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The Strait of Hormuz is entering a phase with no easy way out



The recent movements of American and Iranian forces around the Strait of Hormuz reveal little when considered as isolated incidents or political statements.

What matters becomes clear only in the broader context: both sides are re-establishing operational readiness for a serious conflict.

US forces are rebuilding capabilities that were heavily used in previous strikes, including air units, logistics, and command structures. On the Iranian side, the deployment and further strengthening of systems designed to survive an initial strike and prolong any crisis continues.

These actions do not signal an imminent attack, but they clearly indicate that both sides are preparing for a scenario in which the political process fails.

Such phases rarely last long. They exist because a political decision has not yet been made, but all the military conditions for it are being re-established.

In this respect, the **Strait of Hormuz** is not currently on the brink of war in the traditional sense. It is at a point where the framework is being recreated in which war becomes a realistic option.

US forces between pause and new operation

The **American presence in the region** is not currently in immediate operational mode but shows no signs of diminishing. Following the intense strikes of the previous period, it is clear there has been a phase of recovery and re-establishment of full readiness.

This is evident in the stabilisation of logistics, the replenishment of supplies, and the return of units to a state in which they can operate for longer periods without initial restrictions.

When teams capable of leading multi-domain operations are put in place in advance, it means the framework is being built for a more complex and long-term engagement

The distribution of forces no longer indicates only an airstrike option. The presence of marines, amphibious units, and special forces suggests that scenarios involving control of specific points on the ground – mainly islands and key infrastructure in the strait area – are being considered.

These operations have clear, limited objectives but require precise preparation and coordination.

The most important indicator, however, comes from the command structure. When teams capable of leading multi-domain operations are put in place in advance, it means the framework is being built for a more complex and long-term engagement.

Such structures are not established due to short-term pressure, but because readiness is required for a scenario that may persist.

How Iran organises the defence of the strait

On the other hand, Iran's approach remains consistent but is now visibly improved. The essence of this strategy is not to attempt to match the United States militarily in the traditional sense. Instead, it relies on the ability to impose a long-lasting and costly problem on the opponent.

This is achieved through a combination of dispersion and depth. Instead of concentrating forces on the coast, key capabilities are distributed more widely, including inland.

Missile systems, drones, and logistics infrastructure are not confined to a single

front line. This means they cannot be neutralised with a single strike, nor even in a short time.

The Iranian military presence in the **Strait of Hormuz** is neither centralised nor organised under a single structure. The regular navy covers the broader coastal belt and the direction towards the Arabian Sea, while the Revolutionary Guard plays a key role within the strait itself and at its entrances.

Iranian positions are harder to locate and neutralise quickly, and any action against them now requires more time and resources than before

This division separates tasks: one component maintains presence and control over the wider area, while the other manages points crucial for passage and exerts pressure on navigation.

At the same time, progress is evident in the way Iran monitors the situation on the ground. Different data sources – satellite images, technical data, and open sources – are now processed more quickly and integrated into a single picture.

This makes it more difficult to conceal the movements of American forces and reduces the scope for surprise.

The combination of such organisation and improved situational awareness yields an operationally important result: Iranian positions are harder to locate and neutralise quickly, and any action against them now requires more time and resources than before.

Passage control as the key to conflict

In this conflict, the Strait of Hormuz is not an objective to be "conquered". Its importance lies in its function: a large part of the **world's oil and gas** trade passes through it. Whoever can influence the security of the passage also

influences the market.

That is why Iran's approach is not aimed at complete control of the area. The focus is on making **passage** uncertain. Mines, drones, missiles, and speedboats do not need to stop traffic continuously.

It is sufficient to raise the risk to a level where shippers, insurers, and traders alter their behaviour. Just a few incidents can move prices and disrupt delivery flows.

One successful strike may reduce some capacity, but it does not solve the underlying problem

In such a situation, the **market** reacts more quickly than the military can stabilise the area. This is the key advantage of this approach: the effect is achieved without the need for full control.

For the United States, this presents a different problem from previous operations. It is not enough to establish control once; it must be maintained continuously, in conditions where threats emerge from several directions and persist.

One successful strike may reduce some capacity, but it does not solve the underlying problem unless there is a system in place to keep passage stable day after day.

The limits of American advantage

America's air superiority and precision strike capability remain unquestioned. However, the Strait of Hormuz presents a specific environment where these advantages do not guarantee a quick or stable outcome.

The issue is not the ability to inflict damage, but the ability to manage the consequences over an extended period. A system reliant on high-tech platforms and precision strikes is not optimal for scenarios that require constant

responses to numerous smaller, cheaper, and dispersed threats.

Escalation would initiate a process whose course cannot be easily controlled

This is not a weakness in the traditional sense, but it introduces time as a key variable. The longer the conflict endures, the harder it becomes to maintain the initial advantage.

This is precisely why there is no rush to escalate at this stage. Escalation would initiate a process whose course cannot be easily controlled.

A stalemate with no way out

Viewed as a whole, the **balance of power** in the Strait of Hormuz is clearly asymmetric. The United States has the capacity for heavy strikes and force projection, while Iran can prolong the crisis and increase its global cost.

Neither position offers a clear path to a stable outcome through **military escalation**.

This explains why both sides are currently holding back at the preparation stage. No decision has been made because neither option offers a politically viable outcome.



There is room for agreement, but it is rapidly narrowing - Donald Trump, Pete Hegseth

In this situation, the **negotiations** in Islamabad are not a routine diplomatic round that can be

prolonged without consequence. Their purpose is clear: to prevent the crisis from escalating into open conflict.

The positions are clear. The United States seeks stable and safe navigation through the strait and visible progress in controlling Iran's nuclear programme. Iran aims to preserve its deterrence capability and avoid new strikes on its military and energy infrastructure.

There is room for agreement, but it is rapidly narrowing. As military preparedness increases on both sides, the space for political withdrawal without serious cost diminishes. At some point, negotiations cease to be one option among several and become the last chance to avoid the next phase of conflict.

It is unrealistic to expect a full-scale war in the coming weeks. A continuation of current behaviour is more likely: capacity-building on both sides, occasional incidents at sea, and attempts to pressure the adversary without entering open conflict.

Such an approach has a clear limit. In the Strait of Hormuz, space is narrow, forces are close, and reaction time is short. In these conditions, even a minor incident can quickly spiral out of control and draw both sides into wider escalation.

If the talks fail, the next step will almost certainly involve limited strikes and increased pressure on sea routes. Experience shows that such phases are difficult to control, as each subsequent reaction requires a response.

As preparations continue, the opportunity to postpone the decision diminishes. The next diplomatic moves will not be a formality; they will determine whether the strait remains under controlled pressure or enters a phase of open conflict.

In practice, the choice comes down to two options: a deal that will not solve everything but will reduce risk, or entering a conflict whose consequences would quickly extend beyond regional borders.