

How the US naval blockade can accelerate multipolar global order

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Contrary to analyses by some Western media, the US naval blockade of the Strait of Hormuz might achieve the precise opposite of its stated aims of submission of the Iranian regime, by empowering Tehran as a defiant power, and accelerating the very multipolar realignment Washington has long sought to contain. The main beneficiaries are already in Beijing and Moscow, watching the US lose itself, with quiet satisfaction.

Washington fails to recognise that Tehran did not close the Strait of Hormuz out of desperation. Iran weaponised the Strait deliberately transforming a geographic advantage into a coercive instrument, to respond to US aggression, which they've been preparing for. By restricting and conditioning commercial passage, charging tolls exceeding \$2 million per vessel, and selectively permitting or denying transit, Iran gained from a military confrontation in which the United States and Israel hold overwhelming conventional military superiority. The new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, declared explicitly that the Strait's leverage "must undoubtedly continue to be used" not as a last resort, but as a deliberate strategy refined over decades.

The US administration's logic for the blockade seems straightforward: deny Iran the economic benefit of its chokepoint control. Stop the toll revenues. Interdict ships that have paid them. Force Tehran to choose between accepting US' terms or watching its economy implode. The logic has coherence. But its strategic flaw is equally coherent: it validates the Strait as the primary theatre of the conflict, and fails to account for the geopolitical repercussions that can arise from it.

Prior to the US blockade, Iran's stranglehold on the Strait already proved economically costly and diplomatically embarrassing for Washington. Now, the Strait is a contested chokepoint, a battleground, that Iran can credibly present to Beijing, Moscow, and the broader Global South as a reverberating message: the US will not only launch costly wars that spill across the world, but the US will also weaponise the arteries of the global economy.

Chinese President Xi Jinping warned that "we must not allow the world to revert to the law of the jungle." By unilaterally obstructing Iranian ports, the Trump administration's messaging could hand China a clear precedent: national security overtakes international laws. It's a dangerous precedent, one that could lead China to ignore the application of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait.

Washington has also handed Iran, and the

single miscalculation — a misidentified vessel, such as the US attacking a China-owned vessel will be detrimental for Washington. Each day of enforcement is a day Iran accumulates grievance, along with its allies.

US strategists tend to reach for the naval playbook as though historical precedents validate the tactic regardless of the current context. The Cuban Missile Crisis is invariably invoked as the template. But that confrontation had a precise and credible off-ramp: Soviet ships would turn back, missiles

remains is an open-ended siege with no stipulated terminus.

The parallel with Venezuela is more damning. From 2019 onward, the United States imposed sweeping sanctions and later naval pressure on the Maduro government, pursuing the same logic now applied to Iran: economic pain would produce political capitulation. It failed entirely. Maduro consolidated power, Russia and China undercut US leverage at every turn, and Washington's pressure campaign directly catalysed the adversarial alignment it sought to prevent. Iran, with its deeper institutional roots, its larger population, its revolutionary identity, and its incomparably greater strategic position, presents an even less favourable canvass for the same brush.

The US naval blockade is an outdated instrument that now injures US allies, destabilises emerging market economies. Proponents argue that Iran suffers more. But Washington suffers the global reputational damage of corroding the international world order, as many have already called out. While that may seem merely political, economic globalisation is increasingly dictated by geopolitics.

A realignment of the global order is already happening. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov arrived in Beijing on April 14 — the day after the blockade took effect for high-level consultations. Beijing called the blockade "dangerous and irresponsible," and both Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution aimed at protecting commercial shipping. These form coordinated acts of diplomatic solidarity signalling the formation of a coherent anti-Western bloc crystallising around the Iranian crisis.

