

# EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

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**Chris Ogden** specializes in great power politics, shifting world orders, and the rise of India and China. He is a Fellow of the UK's Higher Education Academy, Senior Research Fellow at the Foreign Policy Centre in London, Honorary Fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies in Edinburgh, and Visiting Scholar at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has held academic positions at the Universities of Edinburgh, St Andrews, Glasgow, and Durham, among others.

The author of eight books including *The Authoritarian Century* (Bristol University Press, 2022), his scholarship spans global authoritarianism, the Asian Century, and Indo-Pacific security. Beyond academia, he founded the ESSAIR research network in 2018 and brought his expertise to a wider audience as Series Consultant for the BBC series *India: The Modi Question* (2022).

**ICMA:** How do you interpret the current crisis in the Middle East in the context of accelerating shifts in the global order?

**Chris Ogden:** The current crisis in the Middle East has revealed several significant fault lines in international relations. First, Washington's failure to build up a suitable coalition of willing partners to pursue the conflict against Iran has led to a weakening of the US's traditional alliance system, primarily with European partners but also involving major international actors such as Japan and South Korea. That such countries have been unwilling to lend military, logistical or concerted political support to the United States shows not only a degree of miscalculation from the current US President but also an unwillingness of these countries to be drawn into a conflict that they neither desired nor planned for.

Secondly, because of the lack of a clear and consistent strategy from the United States in terms of why and how they intend to pursue this conflict with Iran, combined with some highly vitriolic and bellicose language, we can see a significant diminishment of trust in Washington as a competent, rational and stable partner. Within such dynamics Beijing is presenting itself as a country that wants to continue a rules-based international order, wishes to maintain stability concerning trade and energy security, and which is able to help create a peaceful and benign international system. In particular, the US's seeming rejection of international law, as embodied by comments by the current US Defence Secretary that he thinks that rules of engagement are "dumb" or by the US President's threats to attack water refineries or electrical power facilities in Iran, both of which would be war crimes, denotes how the liberal international order is in crisis.

From this basis, shifts in the global order are certainly accelerating away from a US-dominated liberal international order towards something which is much more multipolar in nature, with the US and China, as well as India, Russia and the European Union all being influential.

**ICMA: From a great power politics perspective, how does the Iran conflict reshape the global balance of power, and where does Pakistan fit within this emerging disorder?**

**Chris Ogden:** As noted above, the US has been unable to mobilise traditional allies in this conflict in the Middle East. Combined with its seeming rejection of international law, this failure to assemble partners through traditional means of international diplomacy does appear to signify a power whose influence, importance and centrality are declining. In all these regards, the war with Iran appears to have revealed these deep-seated weaknesses and the flawed way in which the US conducts its foreign policy and diplomacy under the current US President. What is significant here is that trust is a commodity that takes a long time to be acquired, nurtured and gained within international affairs, but is exceptionally easy to lose, potentially irrevocably, especially if longstanding partners are humiliated in the way that the current US President does on a weekly basis. In these ways, the Iran conflict can be regarded more as an inflection point that indicates a sense of redefinition of the prevailing nature of international affairs. Pakistan can also gain from the crisis in terms of augmenting its credentials as a diplomatic interlocutor and regional voice of reason.

Significant in this regard are Iran's actions in the Strait of Hormuz, in particular its charging of tariffs for ships and

vessels transiting through that region. Importantly here, Tehran is asking for these tariffs to be denominated in yuan rather than the US dollar. The impact of this is twofold. One, Iran is able to gain perhaps up to \$1 trillion in transit fees in any year. Two, by demanding that other countries in the region such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, among others, also pay these yuan-denominated fees means that the dominance of the US dollar is potentially under threat. Thus, rather than talking about petrodollars we may start to think about petroyuans. This reveals a deeper significance, in that all these excess petrodollars in the past have been funnelled to investments in the United States and the United States stock market. But if they are denominated in Chinese yuan, such investments in the US will no longer take place on the same scale and much of this money will instead be funnelled into Chinese investments, which will increase the power of Beijing and effectively diminish that of Washington.

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**ICMA: How is this conflict reshaping great power competition, particularly between the United States, China, and Russia?**

**Chris Ogden:** The US's actions towards Iran present it as being an irrational, incompetent and untrustworthy international partner. When combined with President Trump's tariffs against several countries, which were also often incoherent, inconsistent and indiscriminate in nature, the US is quickly acquiring the image of a less-than-preferred international actor. It is for these reasons that the influence of other countries will increase, especially if they are able to present themselves as stable, cooperative and peaceful

entities. Primarily among these is Beijing, which in many ways wishes to continue to adhere to a rules-based, free trade international order. As Beijing gains greater power, partly due to the US losing power in various forms, it means that other entities such as also India and Russia, will have more space to also gain influence.

This in many ways is the hallmark of a multipolar order, whereby there are multiple poles or centres of influence. In this regard, India can also gain more influence, and in common with Beijing, because of its close links with Iran, can perhaps benefit from preferential tariff arrangements with Tehran. Concerning India's growing centrality, we have already seen this in terms of the US President granting waivers to New Delhi regarding its imports of oil from both Tehran and Moscow, which underlines India's new essentialness to international relations, and also how that influence will only rise.

