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## **Pakistan's role as mediator of the Iran-US conflict**

By

**Marwa Kiyani<sup>1</sup>**

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The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization.

<sup>1</sup> Marwa Kiyani is a Year 2 student of Applied Psychology and a Research Assistant at Youth Forum of Policy Research (YFPR) of BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR)

## Background

Pakistan's role as a mediator in the Iran war is rooted in its strategic neutrality and unique diplomatic relationships with key global and regional powers. To fully understand the present dynamics of the conflict, it is essential to examine its historical roots and the events that have shaped relations between the two states. The Iran-US conflict has been a culmination of decades of deep-rooted hostility. One of the earliest turning points occurred in 1953, when the United States, along with the United Kingdom, supported a coup that overthrew Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh. His attempt to nationalize Iran's oil industry had threatened Western economic interests, and his removal left a lasting legacy of mistrust toward the United States within Iran (Blakemore, 2018)<sup>2</sup>. One of the main sources of tension between Iran and the United States has been Iran's nuclear program. In 2015, there was a moment of hope when Iran and several world powers signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Under this agreement, Iran agreed to limit its nuclear activities in return for relief from economic sanctions. However, this progress was short-lived. In 2018, the United States withdrew from the deal and reinstated strict sanctions, putting significant pressure on Iran's economy. This move not only strained relations further but also weakened trust and halted the momentum of diplomatic efforts (Afary, 2026)<sup>3</sup>.

A second pivotal rupture came with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which fundamentally transformed Iran's political identity and its relationship with the West. The overthrow of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a close American ally, and the establishment of an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini signaled a decisive ideological break with Washington. The subsequent Iran Hostage Crisis (1979–1981), during which 52 American diplomats and citizens were held captive for 444 days following the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, inflicted deep and lasting damage on bilateral relations that has never fully healed. The United States responded with the severance of diplomatic ties, imposition of economic sanctions, and the freezing of Iranian assets, establishing patterns of mutual antagonism that persist to the present day (Blakemore, 2018)<sup>4</sup>.

The Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) further complicated the regional dynamic. The United States, viewing revolutionary Iran as a destabilizing force, provided covert support to Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the conflict, including the supply of intelligence and dual-use technology. This tacit backing deepened Iranian grievances toward Washington and reinforced the perception within Tehran that the United States was willing to subordinate regional humanitarian and legal norms to its strategic interests. The war's devastating toll estimated at over one million casualties left a generation of Iranians with an

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<sup>2</sup> Blakemore, E. (2018, May 8). History.com. U.S.-Iran Tensions: From Political Coup to Hostage Crisis to Drone Strikes.

<sup>3</sup> Afary, J. (2026, April 22). Nuclear deal falters. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/Nuclear-deal-falters>

<sup>4</sup> Blakemore, E. (2018, May 8). History.com. U.S.-Iran Tensions: From Political Coup to Hostage Crisis to Drone Strikes.

acute sense of international abandonment and Western complicity. These watershed events collectively shaped the trajectory of Iran–US relations and are essential to understanding the structural mistrust that continues to impede diplomatic progress today.

In the years that followed, the situation steadily worsened. Iran began expanding its nuclear activities beyond the limits set by the agreement, while the United States responded by increasing political and economic pressure. Although there were attempts to restart negotiations, they were often interrupted by deep mistrust and disagreements on key issues. By 2025, tensions had escalated even further, with renewed sanctions and the collapse of nuclear talks bringing both sides dangerously close to open confrontation.

### **The Escalating 2026 Iran War**

The 2026 Iran war, which is still ongoing, has rapidly evolved into one of the most destabilizing conflicts in recent Middle Eastern history. What began as a sudden and highly coordinated military escalation has expanded into a broader regional crisis, drawing in multiple state and non-state actors. The scale of destruction has been immense, with thousands of casualties documented by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED, 2026)<sup>5</sup>, widespread infrastructural damage, and millions displaced across Iran, Lebanon, and neighboring regions, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Ito, 2026)<sup>6</sup>. Strategic waterways, energy routes, and geopolitical alliances have all been impacted, raising concerns about a prolonged and potentially globalized conflict, with the potential to significantly impact Pakistan's economy as well.

Amid this chaos, the urgent need for diplomatic intervention has become increasingly evident. With tensions escalating and trust between the principal actors eroding, the role of neutral mediators has become critical. It is in this volatile environment that Pakistan has stepped forward, attempting to position itself as a facilitator of peace and dialogue.

