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Strait-Forward: A Security Architecture for the Persian Gulf

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TOPLINE POINTS

- The Iranian regime has, over the course of Operation Epic Fury, sought to close the Strait of Hormuz, following its consistent practice of disrupting shipping in the passage for 47 years.
- The U.S. does not directly depend on the Strait of Hormuz for the supply of commodities, and the Strait is poised to be even less of an interest in the long term due to strong domestic energy policies. Meanwhile, other countries, primarily in the Persian Gulf and East Asia, rely heavily on the Strait, but have committed few resources to protecting the waterway.
- Not only has the United States spent trillions of dollars on a waterway on which it does not directly depend, but by doing so, the U.S. has inadvertently subsidized the energy needs of its primary strategic adversary, China.
- Operation Epic Fury's achievements should have the ancillary effect of weakening the Iranian regime's future capacity to wreak havoc in the Strait. Given the limited dependence on the Strait, this new environment is an opportunity to implement a new security framework where the U.S. does not assume primary responsibility for the Strait's protection, and allies increase their responsibilities.

Introduction

The Strait of Hormuz has received widespread attention during Operation Epic Fury, the accompanying negotiations, and the ongoing U.S. economic pressure campaign, Economic Fury, that followed. While the security of the Strait of Hormuz (hereinafter "the Strait") was not the principal objective of Operation Epic Fury, the operation's degradation of Iran's military capabilities can have the ancillary effect of ensuring the long-term stability of the Strait. If these benefits are realized, the focus could shift to a new security environment, beginning with answering questions about who the primary beneficiaries of the current arrangement are, and how the burden of protecting the Strait should be shared among those nations, given their dependencies.

President Trump addressed the security environment plainly in a March 20, 2026, Truth Social post: "The Hormuz Strait will have to be guarded and policed, as necessary, by other Nations who use it — The United States does not! If asked, we will help these Countries in their Hormuz efforts, but it shouldn't be necessary once Iran's threat is eradicated" (Trump, 2026). The Trump Administration continues to emphasize the United States' minimal direct dependence on the Strait. From the beginning of the operation, this was understood and undoubtedly part of strategic planning. Despite the renewed attention, the Strait and the U.S. dependencies on it are adjunct to the operation itself.

Throughout Operation Epic Fury, Iran used the Strait as a means of world extortion. The regime rendered the passage closed by attacking and harassing commercial shipping and laying mines, consistent with its practices over decades (LaPorta & Jacobs, 2026). Indeed, the former Commander of the Fifth Fleet during the first Trump Administration, Vice Admiral (ret.) Kevin Donegan noted that Iran's attacks on the Strait were "built into it [U.S. planning] from the beginning" (ABC, 2026).

During the first round of negotiations in Islamabad, Iran refused to meet the U.S. demand to open the Strait, leading the U.S. to impose a naval blockade on Iran. By halting all maritime traffic entering or exiting Iranian ports, the administration is attempting to undermine Iran's use of the Strait as leverage while removing a key economic lifeline from the regime (CENTCOM, 2026). Such action could also have the effect of strengthening the United States' position ahead of the upcoming Trump-Xi summit in Beijing on May 14-15 due to China's substantial dependence on the Strait of Hormuz for its energy imports.

Located between Oman and Iran, the Strait connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Twenty million barrels of oil pass through it per day, representing more than 20% of global seaborne oil trade (EIA, 2026a). This includes significant global shares of crude oil and condensate, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), liquefied natural gas (LNG), and petrochemicals, including fertilizers for agriculture. As a result, the Strait has historically been one of the most contested geographic locations in the world.

This paper argues that while securing the Strait was not the primary objective of Operation Epic Fury, an ancillary effect of the operation is the conditions it shapes for a new security architecture made up of the primary stakeholders, largely in the Persian Gulf and East Asia, who have voiced a willingness to do so. Crucially, while the U.S. has to date been the principal guarantor of shipping in the Strait, it is not one of these primary stakeholders, importing little from the Strait directly. By degrading Iran's military capabilities and reducing its ability to threaten shipping, regional infrastructure, and neighboring states, the operation has weakened the principal source of coercion that has made the Strait so vulnerable. In turn, this will enable U.S. partners in the region and beyond to work together to maintain the security of the waterway in a manner that is consistent with the Trump Administration's focus on burden-sharing.

