensify insecurity, increase human costs, and destroy infrastructure rather than generate stability, the image of a “responsible power” is replaced by that of an “interventionist power,” thereby diminishing its political attractiveness (19). Consequently, the opposing party can emphasize the human and political consequences of war, increase the symbolic and moral costs imposed on the United States, and weaken its capacity for soft mobilization.

At the regional level, the erosion of US soft power has reduced the confidence of governments and societies in Washington’s declared intentions. Under such circumstances, even traditional allies may question their continued complete dependence on the United States and move toward diversifying their foreign relations or strengthening their strategic autonomy (19). Particularly in West Asia, this process has reduced the attractiveness of the American model compared with previous periods and has constrained Washington’s capacity for political persuasion, sustainable coalition-building, and regional crisis management. In other words, the war has challenged not only the hard-power domain but has also eroded the narrative of US “moral authority” at the soft-power level.

Analysis of the United States’ Strategic Challenges

Failure to Overcome Strategic Depth and the Military Environment

Unlike Iraq, Iran possesses a multilayered “strategic depth”:

Geographical depth: The distance of vital centers from the country’s borders and the existence of extensive coastlines and numerous islands in the Persian Gulf substantially increase Iran’s resilience and defensive maneuverability (15).

Political and networked depth: The existence of regional allies and proxy networks in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen reduces direct pressure on Iran and expands the war beyond Iran’s borders to encompass the entire region.

One of the most significant US miscalculations in confronting the Islamic Republic of Iran is the extrapolation of previous operational models, such as the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, to Iran’s complex territorial and strategic environment. Whereas Iraq, because of its centralized political structure, predominantly flat geography, and international isolation in 2003, surrendered within several weeks to the “shock and awe” strategy, Iran’s defense architecture has developed within a framework of “multidimensional strategic depth” that ensures resilience and continuity of combat (12). Unlike traditional models, this strategic depth is not limited to the distance between the border and the capital; rather, it is founded on the mutual synergy of difficult terrain, distributed passive defense, and transit capabilities, which collectively create an impasse for any preventive offensive scenario.

The first dimension of this resilience is manifested in Iran’s exceptional “geographical and territorial depth.” Its extensive territory and rugged mountainous topography, particularly the Zagros and Alborz mountain ranges, constitute natural obstacles to any ground advance or conventional invasion (15). Furthermore, the relocation of sensitive command centers, vital facilities, and missile arsenals into underground complexes and subterranean

missile cities has substantially reduced the effectiveness of US air and missile strikes. Combined with Iran's long coastlines along the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf and its numerous strategically equipped islands, this geographical depth has transformed the country's tactical defense into a distributed and flexible network that enables the defender to absorb and dissipate the adversary's offensive attacks.

The second and more dynamic dimension of this deterrence is "networked and regional depth," which is defined through asymmetric alliances and the resistance axis in West Asia (14). Iran's security architecture has strategically transferred its defensive lines hundreds of kilometers beyond its formal borders. The presence of strategic allies in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon means that any aggression against Iran's homeland could immediately produce simultaneous and multifront responses against US and allied interests, bases, and naval forces throughout the region (16). This distributed network effectively transforms any limited military confrontation into a comprehensive regional war whose containment would exceed US logistical and political capacities.

Under the influence of these environmental dynamics, US military doctrine has failed to establish a secure operational environment. The US military, whose doctrine is founded on information dominance and long-range precision strikes, loses much of its effectiveness when confronted with Iran's model of "modular and decentralized defense" (6). US military bases in the region, once regarded as instruments of pressure, have effectively become strategic hostages because of their proximity to Iran and their exposure to precision ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and loitering munitions. This situation substantially restricts the tactical freedom of action available to US Central Command commanders.

Ultimately, the United States' failure to overcome Iran's strategic depth indicates a transformation in the balance of power in West Asia. Persisting with conventional military solutions without considering Iran's territorial survival capacities and networked convergences has trapped Washington in a "costly spiral" (17). The comprehensive resilience of Iran's defensive system in the face of material pressure demonstrates that the combination of geographical depth and a regional asymmetric doctrine has invalidated the assumption of rapid military victory over Iran and has compelled the United States to confront the gradual erosion of its power within the regional security environment.

The Nature of Asymmetric Warfare and Modular Defense

Following 1979, Iran redirected its defensive approach toward asymmetric warfare. The characteristics of this doctrine that constrain the United States include the following:

Increasing the adversary's costs: To counter inexpensive drones, such as the Shahed-136, the United States is compelled to employ costly Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense systems, whose interceptor inventories are being depleted.

Modular and decentralized defense structure: By designing a decentralized structure, Iran has adopted the "complexification of the battlefield" as an operational principle. Under this model, the destruction of one base or command center does not disable the entire defensive chain (6).

The formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's military doctrine following 1979 was based on a realistic understanding of the substantial disparity between Iran's material and technological capabilities and those of the world's major powers. This reality directed Iranian defense strategists toward the adoption and development of asymmetric warfare theory (3). The fundamental objective of this model is to avoid direct confrontation with the hegemon's strengths, such as overwhelming air superiority and long-range precision-guided weapons, while

concentrating instead on the adversary's structural and operational weaknesses. Within this framework, defensive resilience is pursued by imposing continuous attrition, targeting supply chains, and establishing a balance of terror that challenges the effectiveness of the adversary's advanced technologies.

One of the most prominent dimensions of asymmetric warfare is the creation of a severe asymmetry in the "balance of costs." By developing and deploying inexpensive but highly effective weapons, including loitering munitions such as the Shahed-136 and miniature precision-guided cruise missiles, Iran has altered the economic equation of warfare to the disadvantage of its adversaries (9). Whereas the manufacture and launch of a loitering munition may cost only tens of thousands of dollars, the United States and its allies must employ Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense interceptors, each valued at several million dollars, to destroy it. Over time, this financial asymmetry depletes the hegemon's strategic air-defense stockpiles and creates a production-chain crisis within Western defense industries.

In addition to its economic dimensions, the development of a "modular defense structure," or networked and decentralized defense, has fundamentally increased the physical resilience of Iran's armed forces. Unlike conventional militaries, which possess hierarchical and pyramidal structures and may experience cascading collapse following the destruction of their command-and-control centers, Iran's modular defense is designed around a network of independent and autonomous defensive cells (6). Under this model, each military unit, missile base, or operational cell throughout the country and the wider region possesses substantial operational autonomy and can pursue predetermined fire-and-maneuver missions without requiring continuous coordination with a central command.

This decentralized model produces the "complexification of the battlefield" for US Central Command planners. Because targeting or eliminating one or more command hubs does not paralyze the other components of the defensive network, the adversary's offensive system confronts target proliferation and declining strike effectiveness. The wide geographical distribution of mobile missile and drone launchers, together with deep concrete shelters, eliminates the possibility of achieving "decisive victory through initial destruction" and transforms any rapid-war scenario into a prolonged, ambiguous, and costly process (7).

Ultimately, the synergy between asymmetric warfare and modular defense has neutralized US military technological superiority in a hypothetical confrontation with Iran. This doctrinal impasse demonstrates that security dependent on expensive defensive systems lacks the sustainability necessary to counter distributed and saturating missile and drone attacks (8). Iran's asymmetric warfare strategy has therefore established an active deterrent based on indigenous and distributed capabilities, under which the costs of initiating any military aggression against Iran would substantially exceed its conceivable geopolitical benefits for the United States.

Findings and Discussion: Operational Constraints

The Logistics Crisis and Base Vulnerability

Analyses indicate that, unlike conventional land warfare, the United States lacks secure overland routes in insular and maritime theaters. Field reports suggest that, within one month, a significant number of US bases in the region were damaged or rendered unsuitable for sustained deployment because of missile and drone attacks. This "base insecurity" compels the US military to relocate personnel and equipment, which consequently reduces its ability to concentrate on other strategically sensitive regions, including East Asia.

The foundation of US military power throughout the decades following the Second World War has rested on the capacity to deploy forces rapidly, provide sustainable logistical support, and maintain uninterrupted supply chains across long distances. This doctrine of overseas presence depends heavily on a global network of large, fixed military bases functioning as logistical hubs. However, in a confrontation with a regional power equipped with precision missile and drone capabilities, these traditional strengths become strategic vulnerabilities. The geography and operational characteristics of West Asia and its surrounding maritime domains have exposed the US military's logistical chain to unprecedented crises and called into question the survivability of its fixed infrastructure.

Unlike previous conflicts in Europe or the Persian Gulf, where coalition forces benefited from secure land lines of communication and well-equipped supporting ports, the geography of contemporary warfare in this region lacks uncontested and secure overland routes for US forces. Supply lines must pass through narrow waterways, strategic straits, and maritime routes that are monitored by and fall within the range of the adversary's anti-access weapons. This condition renders US military logistics heavily dependent on vulnerable maritime and air transportation, exposing every supply shipment to continuous threats from the moment it enters the region until it reaches its destination.

The US military's concentration of defensive capabilities around major installations, including Al Udeid Air Base, Ali Al Salem Air Base, and bases located in Iraq and Syria, has become ineffective against saturating barrages of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and loitering munitions. Field reports indicate that, during intensive periods of combat, simultaneous attacks on these bases caused serious operational disruption. When runways, fuel depots, and maintenance hangars are struck, not only is the base's offensive capability temporarily paralyzed, but the entire process of receiving and distributing support equipment throughout the region is interrupted.

The immediate consequence of this continuous insecurity is "geographical instability of bases," or the inability to maintain long-term force deployments at fixed locations. To reduce casualties and material damage, military commanders are compelled to adopt force-dispersal doctrines and continuously relocate sensitive equipment. These persistent and unexpected movements impose an immense logistical burden on the military's administrative and transportation structures because a significant proportion of the transport capacity and resources that should support frontline operations is instead consumed by protective intraregional relocation.

