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The International Duality in Managing Regional Crises Related to Iran: Between Military Intervention and De-escalation Mechanisms – A Case Study of the Strait of Hormuz

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Abstract:

This study highlights the international duality inherent in addressing regional crises related to Iran. It compares two key approaches to international response: military intervention on the one hand and de-escalation mechanisms on the other. This study analyses and compares the factors influencing the international community's choice between these two approaches, highlighting the nature of strategic interests, legal and diplomatic frameworks, and the role of regional and international actors.

The study finds that international responses to crises are characterized by duality, and the approach taken—whether cooperative (peaceful) or coercive (military)—varies because of differing security, economic, and social considerations. Given the international and regional communities' inclination toward promoting stability and security, the findings suggest a preference for using peaceful de-escalation mechanisms in managing regional and international crises, as these are better suited to containing escalation than coercive military options.

Keywords: *Iran; Regional Crises; Military Intervention; Mechanisms; Strait of Hormuz; International Relations.*

Introduction:

The international response to regional crises, particularly those related to Iran, is controversial and complex, as it intersects with the security, economic, and geopolitical interests of various countries. In this context, the international community faces a choice between coercive military intervention and peaceful de-escalation mechanisms. This

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duality reflects the balance between the desire to protect states' strategic interests and the need to maintain international and regional stability.[1]

The Strait of Hormuz is considered one of the most important maritime straits in the world, through which a significant portion of global trade passes, particularly oil exports. Therefore, containing and managing crises related to the strait is a strategic, security, and economic imperative for many states. Consequently, managing this crisis requires an international cooperative approach to achieve stability and protect the security of this passage from any future escalation or complete closure.[2]

This research paper aims to examine the differences between coercive military responses and peaceful de-escalation mechanisms, as well as to study and analyse the factors influencing states' choices of each approach, including legal and diplomatic considerations, the key roles of regional and international actors, and the implications for regional stability.

Theoretical Framework:

This study is based on a set of theories from the fields of international relations and security. Among the most important of these concepts is military intervention, which refers to the deliberate use of armed force by states or coalitions to achieve a strategic objective, such as protecting national, regional, or international security, or impose a coercive measures on a state that has violated international law and forcibly changes its behaviour. The legitimacy of this type of intervention is based on the concepts of the right to self-defence and a mandate from the United Nations Security Council. Despite the legitimacy of these concepts, international law debates the legality of such military

[1] United Nations, Codification Division, Office of Legal Affairs, "Chapter VII: Article 51," Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs, last updated August 23, 2016, https://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml; Giuseppe Cataldi, "The Strait of Hormuz," QIL-QDI: Questions of International Law, no. 56 (2020), https://www.qil-qdi.org/the-strait-of-hormuz.

[2] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict, the Strait of Hormuz Remains Critical Oil Chokepoint," Today in Energy, June 16, 2025, https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=65504 (accessed May 3, 2026); Cataldi, "The Strait of Hormuz."

interventions, casting doubt on them and making the decisions of the international community a subject of ongoing controversy.[1]

Second, de-escalation mechanisms are grounded in the theory of cooperative crisis management, which emphasizes the importance of cooperation, dialogue, and confidence building among different parties to avoid conflicts and protect regional and international security. Among the most important of these mechanisms are diplomatic understanding, joint patrols, direct and indirect lines of communication, and partial and comprehensive agreements in sensitive areas.[2] Regarding the Strait of Hormuz, the importance of adopting these mechanisms reflects states' recognition of the strait's significance for maintaining global trade and maritime navigation free from any threat that could paralyze its movement, even in the face of political tensions with Iran.[3]

In this context, the study and comprehension of these various approaches highlight the intricate nature of the geopolitical and economic dimensions, as any international response to such crises is linked to strategic interests such as energy and trade, prompting many states to balance the use of military force with peaceful de-escalation. It also highlights the importance of the role of regional and international actors in de-escalating or escalating the situation, given the overlap of their interests and the differences in their military and diplomatic capabilities.[4]

This framework provides a basis for understanding why states resort to a coercive approach (military intervention) in some crises and a peaceful (cooperative) approach in others to contain and resolve them. It also examines how the international community can contain and manage

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[1] United Nations, "Article 51."

