

IRAN-US-ISRAEL WAR

Endgames and lessons for Bangladesh

Veteran diplomat, M Humayun Kabir, explains the current escalation of war in the Middle East and the ramifications for Bangladesh, in an exclusive interview with Ramisa Rob, Geopolitical Insights Editor at The Daily Star

How has the current war and the Trump administration been different to US foreign policy you witnessed firsthand?

During the Bush administration, we have seen the US attacks on Iraq. Then during Obama's time as well, we have seen Libya disintegrating thanks to the US involvement. The US establishment does have a tendency to get involved in external wars. But what makes President Trump's administration different from his predecessors is that both the Bush and Obama administrations used multilateral facilities more. They would rally different countries and build up a coalition, then go into military action.

President Trump is more inclined to take unilateral initiatives, without as much consultations or taking Congress into as much of a consideration before going to war. We have seen what he has done in Venezuela. My sense is, that example inspired him to do something similar in Iran.

Do you think Trump is looking for an exit plan?

After nearly two weeks, he must be looking at some exit plans. As political analysts have stated in the US press, the administration seems to have gone to war thinking it would have been a short one and lead to regime change in Iran. But Iran is an extremely resilient country. Trump said that the war will end soon, but Iran has said they are not ready to end it now.

After 8 years, in 1988, Iran agreed to a ceasefire with the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. Motjaba Khamenei, who has just been elected as the new supreme leader, also fought in the Iran-Iraq war. The leaders of Iran are veterans of the war. Iran wants to remove the "shadow of war," permanently. Iranian scholars are indicating a few demands to the US: guarantee of non-aggression; withdrawal of US bases from the Gulf nations; acknowledge their right to useful use of nuclear energy; and compensation for damages caused from the war. All these elements provide a framework of what could come, as parties search for a way out.

How long can Iran last against the US – historically the most powerful nation in the world?

For Iran, the survival of the regime is not a big deal. Iran has been under sanctions for nearly 40 years. The war is devastating for them. The US and Israel have the capacity to destroy Iran. But the regime in Iran would bet on surviving at the minimum, despite the destruction. If someone can survive at rock bottom, it is difficult to push them down even further. Iran is dexterous at asymmetric warfare. They know they cannot fight the US and Israel face-to-face. They are using other tools: the power of geography and economy by choking the Strait of Hormuz, putting a lot of pressure on the Gulf nations, the entire international community and the US as well. Iran is using whatever leverage it has, and



M Humayun Kabir, former Bangladesh Ambassador to the US, and President of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI).

using it intelligently.

We, in Bangladesh, are not at war but we're facing multiple challenges. We're seeing huge lines at the petrol pumps. A panic has caught up with the users of petrol and fuel. Our economy is in a fragile state – our inflation will go up if the war continues for another few weeks. There are millions of expatriate workers living in the Middle East, who form the remittance lifeline. Due to the disruptions to economic activities in the region, many people will also lose work if the war continues.

How can Bangladesh's government insulate the economy from negative impact in the long-run?

The current government is talking to different countries for oil supply, such as gasoline from China and diesel from India. In the long-term, we need to focus on renewable energy. So far, we have only been talking about it and there has been practically no contribution of renewable energy to our energy supply. This war should be a lesson to improve our energy security. We also have both onshore and offshore gas. For the last 12 years, no progress has taken place. It is time for Bangladesh to find a new strategy for energy for the long-run.

Is getting Russian oil refined through India an option for an emergency solution?

Russian crude oil is thick, and cannot be suitably processed in our refineries. We can look at the opportunity of importing Russian oil through India, if we can do that. India has been given 30-day relief by the US, and I am sure India will be importing a lot.

There have been reports in Middle East Monitor, though it hasn't been substantiated by the government, that Iran is granting Bangladesh safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz. Will that grant relief?

If it happened, I would say it's a gracious move on the part of Iran to give us the concession of safe passage.

However, even if they have given us that facility, getting the vessels and insurance companies to cover that, will not be easy. Regardless, if we can get that, my position would be: let's try it.

How would that impact the relationship with the US though?

Well, my sense is that if the US can give relief to India to import Russian oil, we can very well approach the United States and ask to bring oil supply from the Strait of Hormuz to Bangladesh.

Is now the time to defer LDC graduation?

