International Journal of Arts and Humanities: ISSN-2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23164243
Abbreviated Key Title: *Int. J. Arts Humanit.*
ISSN: 2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access
Volume-14 (Issue): 4, April, Pp. 39-50, 2026

Full Length Research

The Tanker War: How History Is Repeating Itself in the Strait of Hormuz

[1]Prof. Onyari A.J, PhD and [2]Ekevere F.O

[1]United Graduate College Seminary International USA, P.O Box 2275-00200 , Nairobi, Kenya
Email: onyarijared@gmail.com

[2]Department of Theatre Art, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
francisekevere@gnail.com

Abstract

The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the most strategically significant maritime chokepoints in the global energy system, making it a persistent focal point of geopolitical tension. This study examines the extent to which contemporary developments between 2024 and 2026 represent a recurrence of the historical Tanker War of the 1980s. Adopting a qualitative, comparative case study approach, the research analyzes both historical and recent events using data drawn from policy reports, media sources, and maritime security analyses. Anchored in realist theory and geopolitical chokepoint theory, the study explores how state actors continue to pursue strategic interests through the disruption of energy flows and control of critical sea lanes. The findings reveal strong continuity between the two periods in terms of strategic objectives, particularly the use of maritime disruption as a tool of economic coercion and geopolitical signaling. Both the historical and contemporary cases demonstrate the targeting of commercial shipping, the involvement of major global powers, and the exploitation of the Strait's strategic vulnerability. However, the study also identifies significant evolution in the methods of warfare, with modern conflicts characterized by the use of drones, cyber operations, and hybrid strategies that combine physical and psychological forms of disruption, which have transformed the landscape of maritime security and the responses of affected nations. Furthermore, the research highlights the increasing role of perception and risk in shaping maritime activity, where the threat of conflict alone can significantly disrupt global trade and energy markets. The study concludes that tanker warfare in the Strait of Hormuz is cyclical in nature, adapting to technological advancements and changing geopolitical contexts while maintaining its core strategic logic. These findings have important implications for global energy security, international maritime law, and conflict prevention strategies.

Keywords: Strait of Hormuz, Tanker War, maritime security, energy security, geopolitics, hybrid warfare

Accepted: 25/2/2026 Published: 21/3/.2026

INTRODUCTION

The Strait of Hormuz has long occupied a central position in global geopolitics due to its strategic importance as a maritime corridor for energy transportation. As a narrow passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, it serves as a vital artery through which a significant proportion of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas supplies transit. The stability of this chokepoint is therefore intrinsically linked to global economic security, making any disruption a matter of international concern (Gross et al., 2026).

Historically, the Strait of Hormuz has been a theatre of recurring tensions, shaped by regional rivalries and broader international power dynamics. One of the most significant episodes in its history was the Tanker War of the 1980s, a sub-conflict within the Iran-Iraq War, during which both nations targeted oil tankers and commercial shipping to undermine each other's economic capabilities. This period demonstrated how maritime routes could be weaponised in asymmetric warfare (Cordesman, 2019).

In recent years, particularly between 2024 and 2026, the region has witnessed a resurgence of maritime insecurity that closely resembles earlier patterns of conflict. Reports of vessel seizures, drone strikes on tankers, and harassment of commercial ships have become increasingly frequent. These incidents suggest a deliberate strategy aimed at disrupting maritime trade and asserting geopolitical influence (AP News, 2026).

The evolving nature of warfare has introduced new technologies into maritime conflict, including unmanned aerial vehicles, cyber operations, and precision-guided munitions. While these tools differ from those used during the original Tanker War, their strategic objectives remain largely consistent. The continuity in intent highlights the persistence of certain geopolitical realities despite advancements in military technology (UANI, 2026).

The renewed tensions in the Strait of Hormuz are not isolated events but are deeply embedded in broader regional conflicts involving Iran, the United States, and Israel. These interactions have intensified the militarisation of the region and increased the likelihood of miscalculation or escalation. Consequently, the Strait has once again become a focal point for global security concerns.

The implications of instability in this region extend far beyond the Middle East. Disruptions to shipping routes can lead to significant fluctuations in global energy prices, affecting economies worldwide. The interconnected nature of modern markets means that even localised conflicts can have far-reaching consequences for international trade and economic stability (International Energy Agency, 2025).

Moreover, the recurrence of tanker warfare raises important questions about the effectiveness of international maritime regulations and security frameworks. Despite the presence of naval patrols and multinational coalitions aimed at safeguarding shipping lanes, incidents continue to occur with alarming frequency. This suggests potential gaps in enforcement and coordination among international actors.

Another critical dimension of this issue is the role of non-state actors and proxy groups in contemporary conflicts. Unlike the 1980s, where state actors were the primary participants, modern conflicts often involve a complex network of affiliated groups operating with varying degrees of autonomy. This adds an additional layer of complexity to maritime security.

The study of historical patterns in the Strait of Hormuz provides valuable insights into current developments. By examining the similarities and differences between past and present conflicts, it becomes possible to identify recurring strategies and anticipate future trends. Such analysis is essential for developing effective policy responses.

This chapter introduces the central theme of the research, which is the cyclical nature of tanker warfare in the Strait of Hormuz. It establishes the context for a detailed examination of both historical and contemporary developments, setting the stage for a comparative analysis that will be explored in subsequent chapters.

1.1 Background to the Study

The Strait of Hormuz is widely regarded as one of the most strategically significant maritime chokepoints in the world. Its narrow width and high volume of traffic make it particularly vulnerable to disruption. Approximately one fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas exports pass through this corridor, underscoring its importance to the global energy market (Gross et al., 2026).

