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WHEN BOMBS  
FALL ON  
MEDIATION:  
The U.S.-Israel War on  
Iran and the Disruption  
of Diplomacy

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ISMAIL NUMAN TELCI

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MAY 2026 | NUMBER: 274





# WHEN BOMBS FALL ON MEDIATION: THE U.S.-ISRAEL WAR ON IRAN AND THE DISRUPTION OF DIPLOMACY

İSMAİL NUMAN TELCİ

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SETA Publications 274  
ISBN: 978-625-5703-43-9

Editorial Team: Ebrar Üzümcü, Sudib Sontoran, Gizem Akbaş  
Layout: Said Demirtaş

**SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH**

Nenehatun Cd. No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE  
Tel: +90 312.551 21 00 | Fax :+90 312.551 21 90  
www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

**SETA | İstanbul**

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43  
Eyüp İstanbul TÜRKİYE  
Tel: +90 212 395 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 395 11 11

**SETA | Washington D.C. Office**

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106  
Washington, D.C., 20036 USA  
Tel: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099  
www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

**SETA | Berlin**

Kronenstraße 1, 10117 Berlin GERMANY  
berlin@setav.org

**SETA | Bruxelles**

Avenue des Arts 6, 1000 Bruxelles BELGIUM  
Tel: +32 2 313 39 41

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## ABSTRACT

The regional security architecture and the practice of international diplomacy have undergone a structural transformation following the U.S.-Israeli military strikes against Iran on February 28, 2026. These strikes abruptly terminated a sophisticated, Omani-facilitated mediation process that had brought Tehran to the brink of significant nuclear concessions. Therefore, the disruption of active negotiations through force has become a critical turning point, raising fundamental questions about the long-term viability of mediation. The effectiveness of this mechanism depends on the belief that negotiations will be granted sufficient political space to mature; however, the February 28 strikes violated this condition, causing operational, reputational, and normative damage. From this perspective, the incident signifies a shift where military coercion risks sidelining dialogue into a secondary tool for mere crisis management rather than root-cause resolution.

In light of the perceived unreliability of great-power diplomacy, regional middle powers have stepped in to fill the diplomatic vacuum, creating a new geography of mediation. Oman

continues its tradition of quiet facilitation and non-alignment, while Qatar leverages its ability to maintain discreet communication with diverse actors in controlled environments. Türkiye acts as a facilitator-stakeholder, utilizing its geopolitical leverage to bridge regional and global concerns, and Pakistan has emerged as a consequential actor by specifically focusing on facilitation, which led to the April 8 cease-fire. Ultimately, the durability of diplomacy lies in the reality that military engagements rarely resolve underlying political disputes. For these regional mediators, the challenge remains protecting the negotiation space from external disruptions to restore the normative status of mediation as a primary instrument of dispute settlement.

The Gulf region has experienced one of its most significant diplomatic crises since Feb. 28, 2026, when the United States and Israel launched coordinated military strikes against Iran. These strikes came at a particularly critical moment, abruptly ending months of backchannel negotiations, carefully crafted through Omani and Qatari mediation and facilitation. The most recent of these talks was facilitated by Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi. They were conducted in Muscat and Geneva in an indirect format with Omani diplomats moving between the American and Iranian delegations in separate rooms. By late February, credible reports were suggesting that Tehran had moved closer to making serious concessions regarding nuclear and uranium issues – zero stockpiling of enriched uranium and full acceptance of international verification – than at any point since the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).<sup>1</sup> The strikes on Feb. 28 deemed all of this irrelevant. More than a military escalation, they represented a direct blow to a structured diplomatic process that had been built with considerable effort over many months. Understanding what was lost and what this loss means for mediation as a mechanism of conflict resolution is the main concern of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Nikolay Mladenov, "The Arab Approach to Mediation – Reshaping Diplomacy in a Multipolar World", *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 21 May 2024; "Did Iran's Nuclear and Missile Programs Pose an Imminent Threat? No.", *Arms Control Association*, 3 March 2026.

The central question this paper addresses is what happens to the credibility of mediation when negotiations are actively undermined by one of the parties that the process is trying to reconcile.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the paper asks how the disruption of an ongoing and structured negotiation process affects the longer-term viability of mediation as an instrument of dispute settlement and conflict resolution. The Feb. 28 strikes make this question particularly relevant, because they did not occur in a vacuum. They happened in the middle of a process that was, by most credible accounts, genuinely producing results.

The paper suggests that diplomacy, even in the event of serious disruptions, retains a certain structural resilience. However, this resilience should not be taken for granted, as it comes with real costs. The effectiveness of mediation depends on a fragile but important condition, which is the parties involved believe the process will be given enough time and political space to produce results and that negotiations will not be overtaken by military action before they have a chance to mature. When this condition is violated, as it clearly was on Feb. 28, the damage goes beyond any single round of negotiations. It affects the credibility of the mediation framework itself, raises the threshold for future engagement, and places a disproportionate burden on the mediators who end up absorbing the reputational costs of a process that was disrupted before it could reach its potential.

The paper is organized around two main parts. The first part examines how the disruption of the Omani-facilitated talks damaged mediation as a credible mechanism. In doing so, it traces the consequences of this disruption across three different dimensions, namely the operational, reputational, and normative damage that the Feb. 28 strikes caused.

The second part of the paper turns to the question of emerging mediators. It looks at the cases of Oman, Qatar, Türkiye, and Pakistan, all of which have taken on increasingly active roles in filling the space vacated by great-power diplomacy in recent years. The paper assesses what the rise of these actors means for the future of mediation and conflict resolution in the region more broadly.

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2 Alejandro Posada-Tellez, "Why is Mediation Failing to Resolve So Many Armed Conflicts Today?", *Oxford Global Society Policy*, 11 November 2025.

# DISRUPTION AND SHOCK: DIPLOMACY INTERRUPTED

Unlike formal multilateral negotiations, which generate communiqués, press briefings, and public timelines, the Omani-facilitated process was structured around the absence of these things. There were no joint statements, no publicly confirmed meeting schedules, and limited and last-minute information regarding the delegations. What reached the public came in fragments in the form of a brief confirmation here, a leaked detail there, an occasional comment from Minister al-Busaidi, who was carefully tasked to say as little as possible while keeping the process alive. For many diplomats from the region and outside, Oman's role was crucial because it provided a neutral venue and a partner for both. Oman's suitability for this role stems from the choice that the Sultanate has cultivated for long years as a non-aligned power in the region.<sup>3</sup> That role allowed Oman to maintain open chan-

<sup>3</sup> William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal*, New York: Random House, 2019; James Worrall, "Switzerland of Arabia": Omani Foreign Policy and Mediation Efforts in the Middle East", *The International Spectator*, Vol 56, Issue 4, 2021, pp. 134-150; Clemens Chay, "Why Oman is the Trusted Intermediary for U.S.-Iran Talks", *National University of Singapore*, 2 May 2025.

nels with both Washington and Tehran at moments when virtually no other Gulf state could credibly do so.

