Issue | February 2026

GLOBAL UP-TO-DATE

A Monthly Newsletter by Centre for Governance Studies

Illustrated by Roman Uddin

Photo: Mark Harris Illustration

CONTRIBUTORS

1. **Roman Uddin**
   Senior Research Associate (CGS)
2. **Shurat Rana Rushmi**
   Research Associate (CGS)
3. **Md. Saiful Islam Shanto**
   Research Assistant (CGS)

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Roman Uddin

Senior Research Associate (CGS)

A cgs Publication

The world around us is changing rapidly. Wars, new turn in global politics, human rights issues are occurring every day, posing new challenges and concerns. Global Up-to-Date is an initiative by Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) which will work as a hub for explaining the contemporary global issues.

The regular briefs will focus and explain the issues related to International Politics, Economy, Security, Human Rights, and Development. There will be a monthly printed version newsletter containing briefs of all the contemporary global important issues. The online version contains regular updates of the pressing issues along with the PDF version of the news letter.

Four Years of War in Ukraine and the High Price of Nothing

Roman Uddin

Photo: Mark Harris Illustration

Four years have passed since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The war has brought murder on an industrial scale, systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure, forced displacement of millions, abduction of children, and environmental devastation from land mines and scorched earth tactics. It has fueled a refugee crisis, eroded global stability, and imposed crushing economic burdens far beyond the battlefield. Yet for all this suffering, the central question remains, what has anyone gained? The answer is painfully clear. Almost nothing of lasting value, only burdens that weigh on every participant and bystander alike.

The human toll stands as the war's most harrowing consequence. Estimates from the Center for Strategic and International Studies in January 2026 place Russian military casualties at approximately 1.2 million, including up to 325,000 deaths, the highest toll for any major power in any conflict since World War II. Ukrainian military casualties range from 500,000 to 600,000, with 100,000 to 140,000 fatalities according to the same analysis, though President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reported 55,000 Ukrainian troop deaths earlier in the year. Independent Russian outlets like BBC Russian Service and Mediazona have verified over 186,000 Russian soldier deaths by name, while civilian deaths in Ukraine exceed 15,000, with more than 41,000 injured. These figures spark fierce controversy. Russian sources routinely claim far higher Ukrainian losses, sometimes doubling or tripling Western estimates, while Kyiv and its allies emphasize Russian overstretch. Beyond the numbers, the war has erased a generation of young men on both sides, hollowed out families, and left lasting trauma that will echo for decades.

Economic fallout followed swiftly and spread globally. In the war's opening months, oil prices surged past 130 dollars per barrel, wheat futures hit 14-year highs, and global food prices spiked dramatically. Ukraine's grain exports, once a lifeline for dozens of nations, plummeted. By 2025, Ukrainian corn, barley, wheat, and related exports stood 35 percent below 2020 levels. Russia, by contrast, temporarily boosted its own wheat shipments to a record 55 million metric tons in 2023-2024 by seizing Ukrainian infrastructure and appropriating harvests, but its exports have since declined amid weather woes and labor shortages. Global cereal prices remain elevated compared with pre-2022 baselines even as they have eased from their 2022 peak. Fertilizer costs, driven by disruptions in Russian and Ukrainian supplies, have compounded the pain for farmers worldwide. In developing economies, these shocks translated into immediate inflation on staples. Oil and energy volatility added further pressure, delaying recovery from earlier pandemic disruptions.

On the ground, Russia has secured incremental territorial gains at staggering cost. By early 2026, Moscow controls roughly 20 percent of Ukraine, including Crimea and parts of Donbas seized before 2022 plus roughly 75,000 square kilometers captured since the full-scale invasion began. That equates to about 12 percent of Ukrainian territory taken outright since February 2022. Gains in 2025 totaled around 4,800 square kilometers, or 0.8 percent of the country, concentrated in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts through grinding offensives that averaged mere tens of meters per day in key sectors like Pokrovsk. Ukraine has lost strategically vital logistics hubs and farmland but has mounted effective counterattacks in southern areas such as Hulyaipole and Oleksandrivka, liberating pockets of territory and disrupting Russian momentum. Neither side has achieved decisive breakthroughs.