[2] Amnah Mosly, Enhancing Cooperation on Maritime Security in the Gulf (Riyadh: Gulf Research Center, January 2023), https://www.grc.net/documents/63bd2e566f6f3EnhancingCooperationonMaritimeSecurityintheGulf.pdf (accessed May 3, 2026); International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, "International Maritime Security Construct Holds Change of Command," U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, February 20, 2024, https://www.cusnc.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3680492/international-maritime-security-construct-holds-change-of-command (accessed May 3, 2026).

[3] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict, the Strait of Hormuz Remains Critical Oil Chokepoint."

[4] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict"; International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, "Change of Command."

crises in sensitive and strategically important regions, such as the Strait of Hormuz, in a manner that balances security and economic stability as noted by Rabdan Security and Defense Institute.[1]

The Nature of the Crisis and the Interests of the Parties Involved:

Regional crises linked to Iran are characterized by their complexity and intertwining with security, economic, and political interests. They arise from geopolitical tensions related to Iran's nuclear program, military capabilities, and proxies in countries such as Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon. The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most important waterways for global navigation and trade. Due to its proximity to Iran, any escalation in or near the strait poses a strategic and economic threat to the region and the world, as an estimated twenty percent of global oil exports and a significant share of natural gas exports transit through it.[2]

The differing roles of international and regional actors, based on their intertwined interests in the region, are as follows.

First, major powers and regional actors, such as the United States and Gulf states, focus on protecting their security and economic interests that pass through the Strait of Hormuz Strait. Therefore, they seek to constrain Iran's influence through targeted economic and political measures or military deterrence to mitigate and end the Iranian threat.[3]

Second, Iran, Since Iran plays an important role in the Strait of Hormuz, it views this waterway as a geopolitical bargaining chip that it can use at will to protect its national interests, particularly against the United States and Israel. At the same time, it mobilizes its proxies in Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq to expand its influence in the Middle East. Thus, Tehran's security calculations are intertwined with its ambitions for nuclear weapons and regional deterrence through controlling access and disrupting maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz for other ships. In this way, Iran ensures safe passage for its own ships and absolute control

[1] Stephen Blackwell, The International Law of the Sea, the Straits of Hormuz and Regional Security (Abu Dhabi: Rabdan Security & Defense Institute, 2025), https://rsdi.ae/en/publications/the-international-law-of-the-sea-the-straits-of-hormuz-and-regional-security (accessed May 3, 2026).
[2] Cataldi, "The Strait of Hormuz."
[3] International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, "Change of Command."

over the trade and navigation of other vessels, which lends credibility to its threat to global energy security.

Consequently, this asymmetric capacity for defense, deterrence, and leverage gives Iran momentum in managing its relations with the United States and its allies in the region. This grants Iran a balance of ideological and diplomatic influence, enabling it to pressure other countries into making concessions on sensitive security and economic issues—such as sanctions, blockades, and other matters that pose a threat to Iran's political system.[1]

Finally, international organizations and non-governmental entities play a crucial role in safeguarding maritime navigation and international, regional, and economic security worldwide, as well as striving to promote peace, contain crises, and de-escalate tensions to foster regional stability.[2]

Therefore, managing any crisis in the region requires a balance between coercive and cooperative responses, given the interconnected strategic and economic interests of states regarding national and regional security, as well as trade, maritime navigation, and vital energy resources.[3]

International Legal and Diplomatic Frameworks:

Diplomatic and legal frameworks form the basis upon which the

international community responds to regional and global crises, striking a balance between the use of military and coercive intervention while simultaneously seeking to employ peaceful de-escalation mechanisms to maintain stability and peace within the international system. Military intervention's legal legitimacy is based on the right to self-defense enshrined in the United Nations Charter or through a valid mandate from the UN Security Council. However, these justifications for

[1] Cataldi, "The Strait of Hormuz"; Alexander Lott and Shin Kawagishi, "The Legal Regime of the Strait of Hormuz and Attacks Against Oil Tankers: Law of the Sea and Law on the Use of Force Perspectives," Ocean Development & International Law 53, nos. 2–3 (2022): 123–146.
[2] United Nations, "Article 51"; Mosly, Enhancing Cooperation.
[3] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict."

intervention or the use of force are subject to numerous disputes and controversies among states, as threats are interpreted differently and contested among them. Consequently, such interventions—which rely on interpretations of established principles of international law—raise many doubts and questions regarding their legitimacy and impact on state sovereignty.[1]