Background: Iran's History of Disruption

Since 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran and its terror proxies have consistently disrupted shipping in the Strait as a tool for international coercion, with the effects of increasing global prices and slowing growth. The Strait's international importance has been an asset to the Iranian regime, exploiting the geographic significance of the passage as leverage to deter other nations from taking more assertive actions against its export of terror around the world.

In 1984, Iran and Iraq both attacked hundreds of tankers and vessels during the "Tanker War" phase of the Iran-Iraq War, causing traffic to fall by 25% and insurance rates to soar (Strauss Center, 2026). In 2019, attacks on tankers in the Gulf of Oman, which the U.S. blamed on Iran, increased oil prices by over 4% (Inman, 2019).

Iran's harmful effects on the Strait are not confined to instances where it takes military action; the regime's inherent presence raises prices for global consumers. Iran's financing of terror and volatile relations with other powers in the Middle East have forced exporters and insurers to price in risk, driving up shipping costs. Studies estimate that geopolitical tensions involving Iran have historically added to global oil prices by $5 to $15 per barrel, just based on the supply and price uncertainty, which translates to about a $100 billion to $450 billion annual loss in total global output (Navarro, 2026).

Far from bringing about the disruption of the Strait—as some critics of the administration and the operation unfairly claim— the achievements of Operation Epic Fury may in fact be the most practical effort to create the conditions for enduring stability of the waterway.

Operation Epic Fury

Operation Epic Fury had clear objectives to dismantle and weaken Iran's military capacity and its ability to inflict harm (Olidort et al., 2026). While the objectives of the operation did not include protecting the Strait, accomplishing them will have positive downstream effects on the security of the Strait, creating new conditions for the passage that the world has not seen in nearly half a century.

Iran's decision to effectively close the Strait in response to Operation Epic Fury is yet again a manifestation of its practice of weaponizing the waterway. In the context of the military successes of Epic Fury in degrading Iran's capabilities, Iran's threats to the Strait represent a desperate measure amid diminished opportunities to escalate. After declaring the Strait closed and laying mines in the first few weeks of the operation, the regime has moved to obtain de facto control over all shipping through the passage, requiring vessels to go near Iranian coastlines and reportedly instituting tolls (McHugh & Gambrell, 2026). In its ceasefire counterproposal to the U.S., Iran reportedly demanded full sovereignty over the Strait, signaling its continued intentions to exploit the passage for greater concessions (Guzman & Lee, 2026).

From the beginning of the operation, the U.S. has taken efforts to mitigate the temporary disruption, from directing the U.S. Navy to escort convoys to ordering the U.S. Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to issue maritime reinsurance (DFC, 2026). These efforts have also occurred on a global scale; all 32 members of the International Energy Agency (IEA) coordinated to release 400 million barrels of oil to offset the supply shock (IEA, 2026a).

A coalition of over 50 countries (led by the United Kingdom and France) has expressed its readiness to pursue a range of options to secure the Strait (Adamson, 2026). This is after U.S. allies, particularly in Europe, initially declined to heed U.S. requests to contribute to reopening the Strait, demonstrating an increased sense of urgency to counter the extortionate actions of the Iranian regime (Ruitenberg, 2026). After the Iranian regime started using the Strait to extort the U.S. to grant more favorable terms in a potential deal, the Trump Administration took bold action to deny Iran its sole remaining point of leverage. The U.S. began enforcing a blockade of all maritime traffic to or from Iranian ports (CENTCOM, 2026). While Iran initially agreed to allow passage through the Strait on April 17, they reverted to causing disruption by firing at transiting ships days later, yet again demonstrating a last-ditch effort to exploit the Strait.

In the long-term, as the United States achieves its key military objectives of depleting Iran's drone, missile, naval, and air power capabilities, the threat the Iranian regime can pose to the Strait will be dramatically reduced (Olidort et al., 2026).

Explaining U.S. Dependency on the Strait

Should the operation manage to neutralize or greatly attenuate the threat of the Iranian regime to the Strait, the discussion will turn to who should shoulder the long-term responsibility of managing the security environment around the waterway.