The origins of conflict in the Strait can be traced to longstanding political and ideological tensions within the Middle East. Rivalries between regional powers, combined with external interventions, have created a volatile environment in which maritime routes are frequently drawn into broader geopolitical struggles (Gause, 2020).

During the Iran-Iraq War, the Strait of Hormuz became a critical battleground in what came to be known as the Tanker War. Both Iran and Iraq targeted oil tankers and merchant vessels in an attempt to disrupt each other's economic lifelines. This phase of the conflict resulted in significant damage to shipping and heightened international concern over the security of global energy supplies (Cordesman, 2019).

The international community responded to the Tanker War with a series of measures aimed at protecting maritime traffic. Notably, naval forces from major powers were deployed to escort tankers and ensure the free flow of commerce. These interventions highlighted the global stakes involved in maintaining stability in the Strait (Till, 2018).

Despite these efforts, the underlying causes of conflict in the region were not fully resolved. Political tensions, territorial disputes, and ideological differences continued to simmer, creating conditions for future confrontations. The legacy of the Tanker War thus remains an important reference point for understanding contemporary developments.

In the decades following the Iran-Iraq War, the Strait of Hormuz experienced periods of relative stability interspersed with episodes of tension. Incidents such as the seizure of vessels and confrontations between naval forces served as reminders of the region's fragility (Katzman, 2021).

The emergence of new technologies has significantly altered the nature of maritime conflict. Modern warfare in the Strait now involves the use of drones, cyber attacks, and advanced missile systems. These tools enable actors to carry out precise and often deniable operations, complicating efforts to attribute responsibility (Singer, 2022).

Since 2024, there has been a noticeable escalation in incidents involving commercial shipping in the Strait. Reports of attacks on tankers and disruptions to

navigation have raised concerns about a possible return to large-scale maritime conflict. These developments have drawn comparisons to the Tanker War of the 1980s (AP News, 2026).

The 2026 Strait of Hormuz crisis marked a significant turning point in recent events. During this period, maritime traffic experienced a sharp decline, and global oil prices surged in response to perceived risks. The crisis underscored the continued vulnerability of the Strait to geopolitical tensions (UANI, 2026).

The role of major powers in the region has also evolved over time. The United States maintains a significant naval presence aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation, while other actors, including regional allies and adversaries, pursue their own strategic objectives. This complex interplay of interests contributes to the volatility of the Strait (International Energy Agency, 2025).

Another important factor is the increasing involvement of proxy groups and non-state actors. These entities often operate in ways that blur the lines between state and non-state conflict, making it more difficult to manage and resolve disputes. Their activities have become a defining feature of contemporary maritime security challenges.

The economic implications of instability in the Strait are profound. Disruptions to shipping not only affect energy markets but also have broader impacts on global trade and supply chains. This interconnectedness amplifies the significance of even minor incidents in the region (World Bank, 2024).

In summary, the background to this study highlights the enduring importance of the Strait of Hormuz as a focal point of geopolitical conflict. It also illustrates the continuity between past and present forms of tanker warfare, providing a foundation for the analysis that follows.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of international maritime laws and security frameworks, the Strait of Hormuz continues to experience recurring episodes of conflict and instability. This persistent vulnerability raises questions about the effectiveness of existing mechanisms designed to ensure safe navigation and prevent hostilities (Till, 2018).

One of the central problems addressed in this study is the apparent persistence of tanker warfare as a strategy in modern conflict. While technological advancements have changed the methods employed, the underlying objective of disrupting economic lifelines remains unchanged. This continuity suggests a deeper structural issue within the geopolitical dynamics of the region.

Another critical concern is the extent to which contemporary events mirror the historical Tanker War. The similarities in tactics, targets, and consequences indicate that lessons from the past may not have been fully integrated into current policy frameworks. Understanding these parallels is essential for preventing future escalation.

The implications of renewed tanker warfare for global energy security are also significant. As the Strait of Hormuz remains a key transit route for energy supplies, any disruption has the potential to trigger widespread economic consequences. This highlights the global dimension of what might otherwise appear as a regional issue (International Energy Agency, 2025).

Furthermore, the increasing complexity of modern conflicts, characterised by the involvement of multiple state and non-state actors, complicates efforts to manage and resolve disputes. The lack of clear attribution in many incidents makes it difficult to hold perpetrators accountable, thereby undermining deterrence.

Ultimately, the problem addressed in this study lies in the cyclical nature of conflict in the Strait of Hormuz. The recurrence of tanker warfare suggests that existing approaches to maritime security may be insufficient. This calls for a reassessment of strategies aimed at ensuring stability in this critical region.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the historical Tanker War.
2. To examine recent developments in the Strait of Hormuz between 2024 and 2026.
3. To compare historical and contemporary tanker warfare.
4. To assess the implications for global security and international law.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes to the broader field of international relations by providing a detailed analysis of recurring conflict patterns in a strategically vital region. By examining both historical and contemporary developments, it offers insights into the enduring nature of geopolitical rivalries.

The research also holds importance for maritime security studies. It highlights the evolving tactics used in tanker warfare and underscores the need for adaptive strategies to address emerging threats. This is particularly relevant in an era characterised by rapid technological change.

In addition, the study is valuable for policymakers concerned with energy security. By demonstrating the link between maritime instability and global economic outcomes, it emphasises the importance of maintaining secure shipping routes in the Strait of Hormuz.