In contrast, as outlined in the theoretical framework, de-escalation and crisis containment mechanisms rely on peaceful diplomatic tools, including negotiations, confidence-building agreements, and international mediation. In the case of the Strait of Hormuz, these cooperative arrangements—such as maritime coordination and direct communication channels between states—ensure the security of maritime navigation and global trade by avoiding unintended military clashes.[2]

In addition, international organizations play a crucial role in enhancing the legitimacy of these mechanisms by providing a framework and platforms for joint negotiations and dialogues, as well as establishing laws that regulate state behavior in sensitive regions to address any complex crisis and prevent unilateral action by a single state. This highlights the importance of the multilateral role of international organizations and non-governmental actors in managing international and regional crises around the world.[3]

In general, the distinction between legal and diplomatic approaches underscores that the international community possesses diverse tools for containing and managing regional and international crises. However, the choice of one tool over another depends on the nature of the crisis and the strategic, political, and economic interests involved to achieve lasting peace and maintain global trade, maritime navigation, and the smooth flow of gas and oil around the world.[4]

[1] United Nations, "Article 51."
[2] International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, "Change of Command"; Mosly, Enhancing Cooperation.
[3] United Nations, "Article 51"; Blackwell, International Law of the Sea.
[4] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict"; United Nations, "Article 51".

Actors and Alliances:

Key actors and international and regional alliances play a significant role in shaping the nature of intervention and response to regional crises involving Iran, as they seek to balance military intervention with peaceful de-escalation mechanisms, given the differing interests and military capabilities of these parties. At times, certain states resort to military intervention, characterized by alliances led by major powers and supported by regional states, aimed at protecting regional security and vital strategic interests—such as energy and maritime navigation—which rely on military superiority and strategic security coordination.[1]

Building upon the de-escalation mechanisms introduced in the theoretical framework, key actors and alliances utilize these tools to foster cooperative security, regional stability, and energy security. States and international organizations serve as 'neutral mediators' to reduce tensions, bridge differing viewpoints, and reach peaceful solutions that prevent military escalation.[2]

This contrast and dynamic reveal that states sometimes tend toward military interventions to achieve more exclusive and targeted objectives—aiming to resolve specific issues by force—while at other times, they resort to de-escalation mechanisms based on inclusivity and cooperation to manage shared crises and interests. In the case of the Strait of Hormuz, interests are shared, such that no single state can impose a coercive situation or control the crisis without others, given that this passageway holds shared importance in terms of the economy and regional and international security. This reinforces the importance of establishing a balance of power, collective action, and joint coordination among states, international organizations, and non-governmental actors.[3]

Consequently, to understand why the international community resorts to different responses, one must understand the nature of the

[1] International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, “Change of Command.”
[2] Mosly, Enhancing Cooperation; Blackwell, International Law of the Sea.
[3] U.S. Energy Information Administration, “Amid Regional Conflict”; International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, “Change of Command.”

crisis, the interests of the actors, and the various alliances that emerge. These responses range from legal (military intervention) to diplomatic (de-escalation mechanisms), depending on the interests, capabilities, and costs, which are intertwined and sometimes differ for each option.[1]

Strategic Objectives and Outcomes:

Strategic objectives vary depending on the nature of regional and

international crises, as both approaches aim to achieve different—and at times similar—goals that reflect the interests of the actors and their allies in addressing these crises. In military interventions, the primary objective is to deter aggression, weaken and limit the aggressor's capabilities, and forcibly impose changes in behaviour. At times, this objective extends to eliminating the adversary or completely destroying its capabilities. This coercive mechanism relies heavily on the use of force, or the threat of military means to achieve specific and rapid objectives.[2]

However, resorting to force and military intervention often results in devastating and destructive consequences, such as the escalation of conflict, loss of control, retaliatory actions, instability at the regional and international levels, and, in some cases, unmanageable economic, environmental, and security crises. Consequently, the legitimacy of such interventions is a subject of controversy in many international debates because of their costly consequences for both the intervening state and the state being intervened in.[3]

In contrast, relying on the aforementioned de-escalation mechanisms achieves objectives such as managing crises, reducing escalation, and maintaining stability. Through tools like dialogue, mutual understanding, and mediation, these strategies safeguard freedom of passage and ensure the secure flow of energy and global trade in the Strait of Hormuz.[4]

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[1] United Nations, "Article 51"; Cataldi, "The Strait of Hormuz."
[2] United Nations, "Article 51."
[3] United Nations, "Article 51"; Lott and Kawagishi, "The Legal Regime of the Strait of Hormuz," 125.
[4] Mosly, Enhancing Cooperation; U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict."

