

# GLOBAL TURBULENCE: UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT MOMENT

KHATIRA EYVAZ MEHDİYEV

*Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Political Science*

ALVIZ TURAL ABDULLAYEV

*Master's degree student**Baku State University**33 Academic Zahid Khalilov Street, AZ1148, Baku**Email: [alviz.abdullayev04@gmail.com](mailto:alviz.abdullayev04@gmail.com)**Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4053-2554>*

## SUMMARY

This article argues that contemporary global turbulence represents not a temporary disruption but a structural expression of the enduring realities of an anarchic international system. Drawing primarily on Realist theory in international relations, the analysis contends that the current moment — marked by geopolitical fragmentation, eroding multilateralism, and intensifying great-power competition — reflects the logic of power politics that Realism has consistently identified as the irreducible foundation of world affairs. The 2026 Iran-United States war, initiated on February 28, 2026 through Operation Epic Fury, is examined as a paradigmatic case: a militarized confrontation rooted in the security dilemma, preventive war logic, and the structural imperatives of multipolar transition. Four drivers of turbulence are identified — the fragmentation of the liberal order, inequality as a power competition variable, technological disruption of the military balance, and ecological breakdown as a threat multiplier — each interpreted through a consistently Realist lens. The article concludes that states prioritize survival and relative power under anarchy, and that institutions reflect rather than transcend this underlying reality.

**Keywords:** *realism, anarchy, balance of power, security competition, Iran-US war 2026, power politics, polycrisis, global governance.*

The opening decades of the twenty-first century have concentrated an unusual density of simultaneous strategic crises: the return of great-power rivalry, the erosion of multilateral institutions, nuclear proliferation pressures, and the fracturing of the international trading system. These developments are not the product of individual statesmanship failures. They are, as Realist theory has long anticipated, the predictable consequence of an anarchic international system in which states pursue power, security, and survival in the absence of any overarching authority capable of enforcing order [20, s.111; 15, s.3].

The outbreak of armed conflict between the United States and Iran on February 28, 2026 crystallizes these dynamics with exceptional clarity. Operation Epic Fury — a joint US-Israeli campaign of nearly 900 strikes in its opening twelve hours — killed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, dismantled Iranian military infrastructure, and triggered retaliatory action that closed the Strait of Hormuz, drove global fuel prices above 50 percent of pre-war levels, and destabilized the broader Middle East [3]. From a Realist standpoint, this was not an anomaly but the structural outcome of decades of security competition between a hegemon defending regional dominance and a revisionist power pursuing nuclear capability as the only credible deterrent. The collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was not merely a diplomatic failure — it was the reassertion of Realist imperatives over liberal-institutional arrangements. This article employs Realism as its primary analytical framework to argue that contemporary global turbulence reflects the structural realities of anarchy rather than a governable set of policy failures amenable to institutional correction.

Theoretical framework. Realism rests on three foundational assumptions: the international system is anarchic, lacking any authority above the state capable of enforcing rules; states are the primary actors driven by survival and relative power; and conflict under such conditions is structurally endemic, not accidental [17, s.25; 20, s.88]. Classical Realism locates this in the human drive for power projected through states. Structural Realism shifts focus to the system itself: anarchy forces self-help strategies regardless of leaders' intentions. As Waltz argues, the requirements of state action are imposed by the circumstances in which all states find themselves [20, s.111]. Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism sharpens the logic further — under anarchy, the rational response to uncertainty about rivals' intentions is the relentless maximization of relative power [15, s.21].

Two concepts are indispensable here. The security dilemma — wherein one state's defensive measures

are perceived as threatening by another, triggering competitive armament — describes the Iran-US trajectory precisely: Iranian nuclear development functioned structurally as a deterrence bid; US-Israeli military action reflected the imperative to prevent a challenger from foreclosing their strategic options permanently [7, s.157; 11, s.167]. The balance of power — states aligning against dominant capabilities threatening their security — explains China's diplomatic positioning during post-war ceasefire negotiations not as goodwill but as calculated counterbalancing against US regional dominance [4, s.101; 5].

