Beyond the shaky US-Iran ceasefire: An expert explains what West Asia's future could look like

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Israeli military mobile artillery unit fires towards southern Lebanon from northern Israel, Thursday, April 9, 2026. (AP Photo)

In modern-day conflicts, ceasefire is more like a pause button and rarely the end point. The current truce is more due to the constraints of both sides rather than any convergence of political objectives. Just like the war demonstrated both sides' differing capabilities and methods, the ceasefire negotiations are likely to be far from linear.

The divergence

While the US and Israel, with a much more conventionally powerful military, sought to overwhelm Iran with a rapid, high-intensity bombing campaign and killing of its top leaders, Iran's strategy of asymmetric warfare entailed redundancy, decentralised control and dispersal to engage in a protracted war. By establishing control over the Strait of Hormuz, it gained a major negotiating advantage. Its proxies — Hezbollah in South

Lebanon, Houthis in Yemen and fringe 'façade' Shia elements in Iraq — established a perilous escalatory vector, opening multiple fronts and providing Iran strategic depth.

Given the asymmetry, the ceasefire is going to be inherently fragile.

What now in ceasefire talks

For Washington, the pause is more tactical in nature, while Tehran seeks to make it into a structural settlement. As of now, Israel is not even a party to the ceasefire. The immediate focus will be on holding the ceasefire, maintaining its sanctity and expanding the scope to the proxies as well. Limited 'Confidence Building Measures' (CBMs) could also be instituted through the intermediaries.

The negotiations following the ceasefire are likely to proceed in a graduated, step-by-step manner, involving tough bargaining marked by deep distrust.

The USA's 15 points and Iran's 10-point proposals will set the framework for the negotiations process to start. The key issues would be Iran's nuclear programme, sanctions relief and regional de-escalations. It's going to be a long-drawn affair. While the US will be insisting on Iran's nuclear roll back and limit its missile capability, Tehran on the other hand will be pushing for security guarantees, besides complete lifting of sanctions.

At best, there could be an interim deal encompassing capping of uranium enrichment, IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) enhanced monitoring, graduated sanctions relief, and an informal mechanism to restrain the proxies.

Geopolitical ramifications

The Iran War has deep geopolitical implications — both regional and global. The ceasefire itself underscores the emergence of a new architecture, driven by middle powers like Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey and Gulf states, instead of the traditional Western-dominated conflict resolution model.

With declining trust in the US as a security guarantor, the Gulf states might enter 'minilateral coalitions' with increased defence spending. The Saudi-Pakistan 'Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement' could potentially expand to include Turkiye and even Egypt.

China has expanded its diplomatic and technological footprint, offering digital infrastructure as an alternative to the Western system. Hence, US alliance structures in West Asia will come under serious scrutiny. The great Hormuz shock and the fragility of

energy hubs like Qatar's Ras Laffan are bound to lead to the development of alternative supply routes to obviate vulnerabilities.

In this transition process, India has substantial stakes, beyond energy security, diaspora interests and maritime trade. In fact, India needs to revisit its West Asia engagement strategy and position itself as a proactive voice, particularly as the representative of the global South. Islamabad's central role as an interlocutor, though possibly limited, signals a subtle shift in regional power dynamics — something Delhi cannot ignore.

Prognosis

The current ceasefire provides space for diplomacy, dialogue and de-escalation. The danger lies not in its failure but in overpitching the expectations. The process of negotiations remains vulnerable to risks from spoilers, like the proxies, domestic political pressures and the Israeli security calculus.

A full spectrum of a peace agreement and strategic resolution of the conflict is unlikely even in the distant future. The probable end state may be that of "managed rivalry and confrontation"— reconciliation being a delusion.

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