



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on May 14, 2026

Joint Chiefs: War in Iran Benefits China, Shifts Global Balance of Power

The war against Iran has not only depleted American weapons stockpiles, but also given China a good look at U.S. military capability and strategy and the chance to portray the United States as an out-of-control superpower flailing away in another reckless imperial adventure in the Middle East.

That assessment appears in a confidential intelligence analysis [leaked to](#) *The Washington Post*. It says that China “is exploiting the war in Iran to maximize its advantage over the United States across military, economic, diplomatic and other fields,” said two officials in summarizing the report for the newspaper.

China is exploiting the war to cozy up to long-standing U.S. allies who need energy supplies and might fear that the U.S. now lacks the firepower to defend them.



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The Washington Post






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Exclusive: A confidential U.S. intelligence analysis details how China is exploiting the war in Iran to maximize its advantage over the United States across military, economic, diplomatic and other fields, said two U.S. officials who have read the report.



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 China gains major edge on U.S. amid Iran war, intelligence report finds

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Prepared for Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Dan Caine by the group's intelligence directorate, the report assessed China's response to the war in four ways, the [Post reported](#): "diplomatic, informational, military and economic."

China sold weapons to American allies in the Persian Gulf "as they struggled to defend their military bases and oil infrastructure from Iranian missile and drone attacks," the *Post* explained about the report:

Beijing has also assisted countries around the world struggling to meet their energy needs after the U.S.-Israeli attacks prompted Iran to close the Strait of Hormuz, a corridor for the transport of one-fifth of the world's oil and gas.

The war has also drained the U.S. of massive stocks of munitions that would be critical in a potential standoff with China over the fate of Taiwan, the report notes. The Iran conflict, which has resulted in the damage or destruction of U.S. military hardware and facilities throughout the Middle East, has allowed Beijing to observe how the U.S. fights wars and learn how to plan its own future operations.

The report notes that Beijing has incorporated popular criticisms of the war into its public messaging, labeling the conflict "illegal." China has long sought to undermine the image of



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the U.S. as a responsible steward of the rules-based international order, and it views the Iran conflict as emblematic of Washington's cavalier approach to military hostilities.

Not surprisingly, spokesmen for President Donald Trump's administration say the report is much ado about nothing. Any suggestion that the United States is no longer the world's dominant superpower is "fundamentally false," Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell told the newspaper. As well, America "decimated the Iranian regime's military capabilities in 38 short days and is now strangling what's left of their economy with one of the most successful naval blockades in history," White House spokesman [Olivia Wales told](#) the newspaper:

The United States military is the greatest fighting force on the globe with unmatched power on display for the entire world to see.

China Steps In to Help U.S. Allies

Reacting to the report, national security experts told the *Post* that the war has shifted the global balance of power to China. Jacob Stokes, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, said "the war in Iran is massively improving China's geopolitical position."

While President Trump has claimed that China relies on Gulf oil and a closed Strait of Hormuz harms the country, "the intelligence report notes that China has weathered the shortages because of its development of renewable energy and its vast oil reserves," the [Post continued](#):

"China is the second-most-insulated country in the world to the energy crisis, after only the United States," said Ryan Hass, a China expert at the Brookings Institution.

That is allowing Beijing to win friends abroad, Hass said.

"China is presenting itself as a solutions provider in providing access to jet fuel and other products that are in short supply as a bridge for the short term," he said.

Since the war started, Beijing has reached out to Thailand, Australia, the Philippines and other countries to help them manage their energy needs and is offering access to Chinese-produced green energy technology as a longer-term solution.

While previous administrations have attempted to help allies during energy crises, the Trump administration has not. So China, Hass told the *Post*, is stepping in to help.

Weapons Supply Low

A major concern for U.S. military officials is the expenditure of billions of dollars of munitions. During the first 48 hours of the war, the [military expended](#) almost \$6 billion of munitions. The war has now cost American taxpayers almost \$81 billion, the [Iran War Cost Tracker reports](#). Daily price tag: [\\$1 billion](#).



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The Pentagon burned through \$5.6 billion worth of munitions in the first two days of its Iran assault, according to U.S. officials, alarming some on Capitol Hill over how quickly the military has depleted scarce supplies of America's most advanced weaponry. [Show more](#)



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 Early Iran strikes cost \$5.6 billion in munitions, Pentagon estimates

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“The U.S. has expended huge numbers of missiles, bombs and interceptors, many of which are expensive and require a long time to produce, to defend Israel and Gulf allies from Iranian counterattacks and destroy Tehran’s arsenal,” the [Post observed](#).

Important munitions such as Tomahawk missiles, Patriot air-defense batteries, and high-altitude interceptors are running low, which “has left Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and other allies worried about U.S. military readiness and Washington’s ability to intervene in the event of a Chinese attack,” [according to the paper](#).

Stokes said the expenditure invites speculation about how rapidly the defense industry can resupply those munitions.

The war is a propaganda bonanza for China. “China has an opening to portray the United States as an aggressive, unilateralist power in decline,” Stokes said, “because Washington cannot stop itself from getting embroiled in bloody and costly Middle East wars.”



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