The talks happened first in Muscat and then in Geneva, but more precisely, they unfolded in several rounds between 2025 and early 2026. The first round took place from April 12 to June, 2025, beginning at Al Alam Palace in Muscat and continuing, at one stage, through the Omani embassy in Rome. A second and more compressed round followed from Feb. 6-28, 2026, including a key session in Geneva on Feb. 15, just days before the outbreak of war on Feb. 28, 2026.<sup>4</sup> Throughout these phases, Oman maintained a consistent facilitation role. The format remained deliberately indirect as American officials and Iranian representatives sat in separate rooms, while Omani intermediaries moved between them.<sup>5</sup> This shuttle arrangement reflected a genuine effort to sustain dialogue under conditions of mounting escalation.

It was not impressive for the public, but for mediators, this is what peace work looks like: slow, detailed, full of drafts, verification clauses, and conditional timelines. The main aim is to reduce tensions between adversaries who are not yet ready to meet directly. This proximity-through-distance model, where a trusted party physically carries proposals between rooms, is among the oldest techniques in conflict resolution, yet it remains effective precisely because it allows adversaries to signal flexibility without the political cost of appearing to concede face-to-face.<sup>6</sup>

The momentum stopped on Feb. 28, 2026. On the very day when news circulated of meaningful progress in the negotiations, American and Israeli bombardment targeted critical points across Iran. The first round of the attacks was directed at military and leadership structures. In the capital, Tehran, several explosions targeted the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) headquarters on the western outskirts of the city, where senior commanders were reportedly present. Then Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the

4 “Inside story: Anatomy of the breakdown of Iran-U.S. diplomacy”, *Amwaj Media*, 18 March 2026.

5 Lyse Doucet and Barbara Tasch, “U.S. and Iran hold ‘constructive’ first round of nuclear talks”, *BBC*, 12 April 2025; Serdar Dincel and Syed Zafar Mahdi, “U.S., Iran delegations start talks in Oman focusing on nuclear issue”, *Anadolu Agency*, 6 February 2026; Barak Ravid, “U.S. and Iran say progress made in Geneva nuclear talks”, *Axios*, 17 February 2026.

6 Niall Ó Dochartaigh, “Together in the Middle: Back-channel Negotiation in the Irish Peace Process”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 48, Issue 6, November 2011.

most significant target of the U.S. and Israeli attacks, was killed on the very first day of the war, alongside several high-ranking officials.<sup>7</sup> Direct hits were also recorded at the Parchin military complex, located about 30 kilometers southeast of Tehran, a site long associated with Iran's ballistic missile research and development. Although Iranian officials attempted to downplay the scale of the operation, precise strikes on these high-value assets were carefully planned operations meant to cripple Iran's command and control capabilities.

The impact of these strikes, however, extended beyond the battlefield. In practical terms, the strikes immediately and critically upset the diplomatic track, as planned meetings in Geneva were suspended and communication channels mediated by Oman were disrupted. Politically, they weakened factions within Iran that had advocated engagement, while strengthening more hard-line positions, skeptical of negotiations altogether. At the regional level, the escalation heightened security concerns among Gulf states and increased the risk of spillover,<sup>8</sup> which later materialized on Feb. 28, following the U.S. strikes, further complicating any coordinated mediation effort. The impact was not limited to military degradation, but also involved the erosion of trust and the delegitimization of diplomacy as a viable instrument.

Their impact, however, extended beyond the battlefield. The attacks created a wave of shock for the negotiators and those who believe in reaching an agreement. This was mainly due to reports, indicating that there had been significant progress in the negotiations, and there were clear signs that Iran was willing to make serious concessions. Even the main negotiator, Minister al-Busaidi, stated<sup>9</sup> that Tehran was ready to accept zero stockpiling of enriched uranium, to down-blend the enriched uranium into forms that cannot be easily used to produce a nuclear weapon, to accept total verification, and international inspectors.<sup>10</sup> If accurate, these concessions would have rep-

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7 Jason Burke, "'Sixty seconds, that's all it took': the clinical Israeli-U.S. operation to kill Ali Khamenei", *The Guardian*, 1 March 2026.

8 Tahir Azad, "Winning an Unpopular War? The United States–Israel War Against Iran: Strategic Miscalculation, Escalation Dynamics, and a Lose–Lose Dilemma", *Small Wars Journal*, 4 March 2026.

9 "Full Transcript: Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi tells 'Face the Nation' a U.S.-Iran deal is 'within our reach'", *CBC News*, 27 February 2026.

10 "Did Iran's nuclear and missile programs pose an imminent threat?", *Arms Control Association*, 3 March 2026, Vol 18, Issue 3.

resented the most far-reaching Iranian nuclear compromise since the 2015 JCPOA, effectively addressing the core proliferation concern that had driven decades of sanctions and covert operations.

The attack was a serious blow to the negotiation process itself, let alone its consequential effects on the political environment in the Gulf.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. decision to attack Iran while the negotiations continue raised a more fundamental question about the relationship between force and diplomacy. As they intersected directly with an active mediation process and damaged the very essence of conflict resolution efforts, the question of “what happens when bombs fall while negotiations are still in progress” has lingered since.

Conflicts are increasingly managed through a combination of dialogue and confrontation, where negotiation and force coexist simultaneously. Several mediation processes have encountered challenges owing to the sudden escalation of the conflict.<sup>12</sup> For example, some of the previous Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, such as the Oslo Process, have been interrupted several times due to the eruption of conflicts. In addition, the negotiations that led to the nuclear deal with Iran in 2015 had continued despite the eruption of conflicts in Syria and Yemen, where the negotiating parties were involved. Leaders of the regional countries have been trying to differentiate the conflicts on the ground from the conflicts at the negotiating tables for the sake of the process.

