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The Strait of Hormuz Ceasefire: Is Pakistan's Diplomatic Maneuver still intact?

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The Pakistan-brokered ceasefire in the Strait of Hormuz was always more than a military pause. It represented an ambitious diplomatic attempt to prevent a regional war from escalating into a global economic catastrophe. For a brief period, it demonstrated that middle powers can still create space for dialogue even when great powers appear locked in confrontation. However, events following the NATO Summit in Ankara have raised a fundamental question: was the ceasefire merely an operational pause, or has it now collapsed beyond repair?

President Donald Trump's declaration in Ankara that "the ceasefire is over" was more than a rhetorical flourish. It was accompanied by a resumption of military operations that effectively nullified the memorandum of understanding painstakingly negotiated only weeks earlier. Following Iranian attacks on commercial tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, US Central Command launched strikes against Iranian military facilities in Bandar Abbas and Bushehr. Iran responded with missile attacks against American military installations in Bahrain and Kuwait, signalling that both sides had returned to controlled but active hostilities.

At first glance, these developments suggest that the ceasefire has failed. Yet the reality is more complicated.

A Ceasefire Designed to Buy Time

The original Pakistan-brokered agreement was never intended to be a comprehensive peace settlement. It was conceived as a crisis-management mechanism whose principal objective was to prevent unrestricted escalation while keeping the world's most important energy corridor open.

Nearly one-fifth of global seaborne oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz. Any prolonged disruption immediately affects energy prices, insurance premiums, shipping schedules and global inflation. Consequently, the ceasefire was less about resolving American-Iranian differences than about insulating the international economy from the consequences of their confrontation.

Measured against this limited objective, the agreement initially succeeded. Commercial shipping resumed cautiously, insurance markets stabilized, and fears of a wider regional war receded. Pakistan earned considerable diplomatic credit by providing both Washington and Tehran with politically acceptable off-ramps.

The problem was that the ceasefire addressed symptoms rather than causes.

The Structural Weaknesses

The truce rested on three fragile assumptions.

First, both Washington and Tehran viewed

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the ceasefire as temporary rather than transformational. Neither side abandoned its strategic objectives. The United States continued demanding unrestricted freedom of navigation and pressure on Iran's regional military infrastructure. Iran, meanwhile, viewed control over the Strait as one of its few effective deterrent instruments against Western military and economic pressure.

Second, there existed no robust verification mechanism. Unlike traditional ceasefires monitored by international observers, maritime incidents, drone attacks and proxy operations could quickly generate accusations and retaliation without independent confirmation.

Third, domestic political pressures in both capitals reduced room for compromise. For President Trump, appearing weak before NATO allies and American voters carried significant political costs. For Tehran, especially after sustaining military losses, restraint risked being interpreted internally as surrender.

These structural weaknesses meant that even a relatively minor maritime incident could unravel the agreement.

Ankara Changed the Political Narrative

The NATO Summit fundamentally altered the diplomatic environment. President Trump's public declaration that the ceasefire was finished transformed what might have remained a temporary operational breakdown into a political statement of strategic intent. Publicly announcing the end of a ceasefire reduces diplomatic flexibility because any subsequent compromise can be portrayed as a reversal.

Yet Trump's remarks should also be viewed through the lens of negotiation strategy. Throughout his political career, Trump has frequently employed maximalist public statements to increase bargaining leverage before entering renewed negotiations. Declaring a ceasefire "over" does not necessarily preclude reopening talks. Instead, it may serve to pressure Iran into accepting stricter conditions.

Indeed, this interpretation is supported by reports that a fresh two-week conditional ceasefire is now under discussion in Islamabad.

Pakistan Still Holds Diplomatic Relevance

Interestingly, the collapse of the first ceasefire may increase rather than diminish Pakistan's diplomatic importance. Neither Washington nor Tehran currently trusts each other sufficiently to negotiate directly without an intermediary.

Pakistan possesses several unique advantages. It maintains functional relations with both countries. It commands credibility within much of the Islamic world while preserving working strategic ties with the United States. Unlike many regional actors, Pakistan is not perceived as seeking territorial or ideological gains from the conflict. Moreover, Pakistan has consistently framed its mediation around maritime security and economic stability rather than ideological alignment. This neutrality remains its greatest diplomatic asset. Therefore, the reported proposal for new talks in Islamabad demonstrates that despite the apparent collapse of the original arrangement, neither side has completely abandoned diplomacy.

Europe Signals the Limits of NATO

Equally significant was NATO's cautious response in Ankara. Although member states agreed to contribute minesweeping assets to protect maritime navigation, most European governments resisted direct military involvement against Iran. This reflects a broader strategic calculation. European economies depend heavily on uninterrupted Gulf energy supplies, but they remain reluctant to become participants in another prolonged Middle Eastern conflict.

This limited commitment effectively places greater responsibility on regional diplomacy rather than military coalitions. That, once again, creates space for mediators like Pakistan

Can the Ceasefire Be Revived?

The answer depends on whether both parties can separate military signalling from

economic interests. The United States insists upon the complete and secure reopening of the Strait of Hormuz as a precondition for any renewed pause in fighting. Iran, meanwhile, seeks assurances that negotiations will not simply provide cover for renewed military pressure or intensified sanctions.

These positions are not irreconcilable, but they require sustained diplomacy backed by credible guarantees. Pakistan can facilitate dialogue, but it cannot impose trust.

Conclusion

The Pakistan-brokered ceasefire is neither fully alive nor completely dead. Operationally, it has collapsed. Military exchanges have resumed, sanctions have returned, and both Washington and Tehran are once again using force to shape political outcomes. Diplomatically, however, the process remains open. The reported preparations

for renewed talks in Islamabad indicate that both adversaries still recognize the immense costs of unrestricted escalation.

The real test of Pakistan's mediation was never whether it could permanently end one of the Middle East's most enduring rivalries. Rather, it was whether it could repeatedly create opportunities for de-escalation whenever conflict threatened global stability. In that respect, the ceasefire should not be judged solely by its temporary breakdown. Its lasting value lies in establishing Pakistan as a credible diplomatic bridge between two adversaries that continue to communicate most effectively when they are speaking through someone else.

Whether this bridge can withstand the renewed storms in the Gulf will determine not only the future of the Strait of Hormuz, but also the emerging role of middle powers in twenty-first century crisis diplomacy.

