Will the Iran war create a new world order?

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Operation Epic Fury launched on February 28, 2026, and struck at a moment when the post-Cold War international order was already trembling, leading the world to sense that something irreversible had begun. What we are witnessing today is not merely a regional conflict; it may well be the stress test that exposes which ideas, alliances, and institutions built over 70 years can still hold and which collapse under their own contradictions.

Let us be honest, what the Iran crisis has done is accelerate a transformation already underway, compressing decades of gradual shift into months of raw consequence.

For most of the post-World War II era, deterrence was a relatively tidy concept: two superpowers, two arsenals, and a shared understanding that destruction was too costly to contemplate. Kenneth Waltz, in *Theory of International Politics*, described the stability of bipolarity in terms that made strategic sense in 1979. But the world of 2026 is structurally different—multipolar, technologically complex, and populated by actors who have learned that asymmetric strategies can embarrass conventional power.

Iran's deterrence calculus was never purely nuclear. For years, Tehran wielded influence through proxies—Hezbollah, the Houthis, allied militias across Iraq and Syria—as a distributed deterrent architecture. That architecture did not prevent the February strikes, and its existence now raises the question of whether deterrence in a multipolar world must be reconceptualised entirely. Nuclear deterrence worked because both parties had something to lose symmetrically. What happens when one party disperses its deterrent into non-state networks, ideology, and geography?

The Maduro case sharpens this anxiety. When US forces captured Venezuela's president under a domestic criminal indictment, bypassing the International Criminal Court (ICC) framework, it sent a message that power, when sufficiently concentrated, can rewrite the rules of legal jurisdiction in real time. The ICC, already under sanctions pressure from Washington, found itself caught in a Catch-22: would prosecuting Maduro legitimise what may have been an unlawful capture? This is not merely a legal puzzle. It is a signal that the normative infrastructure of international law is being stress-tested not just by rogue actors but also by the very states that once championed it.

Henry Kissinger once argued that international order requires both legitimacy and power, and that legitimacy depends on shared frameworks among sovereign states. What the Iran war has exposed is that those frameworks are now contested at their very foundation. The US and Israel coordinated military action in a way that bypassed conventional multilateral consultation. Nato was not formally invoked. The UN Security Council remained paralysed. Regional bodies issued statements that satisfied no one.

On the other side, Russia and China, while not intervening militarily, have moved with unusual directness in the form of warnings. This shift from strategic ambiguity to deterrence through clarity matters. It means the emerging bloc architecture is not based on formal treaties or elaborate security guarantees, but on shared scepticism of US-led order and increasingly on credible threat-making. This aligns with Mearsheimer's view that states are perpetual security competitors and that liberal internationalism was always an illusion maintained by American hegemony. The emerging configuration—US-Israel-Gulf on one side, China-Russia-Iran on the other, with everyone else navigating anxiously in between—resembles a system of spheres of influence more than a rules-based order.

International law has never been perfect, but it carried weight because even states that violated it felt compelled to justify themselves within its language. The Maduro capture, the Iran strikes conducted without UN authorisation, Venezuela's move to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the ICC, are not isolated anomalies. They form a pattern suggesting that states are not abandoning international law openly but are selectively citing it when convenient and bypassing it when not. This is more dangerous than simple non-compliance, as it means instrumentalising legality.

Hugo Grotius wrote in *The Rights of War and Peace* (1625) that even war had rules deriving from natural reason shared across humanity. Today, the dispute is not over principles, but over who gets to interpret and enforce them. When the ICC drops an investigation into US sanctions against Venezuela under political pressure, and simultaneously prepares potential warrants for Maduro, the institution's neutrality becomes difficult to defend. This asymmetry, real or perceived, is precisely what pushes states towards the exit.

My own reading is this: international law is not dying, but it is entering a period of profound renegotiation. The rules that emerge from this transition may be more regional, more conditional, and more explicitly adjusted by power than the post-1945 frameworks. That may not be catastrophic; it may simply be more honest.

Also, something is revealing in the fact that the ceasefire following the June 2025 Israel-Iran conflict was announced on social media by the US president, not through a formal communiqué or the UN. This reflects a structural shift in how diplomacy is being conducted and legitimised. The traditional grammar of diplomacy—careful ambiguity, deniability, third-party mediation—is being replaced by something rawer and more immediate. China and Russia's rejection of Trump's "Peace Board" initiative was similarly conducted through public declarations. The language of deterrence is bleeding into the language of diplomacy.