The U.S. has been the primary guarantor of free and open shipping lanes since the end of World War II, a responsibility that has extended to the Strait by maintaining a major naval presence in the region and intervening when military tensions, largely caused by the Iranian regime, arise (Brown et al., 2026). Since President Carter asserted the U.S. had a vital interest in the security of the Persian Gulf under his "Carter Doctrine," the U.S. has expended vast military resources to protect the free flow of oil in the region; one study estimated the cost at $7.3 trillion between 1976 and 2008 (Stern, 2010).

Despite these efforts, the U.S. has little direct exposure to the Strait; goods that flow through the passage generally constitute a small share of U.S. imports. In 2024, the U.S. imported approximately 0.5 million barrels per day (b/d) of crude oil and condensate from Persian Gulf countries through the Strait, accounting for just 7% of total U.S. imports of the commodity, and 2% of U.S. petroleum liquids consumption (EIA, 2025a). Considering domestic production made up 86.7% of total U.S. crude oil supply the same year, these import levels are minuscule (IEA, n.d.). For LPG and LNG, the second- and third-largest commodities flowing through the Strait, the U.S. imports virtually none from Persian Gulf countries (EIA, 2026b).

Concerning commodities that are petroleum products or by-products of petroleum refining, the U.S. also relies very little on the region by virtue of significant domestic capacity or high import volumes from non-Gulf sources. For fertilizer, the U.S. produces more than 80% of its total consumption, and while it imports some types of fertilizer nutrients at moderate levels from Persian Gulf countries, such as nitrogen from Qatar, the majority of U.S. fertilizer imports come from an American neighbor, Canada (Williams et al., 2025). For key industrial commodities such as sulfur, the U.S. in 2025 produced 86% of its total consumption, and out of its imports for elemental sulfur and byproduct sulfuric acid (two primary forms of sulfur), at least two-thirds of both categories come from outside the Gulf (U.S. Geological Survey, 2026). These statistics reveal that the U.S. trade does not hinge on the stability of the Strait; disruptions to shipping in the passage do not cause a significant reduction in the availability of many important commodities domestically.

The meager volume of imports the U.S. receives from the Persian Gulf and the Strait should not be interpreted to mean the Strait does not influence the U.S. economy and price levels. Given that goods passing through the Strait are globally traded commodities, disruptions drive global benchmark prices up by reducing the available worldwide supply, affecting prices in the U.S.

After the commencement of Operation Epic Fury on February 28, 2026, U.S. energy commodities rose by 21% in March from the previous month, causing a corresponding 21% rise in gas prices (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2026). Both goods categories rose by an additional 5.6% and 5.4% in April, respectively. Fertilizer prices have also increased, leading to slight increases in crop prices, albeit at a modest level compared to other disruptive geopolitical events such as the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine (Arita et al., 2026). In fact, after the Russian invasion, wheat prices rose by 74% and corn prices by 34%; in March 2026, they increased by 8% and 4%, respectively (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2026). Increases in fertilizer prices can be passed along the supply chain to increase food prices for consumers. However, this pass-through phenomenon has barely materialized so far, as in March, there was zero inflation for food, and in April, they rose by 0.5%. For context, in December 2025, food prices rose month-over-month by 0.7% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2026).

The cascading effect of supply disruptions in the Strait to the U.S. economy further underscores the harm done by the Iranian regime, both historically and during Operation Epic Fury, and why short-term mitigation efforts were important during the operation. Nevertheless, each of these impacts on the U.S. economy is residual; the U.S. does not depend directly on the Strait for commodities, and when factoring in what other countries have at stake, it is clear the U.S. interest in the Strait is not critical.

Reliance by Foreign Countries

The U.S. relies significantly less on the smooth, uninterrupted flow of goods in the Strait than other countries, including some with major economies and significant defense capabilities, and is therefore less susceptible to the effects of supply disruption. For exports, the Persian Gulf countries (Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman) rely almost exclusively on the Strait for their oil and petroleum product exports; for instance, 93% of Qatari and 96% of UAE LNG exports transit the Strait (IEA, 2026b).

Regarding imports, Asian countries are the primary customers of Strait-passing commodities: In the first quarter of 2025, China, India, South Korea, and Japan combined imported over 76%

of the volume of crude oil transported through the Strait. Each of these countries is a net importer of the commodity, with crude via the Strait constituting the majority of their imports (EIA, 2025a). Japan and South Korea, in particular, are almost entirely import-dependent on oil, making them severely vulnerable to the disruption of the Strait.