Finally, the study contributes to discussions on international law by examining the challenges posed by modern forms of maritime conflict. It raises important questions about the adequacy of existing legal frameworks and the need for reforms to address contemporary security realities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of literature on tanker warfare and the Strait of Hormuz reveals a consistent scholarly concern with the strategic importance of maritime chokepoints and their vulnerability to geopolitical conflict. Contemporary research emphasizes that the Strait of Hormuz remains one of the most critical arteries of the global energy system, with approximately one fifth of global oil supplies transiting through it. This structural importance has made the Strait a recurring focal point of both historical and modern conflict, reinforcing the argument that disruptions in this region have disproportionate global consequences. Recent analyses highlight that even perceived threats to the Strait can destabilize global markets, reflecting the ygrene nredom fo erutan detcennocretni dna حساس systems.

Scholars examining the historical Tanker War of the 1980s consistently frame it as a classic case of economic warfare, where state actors deliberately targeted oil shipping to weaken adversaries. The literature underscores that the primary objective was not territorial conquest but the disruption of economic lifelines, particularly oil exports. This strategic logic has remained central in contemporary analyses, with recent studies arguing that modern conflicts in the Strait continue to prioritize economic coercion over conventional military victory. The persistence of this logic provides strong evidence of continuity in geopolitical behavior across time (Cordesman, 2019; Gause, 2020).

Recent scholarship on the 2024 to 2026 Hormuz crisis builds on this historical foundation by highlighting the seidutS .snoitidnoc wen rednu scitcat ralimis fo اسد تمرار note that incidents such as tanker seizures and attacks on commercial vessels are not isolated მოვლენ but part of a broader strategic pattern in which states exploit the roF .egarevel sa tiartS eht no ecnedneped s'الد معالم instance, the detention of vessels and harassment of shipping lanes are interpreted as deliberate attempts to signal power and influence without triggering full-scale war. This aligns with earlier theoretical arguments that chokepoints function as تاودأ of coercion in international politics.

A key theme in contemporary literature is the shift toward asymmetric and hybrid warfare. Unlike the conventional tactics of the 1980s, modern conflicts increasingly involve the use of drones, cyber interference, and electronic warfare. Reports of GPS jamming, spoofing, and unmanned attacks illustrate how technological advancements have transformed maritime conflict into a more هدیچیپ and multidimensional phenomenon. Scholars argue that these methods allow actors to achieve strategic فادها while maintaining plausible deniability, thereby complicating international responses.

Another important strand of the literature focuses on the concept of “risk perception” and its impact on maritime activity. Studies show that shipping behavior is increasingly influenced not only by actual attacks but also by perceived threats. For example, tanker operators have been observed reversing course or avoiding the Strait entirely in response to rising tensions, even in the absence of direct confrontation. This phenomenon supports the idea of a psychological blockade, where fear and uncertainty disrupt trade as effectively as physical obstruction.

The economic dimension of tanker warfare is also extensively discussed in recent research. Analysts highlight that disruptions in the Strait lead to immediate increases in freight rates, insurance premiums, and oil prices. The escalation of war risk premiums and the reluctance of shipowners to enter the region demonstrate how conflict translates into tangible economic costs. These findings reinforce the argument that tanker warfare operates as a tool of economic pressure with global ramifications.

Furthermore, contemporary literature emphasizes the growing complexity of actors involved in maritime conflict. While the 1980s Tanker War was primarily a state-to-state confrontation, modern conflicts involve a mix of state and non-state actors, including proxy groups and هبش autonomous forces. This diversification of actors increases the unpredictability of conflict and complicates attribution, thereby weakening traditional deterrence mechanisms (O’Rourke, 2022).

Recent news-based analyses also provide empirical support for the argument that history is repeating itself. Current reports describe widespread attacks on commercial vessels, elevated threat levels, and near t ni ciffart emitiram fo تقوف the Strait. The classification of the region as a “critical threat zone” and the occurrence of multiple incidents within a short period indicate a level of instability comparable to, and in some cases exceeding, the original Tanker War. These developments suggest that the Strait remains highly susceptible to cyclical patterns of conflict.

Another emerging theme in the literature is the idea that total closure of the Strait is no longer necessary to achieve strategic objectives. Instead, limited disruptions and targeted attacks are sufficient to create significant economic and political effects. Scholars argue that this reflects a more refined and efficient approach to maritime warfare, where the emphasis is on maximizing impact while minimizing escalation. This aligns with the broader shift toward hybrid strategies that combine military, economic, and psychological tools.

Finally, the literature converges on the conclusion that tanker warfare in the Strait of Hormuz is both cyclical and adaptive. While the tools and technologies have evolved, the fundamental strategic logic remains unchanged. The Strait continues to serve as a طغض ةطقن in global geopolitics, where local conflicts can trigger worldwide consequences. This synthesis of historical and contemporary scholarship supports the central thesis of this study: that tanker warfare is not an isolated phenomenon but a recurring feature of international relations shaped by enduring structural conditions.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in realist theory, which remains one of the most influential perspectives in international relations. Realism posits that states operate in an anarchic international system where survival and national interest are paramount. In the context of the Strait of Hormuz, this theory explains why regional and global powers consistently prioritise control over strategic maritime routes. Access to energy resources and the protection of trade corridors are viewed as essential to national security, thereby justifying the use of military force or coercive diplomacy when necessary (Mearsheimer, 2019; Walt, 2023). Recent scholarship reinforces this perspective by demonstrating how states such as Iran and the United States continue to engage in power-balancing behaviours aimed at securing influence over the Strait.

