

FROM NEGOTIATION TO WAR: THE IRAN-U.S. CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT ON GULF REGIONAL SECURITY

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This article examines the negotiation process initiated between Iran and the United States following the transformation of the popular uprisings that began in Iran in December 2025. Initially framed as a domestic national security issue, these uprisings gradually acquired an international dimension with the involvement of extra-regional actors. The study further analyzes the consequences of the war that subsequently emerged between the two parties and evaluates how this conflict has influenced the security dynamics of the Gulf region. Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to explore the extent to which the war that began alongside the negotiation process has reshaped regional security structures. In this context, the central research question guiding the study is: *What are the effects of the war that began between Iran and the United States on the security dynamics of the Gulf region?* The study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis addressing this question.

Popular Uprisings and the Process Leading to Negotiations

The demonstrations that began in Iran on 28 December 2025, following the long-standing economic problems in the country, the gradual deterioration of living conditions, social issues, and the increasing discontent in certain segments of society stemming from the government, attracted the attention of the international community. In a report published on 31 December 2025 titled *"We want the mullahs to go: Economic crisis leads to the biggest protests in Iran since 2022"*, The Guardian stated that, as a result of significant problems such as the loss of value of Iran's currency due to sanctions imposed on the Iranian government, the

Iranian public initiated demonstrations as a reaction, and the events gradually transformed into a mass movement.¹

In line with these developments, various reactions containing symbolic and political messages were expressed by the international community at different levels. A statement was issued by the United Nations Human Rights Council indicating that human rights had been violated during the protests in Iran.² In a report published by the Parliament of the United Kingdom, it was stated that political support was given to the popular uprisings in Iran and that new sanctions would be imposed on the Iranian administration.³ In a declaration published by the Council of the European Union, it was explained that

¹ The Guardian, (2025). "We want the mullahs gone': economic crisis sparks biggest protests in Iran since 2022", <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/31/we-want-the-mullahs-gone-economic-crisis-sparks-biggest-protests-in-iran-since-2022>, (Accessed: Erişim Tarihi: 22 February 2026).

² United Nations Human Rights Council, (2026). "Human Rights Council Adopts Resolution Extending Mandates of Fact-Finding Mission and Special Rapporteur on Iran and Calling for an Urgent Investigation into Human Rights

Violations in Iran in the Context of the Protests Beginning 28 December 2025", <https://www.ohchr.org/en/media-advisories/2026/01/human-rights-council-adopts-resolution-extending-mandates-fact-finding>, (Accessed: 22 February 2026).

³ United Kingdom Parliament, (2026). "Iran protests 2026: UK and international response", <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10462/>, (Accessed: 22 February 2026).

the protests were peaceful in nature, yet restrictive measures had been taken.⁴ In a statement issued by the United States Congress, support was expressed for the struggle of the Iranian people. Furthermore, the U.S. Congress announced that it had discussed possible scenarios involving the use of military forces against the Iranian government.⁵

Negotiation Process Initiated Between Iran and the United States

Iran and the United States initiated negotiations through diplomatic contacts in order to mutually discuss their expectations and national interests before entering into a possible military conflict. The expectations of the United States from Iran during the negotiation process were as follows: that Iran would not continue its nuclear program, that it would halt its uranium enrichment program, that it would limit the production of ballistic missiles, and that Iranian security forces would refrain from using violence during the protests. Iran's expectations from the negotiations were as follows: the complete removal of the sanctions imposed on Iran, non-interference in its nuclear programs on the grounds that they were being developed for civilian purposes, and no concessions being made regarding its ballistic missile programs.⁶

Delegations representing the two actors held their first negotiations in Oman in order to reach an agreement in line with their respective interests. However, due to the complex dynamics of the issues discussed during the negotiations, no definitive result was achieved in the initial meetings. At the end of the talks, significant statements were made at the leadership level. The President of the United States, Donald Trump, stated that the negotiations conducted with Iran had gone "very well" in a positive manner, while the Iranian Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, declared that bilateral talks had taken place "in a positive atmosphere."⁷ However, during the period in which diplomatic contacts continued, the increasing deployment of U.S. military forces to the Strait of Hormuz caused tension in bilateral relations. In particular, the simultaneous deployment of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and other elements of the U.S. Navy around the Strait at the same time as the negotiation process conveyed an important political message. In this context, the gradual placement of U.S. war equipment around the Strait of Hormuz during the period in which diplomatic contacts were being established indicated that a military scenario against Iran could be implemented if necessary. In response to the increasing U.S. presence in the Strait of Hormuz, Iran announced that the Strait