### **Pakistan's Diplomatic Role as a Mediator**

Pakistan's emergence as a mediator in the Iran war reflects both its geopolitical positioning and its longstanding relationships with key regional players. Maintaining diplomatic ties with Iran, the United States, and Gulf Arab states, Pakistan occupies a unique position that allows it to engage multiple sides without being perceived as overtly partisan.

Historically, Pakistan has often advocated for peaceful conflict resolution in the Muslim world while

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<sup>5</sup> ACLED, A. C. (2026). Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). <https://acleddata.com/country/iran>

<sup>6</sup> Ito, A. (2026, March 12). UNHCR: Up to 3.2 million Iranians temporarily displaced in Iran as conflict intensifies. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-3-2-million-iranians-temporarily-displaced-iran-conflict-intensifies>

balancing its strategic partnerships with Western powers. In this instance, Islamabad has signaled its willingness to host negotiations and facilitate communication between adversaries. By offering itself as a neutral platform, Pakistan seeks to reduce tensions and open channels for dialogue that might otherwise remain closed (Shahid, 2026)<sup>7</sup>.

This approach reflects a broader strategy of “strategic neutrality,” where Pakistan aims to avoid direct involvement in the conflict while contributing constructively to regional stability very strategically.

### **Formation of a Multilateral Peace Initiative**

Recognizing that unilateral mediation may not be sufficient, Pakistan has worked toward forming a multilateral framework for peace talks. This initiative involves collaboration with key regional actors such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, which hold significant influence in Middle Eastern affairs. Islamabad has hosted high-level diplomatic engagements, bringing together foreign ministers to discuss possible pathways to de-escalation. By acting as a diplomatic hub, Pakistan is attempting to create a coalition that can collectively pressure the warring parties toward negotiations. This multilateral approach enhances the legitimacy of the peace process and increases the likelihood of achieving consensus. It also distributes the burden of mediation, ensuring that no single country bears the full responsibility for success or failure. During this meeting, reports indicate that Israeli representatives issued threats against the Iranian delegation present in Islamabad; Pakistan responded with a firm diplomatic assurance of the delegation’s safety, a move widely interpreted as reinforcing Pakistan’s credibility as a neutral mediator (Davies, 2026)<sup>8</sup>.

### **Key Proposals Presented by Pakistan**

At the heart of Pakistan’s initiative are a series of proposals designed to halt hostilities and lay the groundwork for long-term peace. These proposals include:

- **An Immediate Ceasefire:** A call for all parties to halt military operations as a first step toward de-escalation.
- **Humanitarian Corridors:** Establishing safe routes for the delivery of aid and evacuation of civilians from conflict zones.

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<sup>7</sup> Shahid, A. (2026, April 7). Efforts to facilitate talks between US and Iran ongoing, Pakistani sources say. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/efforts-facilitate-talks-between-us-iran-ongoing-pakistani-sources-say-2026-04-07/>

<sup>8</sup> Davies, C. (2026, March). How Pakistan won over Trump to become an unlikely mediator in the Iran war. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy91vrzxn34o>

- Reopening Strategic Trade Routes: Ensuring the security and functionality of critical waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz to stabilize global energy markets.
- Confidence Building Measures: Encouraging prisoner exchanges, reduction in hostile rhetoric, and transparency in military movements.

These proposals are designed to address both the immediate humanitarian crisis and the broader strategic concerns that fuel the conflict.

### **Iran's Conditions for Peace**

Iran has expressed cautious openness to negotiations but has outlined specific conditions that must be met before meaningful talks can proceed in this regard. Iran has proposed 10 point peace plan. Chief among these is the demand for a permanent ceasefire, as opposed to temporary pauses in hostilities that could be exploited for strategic advantage.

Additionally, Iran has called for the lifting of economic sanctions and assurances against future aggression. Security guarantees are seen as essential to rebuilding trust and ensuring that any peace agreement is sustainable. These demands reflect Iran's broader concerns about sovereignty, security, and economic stability, and they present significant challenges for negotiators seeking a compromise. (Sabbagh, 2026)<sup>9</sup>.

### **U.S. and Allied Position**

The United States and its allies have adopted a dual strategy of military pressure and diplomatic engagement. While expressing openness to negotiations, they have also emphasized the need for Iran to address concerns related to its missile and nuclear programs. This approach complicates the peace process, as it introduces additional conditions that may be unacceptable to Iran. The presence of military threats alongside diplomatic overtures creates uncertainty, making it difficult to build the trust necessary for successful negotiations.

Nevertheless, the involvement of major global powers underscores the importance of the conflict and the urgency of finding a resolution.

### **Major Obstacles to Peace Talks**

Despite Pakistan's efforts, numerous obstacles stand in the way of successful peace talks:

- Deep Mistrust: Years of hostility have created a significant trust deficit between the parties.