The Gulf states offer perhaps the most interesting case study. Their response to the Iran war has been strategically ambiguous—neither enthusiastically aligned with Washington nor openly sympathetic to Tehran. This calculated silence is itself a diplomatic posture, which we will see more of. Middle powers are learning that in a contested multipolar system, strategic ambiguity is not weakness. It is leverage.

Chatham House analysts noted early in 2026 that even a prolonged Iran war would have "limited consequences for global GDP" but warned that some emerging economies remain acutely vulnerable to persistent high energy prices. That is a carefully calibrated assessment that perhaps understates a longer-term transformation. The Iran war has accelerated de-dollarisation trends already visible for years. Local currency settlements, alternative payment infrastructures, and gold-linked mechanisms have been gathering momentum since Russia's 2022 exclusion from SWIFT. The Iran conflict adds urgency to those trends, as states watching the weaponisation of financial systems quietly diversify their exposure. And interestingly, the usage of blockchain for financial transactions is getting bigger.

Bangladesh, like most developing nations, sits at the intersection of these pressures—energy import dependence, currency vulnerability, and supply chain exposure to Middle East conflict. The economic status quo is not collapsing; it is reconfiguring. The dollar will remain dominant for years. But the *unconditional* dominance of the dollar—the uncontested centrality of Western financial architecture—is being negotiated downwards.

This is also, and I say this with genuine conviction, a transitional moment for academia. The theoretical frameworks we have relied upon—Waltzian neorealism, Nye's liberalism, Wendt's constructivism, even Mearsheimer's offensive realism—were built to explain a world with cleaner categories: states, alliances, institutions, norms. The world of 2026 scrambles those categories. Non-state actors shape deterrence. Social media replaces communiqués. A domestic criminal indictment bypasses international arrest warrant procedures. A ceasefire is declared unilaterally on a social media platform.

Alexander Wendt, in *Social Theory of International Politics*, argued that "anarchy is what states make of it." Scholars today need to ask: what happens when states are no longer the only relevant architects of that anarchy? When proxy networks, technology companies, and domestic legal instruments all become tools of international power? The discipline of international relations is not broken, but it is overdue for a serious revision, not just an addendum.

What this moment demands, from governments, institutions, and scholars alike, is intellectual honesty about what has changed and what still holds. The world is not witnessing the end of order. It is watching one order negotiate its succession with another. That negotiation will be messy, sometimes violent, and deeply consequential, and the choices made in the coming months will define its terms for a generation.

An Iranian flag lies amidst the rubble of a building of the Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, which was damaged in a strike, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran on April 7, 2026.
PHOTO: REUTERS

Repeal of Supreme Court ordinances clouds judicial independence

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When reflecting on broken promises, people sometimes refer to Sunil Gangopadhyay's poem "*Keu Katha Rakheni*" (Nobody kept their promise), whose protagonist received numerous assurances and pledges over his 33 years of life but none were apparently kept. In a way, the essence of this poem is aptly reflected in the long-standing discourse surrounding the separation of the judiciary from executive control in Bangladesh. Years have passed, and much has been said about the importance of this issue, but no government has delivered on the promise of judicial autonomy yet.

It has been 27 years since the Supreme Court passed the landmark 1999 verdict in the *Secretary, Ministry of Finance vs Masdar Hossain case*, outlining a 12-point directive to ensure the genuine independence of the judiciary. The case originated from a petition filed by Masdar Hossain, then general secretary of the BCS (Judicial) Association, in 1995. The issue has returned to public discourse again after a special parliamentary committee, tasked with scrutinising 133 ordinances promulgated during the Professor Yunus-led interim government, recommended the "repeal and preservation" of four ordinances—the Supreme Court Judges Appointment Ordinance, 2025; the Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, 2025; the Supreme Court Secretariat (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026; and the National Parliament Secretariat (Interim Special Provisions) Ordinance, 2024.