World politics have shifted profoundly under these pressures, specially since Donald Trump assumed the US presidency. From the conflict's outset, NATO's eastward expansion and security assurances to Ukraine formed part of the backdrop that Moscow cited as justification for invasion. Trump's administration marked a sharp pivot. His February 28, 2025, Oval Office meeting with Zelenskyy turned contentious, with Trump and Vice President JD Vance openly criticizing the Ukrainian leader and pressing for an immediate ceasefire. Trump made clear that Ukraine would not join NATO under his watch and conditioned further aid on rapid negotiations. US support, once robust, became more transactional and at times paused, straining ties with European allies who viewed the approach as undermining collective security. Relations between Washington and Brussels cooled noticeably, while Ukraine found itself in a precarious position, squeezed between reduced American backing and the need to sustain its defense.

Russia itself has paid dearly in resources and opportunity. While the United States pursued assertive policies across South America and the Middle East, Moscow's attention and treasure remained locked in Ukraine. Sanctions have cost the Russian economy tens of billions annually in foregone growth and circumvention expenses estimated at 130 billion dollars over four years. Energy revenues fell, manufacturing slowed, and labor shortages worsened as the war economy absorbed workers and capital. GDP growth decelerated to around 0.6 to 0.9 percent in 2025, far below wartime peaks fueled by military spending. The defense budget now consumes roughly 8 percent of GDP, crowding out civilian investment and long-term development. Russia has gained no meaningful strategic depth or security; instead it confronts isolation, technological lag, and mounting internal strain without decisive victory.

The war's global ripple effects have hit vulnerable nations especially hard. In Bangladesh, where food and energy imports form the backbone of daily life, the conflict drove up prices of wheat, edible oils, and fuel. Early spikes in 2022 exacerbated inflation and strained foreign reserves. Even as global markets partially recovered, lingering volatility in commodities kept household costs elevated. Similar pressures have afflicted other import-dependent economies across Asia and Africa, turning a regional conflict into a worldwide tax on the poor.

Ultimately, no side has secured a clear victory worth the price. Russia holds patches of Ukrainian soil but at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives and a crippled economy. Ukraine has preserved its independence and exposed Russian military weaknesses yet endures devastation and uncertain future support. Europe faces energy insecurity and alliance tensions. The United States has seen its strategic bandwidth divided. Global food security remains fragile. The conflict has become a mutual burden, draining blood and treasure without delivering strategic gains.

This war demonstrates the futility of territorial conquest in the modern era. It has reshaped alliances, accelerated deglobalization in key sectors, and reminded the world that aggression exacts costs far beyond any battlefield map. A negotiated settlement respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and addressing legitimate security concerns on all sides remains the only rational path forward. Prolonged fighting serves no one. The anniversary should prompt not celebration of resilience alone but urgent recognition that peace, however imperfect, outweighs the alternative of endless attrition. Four years in, the ledger shows only losses. It is time to close the book on this chapter of unnecessary suffering.

The Oil Shock the World Cannot Afford

Shurat Rana Rushmi

The world entered 2026 hoping for a steadier economic year. Inflation had eased from its worst highs, supply chains were no longer in open breakdown, and there was a growing sense that the era of constant shocks might finally be receding. But as February closes, that optimism already looks thin. A new oil shock is emerging, and it is unfolding in the one place the global economy can least afford instability, the Strait of Hormuz.

This is not just another Middle East crisis. It is a reminder that the global economy remains far more fragile than policymakers like to admit. On paper, the year did not begin with signs of immediate scarcity. The International Energy Agency projected that global oil supply would rise by 2.4 million barrels per day in 2026, even as demand growth was revised slightly lower. That should have suggested some breathing room. But aggregate supply numbers can create a false sense of comfort. They say little about what happens when the world's energy system still depends on one narrow, politically exposed corridor.

That corridor is Hormuz, and its importance is extraordinary. Roughly 20 million barrels per day of oil pass through it, equivalent to about 25 percent of global seaborne oil trade. Nearly 19 percent of global LNG trade also moves through the same route. The alternatives are remarkably limited. Only about 3.5 to 5.5 million barrels per day can realistically be redirected through pipelines that bypass the strait. In other words, this is not a route the world can easily replace. The global economy may talk the language of resilience, but it is still structurally dependent on uninterrupted passage through one of the world's most vulnerable chokepoints.

The warning signs were already visible before the latest escalation. On February 5, Maersk projected global container market growth of only 2 to 4 percent in 2026. That is not collapse, but it is hardly the profile of a strong and shock-resistant global economy. Shipping firms are often among the first to detect stress in the system. When one of the world's largest shipping companies signals caution, it usually means the wider economy has less room to absorb fresh disruption than headline narratives suggest.