The findings indicate that the use of de-escalation mechanisms generally yields relatively peaceful outcomes and leads to the containment of the crisis, thereby bringing about relative and sustainable peace even if the conflict is not fully resolved. This helps prevent future escalation or resort to military options, which in turn encourages long-term political solutions.[1]

The conclusion is that the trade-off between military and peaceful approaches relates not only to the desired objectives but also to the consequences of pursuing either approach, as the de-escalation option often leads to reduced tension and the achievement of peace and stability, whereas the military option may lead to military escalation with dire consequences, resulting in crises and international uncertainty.[2]

Impact on Regional Stability and Global Perceptions:

The type and nature of international responses to crises and conflicts directly shape regional and international stability. Therefore, it is essential to understand the nature of these crises and determine the appropriate approach to achieve non-destructive outcomes. In the case of military intervention, the use of force often leads to tensions, escalation, and an increased likelihood of resorting to greater force or the threat of nuclear weapons, affecting the region in general and the Arabian Gulf in particular. Furthermore, unjustified military intervention may deepen political and internal divisions among states, thereby undermining trust between parties and negatively impacting regional and international security.[3]

Military intervention may also lead to a redrawing of alliances and the balance of power in the region, causing states to divide into supporters and opponents of the intervention. This weakens cooperation and collective action within the international system and leads states to form aggressive alliances to protect themselves and, at times, seek control and influence. As observed in many contexts, unjustified interventions driven by states' strategic interests negatively impact

[1] Blackwell, International Law of the Sea.
[2] United Nations, "Article 51"; Lott and Kawagishi, "The Legal Regime of the Strait of Hormuz,".
[3] United Nations, "Article 51."

international security, thereby undermining the credibility of such interventions and the international system.[1]

De-escalation mechanisms contribute significantly to regional stability and reduce the risk of escalation, direct military confrontation, or the threat of using nuclear weapons. This, in turn, encourages dialogue, understanding, and confidence building among the conflicting parties, which helps pave the way for a peaceful and sustainable solution in the future, even if political differences persist.[2]

In addition, de-escalation and confidence-building mechanisms contribute to resolving crises involving shared strategic and economic interests, such as the potential closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Using the international system as a framework for peaceful crisis management helps ensure that all parties adhere to the rules and refrain from violating them, thereby helping to protect global trade, energy security, and other shared interests.[3]

Therefore, the response to a crisis does not merely affect the course of the crisis. Its effects extend to regional and international stability, such that resorting to peaceful, cooperative options yields more stable and sustainable results than destructive military options.[4]

Case Study- The Strait of Hormuz (Military Intervention vs. De- escalation):

The situation in the Strait of Hormuz serves as a critical case study for understanding the difference between coercive military approaches and peaceful de-escalation in managing regional crises, given its strategic and economic importance to the world as a vital corridor for the flow of gas, oil, and global trade. Therefore, any threat or instability in this region poses a serious risk to global trade and economic stability.[5]

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[1] International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, "Change of Command"; Lott and Kawagishi, "The Legal Regime of the Strait of Hormuz,".
[2] Mosly, Enhancing Cooperation; Blackwell, International Law of the Sea.
[3] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict"; United Nations, "Article 51."
[4] Blackwell, International Law of the Sea; U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict."
[5] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict."

Scenarios for military intervention include states adopting joint naval measures, imposing a blockade, launching a military offensive, or even carrying out limited strikes to deter Iran from threatening maritime navigation and ensure stability in the strait. However, these measures carry high risks, as they could destabilize the region by escalating the crisis, lead to threats by Iran and its allies against shipping, and, in some cases, result in uncontrollable direct military confrontations. One consequence of disrupting maritime traffic is a rise in oil, energy, and commodity prices worldwide, which poses an existential threat to many countries and can trigger a global economic crisis.[1]

In contrast, de-escalation mechanisms offer a better alternative, as they rely on coordination, cooperation, dialogue, and mediation despite political tensions and the severity of the crisis between the parties. Among the most important mechanisms adopted to secure maritime navigation are organizing joint naval patrols, establishing joint communication channels, and exchanging expertise and information to avoid misunderstandings and unintentional incidents. These measures, in turn, help de-escalate the crisis, contribute to finding compromises, and build trust among the parties to contain the crisis before it escalates.[2]

Despite the ongoing conflict, this study reveals that the Strait of Hormuz presents a unique case of partial crisis management, in which a degree of stability and cooperation is maintained to ensure freedom of navigation and global trade. If this indicates anything, it is that the cost of military escalation in this region outweighs any potential gains, and this is something many states recognize, prompting them to resort to more cautious and balanced strategies rather than outright confrontation.