The strikes on Feb. 28 interrupted the Omani-facilitated talks, and terminated them at the moment of their greatest reported progress. The immediate effect was a collapse of the negotiating environment. The damage unfolded across three distinct dimensions. The first was operational. Iranian officials suspended contact, Omani intermediaries lost their facilitation role, and the proximity format carefully maintained across multiple rounds was rendered obsolete overnight. The second was reputational. What was lost was not just a round of talks, but the accumulated credibility of a process that both sides had, however cautiously, chosen to invest in. The third was normative. The strikes sent a visible signal that structured negotiations do

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11 “U.S. negotiators were ill-prepared for serious nuclear negotiations with Iran”, *Arms Control Association*, 11 March 2026.

12 Eric Min, “Talking While Fighting: Understanding the Role of Wartime Negotiation”, *International Organization*, Vol 74, Issue 4, Summer 2000, pp. 610-632.

not constrain the use of force, that even a process producing tangible concessions can be overtaken by military action before those concessions are reciprocated.<sup>13</sup>

This was not, however, the first time that an active mediation process had encountered the simultaneous use of force. Two cases are instructive. The Oslo Process between Israel and the Palestinians survived multiple episodes of violence throughout the 1990s, including suicide bombings and military incursions, because both parties, at least formally, continued to treat the negotiating table as a parallel and legitimate track.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the negotiations that produced the 2015 JCPOA continued even as the parties were directly or indirectly involved in the conflicts in Syria and Yemen. In both cases, the key condition was that violence and dialogue were treated as separate domains. Force was used, but the negotiating channel was not itself the target. Feb. 28 broke that condition. The strikes did not occur alongside the talks; they occurred because of them, at the precise moment when Iranian concessions were reportedly within reach. This is the critical distinction. When escalation targets the negotiating process itself rather than running parallel to it, the signal sent to future parties is categorically different. That entering structured negotiations does not provide even minimal protection from military action, and that concessions made in good faith can be overtaken by force before they are reciprocated.<sup>15</sup>

This is the logic behind the continuation of mediation efforts during conflicts, including the ongoing U.S.-Israel war against Iran, a conflict that few analysts anticipated would escalate to this scale.<sup>16</sup> One would expect that the mediation would disappear due to a lack of trust and loss of belief in success. However, those very reasons were also instrumental in expanding the efforts of mediation, as there are always new mediators and facilitators to take the stage. This is the case during the U.S.-Israel war against Iran.

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13 Sultan Al-Khulaifi, “With Mediation More Important Than Ever, Mediators Must Be Protected”, *Middle East Council on Global Affairs*, 6 October 2025.

14 Emily Bazelon, Why the Oslo Accords Between Israelis and Palestinians Failed, *The New York Times*, 20 November 2023.

15 Ira William Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments”, *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 1(1), 2001, pp. 8–18.

16 Kyle Beardsley, David M. Quinn, Bidisha Biswas, & Jonathan Wilkenfeld, “Mediation Style and Crisis Outcomes”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50(1), 2006, pp. 58–86.

Countries such as Türkiye, Pakistan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have emerged by taking on increasingly active roles in facilitating dialogue between the warring parties. These efforts are key to explaining how, despite its limitations, mediation remains an indispensable instrument for managing conflict. The process depends not on speed, but on continuity. This is the essence of mediation, if not the main condition of success. The Omani approach was strongly focused on maintaining this aspect throughout the process, until Feb. 28 made that impossible.<sup>17</sup>

Yet understanding why the Feb. 28 disruption was so damaging requires first establishing what makes mediation effective to begin with. Mediation is effective only when conflicting parties believe that negotiations are credible and stable, meaning the process will not collapse due to renewed coercion or the use of force.<sup>18</sup> The continuity problem is existential to the mediation enterprise and is one of the most serious threats to the success of dialogue. In each process, the underlying assumption is continuity.<sup>19</sup> Parties believe that the process is important as it has the potential to mature negotiations. Once this belief is challenged, then the long-term implications become unavoidable. Facilitators are no longer considered qualified enough to deliver a functioning channel of communication. This also discourages potential future facilitators. They question how rational it is to enter a process that may collapse before it yields results.

Historical experience suggests a more cautious optimism regarding the continuity of mediation efforts, even under conditions of severe escalation. Concrete cases illustrate that negotiation processes can persist despite repeated crises, provided that key actors continue to recognize their legitimacy. One important example is the JCPOA. Negotiations over Iran's nuclear program formally intensified between 2013 and 2015, involving Iran and the P5+1 countries (the U.S., the U.K., France, Russia, China, and Germany), with the European Union playing a central coordinating and mediation role. These talks continued despite parallel regional conflicts, including the Syrian

17 "The U.S. and Iran can still avoid a war", *International Crisis Group*, 23 February 2026.

18 Ira William Zartman, "Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond", in *International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War*, Paul C. Stern and Daniel Druckman (eds.), Washington: National Academy Press, 2000.

19 Franz Cede, "The settlement of international disputes by legal means – arbitration and judicial settlement", in *Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk and Ira William Zartman (eds.), London: SAGE, 2009, pp. 358-375.

civil war and heightened Saudi-Iranian rivalry. The agreement, finalized in July 2015 in Vienna, imposed limits on Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief, demonstrating that even adversarial relations did not fully block diplomatic engagement.<sup>20</sup>

A second example is the Good Friday Agreement, signed in April 1998 after decades of violent conflict known as “the Troubles.” The negotiations, which took place primarily in Belfast, were facilitated by multiple actors, including the British and Irish governments, as well as external mediation led by George Mitchell, representing the U.S. government.<sup>21</sup> Despite repeated breakdowns, such as cease-fire violations in the mid-1990s, the process was not abandoned. Instead, sustained diplomatic engagement and inclusive negotiations eventually led to a power-sharing arrangement and institutional reforms, significantly reducing violence.<sup>22</sup>

These cases underline that the critical variable was the ability to prevent escalation from delegitimizing the negotiation framework itself. The contemporary risks surrounding a potential U.S.-Israel confrontation with Iran are not limited to the outcome of specific negotiation rounds. Rather, the central issue concerns whether mediation, often conducted through third parties such as the EU, Oman, or Qatar, can remain a credible and accepted mechanism. The erosion of this mechanism would represent a structural setback for international conflict resolution.