China imports approximately a third of its oil through the Strait of Hormuz. By demonstrating that Washington will close vital sea lanes to enforce political objectives, the blockade has handed Beijing a compelling strategic incentive to accelerate overland pipeline infrastructure through Central Asia and Russia, permanently reducing Chinese exposure to US maritime leverage. And China has been preparing for this. For some 25 years, China has been buying and

building ports across the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf and around the world. Russia, meanwhile, benefits from elevated oil prices that cushion its sanctioned economy while it consolidates a non-Western energy and security architecture, whose appetite, Washington's own actions are feeding.

Now to play devil's advocate, one might ask: can the blockade actually dislodge the Iranian regime?

If the blockade succeeds — meaning if Iran accepts terms and Washington declares victory — the costs are still notable. Every non-Western government will have absorbed a lesson: the US is willing to impose a global energy shock to enforce its geopolitical preferences. That lesson will accelerate the diversification away from dollar-denominated systems and US controlled maritime corridors to shift to diversify to non-Western powers, who have been waiting for this opportunity. A victory that hastens the erosion of structural US hegemony is not a strategic success. It is a pyrrhic one.

Tehran not capitulating is the more probable outcome, given every historical precedent for external pressure on revolutionary states have already led analysts to draw comparisons to the 1970s oil crisis, when an Arab producers' embargo quadrupled prices and prompted fuel rationing across major economies. In this scenario, the US blockade becomes a sustained state of military and economic attrition, with Iran demonstrating to the world that it cannot be coerced by a carrier strike — a precedent that empowers every revisionist actor watching from the sidelines.

Neither scenario produces an outcome that does not denigrate US global credibility. The multipolar order being assembled in Beijing and Moscow does not need to defeat the US in the Strait of Hormuz. It only needs to wait for Washington to defeat itself, even as its President keeps claiming "victory" on television to cast a veil of his own reality onto a world that is now able to see right through it.

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IRGC, a "global propaganda amplifier" in a war where narratives play increasingly important roles. Iran has already called the blockade "piracy" — a framing that will resonate in every capital that imports energy through that corridor. Washington's adversaries, mainly China, will take notes and frame their own agenda against the US, as standing up against a troubling superpower.

The Gulf of Oman is not a controlled theatre; it is a compressed geography where a

would be removed, and both superpowers had overwhelming incentives to de-escalate within days. The endgame was visible from the opening move.

No such clarity exists in the current war today. The IRGC — especially the empowered young leadership from the decapitation of its leadership — has domestic political incentives to continue to show defiance rather than accept humiliation. There is no nuclear symmetry to force Iran into giving up. What

Myanmar's recent election and what it means for Bangladesh

MD NAHIYAN SHAJID KHAN

Between late December 2025 and late January 2026, Myanmar held its first general election since the military junta, officially the State Administration Council (SAC), seized power in its February 2021 coup. Conducted over three phases on December 28, January 11, and January 25, the election was immediately and widely condemned by international bodies, including the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and the US State Department, as neither free nor fair. The result was as predictable as it was troubling: the military's long-standing proxy, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), swept to a landslide victory, winning 89 of the first 102 declared seats in the initial phase alone.

For readers in Dhaka, this might seem like a distant internal affair, the latest chapter in Myanmar's tragic post-coup story. It is not. The outcomes of Myanmar's political theatre carry direct, concrete, and urgent implications for Bangladesh's foreign policy, its security posture, and its ability to resolve the most pressing humanitarian burden it carries: the presence of over 1.18 million Rohingya refugees on its soil. Understanding Myanmar's election, therefore, is not merely an exercise in regional studies. It is an exercise in strategic self-awareness.

A political landscape designed for one outcome

To understand why Myanmar's election matters to Bangladesh, one must first understand what the election was and was not. It was not a democratic exercise in the conventional sense. The National League for Democracy (NLD), which won 88 percent of national parliamentary seats in the last free election in 2020, was dissolved by the junta in 2023 after refusing to re-register under new political party laws widely regarded as designed to exclude genuine opposition. Along with the NLD, 38 other parties were disbanded. Aung San Suu Kyi, the civilian leader who commanded that mandate in 2020, remains imprisoned.