Furthermore, the attrition caused by continuous attacks adversely affects the morale of logistical and support personnel. In contemporary military doctrine, logistics involves not only the physical movement of supplies but also time management and the maintenance of psychological security along support lines. When soldiers and technical specialists at rear-area bases do not feel secure and perceive themselves as directly exposed to lethal threats, the efficiency of maintenance and repair operations declines and logistical error rates increase substantially. This condition may subject the supply of spare parts and critical munitions to potentially fatal delays during decisive moments of combat.

Another dimension of the logistics crisis is the unprecedented increase in protection costs for supply shipments. To deliver a basic shipment of fuel or ammunition to a forward base, the US military must allocate substantial air and maritime escort capabilities, which themselves require fuel, maintenance, and logistical support. This self-consuming logistical spiral drastically reduces supply-chain efficiency, as a substantial proportion of the logistical capacity available in the theater is devoted to preserving the logistical system itself rather than effectively supporting frontline forces.

At the strategic level, this logistical impasse has created a “global resource-allocation crisis” for Pentagon planners. To compensate for the vulnerability of regional bases and secure lines of communication, the United States must transfer advanced defensive systems, aerial refueling aircraft, combat-engineering units, and maritime transport fleets from other strategically sensitive regions to West Asia. This action depletes US logistical and defensive capacities in other critical theaters, including East Asia and Central Europe, and constrains the implementation of strategies intended to contain emerging global powers.

Ultimately, the logistics crisis and the insecurity of bases during the war demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the traditional model of concentrating forces at fixed peripheral installations. The US military has discovered that advanced weaponry does not create a strategic advantage in the absence of a secure support network and bases protected from attack. The continuous attrition of supply chains and the vulnerability of logistical hubs have restricted the operational mobility of the attacking forces and trapped them in an attritional geographical impasse whose resolution would require a costly reassessment of the entire doctrine of overseas military presence.

Cultural and Identity Heritage

One of the strategic oversights in Western analyses is the neglect of Iran’s “cultural and civilizational heritage.” This study argues that concepts such as “self-sacrifice,” “martyrdom,” and “national solidarity” have not been weakened but have instead been reproduced and reinforced during the war. As a form of identity-based “software,” the culture of resistance has increased society’s capacity to endure economic and military pressures.

One of the fundamental errors in Western strategic analyses of Iranian society is the reduction of national power to material, economic, and military components. Beneath these dimensions, however, Iranian society contains a profound layer of cultural and civilizational heritage whose contribution to national resilience is no less significant than military power. Within this framework, Iran is not merely a geographical or political entity but a living “historical memory” that has accumulated centuries of experience in resistance to invasion, occupation, foreign pressure, and identity reconstruction. During crises, this historical memory becomes a mobilizing resource and reduces the likelihood of rapid social collapse.

Concepts such as self-sacrifice and martyrdom are not merely religious or rhetorical terms; rather, they function as meaning-producing elements within the cognitive and value structures of Iranian society. These concepts redefine dominant interpretations of suffering, loss, and resistance and ensure that the costs of war and pressure are not understood solely in immediate material terms. From this perspective, a society that connects suffering with meaning demonstrates greater resistance to the adversary’s psychological operations and attempts to inculcate defeat because it does not transform a military strike into an identity-based defeat.

Within this context, national solidarity is not merely a product of official propaganda or temporary reactions but is nourished by profound cultural, familial, religious, and historical bonds. Under conditions of external threat, this solidarity can temporarily marginalize political and social divisions and create a form of “defensive consensus.” The significance of this phenomenon lies in the adversary’s tendency to concentrate on superficial divisions and economic dissatisfaction while overlooking the reconstructive capacity of cultural and spiritual networks to generate cohesion. Military pressure therefore does not necessarily produce social fragmentation.

Iran’s culture of resistance should be understood as a form of “identity software” that influences the interpretation of reality, threat assessment, and response selection. This software elevates the logic of survival from the individual to the collective level and teaches society that historical survival may require the acceptance of short-term costs.

Consequently, society responds to psychological warfare, sanctions, threats, and media-based attacks not only through material means but also by drawing on its symbolic and cultural reserves to reproduce hope and resilience. This process significantly increases social tolerance and endurance.

Strategically, the significance of this heritage lies in the adversary's inability to destroy the identity core of society solely through infrastructure destruction or economic pressure. Unlike military equipment, cultural capital is not directly eliminated through physical destruction and, in many cases, may become stronger during crises. War and external threats do not invariably produce cultural erosion; they may instead perform a reconstructive function by returning previously marginalized elements of identity to the center of public attention. Social resistance in Iran is therefore not merely a passive response but an active process of self-redefinition under external pressure.

Another important dimension of this heritage is its connection to a model of collective sacrifice. In a society in which sacrifice for the collective good possesses ethical and historical status, resistance becomes a legitimate and even desirable form of action. As a result, the adversary's attempt to portray resistance as excessively costly does not necessarily succeed because society interprets costs in relation to dignity, independence, and survival. Under these conditions, exclusively economic calculations become insufficient to explain collective behavior, and culture emerges as a decisive variable in the equation of power.