⁴ Council of the European Union, (2026). "Council adopts new sanctions over serious human rights violations and Iran's continued support to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine", <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/01/29/iran-council-adopts-new-sanctions-over-serious-human-rights-violations-and-iran-s-continued-support-to-russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine/>, (Accessed: 22 February 2026).

⁵ United States Congress, (2026). "Protests in Iran: Possible U.S. Responses and Issues for Congress",

<https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF13153>, (Accessed: 22 February 2026).

⁶ Reuters, (2026). "Iran, US to hold nuclear talks on Friday as Trump warns Tehran", <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-examines-diplomacy-with-us-hopes-results-coming-days-official-says-2026-02-02/>, (Accessed: 23 February 2026).

⁷ MepaNews, (2026). "Trump: Negotiations with Iran went very well.", <https://www.mepanews.com/trump-iran-ile-muzakereler-cok-iyi-gecti-76203h.htm>, (Accessed: 23 February 2026).

would be closed. On 17 February 2026, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps conducted a military exercise in the Strait of Hormuz, during which the Strait was closed.⁸ Although both sides made statements expressing their desire to reach a solution through diplomacy, the negotiations continued under the shadow of military presence. Another development demonstrating that military power had come to the forefront was the statements made by the parties to their national and international public opinion that they would carry out military interventions on the basis of deterrence.

Regional Effects of the U.S.–Iran War on the Gulf Region

On 28 February, large-scale airstrikes targeting Iran's national borders were carried out by the United States and Israel, and this development led to the beginning of a military conflict process in the region. In response to the simultaneous missile attacks launched by the United States and Israel, Iran targeted not only Israel but also U.S. military bases located in the Gulf region. Regional actors of the Gulf region Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, and Iraq have been negatively affected by these developments in terms of security, political, and economic dimensions. In the intensive ballistic missile and unmanned aerial vehicle attacks carried out by Iran, oil facilities, airports, and various strategic infrastructure elements located in Gulf countries were targeted. Although the Gulf countries have not yet delivered a large-scale military response to Iran's attacks,

they are taking various steps to strengthen their air defense capacities. Iran's targeting of oil facilities and fuel storage infrastructure in the Gulf countries, which are among the significant energy producers in the region, has created serious problems in terms of energy supply security. Furthermore, the decision of the Iran administration to indefinitely close the Strait of Hormuz to tanker traffic is considered a critical development that has caused disruptions in the energy supply chain. The leaders of the Gulf countries stated that if the effects of the war expand on a regional scale, oil prices could exceed 120 dollars per barrel, and they called on the parties to return to the negotiation process.⁹ The continuous increase in oil prices per barrel may lead to fluctuations in international energy markets and increase the risk of economic stagnation at the global level. In this context, the logistical disruptions that have emerged in the process of transporting the energy resources of the oil-producing Gulf countries to international markets are expected to create large-scale negative effects on the international economy.

The effects of the retaliatory attacks carried out by Iran in response to the joint airstrikes conducted by the United States and Israel were not limited solely to the Gulf region. On 4 March, a ballistic missile launched from Iranian territory was directed toward the airspace of Türkiye; however, the missile was neutralized by an air defense system belonging to NATO. This development was evaluated as an incident that directly affected Türkiye's national security.¹⁰ The Minister of Foreign Affairs

⁸ The National News, (2026). "Iran's brief closure of Strait of Hormuz sends message to US of potential threat to oil trade", <https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/economy/2026/02/18/oil-price-hormuz-shipping-us-iran/>, (Accessed: 23 February 2026).

⁹ The Arab Weekly, (2026). "Iran war sends oil prices to cusp of \$120, US dollar surges", <https://theArabweekly.com/iran-war-sends-oil-prices-cusp-120-us-dollar-surges>, (Accessed: 9 Mart 2026).