A new legal architecture was erected to ensure that only compliant parties could compete. New legislation required parties to possess at least USD 35,000 in funds, maintain 100,000 members (up from 1,000 previously), and contest half of all constituencies — requirements tailor-made to favour the USDP. The junta also enacted a law imposing the death penalty for any act deemed to "disrupt" the electoral process, and rolled out a sweeping cyber security law criminalising VPN use and the sharing of information from banned social media platforms.

In this suffocating political environment, nearly 60 parties registered to compete, but only nine planned to contest nationwide, and most were either small or military-aligned. Independent analysts at the Asian Network for Free Elections and the Special Advisory

Council for Myanmar concluded in their joint April 2026 report, pointedly titled *Old Generals, New Clothes*, that the elections "comprehensively failed to meet internationally recognised standards for genuine elections." In March 2026, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing stepped down as commander-in-chief to position himself as president of a nominally civilian government — a repackaging of military rule, not a departure from it. The International Crisis Group has since described this transition as a shift to "pseudo-civilian rule" that will do nothing to change the fundamental dynamics of conflict inside Myanmar.

Potential outcomes and their implications for Bangladesh

The consolidation of military rule in Myanmar under a thin civilian veneer — what analysts are now calling "authoritarian upgrading" — presents Bangladesh with a multi-dimensional strategic challenge. The most immediate implication is the near-permanent suspension of meaningful Rohingya repatriation. As the Crisis Group has noted, conditions in Rakhine State "offer no pathway to safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation for Rohingya in the medium term." Within Myanmar, the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine insurgent group, has made substantial territorial gains in Rakhine State, creating a complex and contested environment in which neither the junta nor the Arakan Army has demonstrated political will to guarantee Rohingya rights, citizenship, or safety. No major political force in Myanmar, whether aligned with the junta or opposed to it, has articulated any serious vision for Rohingya reintegration.

For Bangladesh, which by January 2026 was hosting 1,182,755 registered Rohingya refugees, this is not an abstract concern. The 2025-26 Joint Response Plan sought \$934.5 million in its first year to assist 1.48 million people. Global donor fatigue is already undermining this effort, with international attention and funding shifting towards other crises in Ukraine, Gaza, and the Gulf. The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against Min Aung Hlaing in November 2024 for crimes against the Rohingya; yet his political ascent since then signals the international community's limited capacity to translate legal accountability into practical pressure.

Another implication flows from the strategic footprint of China. Beijing has deepened its engagement with the Myanmar junta, and by late 2025 had effectively concluded that the military was the only force capable of maintaining even minimal stability. China's primary interest in Rakhine State centres on its infrastructure and energy corridor investments that form a critical part of the Belt and Road Initiative. This reality constrains Bangladesh's diplomatic room for manoeuvre. Dhaka cannot afford to alienate Beijing, its largest trading partner and a key development financier.

Historical ties: A relationship defined by asymmetry and crisis

Bangladesh and Myanmar share a 271-kilometre border and a relationship shaped as much by geography as by tragedy. The modern history of this bilateral relationship is, to a significant degree, the history of the Rohingya crisis. The first major wave of Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh in 1978, followed by another in 1991-92. Notably, Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia oversaw the repatriation of a significant number of Rohingya during their respective tenures. The current Bangladesh Nationalist Party government, led by their son, Tarique Rahman, has cited this experience as evidence that sustained diplomatic engagement with Myanmar can produce results.

However, the scale and severity of the 2017 crisis, when a brutal military crackdown drove nearly a million Rohingya into Bangladesh

conflict in Myanmar has effectively frozen these opportunities. Bangladesh's ambitions to position itself within larger Bay of Bengal and Indo-Pacific frameworks depend, at least partly, on a stable eastern neighbourhood — a stability that Myanmar's political dysfunction comprehensively denies.