Cultural heritage also performs an important function in transmitting historical experience between generations. A society that preserves narratives of resistance, martyrdom, perseverance, and reconstruction within its collective memory responds more deliberately and less impulsively to political and military shocks. This intergenerational transmission creates continuity of meaning and prevents identity fragmentation during crises. Accordingly, even under severe pressure, society may resist psychological and social collapse and draw on previous experiences to sustain collective existence.

Ultimately, Iran's cultural and identity heritage should be regarded as one of the most important layers of national power, performing a role in contemporary warfare that extends beyond that of a supporting factor. This heritage not only increases the capacity for survival but also provides resistance with meaningful depth and resilience with social legitimacy. Any strategic analysis that evaluates Iran's power exclusively through its missile, logistical, or economic capabilities therefore overlooks a central component of the equation. At this level, culture is not peripheral to politics but constitutes one of the primary foundations of national security and deterrence.

The Political Economy of Energy and the Strategic Leverage of the Strait of Hormuz

In geopolitical analyses of West Asia, the Strait of Hormuz is not merely a geographical waterway or a conventional transportation route; it is recognized as the "backbone of the international political economy" and the world's most sensitive energy-transit chokepoint. Any direct military confrontation between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran inevitably activates the security variable associated with the Strait. Because a substantial proportion of the world's crude oil and liquefied natural gas passes through this maritime area each day, the stability of global energy markets and, consequently, the entire value chain of global industries are directly dependent on the level of tension at this location. This interdependence transforms the Strait of Hormuz from a transportation variable into a powerful instrument of geoeconomic deterrence for Iran.

The immediate consequence of escalating tensions or announcing the temporary closure of this chokepoint would be an "instantaneous psychological shock" in financial markets and global energy exchanges. Even before the physical volume of oil exported from the region declines, crude-oil futures indices, including Brent and West

Texas Intermediate, would experience sudden and substantial increases because of negative expectations and forecasts of future supply shortages. This phenomenon, known as “geopolitical risk spillover,” demonstrates that global markets are highly vulnerable to even minor security fluctuations in the Persian Gulf and that the hegemon’s military doctrine of ensuring the market’s physical security cannot neutralize this psychological effect.

Beyond the psychological dimension, operational disruptions or restrictions on maritime traffic would rapidly affect shipping-insurance premiums and maritime freight rates. Once hostilities begin, international insurance companies substantially increase war-risk premiums for oil tankers transiting the Persian Gulf. Combined with the refusal of many major shipping companies to enter the conflict zone, this process reduces the physical supply of oil to global markets. Even without the complete physical closure of the Strait through naval mines or coastal firepower, these conditions reproduce the practical effects of a closed waterway.

An analysis of the crisis’s effects on global supply chains indicates that rising oil prices would rapidly spread to other economic sectors. Higher crude-oil prices increase the cost of road, rail, maritime, and air transportation, thereby directly raising the final cost of moving goods throughout the world. This process generates a wave of structural inflation in oil-importing countries, particularly in Europe and the industrial economies of East Asia, that may exceed the management capacity of central banks. Consequently, stagflation resulting from a Hormuz crisis would substantially weaken global growth prospects and challenge the stability of financial markets.

Measures such as activating alternative pipelines, including Saudi Arabia’s and the United Arab Emirates’ east-west routes, or releasing oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve by the United States and member states of the International Energy Agency would function only as short-term remedies. The technical capacity of these pipelines and the volume of Western strategic reserves are limited compared with the enormous quantity of oil transported daily through the Strait of Hormuz. Moreover, liquefied natural gas transit, which is heavily dependent on the Strait, cannot be transferred through alternative overland pipelines in the short term. The crisis would therefore rapidly extend to electricity generation and heavy industry in importing countries.

At the level of strategic decision-making, dependence on the security of Hormuz creates a paralyzing constraint for Pentagon military planners. The United States recognizes that any retaliatory military response or expansion of the war intended to weaken Iran carries the risk of a prolonged interruption of energy exports from the Persian Gulf. In other words, the United States becomes trapped in a doctrinal impasse because military attempts to reopen or secure the Strait would themselves intensify insecurity and further increase global oil prices. This reality restricts the effectiveness of the hegemon’s military options at the macro level and reduces its strategic freedom of action.

Ultimately, the leverage of the Strait of Hormuz demonstrates the inseparable relationship between regional security and the global political economy. By relying on this geopolitical advantage, Iran has linked the costs of any military adventurism against it to the economic security of US allies and the international financial system as a whole. The long-term stability of the global energy market has therefore become dependent on regional geography, demonstrating that, in the contemporary era, US military hegemony lacks the capacity to determine the outcome of wars unilaterally when confronted with geoeconomic balancing instruments.