I think the new Bangladesh government has already decided and applied for deferral to the United Nations. My understanding is that Bangladesh may get three years of deferral time, to graduate in 2029. Even then, we need to focus on the graduation process with the Iran war shaking us again. My personal observation is that previous processes were more of a slogan than a preparation.

LDC graduation will require massive internal reforms. We will lose our preferential access, and Bangladesh will have to renegotiate agreements with all our partners. That will be very difficult especially with the reciprocal tariff agreement that we have signed with the United States. We will have to sign similar agreements with India, China, the European Union which is already in talks with Bangladesh to sign GSP

plus facilities. The moment we ask the EU to give us such facilities, we have to sign all the human rights records and so on. What this means is that we have to make ourselves more competitive on multiple fronts.

We have to reorganise our economic management, our governance structure, our skills management, among others. All of these elements need reforms, in order to be brought to a global, competitive standard. So, we need to take massive measures to prepare, and ensure that the transition will be less painful.

What should the people and government of Bangladesh focus on now?

The war should be a reminder that the world outside is very uncertain. If we want to weather through such uncertainty, consolidation of our homefront is very important. The July uprising has given indications of which way to go. We really need to focus on reforms and build a consensus-based, inclusive political structure so that Bangladesh can go beyond both the domestic transition – characterised by the rising aspirations of people – and the economic transition that is coming up, along with the geopolitical shifts that are occurring from the war in Iran. We have to think differently. We have to do things differently. Only then, we can face the challenges ahead with dignity as a nation.

Is the Middle East's "rupture" becoming global?



IMTIAZ A. HUSSAIN

To Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, "the global rules-based order" faces "rupture." He had US President Donald J. Trump in mind. A month later, Trump illustrated how he does it. With Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, he tried to "rupture" Iran's theological and military infrastructures.

Iran still stands two weeks later. Bombing US military bases in the neighbourhood alerted European navies and NATO, inflicted civilian casualties, and closed the Strait of Hormuz. Fears of World War III mirror a 2025 "YouGov poll" indicating a near-majority European and US public opinion.

Why does this local "rupturing" predict global war-mongering?

During Israel's 12-day bombings in 2025, Iran trumped Trump's quick victory plan: to not impact the November mid-term elections. Over half a dozen of Iran's neighbours, even more US military bases, refineries, and the US embassy in Riyadh were hit by Iranian missiles. A day after Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian publicly apologised to those civilians, Dubai was hit again, exposing a possible rift between Iranian regular forces and revolutionary guards. Rumours, suspicion, and anger riddle the air, as Israel "ruptures" Lebanese Hezbollah for serving as Iran's proxies.

Plots also thicken. One involves Netanyahu and Zionist groups campaigning for a biblical revival. Pushing Amalek – evil force haunting Jews, with Iran being the

latest – the "final solution" meted out to Gaza's Palestinians now targets Hezbollah and Persians.

Of the one-fifth of the world's gas and oil flowing through the narrow strait, much goes to Asia, half to China, a quarter to India, with Japan and South Korea the rest. Interestingly, since quadrupling oil prices after the 1973 Yom Kippur war impacted western countries hugely, could Asia's eye-catching economic growth make it a geopolitical player now? By controlling Hormuz, could Trump choke China?

Trump treats China more reverently than his other pariahs, Iran and Venezuela. With predictions of China overtaking the United States in economic size and value later this century, is the historical pattern of mid-century global leadership change unfolding now? Is a regional "rupture" becoming global?

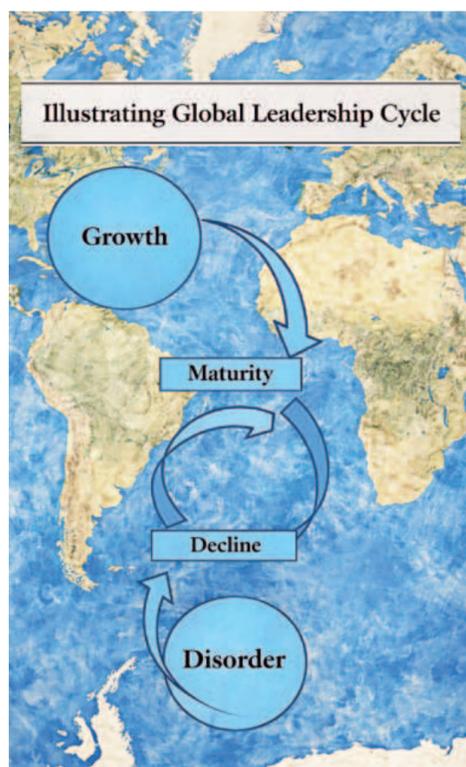
When British colonialism slid into American imperialism from the 1940s, multipolar rivalry was replaced by bipolarity. Europe vanished from the stage, as two outsiders emerged: the Soviet Union and the United States. Negotiations between them converted a "hot war" into the Cold War. Could China and the United States repeat that now?