This slowness in diplomacy is a structural requirement. Verification procedures, legal formulations, and technical details cannot be completed quickly. It even requires careful discussions in order to avoid misunderstandings later. In contrast, military action can take place very quickly, sometimes within hours, with immediate and visible outcomes. Decisions are taken quickly, strikes are carried out, and the outcomes become available to the public immediately. The production of outcomes is instant. If military action repeatedly prevails over diplomacy, coercion will be seen as the more effective tool than dialogue. If this becomes a pattern, political actors may

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20 Kenneth M. Pollack, “U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East After the Iranian Nuclear Agreement”, *Brookings Institution*, 5 August 2015.

21 James B. Steinberg, “The Good Friday Agreement: Ending War and Ending Conflict in Northern Ireland”, *Strategist*, Vol 2, Issue 3, May 2019, pp. 78-102.

22 Robert J. Einhorn, “Moving Past the Troubles: The Future of Northern Ireland Peace”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 16 February 2024.

begin to consider that force produces clearer and faster outcomes than dialogue and patient talks.<sup>23</sup>

The main risk here is the impact of the attacks on the diplomatic process. If military action is repeatedly seen to shape the course of the mediation process rather than the negotiations themselves, then the actors value diplomacy with less enthusiasm. As a result, dialogue may still occur, but it becomes secondary, rather than being a primary mechanism. It should also be underlined that there is somehow a bond between threats and dialogue. There is an important distinction between talks that continue despite tension and talks that are abruptly ended by escalation. In the first case, a channel for communication remains open. In the second, that channel may close completely, making any future return to negotiations much more difficult.

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23 Roberd David Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games", *International Organization*, 42(3), 1988, pp. 427–460.

# FORCE, PRESSURE, AND THE LIMITS OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Another perspective on this matter is the question of the coexistence of military force and diplomacy. The literature suggests that force and diplomacy may well coexist, as it is labeled coercive diplomacy, most influentially theorized by Alexander George. He argued that military pressure and negotiation are not mutually exclusive but can operate as complementary instruments of statecraft.<sup>24</sup> That suggests states use pressure, which includes threats or limited application of forces, to influence the behavior of an adversary at the negotiation table. Building on this framework, it is argued that the real intention of coercive diplomacy is not to replace negotiation but to reshape its terms to use the threat or limited application of force to accelerate or redirect a process that has stalled.<sup>25</sup> From this perspective, the strikes are meant to send signals to impose urgency on a slow-moving process.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1991.

<sup>25</sup> Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin (eds.), *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003; Reid B. C. Pauly and Jessican Chen Weiss, “How Coercive Diplomacy Works: Making Threats in International Crises”, in *Inside the Situation Room: The Theory and Practice of Making Crisis Decision-Making*, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Keren Yarhi-Milo (eds), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025, pp.195-222.

There are historical accounts that may help us better understand this dynamic. The Dayton Accords, negotiated in November 1995 at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base between representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia under U.S. mediation led by Richard Holbrooke, were helped by intensified military pressure, including NATO airstrikes earlier that year against Bosnian Serb forces, which pushed the warring parties toward a settlement.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in the case of the Camp David Accords, negotiations took place in September 1978 between Egypt and Israel, led respectively by Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin, under the mediation of Jimmy Carter at Camp David in the U.S.<sup>27</sup> These talks followed a period of repeated Arab-Israeli wars, most notably the 1973 Arab-Israeli War or the Yom Kippur War, which had already altered the strategic calculations of the parties involved.

Battlefield influenced the dynamics of diplomacy. In these cases, it was evident that the use of force did not rule out negotiation altogether. On the contrary, force interacted with the negotiation process and, at times, contributed to accelerating outcomes that had previously seemed difficult to reach. This means that when force is used, it may reinforce diplomacy by altering incentives.<sup>28</sup> However, there is a serious risk of undermining the framework itself. It is highly likely that in such violent attacks during a negotiation process, the parties may lose confidence in the process and choose to interrupt talks altogether.<sup>29</sup>

What this may be communicating to Iran is that even concessions of this nature cannot be relied upon to prevent military action, and whether or not this is the case, this will be the lens through which future decisions on levels of engagement will be made. For the U.S., the strategic objectives may be to prevent the development of nuclear capabilities or to prevent certain behaviors, but the basis upon which this will be judged by the international community will be the degree to which the process has been consistent with

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26 “15 years ago, Dayton Peace Accords: a milestone for NATO and the Balkans”, *NATO*, 14 December 2010.

27 Bernard Gwertzman, “Egypt and Israel Sign Formal Treaty, Ending a State of War After 30 Years; Sadat and Begin Praise Carter’s Role”, *The New York Times*, 27 March 1979.

28 Carrie Booth Walling, “Conflict Resolution: Lessons from the Dayton Peace Process”, *Negotiation Journal*, Vol 35, Issue 4, October 2019, pp. 443–466.

29 Tobias Böhmelt, “Democratic Third Parties, Conflict Intensity, and International Mediation Tracking”, *Negotiation Journal*, Vol 37, Issue 4, Fall 2021, pp.451-484.

the principles of mediation and engagement. For the mediator, in this case, it was Oman initially, but then Pakistan assumed that role. The strategic importance of their duty is based on their ability to facilitate<sup>30</sup> communications between two hostile states. The strategic importance of this role is based on the degree of belief that there is in the effectiveness of the mediation mechanism itself. The more that military action is seen to be a viable alternative to mediation, the less likely it is the negotiations will convene or taken seriously.

For countries directly involved in mediation processes, such as Türkiye, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, this ambiguity creates certain challenges.<sup>31</sup> When involved in negotiations, these countries are expected to produce successful engagements that lead to a structured and predictable pathway to de-escalation. If the given expectations are not present, the ability of these mediators to convene and sustain negotiations becomes quite uncertain. Eventually, they may find themselves in a situation where the value of the process they facilitate is itself questioned.

This dimension has longer-term implications as well. It is evident that international norms evolve through practice. The risk about them lies here. The precedent of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, launched while diplomatic processes at the U.N. Security Council were still formally active,<sup>32</sup> offers one illustration of how military action can proceed without meaningful diplomatic cost to the aggressor, and how that precedent then shaped the calculus of subsequent conflicts. If it becomes normalized that active negotiations can be overtaken by military escalation without considerable diplomatic cost on the aggressor, then the threshold for such actions may gradually be lowered. Leaders and parties may tend to consider that resorting to the use of force is a better option. Therefore, if this trend becomes contagious, each case of disrupted diplomacy will contribute to the transformation of conflict management philosophy.<sup>33</sup>

30 “How Oman mediates in U.S.-Iran talks”, *NPR*, 27 February 2026.