Comparative Analysis: Examining the Structural Dimensions of the 2003 Iraq Operation and the Alleged Operation in the Third Imposed War

The analysis of strategic phenomena in international security requires the application of comparable and internally consistent models to identify the principles governing the behavior of interventionist actors. Within this

framework, a comparative examination of the “US military operation in Iraq in 2003” and the various dimensions of the “alleged operation in the Third Imposed War scenario” provides an appropriate basis for understanding the structural challenges and constraints confronting US military and diplomatic doctrine. Although the two events differ substantially in their temporal contexts, surrounding geopolitical dynamics, and technological instruments, they possess meaningful similarities and differences in the internal logic of warfare, perception management, and post-conflict challenges, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative Examination of the Strategic Components of the 2003 Iraq Operation and the Alleged Operation in the Third Imposed War

Dimension of Comparison	US Operation in Iraq, 2003	Alleged Operation in the Third Imposed War
Strategic objective	Overthrowing the Ba’athist regime, redesigning the Middle East security order, and consolidating comprehensive hegemony	Imposing deterrence, increasing the adversary’s perceived costs, and changing the balance of power without territorial occupation
Basis of legal legitimacy	The doctrine of preemptive action based on allegations of weapons of mass destruction, outside the consensus of the UN Security Council	Legal ambiguity and reliance on alleged self-defense or indirect and asymmetric responses
Role of intelligence and narrative construction	Construction of the threat through the exaggeration of intelligence assessments, or the weaponization of intelligence	Active ambiguity, multilayered perception management, and the direction of public opinion within hybrid warfare
Operational and tactical model	Rapid strike operations based on “shock and awe,” combining armored-air capabilities and network-centric warfare	Limited, distributed, precision-guided, low-cost strikes relying on modern instruments of asymmetric warfare
International coalition-building	A largely symbolic “coalition of the willing” involving selected Western and regional partners	Limited, informal, fluid coalitions based on tactical expediency at the international level
Psychological and media operations	A centralized media component, including the embedded-journalist program, intended to persuade global public opinion	Distributed cognitive warfare, cyber-mediated communication, and the use of strategic ambiguity to delay the adversary’s decision-making
Operational and strategic consequences	Initial tactical victory, subsequent entrapment in an attritional conflict, persistent instability, and hegemonic decline	Fluctuation between temporary deterrence stabilization and the intensification of a reversible cycle of regional tension

The first analytical proposition derived from the table concerns the transformation in the nature and strategic objectives of the two operations. In 2003, the United States adopted a doctrine of “regime change” and sought a fundamental transformation of Iraq’s political-security structure and absolute hegemony over the Fertile Crescent. This objective led to direct intervention, physical occupation, and substantial material and human costs. By contrast, in the alleged operation associated with the Third Imposed War scenario, the strategic objective shifts from “occupation and political-system transformation” toward “altering the adversary’s rational calculations, imposing costs, and containing strategic capabilities.” This transformation reflects the impasse confronting traditional doctrines of direct military intervention and a shift toward active deterrence without involvement in costly postwar nation-building processes.

The second dimension illustrates the fundamental challenge of international law and political legitimacy. Despite Washington’s efforts to legitimize the 2003 Iraq operation by referring to previous United Nations resolutions and constructing a weapons-of-mass-destruction threat scenario, the war was recorded as one of the clearest manifestations of unilateralism and violations of international law and ultimately contributed to the erosion of US soft power. Comparatively, the alleged operation in the Third Imposed War would also confront an acute legitimacy crisis. However, because of the absence of international consensus and the emergence of a new multipolar structure in the international system, the actors involved would be compelled to rely on concepts such as “defensive

preemption” rather than conventional legal justifications. This reliance would substantially increase their legal and diplomatic vulnerability internationally.

An examination of the intelligence dimension demonstrates that mechanisms of perception management and narrative construction have undergone a qualitative transformation. In 2003, the manipulation of intelligence by the US intelligence system provided the foundation for the physical justification of war. In the alleged Third Imposed War, by contrast, intelligence would function not only during the preoperational phase but also as an instrument of cognitive superiority during operations. Under this scenario, information warfare becomes integrated with contemporary media warfare and social networks to create ambiguity regarding operational details, reduce the legal responsibility of the actors involved, and undermine the timely decision-making capacity of the opposing side’s commanders by applying psychological pressure to domestic and international audiences.

A clear discontinuity exists between the two tactical and operational models. The 2003 operation was designed according to a conventional warfare doctrine based on overwhelming air and armored superiority and the destruction of the adversary’s physical command structures through the “shock and awe” model. An analysis of the alleged operation in the Third Imposed War, however, suggests that military planners, in response to the opposing party’s enhanced defensive capabilities, have increasingly adopted hybrid patterns, cyberattacks, drone operations, precision missile strikes, and indirect operations. This shift reflects recognition that the deployment of large conventional forces in contemporary battle environments is economically and militarily inefficient because of the heightened vulnerability of heavy equipment.

In the domain of international coalition-building, the differences in the political configuration of the actors are highly visible. In 2003, Washington succeeded, at least symbolically, in assembling a coalition of states to support and legitimize its actions. In the contemporary international system and the Third Imposed War scenario, however, the emergence of new power centers, including China and Russia, and the declining willingness of traditional European allies to participate in additional military ventures make broad coalition-building effectively impossible. Consequently, any alleged operational action would have to be conducted unilaterally or through temporary and covert coordination with a limited number of regional actors, thereby substantially reducing the operation’s political sustainability.