Challenges and opportunities for Bangladesh's foreign policy

Bangladesh's new BNP-led government, which came to power following the country's own February 2026 election, has inherited a complex foreign policy landscape shaped in part by Myanmar's disorder. The challenges are formidable. The government must simultaneously maintain a working relationship with the junta for any prospect of repatriation diplomacy, engage China to preserve economic ties, coordinate with Western partners and UN agencies to keep the Rohingya issue alive on the global agenda,

that strengthens Dhaka's moral standing internationally.

The Arakan Army's growing control over parts of Rakhine State creates a new and unconventional interlocutor that Bangladesh could engage, cautiously and without formal recognition, to discuss humanitarian access and eventually repatriation conditions. The United States remains the single largest provider of humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya, having contributed nearly \$2.4 billion since 2017, and Washington's strategic competition with Beijing means it has incentives to keep Bangladesh diplomatically engaged and well-resourced.

The risk, however, is that without a coherent long-term strategy, Bangladesh may find itself cycling through the same diplomatic gestures — bilateral talks, multilateral conferences, and repatriation announcements — that go nowhere, while the structural conditions in Myanmar remain unchanged.

Navigating a neighbourhood in crisis

Myanmar's 2025-26 election was, at its core, not a democratic transition but a political manoeuvre — an attempt by a military establishment to clothe authoritarian continuity in the legitimacy of electoral procedure. The "Old Generals, New Clothes" framing offered by election observers captures this dynamic with uncomfortable precision. Min Aung Hlaing's likely ascent to the presidency changes the façade of power in Naypyidaw without altering its substance.

For Bangladesh, the sobering takeaway is this: the consolidation of junta control under a civilian veneer removes even the theoretical possibility of a genuine democratic transition in Myanmar that might create conditions for Rohingya return. This is not merely a humanitarian issue; it is a strategic one. As foreign policy analysts have observed, Bangladesh's aspirations for regional integration, economic connectivity, and middle-power diplomacy are all complicated by a fractured state on its south-eastern border.

The new government faces a test of strategic imagination. Managing the Rohingya crisis with dignity and sustainability will require moving beyond repatriation as the only diplomatic instrument, investing in Rohingya human development within Bangladesh, pursuing multilateral legal accountability, and finding pragmatic but principled channels to engage the emerging power dynamics inside Rakhine State. Most crucially, it will require recognising that Myanmar's hollow election has not resolved the country's crisis; it has merely institutionalised it. And in a region where instability travels, Bangladesh cannot afford to treat that institutionalisation as somebody else's problem.

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Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing is sworn in as president, continuing his rule from a civilian post five years after seizing power in a military coup.

PHOTO: AFP

in a matter of weeks, was unprecedented. Bangladesh has since attempted multiple rounds of repatriation negotiations, including agreements in 2018 and 2019 that collapsed entirely because Rohingya refugees refused to return without guarantees of safety, citizenship, and dignity that Myanmar was unwilling to provide. This history reveals a structural asymmetry: Bangladesh has far greater urgency to resolve the crisis than Myanmar has incentive to cooperate.

Beyond the refugee issue, Bangladesh and Myanmar have shared economic interests, including trade linkages through Cox's Bazar and the Teknaf-Maungdaw corridor, as well as the broader potential for connectivity within the Bay of Bengal region. But the ongoing

and manage growing domestic anti-Rohingya sentiment in communities around Cox's Bazar that have absorbed extraordinary strain.

Dhaka's Myanmar policy can be characterised as an "exhaustion trap", where Bangladesh keeps managing crisis fatigue rather than changing strategy, which threatens to become a permanent condition if no structural breakthrough occurs.

Yet there are also carefully calibrated opportunities. The BNP's historical record of successful repatriations provides political legitimacy for renewed engagement. Bangladesh's legal advocacy at the International Court of Justice, alongside The Gambia's genocide case against Myanmar, offers a track of principled diplomacy