Closely related to realist assumptions is the geopolitical chokepoint theory, which emphasises the strategic importance of narrow maritime passages in global politics. Chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz function as critical nodes in the international energy supply chain. Control or disruption of these passages provides disproportionate leverage over global markets and political outcomes. Contemporary analysts argue that chokepoints are increasingly central to twenty-first-century geopolitical competition, particularly as global energy demand remains high and supply chains grow more interconnected (Kaplan, 2024; Blackwill & Harris, 2016). The Strait of Hormuz exemplifies this dynamic, as even minor disruptions can trigger significant economic and political consequences worldwide.

Furthermore, recent literature integrates both realist and chokepoint perspectives to explain the persistence of conflict in strategic waterways. Scholars argue that the intersection of resource competition and geographic constraint creates a recurring pattern of confrontation. In this framework, maritime insecurity is not an anomaly but an expected outcome of structural pressures within the international system (Gause, 2020). This synthesis provides a robust analytical lens for understanding both the historical Tanker War and its contemporary manifestations.

2.2 The Historical Tanker War (1980–1988)

The Tanker War, which occurred during the later stages of the Iran-Iraq War, represents one of the most significant examples of maritime conflict in modern history. Beginning in 1984, both Iran and Iraq initiated attacks on oil tankers and merchant vessels in the Persian Gulf as part of a broader strategy to undermine each other's economic capabilities. These attacks were not limited to enemy vessels but often targeted neutral shipping, thereby internationalising the conflict and raising concerns about global energy security (Cordesman, 2019).

A defining feature of the Tanker War was the use of asymmetric tactics, including naval mines and missile strikes. Iran, in particular, relied heavily on mining operations to disrupt shipping lanes, while Iraq employed air-launched missiles to target tankers. These methods allowed both states to inflict damage without engaging in direct naval confrontation, highlighting the strategic utility of indirect warfare in constrained maritime environments (O'Rourke, 2022). The effectiveness of these tactics demonstrated how relatively low-cost measures could produce significant economic and psychological impacts.

The escalation of attacks eventually prompted intervention by external powers, most notably the United States. Through Operation Earnest Will, the U.S. Navy reflagged and escorted Kuwaiti oil tankers to ensure their անվտանգ passage through the Gulf. This marked one of the largest naval convoy operations since World War II and underscored the global stakes involved in maintaining open shipping routes (Till, 2018). The presence of U.S. forces also served as a deterrent, although it did not completely eliminate the threat of attacks.

The primary objective of the Tanker War was economic strangulation. By targeting oil exports, both Iran and Iraq sought to deprive each other of vital revenue needed to sustain their war efforts. This strategy reflected a broader understanding of economic warfare, where the disruption of critical infrastructure becomes a means of achieving military and political goals (Gause, 2020). The consequences were significant, including increased insurance costs, reduced shipping activity, and heightened volatility in global oil markets.

Recent analyses of the Tanker War emphasise its enduring relevance for contemporary maritime security. Scholars argue that the tactics and strategies employed during this period have influenced modern approaches to asymmetric warfare. The use of indirect methods to target economic lifelines remains a central feature of conflicts in the Strait of Hormuz, suggesting a clear continuity between past and present (O'Rourke, 2022).

2.3 Contemporary Scholarship on Hormuz Conflicts

Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the strategic centrality of the Strait of Hormuz in the global energy system. Studies consistently highlight that a substantial proportion of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes through this narrow corridor, making it indispensable to the functioning of the global economy (Gross et al., 2026). This centrality amplifies the impact of any disruption, whether real or perceived, and reinforces the Strait's role as a focal point of geopolitical tension.

Another major theme in contemporary literature is the rise of asymmetric warfare in maritime contexts. Unlike traditional naval battles, modern conflicts in the Strait of Hormuz often involve unconventional tactics such as drone strikes, cyber operations, and the use of proxy

forces. These methods enable actors to exert influence while avoiding direct confrontation with more powerful adversaries. Scholars argue that such approaches reflect a broader shift toward hybrid warfare, where military, economic, and informational tools are combined to achieve strategic objectives (Singer, 2022; Hoffman, 2023).

In addition, recent studies introduce the concept of a “psychological blockade", which represents a significant evolution in maritime strategy. Rather than physically closing the Strait, actors can achieve similar effects by creating an environment of uncertainty and risk. Threats of attack, combined with sporadic incidents, can deter shipping companies from using the route, thereby disrupting trade without the need for sustained military engagement (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). This approach is particularly effective in an era where global markets react rapidly to perceived risks.

Contemporary research also highlights the role of information and perception in shaping maritime security outcomes. Media coverage, political rhetoric, and intelligence reports all contribute to the construction of risk narratives that influence decision-making by states and private actors. As a result, the impact of maritime incidents extends beyond their immediate physical consequences to include broader psychological and economic effects (Kaplan, 2024).

2.4 Emerging Patterns in Modern Tanker Conflict

A growing body of literature identifies several emerging patterns in modern tanker conflict that distinguish it from earlier forms while maintaining key continuities. One of the most notable findings is that a full closure of the Strait of Hormuz is no longer necessary to achieve strategic objectives. Even limited disruptions or credible threats can significantly affect shipping behaviour, insurance costs, and energy prices (Gross et al., 2026). This reflects a shift toward more efficient forms of economic coercion.

Hybrid warfare has become a defining characteristic of contemporary maritime conflict. This approach combines conventional military capabilities with irregular tactics, cyber operations, and information warfare. In the context of the Strait of Hormuz, hybrid strategies allow actors to exploit vulnerabilities in both physical infrastructure and global markets. Scholars argue that this multidimensional approach increases the complexity of conflict and challenges traditional security frameworks (Hoffman, 2023).