Liberal institutionalism and Constructivism offer partial complements: institutions can reduce transaction costs and norms can mitigate self-help imperatives at the margins [12, s.51; 21, s.246]. Yet the JCPOA's collapse and the failure of Oman-based negotiations in February 2026 to prevent the conflict illustrate these frameworks' structural limits [22]. When core security interests are at stake, Realist imperatives consistently reassert primacy. Governance operates in the space that power politics permits — not above it.

Conceptualizing global turbulence. Global turbulence denotes sustained structural instability characterized by the erosion of established ordering principles, intensifying security competition, and the reassertion of Realist imperatives over institutional frameworks. Hegemonic transitions are inherently turbulent: as the dominant power's capacity to enforce a rules-based order declines, revisionist behavior becomes less costly and secondary powers test the system's limits [6, s.9]. The 2026 conflict instantiates this logic directly. The structural dynamics preceding the war were those of a declining hegemon confronting a regional challenger whose nuclear acquisition would permanently alter the Middle Eastern balance — the security dilemma in its most acute, militarized form. Iran's Strait of Hormuz closure further reflects asymmetric power projection: where direct military confrontation was unsustainable, economic coercion became the instrument of strategic leverage.

Drivers of contemporary global turbulence. Four structural drivers account for the depth and durability of current turbulence. First, the fragmentation of the liberal international order is, from a Realist standpoint, the correction of a post-Cold War anomaly: the multilateral architecture was the institutionalization of power politics under American hegemony, not its transcendence [9, s.7; 20, s.131]. As US relative power declines and multipolarity deepens, states revert to self-help and institutions lose authoritative

force. Operation Epic Fury — launched without UN Security Council authorization — directly expresses this logic [14, s.5].

Second, deepening socioeconomic inequality functions as a structural source of state vulnerability and inter-state competition. The Western sanctions regime on Iran was a power instrument designed to degrade Iranian capacity, yet it ultimately accelerated domestic radicalization and the violent repression that preceded the 2026 conflict [5]. Third, technological disruption reshapes the military balance with profound implications for deterrence stability. Precision munitions, drone swarms, and AI-enabled warfare alter the offense-defense balance in ways that make escalation harder to control [1, s.3]. Operation Epic Fury demonstrated near-900 precision strikes achieving leadership decapitation in twelve hours [22], while Iran's retaliatory saturation across the region illustrated asymmetric power projection — both compressing decision timelines and intensifying the security dilemma. Fourth, ecological breakdown functions as a Realist threat multiplier. Climate-driven resource scarcity intensifies state fragility and inter-state competition, providing the structural backdrop to security crises including the 2026 conflict [10; 18]. The Strait of Hormuz closure confirmed that energy dependencies are strategic vulnerabilities adversaries can activate as instruments of coercive power.

Systemic implications. The concurrent crises of the current moment are the cascading consequence of multiple states pursuing incompatible power objectives across an interdependent but anarchic system. The 2026 conflict cascaded from a bilateral confrontation into a Lebanese war, a Gulf Arab security crisis, a NATO cohesion challenge, a global energy shock, and a China-US diplomatic competition — all within weeks [3; 5]. No actor controlled these cascades; that is a structural feature of anarchy that liberal institutionalists consistently underestimate. The post-ceasefire negotiations — a fourteen-point memorandum covering nuclear enrichment, sanctions relief, and Strait governance — do not resolve the underlying structural competition; they represent a temporary management of its most acute expression. For human security, the consequences were severe and asymmetric: thousands of Iranian civilians killed, civilian infrastructure struck, Lebanon massively displaced, and a global fuel price shock imposing acute hardship on the most import-dependent and economically vulnerable populations [2; 16, s.10].