Carney's "rupture" cannot be passively finished. So far, only a military foundation permits preaching human rights. Since championing them leaves the United Nations flat-footed, could Trump's militaristic approach profit from China's globally inclusive counterpart?

World leadership today echoes the 1930s, with populism edging democracy. Trump's populism attracts the likes of Netanyahu, just as Benito Mussolini drifted towards Adolf Hitler in the 1930s. No European leader could till now go against Trump.

China's Xi Jinping can. He hosts Trump next month. Both could eke out fake *modus operandi*, as Hitler and Joseph Stalin briefly did on the eve of World War II, or a real one, as Soviet and US negotiators did during the Cold War.

Both the "American century" and the "British Century" show a cyclical pattern with rise, maturity, and decline, in stages.



Tariffs are the game-changing weapon. Lowering them boosts trade, growth, and stability. Ramping them invites decline, while maturity mixes both as a preface to inevitable disorder. In short, one world leader brings more peace, but as the number increases, stability diminishes. The Cold War was more stable than the period before World War II, or during neoliberalism, as it promotes competition.

Britain's leadership began after corn tariffs were lowered in 1846 to promote economic growth, while the US' leadership began in 1934 to escape economic depression. In its growth phase, Britain launched the first and second industrial revolutions on RMGs and steel, respectively, replacing the East India Company to govern the colony of the British Empire. Correspondingly,

the United States signed the Atlantic Charter in 1941 to replace the League of Nations with the United Nations, then constructed the IMF and World Bank in 1944. When World War II ended, the Marshall Plan revived developed countries from 1947 and NATO protected them from 1949. Economic competition was fundamental for Britain, but military strength was the ace card. Britain won the first and second world wars only because of US military intervention. US leadership salvaged Europe from the Soviet Union's peril. Today Trump distances Europe, but previous US leadership needed it. They were the top free-riders of US economic and military resources, which Trump does not want.

When Trump and Xi Jinping meet next month Trump will sweeten his midterm election approach,

China will be anointed as the other superpower, and from both we will deduce the future of war.

An already shaken Bangladesh economy faces a grimmer future. Rationing fuel usually triggers other downwardly spiraling trends. With exports too expensive to ship and remittances from Middle East work-migrants plummeting, households, transportation, factories, and ultimately, development could face and feel unprecedented pinches.

Rekindling solar alternatives demands attention, given their notable usages in rural areas. Converting factories to them and automating RMG production demands attention. Yet, to become a developed country, Bangladesh must shift from such low-wage industries towards high-tech and allow the ECOSOC's November meeting to make its "graduation"

decision. Bangladesh's upward swing cannot be held hostage to low-wage profiting. Long-term oil price-hike recovery depends on these moves. So too the public desire to shift from hardware job outlets to software. Reinvigorating under-utilised high-tech parks across the country may answer the spark that produced the 2024 movement.

The "rupture" from the war in Iran opens a can of worms locally, regionally, and globally. Increasing distrust within these domains would logically feed nationalism the most, with religious fundamentalism not far behind. Rising above them is the most urgent call of the day.

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COMPARING HISTORICAL LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

	1930s, 1940s	2020-2023s
Prevalent World Leader	Great Britain	United States
Key Challenger	Germany	China
Dominant Attitudinal Atmosphere	Populism	Populism
Political Conditions	Dictatorship ascendant	Dictatorship ascendant
Economic Conditions	Great Depression, 1929-39	Great Recession, 2008-11
Political Settings	* Colonies seeking independence * Democracy too raw to prevail * Democracy vs. Communism	* Rising developing nations * Democracy shaky * Democracy, Communism & Socialism marginalised
Key International Organisations & Status	League of Nations; Ignored by All	United Nations IMF/World Bank NGOs marginalised
Industrial Setting	Shift from Agricultural to Industrial Growth	Shift to High-Tech & Automated Systems
Contending Leaders & International Institutions	US, Did Not Join; Germany Rejected It	Trump Pulled Out of Agreements