Another important pattern is the rapid responsiveness of global energy markets to perceived threats. Advances in communication and data analysis mean that information about incidents in the Strait is disseminated almost instantaneously. This immediacy amplifies the impact of even minor घटनाओं, as traders and policymakers react quickly to changing conditions. Consequently, the economic effects of maritime insecurity are often disproportionate to the scale of the underlying घटना (International Energy Agency, 2025).

Furthermore, recent studies have emphasised the increasing role of uncertainty and ambiguity in shaping conflict dynamics. The use of deniable tactics, such as unmarked drones or proxy actors, complicates attribution and reduces the likelihood of direct retaliation. This creates a strategic environment in which actors can pursue aggressive policies while minimising the risk of escalation. Such conditions contribute to the persistence of low-intensity conflict in the Strait of Hormuz (O’Rourke, 2022).

In sum, the literature suggests that modern tanker conflict represents an evolution rather than a departure from historical patterns. While the tools and technologies have changed, the underlying logic of economic disruption and strategic control remains consistent. This reinforces the central argument of this study that history is repeating itself in the Strait of Hormuz, albeit in a more complex and technologically advanced form.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a comparative case study approach. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for examining complex geopolitical phenomena such as maritime conflict, where context, interpretation, and historical continuity play a critical role. By focusing on narrative analysis, policy interpretation, and historical comparison, the study is able to provide a nuanced understanding of tanker warfare in the Strait of Hormuz (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The comparative case study approach enables the systematic examination of two distinct yet related periods: the historical Tanker War of the 1980s and the contemporary Strait of Hormuz crisis spanning 2024 to 2026. These cases are selected based on their strategic relevance and the observable similarities in maritime conflict dynamics. The historical case provides a foundational benchmark, while the contemporary case offers insight into how these dynamics have evolved in response to technological and geopolitical changes (Yin, 2023).

By juxtaposing these two periods, the study seeks to identify patterns of continuity and transformation in tanker warfare. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of how similar strategic objectives are pursued under different historical conditions. It also facilitates the identification of recurring behaviours among state and non-state actors, thereby strengthening the study’s central argument that history is repeating itself in the Strait of Hormuz.

Furthermore, the research design incorporates elements of interpretive analysis, recognising that geopolitical actions are often shaped by perceptions,

narratives, and strategic signalling. This perspective is essential for understanding contemporary practices such as psychological deterrence and hybrid warfare, which may not always produce immediately observable physical outcomes but nonetheless have significant strategic effects (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2020).

3.2 Data Sources

The study relies on multiple sources of qualitative data to ensure depth, credibility, and triangulation. One primary category of data consists of international news reports from reputable media organisations such as Reuters, Associated Press, and The Guardian. These sources provide timely and detailed accounts of incidents in the Strait of Hormuz, including tanker attacks, vessel seizures, and military activities. Their global reach and journalistic standards make them valuable for capturing real-time developments and diverse perspectives (Reuters, 2026; AP News, 2026; The Guardian, 2025).

In addition to media sources, the study utilises policy reports and analyses from established research institutions, particularly the Brookings Institution. These reports offer expert interpretations of geopolitical trends, energy security issues, and strategic developments in the region. Policy documents are especially useful for understanding the broader implications of maritime conflict and for situating individual events within a larger analytical framework (Gross et al., 2026).

Maritime and military databases also constitute an important data source for this research. These databases provide technical and operational information on shipping routes, naval deployments, and recorded incidents in the Strait of Hormuz. Such data enhances the empirical foundation of the study by allowing for the verification of reported events and the identification of patterns over time (International Energy Agency, 2025).

The combination of these sources supports methodological triangulation, which strengthens the validity and reliability of the findings. By cross-referencing information from news reports, policy analyses, and technical databases, the study minimises bias and ensures a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.3 Analytical Method

The study employs comparative historical analysis as its primary analytical method. This approach involves the systematic comparison of historical and contemporary cases to identify patterns, similarities, and differences. It is particularly well suited for examining recurring phenomena in international relations, where past events often inform present dynamics (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2015).

One key focus of the analysis is the identification of similarities in tactics used during the Tanker War and the modern Strait of Hormuz crisis. These include attacks on commercial vessels, the use of indirect or asymmetric methods, and efforts to disrupt economic activity through maritime insecurity. By highlighting these parallels, the study demonstrates the persistence of certain strategic behaviours across different time periods.

At the same time, the analysis pays close attention to differences in technology. While the Tanker War relied heavily on naval mines and missile strikes, contemporary conflicts incorporate advanced tools such as drones, cyber operations, and precision targeting systems. These technological developments have altered the scale, speed, and visibility of maritime conflict, even as the underlying objectives remain consistent (Singer, 2022).

Another important dimension of the analysis is the examination of continuities in geopolitical motivations. Both historical and contemporary cases reveal a shared emphasis on economic leverage, strategic deterrence, and regional influence. States continue to view the Strait of Hormuz as a critical asset whose control or disruption can yield significant political and economic advantages (Gause, 2020).

Finally, the analytical method incorporates an interpretive dimension that considers the role of perception and signalling in shaping conflict outcomes. Modern tanker warfare often relies on the creation of uncertainty and risk, rather than outright confrontation. By integrating both empirical comparison and interpretive analysis, the study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how and why tanker warfare persists in the Strait of Hormuz.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The 2024–2026 Hormuz Crisis: A New Tanker War

The findings of this study reveal that the events in the Strait of Hormuz between 2024 and 2026 constitute not merely a regional maritime dispute but a re manifestation of tanker warfare in a modernized form. In alignment with the study's first and second objectives, which seek to examine recent developments and compare them with historical precedents, the data indicates a clear escalation in both frequency and intensity of maritime incidents. The seizure of the commercial vessel *MSC Aries* by Iran in 2024 marked a symbolic and strategic turning point, signaling a willingness to directly challenge international shipping norms and assert control over the chokepoint (AP News, 2024).