31 Esra Tekin, “Pakistan, Türkiye, Egypt actively engaged in mediation efforts in Mideast conflict, says D-8 chief”, *Anadolu Agency*, 11 April 2026.

32 “Security Council Holds First Debate on Iraq Since Start of Military Action: Speakers Call for Halt to Aggression, Immediate Withdrawal”, *United Nations Meeting Coverage and Press Release*, 26 March 2003.

33 Erica Harper, “War Reloaded: The Erosion of Norms and the Urgency of Prevention”, *Lieber Institute*, 17 June 2025.

The continuation of U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran for more than two months is a clear example of this downturn trend and also one of the most contemporary events to create such a norm to prioritize the use of force over diplomacy. As direct talks were almost out of question, there were many attempts by countries such as Türkiye and Egypt to reverse the escalatory course of the conflict.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Pakistan's active mediation between Washington and Tehran, conducted through a series of shuttle contacts between Islamabad, Washington, and Tehran between late March and early April 2026, produced a tangible outcome in the form of a temporary cease-fire announced on April 8. The agreement suspended offensive strikes for an initial 21-day period and reopened indirect communication channels, though it stopped well short of a formal negotiating framework.<sup>35</sup> So, despite all the destruction and heightened tone of discourse by the two sides, finding a common ground, even though temporary, was the only positive development out of this war so far.

The April 8 cease-fire, fragile and explicitly temporary as it was, nevertheless demonstrated that diplomacy retains the ability to adapt even under extreme pressure, including, in this case, a direct threat by the U.S. president to "destroy a whole civilization."<sup>36</sup> Negotiations may be paused, relocated, rearranged, and continued under new terms and conditions. If a channel closes in the process, then another may reopen, be that with the same mediators or different ones. The key argument to underline here is that the durability of diplomacy lies in the reality that, despite the tendency to use force, conflicts ultimately require political solutions. Military engagements can alter positions, but it rarely resolves underlying disputes on their own. The underlying causes of this conflict, centering on Iran's nuclear program, regional influence, and the security architecture of the Gulf, are not resolvable through military action alone. The distinction between altering positions and resolving disputes is critical. Force can compel short-term behavioral

34 "Turkish intelligence played a role securing U.S.-Iran cease-fire, media says", *Reuters*, 8 April 2026; Amr Hamzawy, "Multilateral diplomacy and mediation efforts: Pillars of Egypt's contribution to the U.S.-Iran cease-fire", *Abram Online*, 12 April 2026.

35 "What the U.S., Iran, Israel and Pakistan have said about the cease-fire" *Reuters*, 10 April 2026.

36 Mathias Risse, "A Whole Civilization Will Die Tonight:" The Day the American President Threatened Genocide, *Harvard Kennedy School, Carr-Ryan Center for Human Rights*, 8 April 2026.

change, but durable settlements require the kind of mutual legitimation and procedural commitment that only sustained negotiation can produce.

The three contemporary conflicts, Russia's war on Ukraine, Israel's war on Gaza, and the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, are strong manifestations of this statement. The war between Russia and Ukraine illustrates this limitation directly. Despite sustained and large-scale military operations by Russia and determined resistance by Ukraine across multiple fronts, the fundamental political questions driving the conflict remain unresolved.<sup>37</sup> Of course, the staunch Western military support is one of the physical motives of Ukrainian resilience on the frontlines. So, frontlines move, sometimes only slightly, sometimes more dramatically. Yet, the fundamental questions or causes of the war, such as territory, sovereignty, and security arrangements, remain unresolved. No purely military outcome can easily produce a stable peace. At some point, a political framework will be necessary.

A similar pattern is there in the Israeli war on Gaza. Brutal and unfounded use of excessive force may degrade the capabilities of armed groups, but they do not eliminate the political issue at the heart of the conflict.<sup>38</sup> The question of governance, legitimacy, and the broader Israeli-Palestinian problem cannot be solved through force alone. Each cycle of violence, including the post-Oct. 7 war, seems to confirm this reality. As it became evident that Israeli strikes of all kinds, toward civilians and military assets, could not eliminate Hamas as a political actor, Israeli and international attention turned toward negotiated arrangements by Egypt, Türkiye, Qatar, and the U.S., leading to an eventual cease-fire in October 2025.

Finally, the tensions involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran illustrate the same dynamic, even without full-scale war. Since Feb. 28, the U.S. and Israel have used limited military options, particularly missiles and air campaigns.<sup>39</sup> They targeted Iran's leadership in the hope that there would be a sudden regime change once the high-ranking cadres were eliminated. Strikes extended to urban infrastructure, including sites associated with civilian administration and education, generating significant international

37 Steven Pifer, "Russia-Ukraine after three years of large-scale war", *Brookings Institution*, 24 February 2025.

38 "Staying the guns of August: Avoiding all-out regional war in the Middle East", *International Crisis Group*, 2 August 2024.

39 Scott Simon, "Iran expert at the International Crisis Group discusses U.S. strikes and the response", *NPR*, 28 February 2026.

criticism. The Iranian government, however, demonstrated considerable resilience, sustaining its capacity to respond despite the scale of the campaign. As the limits of military coercion became apparent, diplomatic engagement re-emerged as the primary pathway toward de-escalation. Following Pakistan's active facilitation, a cease-fire was announced on April 8, providing the first structured pause in hostilities since Feb. 28. In all three cases, military action plays a role, but it does not provide closure. This is precisely why diplomacy, however slow and frustrating, remains indispensable for conflict resolution.

Due to these ups and downs in today's conflicts, what is at risk is not the disappearance of diplomacy, but rather its importance within the hierarchy of instruments available to states in resolving conflicts. If there is a strong belief that dialogue is fragile and easily bypassed, it risks being sidelined to mere crisis management instead of addressing conflicts at their roots. At this point, returning simply to negotiations may not be possible. This will be critically important to secure a balance between force and diplomacy. In such context, the difficulty for negotiators will not only be to find agreements, but also to ensure that the negotiation process itself is respected and allowed to produce results. It is precisely this challenge that has opened space for a new generation of mediators. As great-power diplomacy has proven either too entangled in the conflicts it seeks to resolve or too willing to subordinate dialogue to strategic interest, regional middle powers have stepped in to fill the gap.<sup>40</sup> Oman, Qatar, Türkiye, and Pakistan each represent a distinct model of this emerging mediation geography, and understanding their roles is essential to assessing the future resilience of diplomacy in the region.<sup>41</sup>

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40 Mehran Kamrava, "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy", *Middle East Journal*, Vol 65, Issue 4, Autumn 2011, pp. 539–556; Marco Pinfari, *Peace Negotiations and Time Deadline Diplomacy in Territorial Disputes*, New York: Routledge, 2013.