An explanation of operational and post-conflict consequences demonstrates that, despite the United States’ rapid tactical success in overthrowing Saddam Hussein’s regime, it experienced strategic failure during the political and security stabilization phase and transformed Iraq into a center of prolonged threats against its own interests. Comparatively, the alleged operation in the Third Imposed War confronts the same structural threat. Any temporary or limited military strike lacking a clearly defined exit strategy and a sustainable political framework would not compel the opposing party to surrender. Instead, by activating retaliatory capacities and asymmetric forces, it would create the conditions for a continuous and uncontrollable regional security crisis.

Ultimately, the synthesized analysis of these two events demonstrates that the persistent strategic constraint lies in the inability to transform temporary military superiority into a desirable and sustainable political order. The structural similarity between US military doctrine in Iraq in 2003 and the alleged operation in the Third Imposed War is rooted in the mistaken assumption that military instruments alone can resolve geopolitical conflicts. The findings indicate that ignoring ecological variables, the adversary’s active deterrence capabilities, and the long-term costs of attritional warfare functions in both cases as a catalyst for hegemonic decline and strategic failure.

Strategic Implications for the Future of the Region

This analysis identifies four principal implications of the Third Imposed War:

Strengthening the Resolve to Resist

Iran has introduced a new model of resistance that increases the confidence of other regional countries in confronting the hegemon.

Direct and attritional military confrontation with the United States and resilience against the hegemon's military apparatus possess profound perceptual and normative consequences at the regional level that extend beyond their physical dimensions. By relying on its asymmetric and modular defense model, Iran has seriously undermined the perception of the hegemon's "absolute invincibility." This resistance challenges traditional balance-of-power formulations that have consistently emphasized Western material and technological superiority and demonstrates that a regional power, through the design of intelligent indigenous doctrines, can increase the costs of military intervention for great powers to an intolerable level.

This transformation in the perceptual balance directly affects the strategic calculations of other state and non-state actors in West Asia. When regional societies and political structures observe the capacity of a country to endure severe economic and military encirclement, their "threshold of tolerance and resistance" to Washington's political pressure and ultimatums rises. This phenomenon strengthens the diplomatic and defensive confidence of local actors and encourages them to redefine their deterrence options rather than submit to the hegemon's demands.

Within this context, the network of regional allied forces, or the resistance axis, experiences a new dynamic inspired by Iran's operational model. This transnational structure, itself founded on modular defense doctrine, recognizes that dispersing firepower and geographically distributing missile and drone capabilities can paralyze costly Western defensive systems. The transfer of this operational experience and its transformation into a shared defensive doctrine significantly weakens the effectiveness of US military threats throughout the region's geopolitical space.

The strengthened resolve to resist also obstructs the formation of US-led international military coalitions against independent countries. Third states observing the substantial logistical and operational costs imposed on the US military become less willing to participate in new military ventures. This coalition-based isolation compels the hegemon to bear the financial and military burden of confrontation independently, thereby further strengthening active deterrence among targeted countries.

Ultimately, the new model of resistance transforms the prevailing logic of "preserving security through submission" into "preserving security through asymmetric deterrence." This normative transformation teaches regional actors that political and territorial independence can be achieved only through the internal development of defensive capabilities and reliance on strategic depth. In the medium term, this intellectual development may move the region's political structure away from historical patterns of submission and toward an indigenous multipolar order.

Reconsideration of Security Relations

The Persian Gulf states, which previously tied their security to the United States, are now reconsidering their security strategies.

For several consecutive decades, the national security doctrines of the Persian Gulf states were organized around the purchase of advanced Western military equipment and reliance on the US military and security umbrella. This model, also described as the doctrine of “rented security,” assumed that, in the event of an acute crisis, the direct presence of US forces would guarantee the survival of these regimes. However, the Pentagon’s operational inability to provide complete protection for energy-transit routes and its own fixed bases during the recent war exposed the fundamental weakness of this assumption to the region’s Arab governments.

The vulnerability of advanced defensive systems, such as the Patriot system, to distributed missile and drone attacks has generated serious doubts among Persian Gulf capitals regarding the effectiveness of expensive Western weaponry. When these countries observe that military systems worth billions of dollars cannot provide absolute security for ports and vital oil and gas installations, they become less willing to invest exclusively in such platforms. This defensive impasse represents the beginning of a fundamental reassessment of their arms-procurement strategies and defense doctrines.

The direct consequence of this strategic uncertainty is the growing inclination of regional states to adopt policies of “multilateral hedging.” States that previously advocated the comprehensive containment of Iran have increasingly recognized that unconditional participation in Washington’s escalation scenarios would transform their territory and economic infrastructure into the first accessible targets of retaliatory attacks. Consequently, there has been a substantial shift toward direct de-escalatory diplomacy with Tehran and efforts to establish bilateral security channels without US mediation.

This behavioral transformation may gradually reduce the military facilities and operational access provided to US forces in these countries. To protect their infrastructure from the consequences of war, Persian Gulf governments may impose greater restrictions on the use of bases located within their territory for US offensive operations. Such tactical distancing would further constrain US Central Command’s operational freedom and substantially reduce the hegemon’s logistical and maneuver capabilities during future crises.