The same trend also applies to LNG, where China, India, and South Korea accounted for 51% of all LNG imports flowing through the Strait in 2025 Q1 (EIA, 2025b). Furthermore, while European countries depend less on the Strait than Asian countries for crude oil, 10% of Europe's LNG imports in 2024 came from Qatar alone; considering that European countries are major net importers of LNG, disruption in the Strait has a more significant direct impact on them than on the U.S. (Jaller-Makarewicz, 2025).

China's reliance on the Strait, with half of its crude oil and one-third of its LNG imports coming from Persian Gulf countries, carries additional considerations given that it is America's top strategic adversary (Downs, 2026). These import reliance figures underestimate the true scale of China's dependence due to its clandestine imports from one crucial supplier: Iran. China has not reported oil imports from Iran since 2022 in order for Chinese firms to evade U.S. sanctions, but data that tracks tankers show that in 2025 China imported 1.38 million b/d of Iranian crude – or about 13% of its total imports – at below market rates (Downs, 2026; Reuters, 2026a). These purchases accounted for more than 80% of Iran's oil exports, a major economic bailout for the Iranian regime. Taken together, this means that the U.S. has effectively subsidized China's energy needs by assuming sole responsibility for protecting the Strait, guaranteeing safe passage of Chinese oil imports, which in turn propped up the terror-financing Iranian regime.

Relative U.S. Resilience Amid Broader Global Disruption

The discrepancy in Strait reliance between the U.S. and the rest of the world has already manifested in significantly different effects on regional price levels. Asian crude oil price benchmarks have eclipsed $150 a barrel, compared to the North American benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), which has largely hovered between $90–100 per barrel. The gap between WTI and the global benchmark, Brent, also reached an 11-year high (McCartney & Cavale, 2026).

While the spread has narrowed and WTI prices have occasionally eclipsed Brent since then, this largely reflects an increase in the demand for American crude from Asian countries, which now need alternative sources of fuel (Vahn & Wong, 2026). Empty tankers have been flocking to the U.S.; ship movement trackers show the amount of large crude carriers voyaging to the U.S. is more than double last year's average (Ohira & Asada, 2026). As a result, weekly U.S. exports of crude oil between April 18th and April 24th reached the highest ever recorded (EIA, 2026c). Surging demand for U.S. oil can be a boon for American businesses and jobs and further evinces the relatively advantageous position of the U.S. compared to countries and markets seeing price increases solely from supply shocks. Concerning petroleum products, Asian fertilizer prices have also jumped exponentially, with some products jumping over 50% in the span of a few weeks (Lee & Thang, 2026).

The growth of domestic energy production is a major factor for the U.S. being comparatively impervious to supply shocks in the Strait today, and heralds the waterway being even less of a

U.S. interest in the future. The U.S. has significantly expanded oil and gas production in the past few decades, and since 2020 has been a net exporter of petroleum (EIA, 2024). This increase coincides with the dramatic reduction in U.S. imports of oil from the Persian Gulf, declining by 68% since President Carter laid forth his "Carter Doctrine" in 1980 (EIA, 2026d).

Combined with the Trump Administration's "Energy Dominance" agenda, the U.S. is better positioned than ever to withstand global supply disruptions, capturing a greater share of the global production to have more influence on world prices and maintain a buffer when there are occurrences like the current situation (Hayes & Vasquez, 2026).

While the U.S. has historically taken and is currently leading efforts to secure the Strait, robust domestic policies, as well as the limited and lessening direct dependence, insulate the U.S. from disruption relative to other countries. Assuming sole responsibility for protecting the Strait may have made sense when the U.S. imported sizeable quantities of oil from the Persian Gulf for its domestic consumption, but the facts in the present make clear that it is not in the long-term interest of the U.S. to carry most of this burden. Other countries, with substantial economies and in some cases formidable military capabilities, depend on the Strait significantly more and are therefore more affected by disruptions to the waterway. It is past time for these countries to have their commitments in protecting the Strait reflect this dependence.

The Free Ride Ends: Shifting Strait Security to Those Who Depend on It

Given the dependencies on the Strait by both partners and adversaries alike, the U.S. is positioned to foster a new ecosystem around the waterway that can shift responsibility for its security to others, while, in the short term, transforming it into a source of leverage against China.