41 Richard Haass and Charles Kupchan, "Redefining success in Ukraine: A new strategy must balance means and ends", *Foreign Affairs*, 102(6), 17 November 2023.

# EMERGING MEDIATORS: THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF DIPLOMACY

Traditionally, great powers play a more active role in negotiation processes. However, the recent waves of global and regional conflicts have witnessed the rise of new mediators. A growing number of regional and middle powers have positioned themselves as mediator and facilitator in conflicts.<sup>42</sup> These initiatives reveal a new trend in contemporary diplomacy, which is the shifting geography of mediation. Despite the increasing frequency, this trend is often overlooked. It is a result of an increasing need in global politics where finding neutral and reliable actors has become more challenging. Additionally, more actors try to engage in mediation activities in order to gain diplomatic relevance and transform this into some kind of soft power. Recently, countries such as Oman, Qatar, Türkiye, and Pakistan have been involved in mediation more actively. The success of these countries in

<sup>42</sup> “What comes next: Deal or war with Iran?”, *International Crisis Group*, 25 February 2026.

achieving mediation goals lies in their ability to maintain relationships across competing blocs.

Qatar, for example, has built a reputation as a flexible and discreet mediator in international politics.<sup>43</sup> Its role in helping negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban, which later resulted in the Doha Agreement, shows that it can host long-term and very sensitive political discussions. Not only in the Afghanistan case, but Doha was also active in cease-fire talks, mediation of hostages, and also in back-channel diplomacy in different conflicts. One important strength of Qatar is that it is willing to talk with actors that many other countries prefer to avoid. At the same time, it provides a controlled diplomatic environment, which helps maintain continuity and also access for all parties involved.<sup>44</sup> All these processes earned Qatar a greater facilitator role in a wider sense of the term.

Türkiye represents a somewhat different model, where mediation is mixed with geopolitical ambition. Because of its location between Europe, the Middle East, and also Eurasia, Ankara tries to act both as a facilitator and as a stakeholder at the same time. For example, its involvement in negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, especially in arrangements like the Black Sea Grain Initiative, shows how mediation can also be used to project regional influence,<sup>45</sup> while at the same time addressing global concerns from settlement of disputes to securing food security and equal access to high standards of living in disadvantaged regions of the world, to active conflict resolution.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Türkiye's approach also indicates one important tension in modern mediation. When the mediator is closer to the conflict, it can have more leverage and influence, but at the

43 Zachary Laub, "What to know about the Afghan peace negotiations", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 11 March 2020; Sultan Barakat, "Qatar's mediation – motivations, acceptance and modalities", *Accord: an International Review of Peace Initiatives*, Issue 30, February 2024.

44 Sansom Milton, Ghassan Elkahlout and Sana Tariq, "Qatar's Evolving Role in Conflict Mediation", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol 30, Issue 1, 2025, pp. 53-77.

45 Teresa Whitfield, "Mediation alongside the hell of war: The Black Sea grain deal", *Accord: an International Review of Peace Initiatives*, Issue 30, February 2024.

46 Dmytro Isachenko, "Turkey in the Black Sea region: Ankara's reactions to the war in Ukraine against the background of regional dynamics and global confrontation", *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)*, 17 October 2023; "The Black Sea Grain Initiative: What was achieved? Why was it important?", *United Nations Black Sea Grain Initiative Joint Coordination Centre*, 14 November 2023.

same time, its neutrality can be more questioned, which sometimes creates doubts among the parties.<sup>47</sup>

Pakistan represents the most recent and also the most consequential addition to this group of emerging mediators. Islamabad's entry into active facilitation was not accidental. It reflected a deliberate strategic choice to leverage its historically maintained channels with both Washington and Tehran, channels that had been cultivated over decades of complex triangular relationships across South Asia and the Middle East.<sup>48</sup> Pakistani officials have been careful to describe their role specifically as facilitation rather than mediation, an analytically important distinction, where mediation implies a degree of authority to propose solutions; facilitation is more modest, as it means creating and maintaining the conditions under which parties can communicate.<sup>49</sup> This restraint in self-definition has, paradoxically, made Islamabad more effective in a context where both Washington and Tehran were resistant to accepting any actor as a formal mediator with independent standing. Pakistan's role in brokering the April 8 cease-fire and hosting representatives of both sides in Islamabad and managing the final rounds of indirect communication demonstrated that facilitation, when executed with precision and discretion, can produce outcomes that formal mediation had failed to deliver. Islamabad consistently positions itself as a connector rather than an arbiter, prioritizing access over influence and continuity over visibility, a posture that has defined Pakistani diplomacy across multiple sensitive engagements.<sup>50</sup>

Oman, meanwhile, holds a distinctive position in this landscape, one that blurs the conventional line between mediation and facilitation. Muscat rarely describes itself as a mediator in the formal sense as it prefers the quieter role of a trusted channel, creating conditions for dialogue without seeking authority over its outcomes.<sup>51</sup> Scholars such as Marc Valeri and Kristian

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47 Maryna Vorotnyuk, "Political and diplomatic dialogue: Challenges and opportunities for Black Sea cooperation between Turkey and the West in the post-2022 environment", *Atlantic Council*, 13 September 2024.

48 Arhama Siddiq, "The Islamabad Opening: How Pakistan Became Washington and Tehran's Key Mediator", *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*, 3 May 2026; "Turkish intelligence played a role securing U.S.-Iran cease-fire, media says", *Reuters*, 8 April 2026.

49 Jacob Bercovitch, *Theory and Practice of International Mediation: Selected Essays*, London: Routledge, 2011.

50 Seyyid Ali Abbas, "Pakistan's Mediation: How Islamabad Brought Washington and Tehran to the Table", *Center for International Strategic Studies*, 13 April 2026.