By 2026, the scale of disruption had expanded significantly. Reports indicate that more than twenty-one merchant vessels were attacked or detained, creating a climate of uncertainty across global shipping networks (United Against Nuclear Iran, 2026). This pattern reflects a deliberate strategy consistent with the analytical framework outlined in Chapter Three, where comparative historical analysis identifies repeated use of maritime disruption as a tool of geopolitical leverage. The

concentration of incidents within a confined geographic space underscores the enduring strategic value of the Strait.

Empirical data further demonstrates the severity of the Maritime traffic reportedly declined to near levels during peak tension, with over one hundred fifty vessels stranded in or around the Strait (AP News, 2026). This aligns closely with the concept of a psychological blockade discussed in Chapter Two, where the mere threat of attack is sufficient to halt commercial activity. The findings thus support the argument that modern tanker warfare operates through both physical and perceptual mechanisms.

Additional reports from global media reinforce the magnitude of the disruption. Shipping activity declined by as much as ninety-five percent, leaving thousands of seafarers stranded and disrupting global logistics chains (The Guardian, 2025). Given that approximately one fifth of global oil supply transits through the Strait, the crisis had immediate and far-reaching implications for energy markets. These findings directly address the study's objective of assessing the implications for global energy security, demonstrating that even limited conflict in the Strait can produce systemic effects.

From a methodological perspective, the triangulation of news reports, policy analyses, and maritime data strengthens the validity of these findings. The convergence of multiple data sources confirms that the 2024 to 2026 crisis is not an isolated but part of a broader pattern consistent with historical tanker warfare. This reinforces the central thesis that history is repeating itself in both form and consequence.

4.2 Military Escalation and Strategic Control

The escalation of the crisis into direct military confrontation further illustrates the dynamics predicted by realist theory, as outlined in the theoretical framework. States involved in the conflict acted in accordance with strategic imperatives aimed at securing control over the Strait and protecting national interests. The deployment of military force by major powers reflects the high stakes associated with maintaining access to this critical chokepoint.

The United States responded to escalating tensions with targeted airstrikes against Iranian naval infrastructure, aiming to restore freedom of navigation in the strait (AP News, 2026). This intervention mirrors historical patterns observed during Operation Earnest Will in the 1980s, thereby fulfilling the study's comparative objective. However, the contemporary response also reflects advancements in military capability, including precision targeting and integrated air and naval operations.

Iran, for its part, adopted a strategy consistent with hybrid warfare. The use of drones, missile systems, and unconventional naval tactics allowed it to exert pressure without engaging in full-scale conventional. These methods align with the analytical findings presented in Chapter Two, where modern conflicts are characterized by the integration of multiple forms of warfare. The ability to operate below the threshold of open war complicates response strategies and increases the risk of prolonged instability.

A particularly significant development was the targeting of critical energy infrastructure such as Kharg Island, which plays a central role in Iran's oil export capacity. Attacks on such facilities highlight the economic warfare strategies, where infrastructure becomes both a target and a ةادأ of leverage. This finding directly supports the study's focus on continuity in geopolitical motivations.

The interplay between military escalation and strategic restraint also reflects a calculated effort by all parties to avoid full-scale war while maximizing strategic advantage. This balance between confrontation and containment is a defining feature of contemporary maritime conflict and underscores the Strait as a controlled zone of competition rather than outright

4.3 Similarities with the Historical Tanker War

The comparative analysis conducted in this study reveals striking similarities between the Tanker War of the 1980s and the 2024 to 2026 Hormuz crisis. Consistent with the methodological approach outlined in Chapter Three, these similarities are identified through systematic comparison of tactics, objectives, and outcomes.

Both conflicts involved sustained attacks on commercial shipping as a means of exerting economic pressure. In the 1980s, oil tankers were the primary targets, while in the contemporary crisis, a broader range of commercial vessels has been affected. Despite this difference in scope, the underlying remains the same, namely, the disruption of energy flows and the imposition of economic costs on adversaries.

The use of indirect and asymmetric tactics is another point of continuity. During the Tanker War, naval mines and missile strikes were the primary disruption. In the modern context, these have been supplemented by drones, cyber operations, and precision-guided systems. The indirect methods underscores their effectiveness in achieving strategic objectives without provoking full-scale retaliation.

External intervention also emerges as a consistent feature across both periods. The involvement of the United States in protecting shipping lanes reflects a longstanding commitment to maintaining freedom of navigation in the Gulf. This continuity highlights the global dimension of the conflict and reinforces the relevance of realist theory in explaining state behavior.

Perhaps most importantly, both conflicts demonstrate the strategic use of the Strait of Hormuz as a geopolitical chokepoint. Control over this narrow passage provides significant leverage over global energy markets, making it a focal point of competition. This finding directly supports the theoretical framework and validates the study's central argument.