¹⁰ Anadolu Ajansı, (2026). "Ballistic munition from Iran neutralized by NATO over Turkish airspace: Ministry",

of the Republic of Türkiye, Hakan Fidan, made the following statement regarding the issue: *"We spoke with our friends in Iran and said that if this is a missile that went off course, then the situation is different. However, if this continues, our advice is this: be careful and do not allow anyone to embark on such an adventure."*¹¹ NATO stated that allied solidarity continues against possible threats to Türkiye's national security and issued the following statement: *"In the face of Iran's indiscriminate attacks across the region, NATO stands with all its allies, including Türkiye."*¹² However, the Iran administration denied the allegations that a missile attack had been intentionally directed at Türkiye. The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Kazem Gharibabadi, emphasized the importance of maintaining relations with Türkiye and stated: *"Our relations with Türkiye are very good, and we have never had any intention of targeting neighboring countries in the region. There is no reason for us to target Türkiye."*¹³ In addition, the spokesperson of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Esmail Baghaei, described the ballistic missile attack directed toward Türkiye's airspace as a "false flag" attack attributed to Iran.¹⁴ On 9 March, a second ballistic missile test originating from Iran and detected as heading toward the airspace of

Türkiye was carried out. According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, the missile was neutralized by a NATO air defense system in the vicinity of Gaziantep.¹⁵ In response to these developments, Türkiye announced that it would not become a party to the war and that it had strengthened its defense capacity. In this context, increasing defense capacity against any potential attack that could directly affect its national interests and security constitutes a strategic objective for Türkiye.

The statement by the President of the United States, Donald Trump, announcing that plans were being made to initiate a ground operation against Iran indicates that the war will not remain limited to airstrikes but may evolve into a prolonged and comprehensive military conflict. This statement has increased the level of military tension and the likelihood of the use of military force in the region. The announcement by the Iranian administration that it is prepared for a large-scale ground war directly shapes the security policies of the Gulf region. Statements made by Iran have led Gulf countries to increasingly turn toward the use of modern military equipment in order

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/ballistic-munition-from-iran-neutralized-by-nato-over-turkish-airspace-ministry/3849779>, (Accessed: 9 Mart 2026).

¹¹ France24, (2026). "Turkey warns over 'dangerous' bid to stir civil war in Iran",

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20260307-turkey-warns-over-dangerous-bid-to-stir-civil-war-in-iran>, (Accessed: 9 Mart 2026).

¹² Hürriyet Daily News, (2026). "Fidan discusses Middle East, intercepted Iran-fired missile with Rubio", <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/fidan-discusses-middle-east-intercepted-iran-fired-missile-with-rubio-219615>, (Accessed: 9 Mart 2026).

¹³ Daily Sabah, (2026). "Iran denies shooting missile at Türkiye, cites strong relations",

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/iran-denies-shooting-missile-at-turkiye-cites-strong-relations/news>, (Accessed: 9 Mart 2026).

¹⁴ Alarabiya English, (2026). "Iran's foreign ministry dismisses idea of talks while country is under attack", <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2026/03/09/iran-s-foreign-ministry-dismisses-idea-of-talks-while-country-is-under-attack->, (Accessed: 9 Mart 2026).

¹⁵ Aljazeera, (2026). "Türkiye says Iranian ballistic missile intercepted by NATO air defences".

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/9/turkiye-says-iranian-ballistic-missile-intercepted-by-nato-air-defences>, (Accessed: 12 Mart 2026).

to strengthen their national security and enhance their air defense capabilities.

In conclusion, the spillover effects of the war between the parties into the Gulf region have significant implications for the logistics of energy resources, stability in international markets, and the dynamics of diplomatic relations among regional and global actors. These developments contribute to increasing fragility within the broader international system. Gulf countries, which possess substantial energy reserves, generally seek to avoid becoming direct parties to a large-scale armed conflict, as such a scenario could seriously threaten regional stability. Political leaders in the Gulf region emphasize that managing tensions between the United States and Israel on one side and Iran on the other through a constructive and sustainable negotiation process is crucial for maintaining regional security. However, the continuing uncertainty surrounding the trajectory of the conflict makes a return to peaceful dialogue increasingly difficult and encourages a greater reliance on military means. Consequently, this development weakens not only regional security but also the overall stability of the international security system.

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