By the final week of February, the energy side of shipping was sending an even clearer signal. On February 26, Reuters reported that the cost of hiring a supertanker from the Middle East to China had climbed above $200,000 a day for the first time since 2020, with the TD3 benchmark rate reaching W218.52, or about $206,141 per day. The Baltic Exchange captured the same strain from another angle, showing that the 270,000-metric-ton Middle East Gulf-to-China trip had risen to a daily round-trip equivalent of $209,550. That kind of surge matters because tanker markets do not wait for a crisis to fully arrive. They begin pricing fear early.

Then came February 28, when the United States and Israel attacked Iran. At that point, what had been a tense market became an openly alarming one. Once conflict touches the political geography around Hormuz, it stops being a regional military story and becomes a global economic story. About a fifth of world oil consumption depends on this route. Even the possibility of disruption is enough to unsettle freight costs, energy pricing, and inflation expectations far beyond the Gulf.

That is the real danger of oil shocks: they do not remain confined to oil. They move outward through freight, food, public finance, and monetary policy. Higher tanker rates feed into higher delivered energy costs. Higher energy costs push up transport and production costs. Import-dependent economies, especially poorer ones, face the harshest consequences because they have the least fiscal space to cushion consumers. The damage begins long before an actual shortage appears. Uncertainty itself becomes expensive.

There is also an uncomfortable lesson here. Governments have spent years speaking confidently about diversification, transition, and resilience. Yet February has shown how shallow much of that confidence really is. A truly resilient energy system would not remain this exposed to a single maritime chokepoint. If the world can still be rattled so quickly by rising tanker rates, cautious shipping forecasts, and one escalation near Hormuz, then its celebrated resilience is thinner than advertised.

Some may argue that markets often overreact and that prices could settle once the immediate panic fades. That may happen. But that misses the larger point. The issue is not whether the first spike lasts. The issue is why the global economy remains so exposed that, by the end of a single month, weaker trade momentum, tanker costs above $200,000 a day, and military escalation near Hormuz can place the whole system on edge.

That is why this moment should be read as more than a commodity story. It is a structural warning. Strategic reserves matter, but they are not enough. So do diversified routes, credible contingency planning, and a faster transition toward energy systems less vulnerable to geopolitical chokepoints. The real significance of this oil shock is not that it arrived without warning. It is that the warning was always there, and the world remained unprepared.

Middle East in Flames: Will Hormuz Freeze the World?

Md. Saiful Islam Shanto

The Middle East entered a terrifying new chapter on February 2026. The United States and Israel launched a massive military campaign against Iran. The United States named this campaign Operation Epic Fury. Israel called its offensive Operation Roaring Lion. In the first few hours, allied forces struck hundreds of targets across Iran. They destroyed military bases, missile facilities, and air defenses. The most shocking event was the targeted assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The region is now fully engulfed in an active war. Iran has fired thousands of retaliatory missiles and drones. The human cost of this conflict is already devastating. However, beyond the immediate loss of life, another massive threat is emerging. The entire global economy is now at risk of sudden collapse. The center of this economic danger is a narrow waterway called the Strait of Hormuz.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most important geographic locations on the planet. It is located directly between Oman and Iran. It connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. At its narrowest point, the strait is only 21 miles wide. The actual shipping lanes are even narrower. Ships must travel within traffic lanes that are just two miles wide in either direction. Despite its incredibly small size, this waterway is the main artery for the global energy supply. Almost all of the oil produced in the Persian Gulf must pass through this specific bottleneck to reach global markets. If this strait is blocked, the world loses a massive portion of its daily energy.

The statistics regarding the Strait of Hormuz are staggering. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, an enormous amount of oil flows through this passage. In the first half of 2025, an average of 20.9 million barrels of oil passed through the strait every single day. This single waterway handles roughly 26% of the entire global maritime oil trade. Furthermore, it accounts for about 20% of total global oil consumption. This means one out of every five barrels of oil used in the world travels through this narrow gap. The oil comes from major producers like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.

The danger is not limited to just crude oil. The Strait of Hormuz is also absolutely vital for natural gas. Roughly 20% of the global liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade travels through this corridor. Qatar is currently the world's second-largest exporter of LNG. Almost all of Qatar's gas exports must transit the strait to reach buyers. The United Arab Emirates also relies heavily on the Strait for its gas exports. The modern world relies heavily on natural gas to generate electricity and heat homes. A sudden disruption in the Strait of Hormuz would cause a severe, immediate shock to global natural gas supplies.