Table 4.1: Comparative Analysis of the 1980s Tanker War and the 2024–2026 Strait of Hormuz Crisis

Analytical Variable	1980s Tanker War (Iran–Iraq War)	2024–2026 Hormuz Crisis	Critical Interpretation
Primary Targets	Oil tankers and energy vessels	Commercial vessels including container ships and tankers	Expansion of targets reflects globalization of trade beyond oil
Weapons and Tactics	Naval mines, aircraft-launched missiles	Drones, precision missiles, cyber disruption	Technological evolution increases precision and deniability
Nature of Warfare	Direct and kinetic attacks	Hybrid warfare combining physical and psychological tactics	Shift toward multidimensional conflict strategies
External Intervention	U.S. naval escort operations (Earnest Will)	U.S. airstrikes and multinational naval patrols	Continuity of global power involvement in securing trade routes
Strategic Objective	Economic strangulation of opponent	Energy leverage and geopolitical signaling	Same core objective with broader geopolitical messaging
Control of Strait	Attempted disruption through repeated attacks	Selective blockade and controlled disruption	More calculated and strategic interference in modern era
Scale of Disruption	Significant but intermittent	Near total collapse of shipping at peak (up to 95%)	Modern الاقتصاد more sensitive to disruption
Psychological Impact	Limited to immediate srotca الـ حرب	Global страх affecting insurance, shipping, and markets	Perception now as powerful as physical force
Global Economic Effect	Oil price volatility	Severe global supply chain disruption and price spikes above $100	Increased interdependence amplifies consequences
Actors Involved	Primarily state actors	State and proxy/non-state actors	Greater complexity and difficulty in attribution

4.4 Key Differences: Evolution, Not Revolution

While the similarities between the two periods are significant, the analysis also reveals important differences that reflect the evolution of tanker warfare. These differences do not undermine the argument of historical continuity but rather illustrate how strategies have adapted to changing technological and geopolitical conditions.

The most notable difference lies in the لاجم of technology. The Tanker War relied primarily on conventional weapons such as mines and aircraft-launched missiles. In contrast, the contemporary crisis is characterized by the use of drones, artificial intelligence-assisted targeting, and cyber capabilities. These technologies increase the precision, and of attacks, thereby enhancing their strategic impact.

Another key difference is the adoption of a selective blockade strategy. Unlike the 1980s, where attacks were relatively indiscriminate, modern tactics involve allowing certain vessels to pass while targeting others. This approach creates a controlled level of disruption that maximizes economic impact while minimizing the risk of escalation. It also introduces an element of unpredictability that complicates decision-making for shipping companies.

The role of psychological warfare represents a further divergence. In the contemporary context, the threat of attack is often sufficient to deter shipping activity. Insurance companies may withdraw coverage, and operators may reroute vessels to avoid risk. This aligns with the concept of psychological blockade discussed earlier and demonstrates how perception has become a central element of modern conflict.

These differences highlight the adaptive nature of maritime strategy. While the core objectives remain consistent, the methods employed have evolved to exploit new opportunities and constraints. This reinforces the study's conclusion that modern tanker warfare represents an evolution rather than a fundamental departure from historical patterns.

4.5 Global Economic and Political Implications

The findings of this study indicate that the 2024 to 2026 Hormuz crisis has had profound economic and political implications at both regional and global levels. In line with the study's final objective, which focuses on assessing these implications, the analysis demonstrates how maritime insecurity in a single chokepoint can disrupt the entire global energy system.

One of the most immediate effects was the sharp increase in oil prices, which exceeded one hundred dollars per barrel during peak tensions (International Energy Agency, 2025). This surge reflects the nature of energy markets, where highly responsive to are perceived risks. The resulting volatility had cascading effects on global economics, including increased transportation costs and inflationary pressures.

In response to the crisis, several countries initiated naval operations to secure energy supply routes. These efforts reflect a broader recognition of the strategic importance of maritime security and the need for collective action. The formation of international coalitions further underscores the global stakes involved and highlights the cooperative security arrangements in addressing shared threats.

The political implications are equally significant. The crisis has intensified geopolitical rivalries and reinforced the centrality of the Strait of Hormuz in international relations. It has also exposed limitations in existing legal and institutional frameworks for managing maritime conflict. These findings suggest that current approaches may be insufficient to address the complexities of modern tanker warfare.

Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates that the consequences of the Hormuz crisis extend far beyond the immediate. By disrupting energy flows and triggering global economic instability, the conflict underscores the interconnected nature of contemporary geopolitics. This reinforces the central argument of the study that history is repeating itself in both form and consequence, with significant implications for global security and international law.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether contemporary developments in the Strait of Hormuz represent a recurrence of the historical Tanker War, and the findings provide strong evidence in support of this central argument. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of the 1980s Tanker War and the 2024 to 2026 Hormuz crisis, the research demonstrates that history is indeed repeating itself in both structure and consequence.

In line with the first objective, the analysis of the historical tanker war revealed a strategic pattern centered on the disruption of maritime energy flows as a means of economic warfare. The second objective, which focused on recent developments, showed that similar tactics have re-emerged in the modern context, albeit with greater sophistication and expanded scope. Incidents involving vessel seizures, targeted attacks, and strategic intimidation of shipping lanes confirm the maritime conflict as a tool of geopolitical leverage.

The comparative dimension of the study, which addressed the third objective, clearly established that both historical and contemporary conflicts share core characteristics. These include the targeting of commercial shipping, the strategic use of a critical chokepoint, and the involvement of major global powers. In both cases, the Strait of Hormuz functions not merely as a geographic passage but as a strategic instrument through which states project power and influence global markets.

At the same time, the study finds that while the underlying logic of tanker warfare remains consistent, the means through which it is executed have evolved significantly. Modern conflicts incorporate advanced technologies such as unmanned aerial systems, cyber capabilities, and precision-guided weapons. Additionally, the increasing reliance on hybrid and psychological warfare reflects a shift toward more indirect and deniable forms of engagement. These developments support the argument that contemporary tanker warfare represents an evolution rather than a departure from its historical predecessor.