Global governance under structural constraints. The Realist framework imposes a fundamental

discipline on governance: institutions are instruments of state power, not its replacement [14, s.7]. The Security Council's paralysis during the 2026 conflict and the IAEA's inability to verify Iranian compliance after nuclear facilities were struck confirm that institutional frameworks cannot bridge gaps where survival interests fundamentally diverge. Effective governance under Realist constraints therefore requires arrangements designed for the system as it is: agreements grounded in reciprocity and verifiable compliance; management of shared vulnerabilities — energy transit, climate, pandemic preparedness — where interests converge sufficiently to sustain cooperation despite competition [13, s.24]; and communication channels reducing miscalculation risk. The US-Iran memorandum negotiations exemplify this kind of interest-based, coercion-shaped governance: not multilateral idealism, but the disciplined management of incompatible interests within the structural reality of anarchy [2]. Governance is not futile — but its ambitions must be calibrated to what anarchy structurally permits.

Contemporary global turbulence is most accurately understood as a structural expression of an anarchic international system undergoing a fundamental power transition. The 2026 Iran-US war — Operation Epic Fury, the Strait of Hormuz closure, the regional escalation cascade — is not an interruption of this analysis but its empirical confirmation: a conflict produced by the security dilemma, preventive war logic, and the structural reassertion of power-political imperatives over institutional arrangements. Each concurrent crisis — geopolitical fragmentation, technological disruption, economic inequality, ecological breakdown — is, through a Realist lens, a dimension of the same structural reality: states pursuing power and security under anarchy, with institutions reflecting rather than transcending this dynamic, and costs falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable. The path forward lies not in transcending power politics but in designing governance arrangements robust to its structural realities — frameworks that manage competition, reduce miscalculation, and protect human security within the constraints that anarchy imposes. The current moment demands, above all, analytical clarity about those constraints.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Acemoglu, Daron, and Pascual Restrepo. "Automation and New Tasks: How Technology Displaces and Reinstates Labor." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2019): 3-30.
2. Axios. "Exclusive: U.S. and Iran Closing in on One-Page Memo to End War, Officials Say." May 6, 2026. <https://www.axios.com/2026/05/06/iran-us-deal-one-page-memo>.
3. Britannica. "2026 Iran War." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/event/2026-Iran-war>.
4. Bull, Hedley. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.
5. CNN. "Live Updates: Iran-US War." May 6, 2026. <https://www.cnn.com/2026/05/06/world/live-news/iran-war-trump-strait-of-hormuz>.
6. Gilpin, Robert. *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
7. Herz, John H. "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950): 157-180.
8. Homer-Dixon, Thomas, Brian Walker, Reinette Biggs, Anne-Sophie Crepin, Carl Folke, Eric F. Lambin, Garry D. Peterson, Johan Rockstrom, Marten Scheffer, Will Steffen, and Max Troell. "Synchronous Failure: The Emerging Causal Architecture of Global Crisis." *Ecology and Society* 20, no. 3 (2015): 6.
9. Ikenberry, G. John. "The End of Liberal International Order?" *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 7-23.
10. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
11. Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 167-214.
12. Keohane, Robert O. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
13. Keohane, Robert O., and Joseph S. Nye. *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1977.
14. Mearsheimer, John J. "The False Promise of International Institutions." *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 5-49.
15. Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.
16. Milanovic, Branko. *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.
17. Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred

A. Knopf, 1948.

18. Rockstrom, Johan, Will Steffen, Kevin Noone, Asa Persson, F. Stuart Chapin, Eric F. Lambin, Timothy M. Lenton, et al. "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity." *Nature* 461 (2009): 472-475.

19. Tooze, Adam. "Welcome to the World of the Polycrisis." *Financial Times*, October 28, 2022.

20. Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979.

21. Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

22. Wikipedia. "2026 Iran War." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026\\_Iran\\_war](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Iran_war).