Ultimately, the gradual erosion of the US-dependent security doctrine directs the geopolitical structure of the Persian Gulf toward more balanced and inclusive security arrangements. The region’s states are increasingly recognizing that sustainable security cannot be achieved through confrontation and reliance on extraregional powers but requires indigenous arrangements and the mutual accommodation of interests with major neighboring powers. This intellectual shift poses a serious challenge to the United States’ historical and exclusive influence over the world’s critical energy arteries.

The Turn toward the East

The recent war has accelerated Iran’s growing alignment with the emerging Eastern powers of China and Russia.

Comprehensive military and economic confrontation with the United States has functioned as a historical accelerator of Iran’s “Look East” strategy. The crisis underscored the urgency of developing alternative alliances to neutralize the hegemon’s policy of international isolation. Recognizing that maintaining the balance of power requires connection to emerging centers of global power, Iran has expanded its strategic, military, and economic

relations with the Eurasian powers of China and Russia to an unprecedented degree. In the military and security domains, the war created more favorable conditions for the exchange of defense and intelligence technologies between Iran and Russia. Their mutual need to share operational experience in electronic warfare, counter-stealth systems, and drone development has elevated bilateral defense cooperation from joint exercises to technical and tactical synergy on the battlefield. This military convergence substantially strengthens Iran's deterrence capabilities against Western air and missile threats.

In the economic and geopolitical domains, China, as a key strategic partner, performs a vital role in ensuring Iran's economic survival. Unilateral Western sanctions have directed Tehran toward deeper integration into major initiatives, including the Belt and Road Initiative and the International North-South Transport Corridor. Beijing's commitment to stable energy purchases and investment in Iran's port and transportation infrastructure reduces the effectiveness of US economic sanctions as a strategic weapon. This strategic reorientation has also contributed to strengthening non-Western multilateral institutions, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and BRICS. Iran's structural integration into these organizations provides a basis for developing parallel financial systems, removing the US dollar from bilateral transactions, and bypassing Western-controlled banking networks. Over the long term, this process of de-dollarization and parallel institution-building may weaken US sanctions instruments and financial dominance over global markets.

Ultimately, the accelerated turn toward the East demonstrates the failure of the doctrines of dual containment and Iran's geopolitical isolation. The consolidation of a Tehran-Beijing-Moscow strategic triangle in West Asia creates a powerful bloc against the excessive demands of NATO and the United States. This Eurasian convergence not only transforms the regional balance of power but also, as a central component of the emerging multipolar world order, significantly challenges traditional Western spheres of influence.

The Erosion of US Soft Power

According to Joseph Nye's definition, war and extensive violence have substantially reduced the attractiveness of US soft power among regional and global public opinion.

According to Joseph Nye's classical definition, soft power is the ability to obtain desired outcomes through attraction, persuasion, and consent rather than through coercion, threats, or material violence. During the recent war, the United States' extensive and indiscriminate use of destructive weaponry, comprehensive economic sanctions affecting civilians, and broad support for escalatory measures substantially damaged its claimed moral and legal image among regional and global audiences. Such coercive conduct created a profound gap between declared values, including human rights and peace, and the practical implementation of US foreign policy. Rising civilian casualties and widespread destruction of vital infrastructure generated substantial public resentment toward Washington's policies throughout West Asia and beyond. Images of destruction and human suffering transformed the perception of the United States from a "peace mediator" or "stabilizing power" into a "principal source of instability and insecurity." This perceptual erosion has encouraged public opinion and intellectual elites to approach the official narratives of Western media with growing skepticism and distrust.

Beyond public opinion, the war has called into question the effectiveness of US-influenced international institutions in managing crises. The repeated use of the veto in the Security Council to prevent ceasefires and the disregard of decisions issued by international courts have exposed Western double standards concerning international law. This phenomenon has weakened the normative legitimacy of international institutions and

demonstrated that global rules are respected only when they correspond with the hegemonic interests of the United States and its allies. The direct consequence of declining soft-power appeal is a substantial reduction in US diplomatic capacity to persuade developing countries to align with its positions. When the moral foundations of a great power's foreign policy collapse, threats and material incentives no longer possess their previous effectiveness. Countries of the Global South may prefer to distance themselves from Washington's escalation strategies to avoid being regarded by their own populations as complicit in unlawful conduct.

Ultimately, the erosion of US soft power represents the loss of the country's most important low-cost instrument of dominance. A hegemon lacking moral and persuasive attractiveness must increasingly rely on expensive military and economic instruments to advance its objectives. This exclusive dependence on hard power not only substantially increases the costs of maintaining the United States' overseas presence but also accelerates the structural decline and attrition of its military empire globally.