The chairman of the parliamentary committee, Zainul Abedin, MP, explained that repeal of these ordinances would mean no new actions would be taken under them for now, while preservation would ensure that actions already taken under these ordinances would remain valid and would not be cancelled. Abedin also noted that the ordinances were recommended for repeal and preservation as they were inconsistent with the constitution and that necessary laws could be enacted in the future.

He further clarified that under the current constitution, the president appoints Supreme Court judges in consultation with the chief justice, and the main qualification for appointment is at least 10 years' experience in the legal profession. However, the new ordinance stipulates that a judge must be at least 45 years of age for appointment. He also said that there are notes of dissent regarding the formation and functioning of the Supreme Court Secretariat, which requires further discussion.

Of the total 133 ordinances, the committee adopted 98 as they were; 15 were recommended for passage with amendments, 16 ordinances would be allowed to lapse and later reintroduced in parliament as bills by the relevant ministries, and the remaining four ordinances were recommended for outright repeal.

However, several BNP lawmakers said that new bills would be introduced in due course to ensure the judiciary's full independence. If that happens, members of parliament, including opposition MPs, will have the opportunity to propose amendments and take part in discussions. But then, all decisions hinge on the ruling party, BNP, as it holds the majority required to pass any law and also pass constitutional amendments.

Article 95 of the constitution states that the president appoints judges in consultation with the chief justice. However, Article 48(3) stipulates that, except for the appointment of the prime minister and the chief justice, the president shall act upon the advice of the prime minister in all other matters. In practice, this constitutional arrangement has long raised questions about the extent of executive influence over the judiciary.

While allegations of politicisation of the judiciary have surfaced at different times, no government has enacted a specific law governing judicial appointments. In this context, the interim government promulgated an ordinance in 2025 regarding the appointment of Supreme Court judges to select suitable candidates for appointment to both the Appellate Division and the High Court Division. Such a legal framework could increase the scope for appointing more competent and impartial judges. Besides, two ordinances were introduced to establish an independent Supreme Court Secretariat to ensure effective implementation of judicial independence, including supervision, control, and discipline of subordinate courts.

Since the BNP government is not approving the ordinances, there is a risk that the process of judicial appointments may revert to the previous framework until a new law is enacted.

The BNP's 2026 election manifesto, however, states that effective independence of the judiciary will be ensured in accordance with the constitution and the Masdar Hossain case verdict. It also pledges to enact a law regarding judicial appointments, establish a judicial commission, allow the Supreme Court to control subordinate courts, and strengthen a separate judiciary secretariat. The party's 31-point reform proposals unveiled in July 2023 also state similar visions about judicial independence. So, the question that comes to mind is, where does the contradiction lie? There is little substantive difference between the BNP's promises and the ordinances. Although the three above-mentioned judiciary-related ordinances offer more detailed provisions than the party's broad commitments, BNP's reluctance to retain them in their current form casts doubt on the execution of genuine judicial separation.

This fear of broken promises is not unfounded, given our past experiences, even though Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman has said the government will further scrutinise the ordinances, make necessary corrections, and reintroduce them as bills in parliament to ensure judicial independence. Scepticism looms large because promises of judicial independence are not new in Bangladesh. Even Masdar Hossain, in a 2022 newspaper article, pointed out that the discussion on the separation of the judiciary in Bangladesh is not recent. It dates back to the colonial period. One of the earliest initiatives came in 1900, when the then secretary to the government of Bengal, CW Bolton, presented a plan for segregation, but no action was taken to implement it.

Later, in 1908, Sir Harvey Adamson, who was the home member of the government of India then, prepared a draft to introduce the plan on an experimental basis in some districts. In 1921, the Legislative Council of Bengal also passed a unanimous resolution for the separation of the judiciary, but again, no action was taken. Again in 1947, some experimental steps were taken regarding segregation in West Pakistan, but no such initiative was taken in East Pakistan.

It remains to be seen whether BNP keeps its promises concerning this issue. It must be noted that the three judiciary-related ordinances and other ordinances relating to key reform measures on human rights, enforced disappearances, anti-corruption, and revenue administration—which have been put on hold for further review—were not drafted in ordinary times. They emerged from the July uprising, which had pledged to dismantle fascism and establish the rule of law and good governance. The real question now is whether those visions of the uprising and subsequent commitments made by political parties will be carried forward or quietly set aside.