In response to Iran's attempt to use the Strait as leverage during negotiations, President Trump responded with a blockade of Iran's ports. Although China was not the principal focus of this action, the blockade has the residual effect of harming China due to its significant dependence on the Strait. This reliance – coupled with the military degradation of China's premier partner in the Middle East – may represent a new avenue of leverage ahead of the Trump-Xi summit in Beijing.

Now, with new conditions on the ground favorable to U.S. interests, a weakened Iran, and regional partners ready to defend their neighborhood, steps can be taken to end the United States' longstanding position as the sole arbitrator of security in the Strait.

The case for burden sharing in the Strait rests on three straightforward propositions. First, America's partners have a larger direct stake than does the United States in the uninterrupted flow of goods and commodities through the Strait. Second, many of those partners possess meaningful tools and capabilities that will allow them to shoulder more of the security burden. Third, Operation Epic Fury, by degrading Iran's missile, naval, and proxy capabilities, reduced the threat partners face and can lead to conditions that would make a more partner-led regional security model more feasible.

This approach is consistent with the Trump Administration's National Security Strategy, which directly calls for "wealthy, sophisticated nations" to take the primary responsibility for their own regions while the U.S. maintains a more separate role as a "convenor and supporter" (Trump, 2025). The Strait is one of the clearest cases for applying this principle.

As of May 13, 2026, more than 50 countries formed a coalition to discuss measures to ensure the security of the Strait (Adamson, 2026). The United Kingdom convened military planners from several of these countries to formulate potential actions to secure the Strait "as soon as conditions allow" (Corbet & Lawless, 2026). Such military planning has so far amounted to little more than posturing, with a French carrier strike group moving into the region alongside several ships from other European partners (Mahadzir, 2026).

These actions follow President Trump's repeated calls for European partners to take a more active role in reopening the Strait. It remains unclear whether they are truly willing to bear the material costs of guaranteeing the future security of such a contested waterway. What is clear is that the U.S. should no longer be the sole arbiter of such security, and that the progress being made can at least stand as the foundation of a future security architecture in which other countries can take on a larger role.

Among East Asian countries, thus far, none of the major players has opted to deploy any naval assets to the region. Japan is raising the possibility of deploying minesweepers through the waterway, although the scope of its involvement would be constrained by its pacifist constitution (Reuters, 2026b). The Prime Minister of Japan continues to express her support for the coalition formed by France and the U.K., and launched a framework to strengthen the supply chains of energy in Asia, contributing $10 billion in financial cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2026). When a South Korean cargo ship was struck while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, President Trump rightly called out Iran's culpability and urged Seoul to join U.S. efforts to respond (Shim, 2026). Despite vowing action, South Korea remains stagnant in any form of military action. This attack may result in continued pressure for South Korea to respond, presenting yet another opportunity for more active participation from U.S. partners around the world.

Even if these countries do not possess the political will to participate in the near term, a weakened Iran affords them the flexibility to join a broader effort to secure their interests in the long run.

Although not the primary objective of Operation Epic Fury, it has achieved the ancillary effects of stronger partnerships with the Gulf states which can also shift burdens long borne by the U.S. The broader burden-shifting logic also fits with the administration's broader efforts of regional diplomacy. President Trump's first overseas trip in both terms was to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

These trends emphasize the view of Gulf states as central economic and security partners to the United States. However, the strengthened alliances come with further expectations for the regional actors to assume greater responsibility for stability in their own neighborhood.

Recent reports on the UAE suggest that this burden-shifting logic is starting to take operational shape. Their willingness to act is demonstrated by reported strikes on Iran, one of which targeted a refinery on Iran's Lavan Island in early April (Said & Holliday, 2026). The Emirates also appear to be reviewing their capabilities to assist in securing the Strait and even proposing a more active role in the conflict (Said et al., 2026). The UAE had proposed a joint United Nations Security Council resolution to permit countries to use force in opening the Strait. The resolution failed, leading to public condemnation by Emirati representatives (Pietromarchi, 2026).