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<sup>9</sup> Sabbagh, D. (2026, April 7). Talks to end Iran war appear to falter a day before Trump deadline. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/apr/06/proposals-for-immediate-ceasefire-us-israel-iran-war>

- **Ongoing Violence:** Continued military actions undermine diplomatic efforts and harden positions.
- **Conflicting Objectives:** Differing demands regarding ceasefire terms and long-term goals complicate negotiations.
- **Regional Spillover Risks:** The involvement of proxy groups and neighboring states increases the complexity of the conflict.

These challenges highlight the difficulty of achieving peace in a highly polarized and volatile environment.

### **Role of Backchannel Diplomacy**

In addition to formal negotiations, backchannel diplomacy has played a crucial role in Pakistan's mediation efforts. Quiet, indirect communications allow parties to explore compromises without the pressure of public scrutiny. According to Pakistani diplomatic sources cited by Reuters, Pakistan has actively facilitated such exchanges, helping to clarify positions and reduce misunderstandings (Shahid, 2026)<sup>10</sup>. Backchannel diplomacy is particularly valuable in situations where official dialogue has broken down or is politically sensitive.

By maintaining these discreet lines of communication, Pakistan enhances the flexibility and resilience of the peace process.

### **Regional and Global Implications**

The outcome of the Iran war will have far-reaching implications beyond the immediate region. Stability in the Middle East is closely tied to global energy markets, international trade, and security dynamics. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, for example, could have significant economic consequences worldwide, and in this regard, Trump, the President of the US, has said that the operation will continue "as long as necessary." (Ferragamo, 2026)<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, the conflict risks drawing in other global powers, potentially escalating into a broader confrontation.

Pakistan's peace initiative, therefore, is not only a regional effort but also a contribution to global stability.

### **Challenges Facing Pakistan**

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<sup>10</sup> Shahid, A. (2026, April 7). Efforts to facilitate talks between US and Iran ongoing, Pakistani sources say. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/efforts-facilitate-talks-between-us-iran-ongoing-pakistani-sources-say-2026-04-07/>

<sup>11</sup> Ferragamo, M. (2026, March 2). U.S. Relations With Iran. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/us-relations-iran>

While Pakistan's role as a mediator offers opportunities, it also presents significant challenges:

- **Balancing Relationships:** Maintaining neutrality while engaging with competing powers is a delicate task.
- **Domestic Considerations:** Internal political dynamics and public opinion may influence foreign policy decisions.
- **Security Risks:** Increased involvement in the conflict could expose Pakistan to retaliatory threats or regional instability.

Navigating these challenges requires careful diplomacy and strategic foresight, as there are still big questions for Pakistan. (Davies, 2026)<sup>12</sup>.

### **Prospects for Peace**

The success of Pakistan's initiative will depend on several factors, including the willingness of the parties to compromise, the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation, and the ability to build trust.

While the path to peace is fraught with difficulties, the presence of a credible mediator and a structured framework for dialogue offers a glimmer of hope. Incremental progress, such as temporary ceasefires and humanitarian agreements, could pave the way for more comprehensive solutions. Ultimately, the resolution of the conflict will require not only diplomatic skill but also political will from all involved parties.

### **Conclusion**

The 2026 Iran war represents a critical juncture for the Middle East and the international community. As violence continues to take a heavy toll, the need for effective mediation has never been greater. Pakistan's efforts to initiate peace talks demonstrate the potential of diplomacy to address even the most complex conflicts. By fostering dialogue, promoting cooperation, and advocating for peaceful solutions, Pakistan has positioned itself as a key player in the search for stability.

While significant challenges remain, the pursuit of peace is a necessary and urgent endeavor. The success of these efforts could not only end the current conflict but also set a precedent for resolving future crises through mutual understanding. The imperative of sustained diplomatic engagement between the United States and Iran cannot be overstated. As the broader Middle East bears the cumulative costs of protracted conflict, the window for a negotiated settlement demands urgent and deliberate action. Given the structural vulnerabilities exposed in regional economies, no state actor can

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<sup>12</sup> Davies, C. (2026, March). How Pakistan won over Trump to become an unlikely mediator in the Iran war. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy91vrzxn34o>

sustain the long-term fiscal and geopolitical consequences of continued escalation without irreparable damage to its strategic interests.

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Institute of Psychology

**BNU Center for Policy Research**  
Beaconhouse National University

**Main Campus**

13 KM, Off Thokar Niaz Baig  
Raiwind Road, Lahore-53700, Pakistan  
Telephone: 042-38100156  
[www.bnu.edu.pk](http://www.bnu.edu.pk)