Asian countries are the most vulnerable to this crisis. The economies of Asia rely heavily on energy from the Middle East. Statistics show that up to 89% of the crude oil moving through the Strait of Hormuz is destined for Asian markets. The biggest buyers are China, India, Japan, and South Korea. Similarly, over 80% of the liquefied natural gas passing through the strait goes directly to Asia. China alone imports a massive amount of oil from this region. Over half of China's total crude oil imports come from the Middle East. If the Strait closes, the factories in these Asian countries will quickly run out of power. Because Asia is the manufacturing hub of the world, a shutdown there means empty store shelves everywhere else.

For South Asian nations, a crisis in the Strait of Hormuz is a double-edged sword. Countries like Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan are deeply integrated into the global economy. They rely on cheap energy to fuel their rapidly growing industries. In Bangladesh, the ready-made garment sector is the backbone of the economy. This industry requires continuous, affordable electricity to operate. If global oil and gas prices skyrocket, the cost of manufacturing will surge. The price of importing raw materials will also increase due to higher shipping costs. Furthermore, millions of South Asian migrant workers are currently employed in the Middle East. These workers send billions of dollars in remittances back home every year. A prolonged regional war threatens their physical safety and their employment. If these workers are forced to flee, South Asian economies will lose a crucial source of foreign currency.

Unfortunately, there are very few alternative routes. The world cannot simply bypass the Strait of Hormuz. If the waterway is blocked by military conflict or sunken ships, the oil is trapped. There is a small network of pipelines that can move oil around the strait. Saudi Arabia has a pipeline that runs to the Red Sea. The United Arab Emirates has a pipeline that runs to the port of Fujairah. However, these pipelines have very limited capacity. Together, they can only handle about 3.5 to 5.5 million extra barrels per day. They cannot possibly replace the nearly 21 million barrels that normally flow through the sea. The vast majority of the oil would simply be stuck in the Persian Gulf.

Some politicians suggest that strategic oil reserves can save the economy. Major countries maintain large onshore stockpiles for emergencies. Japan currently holds enough reserves to cover nearly 150 days of imports. China has built an estimated 1.2 billion barrels in its own stockpiles. However, these reserves are only a temporary fix. They are designed to manage short-term supply shocks, not a permanent closure of the world's most important transit route. If the Strait of Hormuz remains blocked for several months, these strategic reserves will slowly drain away. Once the reserves are depleted, the global market will face a catastrophic shortage.

The military situation makes a closure highly possible. The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has frequently threatened to close the Strait. Recently, an Iranian state-affiliated news agency reported that the strait is to be closed to shipping. In response, the United States military has taken aggressive action. During the opening days of Operation Epic Fury, U.S. forces heavily targeted the Iranian Navy. The U.S. Central Command reported that they destroyed 11 Iranian ships in the Gulf of Oman in just two days. They also sank an Iranian submarine. The goal is to prevent Iran from laying sea mines or attacking oil tankers. Despite these American efforts, the waterway remains an active war zone. Commercial shipping companies are terrified to send their expensive vessels into a crossfire.

The economic damage is already starting to happen. The fear of a wider war has shocked energy markets. Immediately after the strikes began, Brent crude oil prices jumped by 10%, reaching over $82 a barrel. The cost of shipping goods has also skyrocketed. Supertanker insurance rates in the Middle East have hit unprecedented, historic highs. Commercial flights across the region are entirely grounded. This adds massive stress to the global supply chain. If war drags on and oil stops flowing, these price increases will become much worse. High energy prices cause inflation to rise rapidly. Everything from gasoline to groceries has become more expensive. This situation could easily trigger a severe, long-lasting global recession.

The world is currently watching the skies over Tehran. The assassination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the massive American bombings are historic events. However, the true global impact of this war will be decided at sea. The Strait of Hormuz is the Achilles heel of the modern global economy. Decades of diplomatic tension have finally exploded into a direct, brutal conflict. The era of empty threats has ended. The world must now prepare for the real possibility of a blocked strait. If the oil stops flowing, the entire world will suffer the consequences. The Middle East might be the battlefield, but the economic shockwaves will ruin livelihoods across the globe.