Gulf officials had previously stated that even if the resolution fails, the UAE would still be willing to join an effort to open the Strait (Said et al., 2026). It has yet to be seen how this rhetoric may translate into action; however, the reported military strikes by the UAE on Iran illustrate how the country is willing to accept the risks of military action, recognizing the greater long-term costs of a hostile neighbor's control of such a vital waterway. This dramatic shift in stance comes after the UAE has sustained significant strikes—about 2,500 drones and missiles—from Iran, targeting key civilian infrastructure such as hotels and airports (Said et al., 2026). Even after the ceasefire, the UAE and other Gulf states incurred an attack involving dozens of Iranian missiles and drones (Pietromarchi, 2026).

During this temporary period of instability, countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have pre-established pipelines that provide alternatives to the Strait. Both the East-West pipeline (Saudi Arabia) and the Abu Dhabi pipeline (UAE) are estimated to provide a combined 4.7 million barrels per day (EIA, 2026a). These serve as substitutes, not solutions, but the investment in these alternatives does demonstrate a recognition of the necessity of reducing the vulnerability to Iranian coercion.

Despite these alternatives, just hours after the ceasefire was announced, Iran struck Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline, illustrating that even the bypass corridors designed to circumvent the Strait are not beyond Iran's reach (Saba & Dahan, 2026). The continued strikes on Saudi Arabia's energy infrastructure have reduced the country's oil output by 600,000 barrels a day and decreased the throughput of the East-West pipeline by 700,000 barrels per day (Shan & Meredith, 2026).

Before the ceasefire was announced, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia, reportedly urged President Trump to continue operations with Iran as he sees this as a "historic opportunity" to remake the Middle East (Barnes et al., 2026). However, the country did welcome the announcement of a two-week ceasefire, expressing hope for a "permanent agreement" emphasizing the need to keep the Strait open (NBC News, 2026).

The burden-sharing case is not just about who benefits the most, but also a mutual recognition of shared interests in a stable Middle East. By striking the Gulf states, Iran has served as a catalyst for the paradigm shift that was already underway. These nations are continuing to signal their willingness to play a larger role, and this presents an opportunity for a new security architecture around the Strait.

The capabilities of these Gulf partners have also improved. Over the past decade, the Gulf states have taken on naval modernization and expansion. This has manifested in an addition of more than 100 new vessels, leadership in multinational maritime security partnerships, and adaptive naval strategies (Thievon, 2023).

The trend is already visible in multinational command structures. In August 2025, Saudi Arabia assumed command of the Combined Task Force 150, which is a multinational security partnership operating from Bahrain (CENTCOM, 2025). This demonstrates how Gulf partners are already taking initiative in their maritime security and provides a framework on which future coalitions can be based.

General military expenditures point in the same direction. In 2024, the estimated total for the Middle East was $243 billion, a 15% increase from the previous year, led by Saudi Arabia's $80.3 billion (SIPRI, 2025). These figures do not prove that regional states can immediately replace the United States, but they do illustrate the capacity for these countries to play a more significant role.

The Strait is not just a Gulf problem; it is a chokepoint that affects external importers and maritime powers that are far more dependent on the waterway than the United States. Therefore, contributions should not only be expected from Gulf states, but also from Asian and European partners, who rely on the smooth passage of goods and commodities through the Strait for imports. On March 15, 2026, President Trump called on several countries to help secure the Strait, citing these nations' reliance on oil from the Gulf relative to the U.S., as justification for their responsibility to protect it (Gebeily et al., 2026).

For these reasons, the United States should build on the new opportunities created by the operational successes of Epic Fury to encourage U.S. Gulf partners and other global stakeholders to work together towards maintaining the security of the Strait.

Conclusion

For decades, the United States has been the main guardian of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, while the Iranian regime has been the primary cause of disruption. However, the responsibility undertaken by the U.S. has been disproportional to its reliance on the Strait, as the goods flowing through the waterway constitute a relatively minor share of U.S. imports. In comparison, other countries rely significantly on the Strait – a contrast that has manifested in greater economic losses by the rest of the world in this most recent conflict.

Operation Epic Fury served as an opportunity to address the threat posed by Iran while also rethinking the division of responsibilities for the long-term protection of the Strait itself. The United States can help create the conditions for maritime security without permanently serving as the principal guarantor of a trade route on which others depend far more heavily. This model of burden sharing is emblematic of an America First worldview, as it focuses primarily on ensuring that the nations with the greatest stakes—many of whom have strong economies and substantial military capabilities—rise to the occasion and carry a larger share of the burden for defending their interests and regions.

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