Collectively, given Iran's membership of the BRICS+ grouping, we could also potentially see more gains for these great powers, along with Russia. In particular, Russia has benefited from the Iran conflict in terms of rising oil prices, but also as supplies of energy drop from the Middle East, it has opened up new possibilities for Moscow to sell its own energy supplies elsewhere. Again, this will serve to increase Russia's influence. In all these ways, we can see how the conflict is reshaping great power competition between all these entities, as it pulls collective power and influence away from the West and towards Asia.

**ICMA: Do you see the emergence of a fragmented regional order, or is there still space for a stable security architecture?**

**Chris Ogden:** Without doubt the current liberal international order is under pressure and in flux. US dominance and associated alliance systems are weakening and being questioned by allies and enemies alike. Prevailing multilateral institutions are at the same time also facing mounting scrutiny. First among these is the United Nations, which is already facing significant criticism concerning its muted reaction to the genocide in Gaza and which is currently able to do very little to control or de-escalate the conflict in Iran. Added to these pressures, several leaders within the US have openly suggested that Washington leaves the United Nations, which would completely debase the UN's standing as the world's leading international system, as well as significantly weaken – if not remove – a major pillar of the liberal international order.

Although such challenges certainly suggest existing security architectures may be diminished and could eventually

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completely deteriorate, this does not mean all countries in the international system are opposed to a rules-based international order. In actuality, the vast majority of countries are in favour of the stability that such an order brings, especially in terms of commerce and free trade, as well as related issues such as the free navigation of the seas. The difficulty lies in that, if major international actors such as the United States, Russia or indeed China decide that they do not like such a system or, in Beijing's case, they want to change the system in terms of their interpretation of dominant rules and laws, then the system will face a time of transition and uncertainty.

Notably in this regard, as the world moves towards a more multipolar order, it will be possible for regions, perhaps centred around one pole, to create their own stable security systems. Thus, while we might see continued instability between Russia and Ukraine, it may well be possible for Asian states to find new ways of guaranteeing free and unfettered trade and thus continue their modernization and development, say through BRICS+ or the SCO.

**ICMA: How do you see the future trajectory of the Middle East, and what implications will it have for global power politics and regional stability?**

**Chris Ogden:** It appears from Iran's actions that Tehran wishes to introduce a new security paradigm in the Middle East. This is shown most specifically in the ceasefire plan concerning aspects that relate to the US withdrawing all its

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military forces from the region, forcing Israel to withdraw from Lebanon and also its demands to receive reparations from this conflict, as well as assets frozen by the US and others through many years of sanctions. When combined with its intentions to monetize the Straits of Hormuz through the introduction of petroyuans as detailed above, these measures would align the region around Iran and its close partnerships with China, India and Russia, and thus away from the United States and the West. It remains to be seen what this will mean for Israel's position in the region but if Washington were to completely withdraw, as well as potentially have weaker relations with a range of Gulf states who themselves may well be more closely aligned or at least tilted towards China, Tel Aviv may find itself in a highly isolated position.

More broadly, and given the energy shocks already emanating from the region which look set to get far worse, fundamental questions are being asked by all states large and small about the practicalities and wisdom of being dependent upon gas and oil, not only from the Middle East but elsewhere. If these debates are allowed to follow through to their logical conclusions, a resultant expansion and perhaps even revolution in green technology and renewable energy may well diminish the geostrategic

importance of the Middle East to great power politics, and perhaps even enhance regional security and stability as a side effect of such a withdrawal. Certainly, the current crisis is in many ways similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, pulling back the curtain on the realities of geo-economics, especially in terms of supply lines and general interconnectedness between countries in the globalised age. If the conflict does worsen, which on balance seems highly likely at this stage in late April 2026, and result in regional recessions or worse, then these debates and their consequences will only rise in importance.

**ICMA: How viable is Pakistan's role as a diplomatic facilitator or bridge-builder in sensitive regional engagements, including potential US–Iran dialogue in a neutral setting?**

**Chris Ogden:** Through diplomatic and religious links across the region, which encompass the major actors central to this conflict within the Middle East, Pakistan has been able to craft an influential position for itself concerning the present conflict. Uniquely positioned both geographically and culturally towards Tehran, but also with historical security linkages towards the US, Islamabad has emerged as a diplomatic facilitator concerning the current war. This position has been legitimised by both Tehran and Washington, who have been receptive to Pakistan acting in this capacity. Ultimately, however, the degree to which this role will result in success will come down to the actions and personalities of the leadership in the US, Iran and Israel. Certainly, concerning the latter, Israeli leaders' security concerns encompass many more issues than just Iran alone, which may make coming to a durable peace more difficult to achieve. In turn, given that previous rounds of negotiations between Iran and the current US administration led by President Trump were interrupted by the assassinations of Iranian negotiators, as well as the bombing of Iranian territory, it suggests that building adequate levels of trust to result in successful negotiations may not be easy to achieve. That stated, Pakistan remains the most viable diplomatic option at the moment, and whatever the wider outcome, will emerge with its status significantly heightened, both regionally and globally, for the efforts that it has made thus far.

*The Editorial Board thanks Mr. Chris Ogden, Associate Professor in Global Studies, University of Auckland (New Zealand) for sparing his precious time to give an exclusive interview for Chartered Management Accountant Journal.*

**Editor's Note:** The views expressed in this interview are those of the interviewee and do not reflect the official position or views of ICMA.