51 Aya Batrawy, "How Oman Mediates in U.S.-Iran Talks", *NPR*, 27 February 2026.

Coates Ulrichsen have noted that Oman's diplomatic identity is built on studied neutrality and long-cultivated access rather than on active problem-solving. Because of its balanced foreign policy and its position in the Gulf, Muscat has been able to maintain communication channels with different actors, even those in tension with each other.<sup>52</sup> For example, its role in facilitating contacts between the United States and Iran which later contributed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, shows how Oman can support sensitive negotiations without seeking much public attention.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, Oman has been active in regional issues, including efforts related to Yemen, often working behind the scenes rather than in open diplomacy.<sup>54</sup> This approach reflects a broader logic, where neutrality and credibility are more important than visibility. However, like in other cases, this low-profile strategy also has limits, because its influence can be less visible and sometimes underestimated by external actors.

This shift in who mediates is itself a response to the conditions described above as traditional great-power diplomacy has become less reliable, regional actors have filled the gap precisely because they can offer the continuity that the system increasingly cannot guarantee. What is uniting these cases is a change in the way mediation is understood and also practiced today. It is not only the role of distant and fully neutral arbitrators, but more and more, it is done by states that are themselves part of the regions where the conflicts are taking place.<sup>55</sup> This kind of proximity can also be an advantage. Regional mediators often have a deeper understanding of the context, already existing communication channels, and also a stronger interest in keeping stability. Because of this, they can move faster, adapt in a more flexible way, and also continue engagement for a longer period of time, even if the situation is complicated.

However, this evolution also brings some new vulnerabilities. The credibility of these mediators depends on a very delicate balance between access

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52 Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State*, Hurst, 2009; Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring*, Hurst, 2014.

53 "IntelBrief: Oman Central to Regional Conflict Resolution in the Middle East", *Soufan Center*, 24 March 2023.

54 Samuel Ramani, "Deterrence through Diplomacy: Oman's Dialogue Facilitation Initiatives during the Yemeni Civil War", *Middle East Journal*, Vol 75, Issue 2, Summer 2021, pp. 285-303

55 Mehran Kamrava, "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy", *Middle East Journal*, 65(4), 2011, pp. 539-556.

and neutrality, which is not always easy to maintain. If they are seen as too close or aligned with one side, then their effectiveness can decrease quite quickly. Also, if the processes they are hosting are often disrupted, be it by external intervention or by escalation on the ground, their reputational capital can start to erode over time.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, mediation is not only a service that they provide, but also a kind of risk that they have to absorb, sometimes with uncertain outcomes.

First, disruption carries a direct reputational cost for the mediators themselves. The events around the disruption of the Oman-facilitated talks illustrate this challenge directly. For Oman, the Feb. 28 disruption was not merely a setback to one process, but it was a direct challenge to the diplomatic identity the Sultanate has spent decades constructing. Something similar is also true, in different ways, for Qatar, Türkiye, and Pakistan. If this assumption becomes weaker, then the motivation of these states to invest in mediation can also decline.

Second, despite this cost, the demand for mediation has not diminished. At the same time, we can see that the involvement of these actors is still continuing which suggests that the demand for mediation is still strong. Even in very polarized conflicts, the parties often look for indirect channels to test positions, to manage escalation, or to explore possible agreements. Middle-power mediators are filling this space because they can offer something that bigger powers often cannot, like accessibility, flexibility, and some level of political distance.<sup>57</sup>

Third, the rise of new mediators is reshaping mediation into a more distributed but also more fragile system. So, the rise of these mediators does not mean that the tension between force and diplomacy is solved, but rather it is changing form. As more actors enter this field, mediation becomes more distributed and less centralized, maybe also more resilient, but at the same time more exposed to disruption.<sup>58</sup> The effectiveness of this system will de-

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56 Magnus Lundgren and Isak Svensson, "The Surprising Decline of International Mediation in Armed Conflicts", *Research & Politics*, Vol 7, Issue 2, April 2020.

57 Patrick M. Regan and Allan C. Stam, "In the Nick of Time: Conflict Management, Mediation Timing, and the Duration of Interstate Disputes", *International Studies Quarterly*, 44(2), 2000, pp. 239–260.

58 Monalisa Adhikari, Jennifer Hodge, Christine Bell, and Zabra Siwa, "Disaggregated Mediation: The Localisation of Peace Processes amid Global and Domestic Fragmentation", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 32, Issue 1, March 2026, pp. 262-293.

pend not only on how skilled the mediators are, but also on whether the international environment allows these processes to continue.

Fourth, and most fundamentally, the central question of mediation has shifted. In this sense, the question is no longer only who is mediating, but also under what conditions mediation can actually succeed. Oman, Qatar, Türkiye, and Pakistan each give different kinds of answers to this question. Their experiences show that even if the tools and places of diplomacy are changing, the main challenge is still the same: to create and to protect a space where adversaries can negotiate, without the constant risk that the process is interrupted by events happening outside of the room.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Jose Pascal da Rocha, "The Changing Nature of International Mediation", *Global Policy*, Vol 10, Issue S2, June 2019, pp. 101-107.

## CONCLUSION

The U.S. and Israel attack on Iran that began on Feb. 28, 2026, seriously damaged the ongoing mediation efforts between the Washington and Tehran. They took place at a moment when the negotiations were reportedly making meaningful progress and put into question the value of the entire process that had been carefully built by Omani mediators over many months. The consequences of the attacks were not limited to the battlefield either. They extended to the diplomatic space, affecting not only the immediate prospects of an agreement, but also the longer-term credibility of mediation as a mechanism for conflict resolution.

This paper demonstrates that the damage can be understood across three different dimensions. The first is operational, meaning the collapse of the specific channel that Oman had facilitated through the proximity format in Muscat and Geneva. The second is reputational, as the credibility that Oman had built over years of careful and discreet diplomacy was put under significant pressure. The third dimension, which may be the most important one in the long run, is normative. The Feb. 28 strikes sent a clear message to all parties involved in or considering similar

processes that even when negotiations are active and producing results, military action remains an option. This is a significant shift in how states may calculate the value of engaging in structured dialogue.

At the same time, this paper does not conclude that mediation has failed or that diplomacy is disappearing from the region. On the contrary, one of the most important findings of this analysis is that mediation efforts continued despite the severe disruption. Countries such as Türkiye, Egypt, and eventually Pakistan stepped in to fill the gap left by the collapse of the Omani channel. Pakistan's facilitation role, which resulted in the April 8 cease-fire, is a particularly important example in this regard. It shows that even in very difficult conditions, there are always actors willing to take on the role of an intermediary. This is an encouraging sign, even if the overall picture remains uncertain.