Thus, the situation in the Strait of Hormuz demonstrates that adopting strategies that balance de-escalation and military deterrence is of great importance in managing similar regional crises, with priority given to de-escalation mechanisms that contribute to enhancing stability,

[1] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict"; Lott and Kawagishi, "The Legal Regime of the Strait of Hormuz,"
[2] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict"; Lott and Kawagishi, "The Legal Regime of the Strait of Hormuz,"

reducing the intensity of conflict, and preserving the shared interests of states, thereby minimizing risks to regional and international security.[1]

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that the international response to regional crises—particularly those related to Iran—is characterized by a duality of two main approaches: the first being military and the second being peaceful intervention. A comparison of the two approaches in this study reveals that they stem from different legal and strategic considerations, and their outcomes differ at the international and regional levels, as well as in the short and long term. While adopting a coercive approach— such as military intervention for deterrence or the use of force—achieves rapid and direct objectives, it carries inherent risks that may lead to increased escalation, mutual threats, and retaliation, thereby intensifying the crisis. Conversely, the peaceful approach, which relies on de-escalation mechanisms such as joint patrols, mediation, dialogue, and other tools, helps manage crises effectively and gradually, thereby fostering trust among the parties and facilitating a peaceful resolution, which reduces the likelihood of direct military confrontation and yields more sustainable results compared to a military approach.[2]

This study concludes that the importance of the Strait of Hormuz as a shared economic interest in many countries—particularly regarding energy security, navigation, and global trade—leads states to adopt more rational and cooperative strategies out of concern for their shared interests. This underscores the importance of balancing military intervention mechanisms with de-escalation mechanisms to effectively manage regional and international crises, particularly in sensitive areas of political and economic significance to the international community.[3]

Based on the above discussion, the following recommendations can be made to address this issue:

First, diplomatic channels between the parties and key actors must be strengthened through joint and cooperative mechanisms that help

[1] Mosly, Enhancing Cooperation; United Nations, "Article 51."
[2] United Nations, "Article 51"; International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, "Change of Command."
[3] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict"; Blackwell, *International Law of the Sea*.

prevent misunderstandings, build trust, and reach a compromise that satisfies all parties and facilitates effective and peaceful crisis management.[1]

Second, measures must be taken to strengthen trust and uphold international law to prevent any party from resorting to military force or threatening shared strategic and economic interests. These measures may include establishing joint security agreements, establishing direct communication channels between military, naval, and air forces, and convening urgent and emergency summits to reach a peaceful solution and facilitate mediation to prevent the crisis from escalating or spiraling out of control.[2]

Third, international organizations should be encouraged and relied upon to strengthen the role of mediation, which yields peaceful solutions subject to the oversight of international law and the international community. This may include using international organizations to exert diplomatic pressure on the aggressor through sanctions or, in exceptional cases, to support military intervention based on Security Council recommendations when justified.[3]

Finally, the focus should be on cooperative options based on the shared interests of states, such as ensuring maritime navigation and energy security, and avoiding any reliance on rapid military intervention mechanisms due to their high costs and risks, which are often uncontrollable. Therefore, it is important to exhaust peaceful options first and only then resort to military intervention as a last resort to resolve the crisis.[4]

In conclusion, this study concludes that achieving stability and effectively managing crises in regional areas, such as the Strait of Hormuz crisis, must be accomplished by balancing various de-escalation and diplomatic mechanisms with strategic security caution, including military intervention, while giving high priority to diplomatic

[1] Mosly, Enhancing Cooperation; Blackwell, International Law of the Sea.
[2] International Maritime Security Construct Public Affairs, "Change of Command"; United Nations, "Article 51."
[3] United Nations, "Article 51."
[4] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict"; Lott and Kawagishi, "The Legal Regime of the Strait of Hormuz,".

and cooperative solutions to ensure de-escalation, mitigate the severity of the crisis, and achieve sustainable outcomes at the regional and international levels.[1]

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[1] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Amid Regional Conflict"; Lott and Kawagishi, "The Legal Regime of the Strait of Hormuz,".

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