

West Asia Conflict: Mixed signalling from Trump amidst some positive signs, Houthi entry and growing rift between US and NATO allies

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Updated : Mar 31, 2026



On March 23, US President Donald Trump announced that talks between both countries had been ‘successful’ and strikes on Iranian power plants and infrastructure would be put on hold for five days. The IRGC was quick to rebuff Trump’s offer.

The US had handed a 15-point ceasefire proposal to Iran, which included: a 30-day ceasefire, opening of the Strait of Hormuz, a permanent commitment from Iran to never develop nuclear weapons, ending Iranian strikes on regional energy facilities and dismantling Iran’s nuclear

facilities in Natanz, Isfahan and Fordow. Iran dismissed this and handed its own negotiation plan to intermediary countries.

On March 26, Donald Trump prolonged the ceasefire relating to energy strikes:

‘As per Iranian Government request, please let this statement serve to represent that I am pausing the period of Energy Plant destruction by 10 Days to Monday, April 6, 2026, at 8 PM, Eastern-Time’.

Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia met in Islamabad (Pakistan) on March 29th for talks pertaining to the West Asia crisis. The economic impact of the current conflict – especially energy security and the impact on supply chains were discussed during the talks. Pakistan also said that it would be ‘happy’ to ‘host’ and ‘facilitate’ talks between Tehran and Washington DC.

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He also alluded to the fact, that some of the Iranian leaders have been ‘very reasonable’ and that negotiations between both sides were doing well. According to reports, differences between the Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have grown regarding the handling of the conflict. The Iranian President is supposed to have stated that without a ceasefire Iran’s economy will collapse in the next few weeks.

Mixed signals from Washington DC?

While Trump’s announcements did generate hopes of an end to the conflict. At this point of time, mixed signals are emanating from West Asia. Despite talks of putting an end to the conflict, 3500 US troops landed in the Middle East on March 29.

In an interview to The Financial Times, on March 29, Trump also said: ‘Maybe we take Kharg Island, maybe we don't. We have a lot of options...It would also mean we had to be there [in Kharg Island] for a while.’

On March 26, (IRGC) naval commander Alireza Tangsiri was killed in a US-Israel strike. Tangsiri had played an important role in the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. On March 27, Iran struck US military bases in Saudi Arabia injuring 12 American troops. On March 29, Israel and US launched strikes on a port city near the Strait of Hormuz. Iran continued with it’s strikes on Gulf countries. On March 28, Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian issued a warning to Gulf countries saying

'...To the countries of the region: If you want development and security, don't let our enemies run the war from your lands'.

Apart from energy facilities in Iran, two universities have also been attacked in strikes by US and Israel on the weekend.

Entry of the Houthis into the West Asia conflict

The entry of the Iran backed Houthi forces – based in Yemen – is important. The Houthis launched ballistic missiles at Israel on March 28, 2026. The Houthis stated that their attacks on Israel were a response to Israel's strikes on Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, and the West Bank. In January 2024, the Houthis struck several commercial vessels claiming solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza. The Houthi's had attacked vessels passing through the Bab al-Mandab strait at the southern end of the Red Sea, between Yemen and the Horn of Africa. 12% of global oil trade passes via the Red Sea and any disruptions in the Red Sea will exacerbate the global energy supply.

Trump conversation with Modi regarding de-escalation and the Strait of Hormuz

US President, Donald Trump spoke to PM Modi on March 24 – a day after Trump's March 23rd announcement. PM Modi in a tweet said that India supported 'de-escalation' and peace in West Asia. Modi also said that it was important to ensure that the 'Strait of Hormuz remains open, secure, and accessible is essential for the world'

Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi on March 26, said that India was amongst the six nations whose vessels had been allowed safe passage via the Strait of Hormuz. While two additional Indian LPG tankers crossed the Strait on March 29, 20 Indian flagged tankers were still stranded there.

Dip in Trump's popularity domestically

While US President, Donald Trump has claimed that his popularity has risen after the joint attack of US and Israel on Iran. A Reuters/IPSOS poll shows that Trump's approval had dipped to 36%, as of March 25 (this was a drop of 4%). This dip in popularity has been attributed to rising oil and gas prices in the US. Only 1/4th of Americans – 25% -- approved of Trump's handling of cost of living. Significantly, according to the recent poll 1/3rd of Republicans do not support Trump's handling of rising costs. Rising prices and Trump's declining popularity could impact Republican chances during the Mid-terms to be held in November 2026.

Trump's criticism of NATO allies and remarks on MBS and mixed signals from the Gulf

President Trump criticised NATO allies for failing to provide support to the US during the West Asia conflict. On March 21, Trump had dubbed NATO nations as 'cowards' The UAE does not seem to be comfortable with a ceasefire. In an article for the Wall Street Journal, UAE Ambassador to the US, Yousef Al Otaiba, highlighted this point: 'We want Iran as a normal neighbor. It can be reclusive and even unwelcoming, but it can't

attack its neighbors, blockade international waters, or export extremism. Building a fence around the problem and wishing it goes away isn't the answer. It would simply defer the next crisis,'

Another GCC country, Qatar pulled out of the war on March 27, 2026. Second, Donald Trump while referring to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) said, “..he has to be nice to me....he better be nice to me”.

Balendra Shah takes over as Nepali PM

Balendra Shah leader of Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) was sworn in as PM of Nepal on March 28, 2026. PM Modi and External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar congratulated the Nepal PM. Balendra Shah on his part thanked Modi and Jaishankar and hoped to further strengthen bilateral relations between both nations.

Conclusion

As we enter the fifth week of the West Asia conflict, there are some signs that sections within the US establishment, as well as Iran, are keen to put an end to the current conflict, but mixed messaging is emanating from the US, Israel, and some Gulf countries. The divide between the US and NATO has been reiterated during the current conflict. While Trump's announcements have generated some optimism, it is too early to make any forecasts. With Brent crude having reached \$115 per barrel and the Houthis entering the West Asia conflict, there could be more economic turbulence at least in the short to medium term.

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