23. World Economic Forum. *Global Risks Report 2023*. 18th ed. Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2023.

## ГЛОБАЛЬНАЯ ТУРБУЛЕНТНОСТЬ: ПОНИМАНИЕ ТЕКУЩЕГО МОМЕНТА

Хатира Эйвас Мехдиева

Доктор философии по политическим наукам

Альвиз Турал Абдуллаев, магистрант

### РЕЗЮМЕ

В данной статье утверждается, что современная глобальная турбулентность представляет собой не временное нарушение, а структурное выражение устойчивых реалий анархичной международной системы. Опираясь главным образом на реалистскую теорию международных отношений, анализ показывает, что нынешний момент — отмеченный геополитической фрагментацией, ослаблением многосторонности и усилением конкуренции между великими державами — отражает логику силовой политики, которую реализм последовательно определяет как неустранимую основу мировых дел. Война между Ираном и США 2026 года, начавшаяся 28 февраля 2026 года операцией «Epic Fury», рассматривается как показательный случай: военное противостояние, коренящееся в дилемме безопасности, логике превентивной войны и структурных императивах перехода к многополярности. Выделяются четыре фактора турбулентности: фрагментация либерального порядка, неравенство как переменная силовой конкуренции, технологическое нарушение военного баланса и экологический кризис как мультипликатор угроз — каждый из

которых интерпретируется через последовательную реалистскую призму. В статье делается вывод, что государства в условиях анархии отдают приоритет выживанию и относительной силе, а институты отражают, а не преодолевают эту лежащую в основе реальность.

**Ключевые слова:** реализм, анархия, баланс сил, конкуренция в сфере безопасности, ирано-американская война 2026, силовая политика, полкризис, глобальное управление

## QLOBAL TÜRBULENTLİK: CARİ ANIN ANLAŞILMASI

Xatirə Eyvaz qızı Mehdiyeva

Siyasi elmlər üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru,

Alviz Tural oğlu Abdullayev, magistrant

### XÜLASƏ

Bu məqalə müasir qlobal türbülentliyin müvəqqəti pozulma deyil, anarxik beynəlxalq sistemin daimi reallıqlarının struktur ifadəsi olduğunu iddia edir. Əsasən beynəlxalq münasibətlərdə realizm nəzəriyyəsinə əsaslanan təhlil göstərir ki, geosiyasi parçalanma, çoxtərəfliliyin zəifləməsi və böyük dövlətlər arasında rəqabətin güclənməsi ilə xarakterizə olunan cari an, realizmin dünya işlərinin əsası kimi ardıcıl olaraq müəyyən etdiyi güc siyasəti məntiqini əks etdirir. 28 fevral 2026-cı ildə "Epic Fury" əməliyyatı ilə başlayan 2026-cı il İran-ABŞ müharibəsi, təhlükəsizlik dilemması, qabaqlayıcı müharibə məntiqi və çoxqütblü keçidin struktur tələbləri ilə bağlı hərbi qarşılıqlı nümunəsi kimi araşdırılır. Cari türbülentliyin dörd amili müəyyən edilir: liberal nizamın parçalanması, güc rəqabətinin dəyişməsi kimi bərabərsizlik, hərbi balansın texnoloji pozulması və təhdid gücləndiricisi kimi ekoloji dağılma — hər biri ardıcıl realist prizmadan şərh olunur. Məqalə belə nəticəyə gəlir ki, dövlətlər anarxiya şəraitində sağqalmaya və nisbi gücə üstünlük verir, institutlar isə bu reallığı aşmaq əvəzinə əks etdirir.

**Açar sözlər:** realizm, anarxiya, güc balans, təhlükəsizlik rəqabəti, 2026 İran-ABŞ müharibəsi, güc siyasəti, polikrizis, qlobal idarəetmə.

Rəyçi: Nərgiz Nağıyeva, siyasi elmlər üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru

Məqalə redaksiyaya daxil olub: 18.05.2026

Çapa qəbul olunub: 19.06.2026

The date of the admission of the article

to the editorial office: 18.05.2026

Accepted for publication: 19.06.2026