Table 2. Strategic Consequences of the Third Imposed War for the Regional Geopolitical Balance

Strategic Axis	Key Operational Variables	Instrument of Influence on the Regional Environment	Ultimate Geopolitical Consequence
Strengthening the resolve to resist	Asymmetric defense, distribution of firepower, and drone-based resilience	Transformation of the perceptual balance and erosion of the hegemon's material prestige	Transition toward active deterrence and the formation of indigenous defensive poles
Reconsideration of security relations	Ineffectiveness of conventional defense and insecurity of Persian Gulf bases	Multilateral hedging and direct diplomacy	Reduction of US military access and collapse of the rented-security model
Turn toward the East	Eurasian alliances, de-dollarization, and transit corridors	Technical-military cooperation with Russia and strategic Chinese investment	Failure of dual containment and strengthening of a multipolar order
Erosion of US soft power	Double standards, civilian casualties, and vetoes of resolutions	Loss of moral legitimacy and media exposure	Washington's diplomatic isolation and the need for greater expenditure on hard-power instruments

Conclusion

The Third Imposed War demonstrated that military power alone, despite technological superiority, remains vulnerable when confronted with a form of strategic depth composed of extensive geography, modular defense, and society's identity-based cohesion. The United States has become trapped in a strategic contradiction in this conflict: continued engagement increases its domestic and international economic and political costs, whereas withdrawal diminishes its prestige and strategic credibility in the region. Iran's current strategy of "managing war across hybrid domains" has reduced the United States from the role of "regional order-setter" to that of an actor entrapped in an attritional quagmire.

The present study examined the strategic challenges and constraints confronting the United States within the context described as the "Third Imposed War." The findings demonstrate that the paradigms governing US military doctrine have become structurally disconnected from contemporary regional battlefield and geopolitical realities. Tactical successes and material superiority that previously generated strategic transformations, as in Iraq in 2003, have lost their effectiveness against the Islamic Republic of Iran because of the existence of a "wall of resistance" and advanced defensive doctrines. They have consequently become Pyrrhic victories or costly and strategically ineffective successes.

At the theoretical level, the study demonstrated that Iran's application of "asymmetric warfare theory" and "modular defense" has trapped US military technological superiority in a doctrinal impasse. The creation of cost

asymmetry, through the use of inexpensive missiles and drones against costly defensive systems, together with the decentralized distribution of command networks, has confronted Washington's "shock and awe" strategy with target proliferation and resource attrition. This condition has not only prevented rapid victory but has also confined the United States within an expensive and attritional spiral.

Another central finding of the study is the redefinition of "strategic depth" within Iran's defense doctrine. The findings indicate that this depth is no longer merely a function of territorial expanse and difficult topography but represents an intelligent combination of domestic political depth and regional networked depth associated with the resistance axis. This multilayered deterrence structure links any military action against Iran's homeland to simultaneous threats throughout the geographical expanse of West Asia. By transforming fixed US bases into "strategic hostages," it substantially restricts the operational freedom of US Central Command.

At the level of political economy, the findings demonstrate that the "strategic leverage of the Strait of Hormuz" remains the most powerful instrument of geoeconomic deterrence against hegemonic intervention. The inseparable relationship between the security of this waterway and the stability of global energy markets enables Iran to connect the costs of any aggression against it to the economic security of US allies and the international financial system as a whole. This interdependence effectively restricts US military options and prevents the conversion of hard power into the desired political outcome.

The comparative analysis of the 2003 Iraq operation and the Third Imposed War scenario demonstrated that the United States experiences a chronic failure in moving from "military victory" to a "sustainable political order." Unlike Iraq, which was almost completely isolated, Iran has prevented the formation of a power vacuum or structural collapse by relying on cultural and identity capital, understood as the software of resistance, and indigenous capabilities. This fundamental distinction demonstrates that traditional regime-change models lack structural effectiveness in Iran's complex and deeply rooted environment. The study also indicated that the continuation of this hybrid conflict has resulted in the substantial erosion of US "soft power" at the global and regional levels. The gap between declared values and political conduct, combined with the human and infrastructural costs of war, has transformed Washington's image from that of a "mediator of stability" into an "agent of insecurity." This erosion of legitimacy has weakened the United States' coalition-building capacity and encouraged its traditional allies to adopt strategies of "multilateral hedging" and independent de-escalation with Tehran.

The strategic consequence of this impasse is the acceleration of Iran's "turn toward the East" and its structural integration into the emerging global order through BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The findings indicate that US pressure did not isolate Iran but instead functioned as a catalyst for the formation of a strategic Tehran-Beijing-Moscow triangle. This Eurasian convergence has weakened the effectiveness of sanctions and, by developing parallel financial and security systems, has challenged the hegemony of the US dollar and the West's traditional influence in the center of the global energy system. Ultimately, the Third Imposed War may be regarded as a turning point in the decline of US hegemony in West Asia. The failure to adapt to the realities of asymmetric warfare, the neglect of Iran's identity-based and civilizational depth, and the logistical impasse surrounding regional bases have directed Washington toward a situation in which the costs of direct military presence exceed its benefits. The future regional order will therefore be shaped not by hegemonic impositions but by indigenous balances of power and new East-oriented alliances in which Iran consolidates its position as a central and indispensable actor.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

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Transparency of Data

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