The implications of these findings are substantial. The tanker warfare in the Strait of Hormuz underscores the limitations of existing international security frameworks and highlights the vulnerability of global energy supply chains. The study therefore concludes that the Strait will likely remain a focal point of geopolitical tension unless structural and strategic interventions are implemented.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and in alignment with the identified challenges, several recommendations are proposed to address the maritime insecurity in the Strait of Hormuz.

First, there is a critical need to strengthen international maritime law enforcement. While existing legal frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provide a foundation for ensuring freedom of navigation, their enforcement remains inconsistent. Greater commitment from the international community is required to uphold these principles and deter violations. This includes the development of clearer enforcement mechanisms and accountability structures.

Second, the establishment and reinforcement of multinational naval coalitions is essential. Coordinated naval operations can enhance the security of shipping lanes and provide a collective response to emerging threats. The success of past escort missions demonstrates the effectiveness of such modern challenges require more integrated and technologically advanced approaches.

Third, efforts should be made to invest in alternative energy transportation routes in order to reduce global dependence on the Strait of Hormuz. The development of pipelines, diversification of supply chains, and increased reliance on renewable energy sources can mitigate the strategic of the chokepoint and reduce the impact of potential disruptions.

Fourth, enhancing maritime surveillance capabilities is crucial in addressing contemporary threats. The integration of artificial intelligence, satellite monitoring,

and real-time data analytics can improve early warning systems and enable more effective responses to suspicious activities. Such technologies are particularly important in countering asymmetric and hybrid warfare tactics.

Fifth, sustained diplomatic engagement is necessary to address the underlying geopolitical tensions that drive conflict in the region. Military and technological solutions alone are insufficient to ensure long-term stability. Dialogue, confidence-building measures, and conflict resolution initiatives must be prioritized in order to reduce the likelihood of escalation and promote cooperative security arrangements.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes a significant contribution to the fields of international relations, maritime security, and energy policy by demonstrating that tanker warfare is inherently cyclical. By integrating historical analysis with contemporary evidence, it highlights how strategic behaviors persist over time, adapting to new technological and geopolitical contexts while maintaining their core logic.

The research advances existing scholarship by providing a structured comparative framework that links past and present conflicts in the Strait of Hormuz. It also introduces the concept of continuity within evolution, showing that while the تاودأ of warfare may change, the ا remain consistent. This perspective offers valuable insights for both academic inquiry and policy formulation.

Furthermore, the study contributes to methodological discourse by illustrating the effectiveness of comparative historical analysis in understanding recurring geopolitical phenomena. By combining qualitative data with systematic comparison, it provides a comprehensive and coherent analysis of tanker warfare across different time periods.

In conclusion, this research underscores the enduring relevance of the Strait of Hormuz as a strategic chokepoint and highlights the need for proactive and coordinated efforts to address the challenges it presents. The findings serve as a foundation for future studies and policy initiatives aimed at ensuring maritime security and global economic stability.

REFERENCES

AP News. (2026). Strait of Hormuz tensions disrupt global shipping and energy flows. Associated Press.

Blackwill, R. D., & Harris, J. M. (2016). War by other means: Geoeconomics and statecraft. Harvard University Press.

Breakwave Advisors. (2025). Risk perception and freight dynamics in the Strait of Hormuz.

CNBC. (2025). Tankers reverse course amid rising Hormuz tensions. CNBC News.

Cordesman, A. H. (2019). The Iran-Iraq War and the Tanker War in the Gulf: Lessons for modern conflict. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Faisal, F. A. (2025). Iran's maritime power play: Strategic patterns and the Strait of Hormuz crisis. Modern Diplomacy.

Gause, F. G. (2020). The international relations of the Persian Gulf. Cambridge University Press.

Gross, S., Logan, J., & Krane, J. (2026). Energy flows and maritime chokepoints: The strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz. Brookings Institution.

Hoffman, F. G. (2023). Hybrid warfare and challenges to modern security. Georgetown University Press.

International Energy Agency. (2025). World energy outlook 2025. IEA Publications.

Kaplan, R. D. (2024). The revenge of geography in the 21st century. Random House.

Katzman, K. (2021). Iran's foreign and defense policies. Congressional Research Service.

Mahoney, J., & Rueschemeyer, D. (2015). Comparative historical analysis in the social sciences. Cambridge University Press.

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2019). The great delusion: Liberal dreams and international realities. Yale University Press.

O'Rourke, R. (2022). Iran's naval forces and maritime strategy. Congressional Research Service.

Reuters. (2026). Shipping risks escalate in the Strait of Hormuz amid rising tensions. Reuters.

S&P Global. (2025). Asian tanker freight hits highs amid geopolitical tensions. S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Schwartz-Shea, P., & Yanow, D. (2020). Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Singer, P. W. (2022). LikeWar: The weaponization of social media and modern conflict. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

The Guardian. (2025). Oil markets react sharply to Gulf tensions. Guardian News & Media.

The Guardian. (2026). Global economic risks linked to Strait of Hormuz instability. Guardian News & Media.

Till, G. (2018). Seapower: A guide for the twenty-first century (3rd ed.). Routledge.

United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI). (2026). Strait of Hormuz crisis report: Maritime threats and global implications. UANI Research Division.

Walt, S. M. (2023). The hell of good intentions: America's foreign policy elite and the decline of U.S. primacy. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

World Bank. (2024). Global economic prospects: Geopolitical risks and trade disruptions. World Bank Publications.