

Blood, iron will not resolve Middle East question

In one of my recent columns, I warned that the world was sleepwalking into a third world war. Today, the alarm bells are louder and harder to ignore. Despite repeated warnings from diplomats, scholars and global institutions, the panic buttons of global conflict continue to be pressed.

What began as an open confrontation between the US, Israel and Iran has now evolved into a volatile regional war with unmistakable global implications. Recent strikes by the US and Israel deep inside Iran targeted senior military commanders and nuclear-linked facilities. Tehran's retaliation was swift, with missiles and drones launched towards Israeli territory, US installations and allied positions in the Gulf.

This is no longer a proxy chess match played in the shadows. It is an overt military contest whose shockwaves are already rattling global political and economic systems.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ SHOCK

Perhaps, the most dangerous development is the near shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow maritime corridor through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil supply flows. Any serious disruption there sends immediate tremors through the global economy.

Those tremors are already visible. Oil markets have reacted sharply. US crude prices jumped by about 14% in a single week to around \$76 per barrel, while Brent crude climbed above \$83. These figures may appear technical to economists, but in reality, they translate into rising fuel prices, higher transport costs and inflation in food and consumer goods worldwide.

In simple terms, when Hormuz sneezes, the global economy catches a cold.

For Africa, the implications are severe. Energy experts warn that even countries that do not import oil directly from the Gulf still feel the shock because prices are determined by global supply and demand. Higher oil prices drive up shipping costs, electricity generation, aviation and food logistics.

For Uganda, a landlocked economy heavily dependent on imported petroleum products,

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the consequences could be immediate and painful: higher pump prices, rising transport fares and increased pressure on the already-stretched household budgets. Across the continent, governments are bracing for ripple effects across logistics, trade and supply chains.

Some oil-producing countries such as Nigeria and Angola may enjoy short-term fiscal windfalls from higher prices. But for most African economies, this war threatens turbulence rather than opportunity.

WAR PROPAGANDA, HARDENED POSITIONS

Alongside the military confrontation, the propaganda war is escalating. Washington and its allies portray the strikes as preventive security measures. Tehran describes them as acts of aggression and war crimes.

Despite reports of the death of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Iranian state apparatus shows no sign of capitulation. On the contrary, its leadership appears prepared for a long war of attrition, relying on missiles, drones and regional proxy networks.

Complicating matters further are statements from US President Donald Trump, urging Iranians to surrender and form a new government. Yet, even Trump himself has admitted uncertainty about how long such a war might take. That ambiguity reveals a familiar strategic dilemma: wars are easy to start but notoriously difficult to end.

The international response has been

alarmingly disjointed. The UN, once the guardian of collective security, increasingly resembles what diplomats privately describe as a barking dog with no bite. It calls for restraint and dialogue but lacks the enforcement power to halt escalation.

The world's major powers appear reluctant to intervene decisively. The UK, Russia and China are largely sitting on the fence — issuing diplomatic statements urging ceasefire and negotiation while avoiding deeper engagement. This uneasy neutrality has created a dangerous vacuum.

Without credible mediation or enforceable agreements, the conflict risks drifting towards wider confrontation, drawing in more actors and hardening positions on all sides.

THE NUCLEAR SHADOW

The danger is compounded by the erosion of nuclear safeguards. With the expiration of the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in February, the last major limits on US and Russian strategic nuclear forces disappeared. Transparency measures, inspections and data exchanges vanished overnight.

In geopolitical terms, this means the world's largest nuclear powers now operate without formal guardrails. Combine that reality with a widening Middle Eastern war, ongoing tensions in eastern Europe, and the weaponisation of energy routes such as Hormuz, and the strategic environment becomes alarmingly combustible.

STILL PRESSING WRONG BUTTONS

History teaches that world wars rarely begin with a single dramatic event. They emerge from miscalculation, rigid alliances and economic shocks that push leaders into corners from which they cannot easily retreat.

Today, those ingredients are unmistakably present.

A regional war is

spreading. A critical oil corridor is under threat. Nuclear arms control regimes have collapsed. Global powers are divided, and economic shockwaves are already rippling across continents.

In diplomatic language, this is called strategic instability. In plain language, it is a recipe for catastrophe.

It is at this juncture that the perspective of leaders who have consistently argued for political solutions over military adventurism becomes especially relevant. President Yoweri Museveni has long cautioned that force, while sometimes unavoidable, is a blunt instrument that rarely resolves the fundamental political questions at the heart of international conflict. His position, shaped by historical experience rather than ideological posturing, is that sustainable peace is achieved through dialogue, mutual recognition of interests and negotiated compromise — not through humiliation, coercion or regime-change fantasies.

Applied to the Middle East, this insight exposes the limitations of the current strategy. Airstrikes, assassinations and threats of total victory may satisfy domestic political audiences, but they entrench hostility, radicalise populations and lock adversaries into cycles of retaliation. Blood and iron may alter battlefields, but they do not settle historical grievances, security dilemmas or competing national narratives.

The world still has a narrow window to step back from the brink through genuine multilateral engagement involving Washington, Tehran, Tel Aviv, Moscow, Beijing, the European Union and key regional actors. Such dialogue will be slow, uncomfortable and politically costly — but history suggests it is the only path that averts systemic collapse.

If the present trajectory continues — if panic buttons keep being pressed and military solutions remain the default — the warning raised earlier will no longer be theoretical. It will become history.

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