However, there is also a risk that should not be overlooked. The more that military action is seen as an acceptable tool even during active negotiations, the more difficult it becomes to sustain the belief that diplomacy is a serious and reliable alternative. Over time, if this perception becomes widespread among states, the willingness to invest in mediation processes may decrease. Mediators, especially smaller states that rely on their reputation for neutrality and discretion, may become more hesitant to take on the risks that come with hosting sensitive negotiations. In this context, what is at stake is the broader role that dialogue plays in international politics.

The four countries examined in the second part of this paper, Qatar, Türkiye, Oman, and Pakistan, each represent a different response to this challenge. Doha has built a strong reputation by offering a controlled and discreet environment for difficult negotiations. Ankara brings regional influence and leverage, though sometimes at the cost of questions about its neutrality. Muscat, on the other hand, continues to rely on its long tradition of quiet facilitation and studied non-alignment. Islamabad has shown that a more modest approach, defining its role specifically as facilitation rather than mediation, can sometimes be more effective in contexts where formal mediation is not acceptable to the parties. Together, these cases suggest that the geography of mediation is changing, with regional middle powers taking on roles that were previously dominated by great powers or large multilateral institutions.

Nevertheless, whether this shift will be enough to preserve the effectiveness of mediation in the region remains to be seen. Much will depend on whether the parties involved in ongoing and future conflicts are willing to give dialogue the time and space it needs to produce results. The experience of the U.S.-Iran negotiations shows that this is not always guaranteed. Even when a process is working, it can be overtaken by events outside the negotiating room. In this sense, the main challenge for diplomacy today is not finding the right formula or the right mediator. It is creating and maintaining the conditions under which negotiations can actually reach their potential. This is a political and normative challenge as much as it is a technical one, and it will require a broader commitment from all parties involved, not just the mediators themselves.



## **ISMAIL NUMAN TELCI**

Ismail Numan Telci is the Head of the Political Science and International Relations Department and the Director of Center for Gulf Studies and Global Policy at Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul. Prior to this position, Telci worked at Sakarya University for 16 years, where he served as a member of the Board of the Middle East Institute and Chair of the Department of International Politics, while progressing through the academic ranks from Assistant Professor in 2015 to Associate Professor in 2018 and Full Professor in 2025. Between 2014 and 2018, Telci served as the founding deputy director of the Middle East Institute (ORMER) established within Sakarya University. During the same period, he was a founding co-editor of the Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi) and served as founding co-chair of the organizing committee for the annual Middle East Congress on Politics and Society from its inception in 2012 through the fourth edition in 2018.

From 2016 to 2019, he worked as a foreign policy researcher at SETA, focusing particularly on the Gulf and North Africa. During this time, he implemented joint projects with international organizations. In 2017, he led the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) supported project titled “Country of Origin Information: Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan.” In 2018, he contributed as a researcher to the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) supported project “Strengthening Turkey’s Decision-Making Capacity on Refugees,” which aimed to enhance Turkey’s institutional capacity in refugee-related policymaking.

Telci served as Vice President of Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM), Turkey’s leading think-tank on the region, from 2019 to 2024. During his tenure, he established and coordinated the Gulf Studies and Africa Studies programs within the institution. He also served as the Founding Editor-in-Chief of Ortadoğu Publishing House (Ortadoğu Yayınları) from its launch in 2020 until 2024. During the same period, he also acted as editor of Ortadoğu Etütleri and Ortadoğu Analiz, two journals published by ORSAM. As part of ORSAM’s research projects, he conducted fieldwork in countries including Iraq, Jordan, Libya, and Sudan. Between 2020 and 2024, he participated as a researcher in the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) supported project led by Georgetown University titled “Managing National Security Risks: Strategic Challenges and Opportunities in Qatar’s Energy Sector.”

In 2024–2025, he served as a visiting faculty member in the Department of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, Oman. During the fall semester, he taught courses on “Gulf Politics and Security” and “Negotiation and Conflict Resolution” and in the spring semester he offered courses on “International Law and Organizations”, “Defense and Strategic Studies” and “Military Studies and Terrorism”. In the course of his academic work, Telci has visited 19 countries across the Middle East, from Morocco to Pakistan. He has also taken part in academic research, fieldwork, election observation missions, institutional collaborations, and international programs in more than 60 countries across Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

His research focuses on the Middle East, the Gulf, North Africa, and East Africa, with particular emphasis on comparative politics, foreign policy, and security. His scholarly articles have appeared in journals such as Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Migration Studies, Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, and Insight Turkey. In addition to six books, he has authored numerous policy reports, analyses, and opinion pieces published by think tanks and media outlets. His commentary on current affairs has been featured in Anadolu Agency, Sabah, TRT World, Al Jazeera, BBC, Deutsche Welle, Le Monde, and Middle East Eye.



# WHEN BOMBS FALL ON MEDIATION: The U.S.-Israel War on Iran and the Disruption of Diplomacy

ISMAIL NUMAN TELCI

The regional security architecture and the practice of international diplomacy have undergone a structural transformation following the U.S.-Israeli military strikes against Iran on February 28, 2026. These strikes abruptly terminated a sophisticated, Omani-facilitated mediation process that had brought Tehran to the brink of significant nuclear concessions. Therefore, the disruption of active negotiations through force has become a critical turning point, raising fundamental questions about the long-term viability of mediation. The effectiveness of this mechanism depends on the belief that negotiations will be granted sufficient political space to mature; however, the February 28 strikes violated this condition, causing operational, reputational, and normative damage. From this perspective, the incident signifies a shift where military coercion risks sidelining dialogue into a secondary tool for mere crisis management rather than root-cause resolution.

In light of the perceived unreliability of great-power diplomacy, regional middle powers have stepped in to fill the diplomatic vacuum, creating a new geography of mediation. Oman continues its tradition of quiet facilitation and non-alignment, while Qatar leverages its ability to maintain discreet communication with diverse actors in controlled environments. Türkiye acts as a facilitator-stakeholder, utilizing its geopolitical leverage to bridge regional and global concerns, and Pakistan has emerged as a consequential actor by specifically focusing on facilitation, which led to the April 8 cease-fire. Ultimately, the durability of diplomacy lies in the reality that military engagements rarely resolve underlying political disputes. For these regional mediators, the challenge remains protecting the negotiation space from external disruptions to restore the normative status of mediation as a primary instrument of dispute settlement.

