

## Proxy Wars Threaten Energy Security in the Indo-Pacific Amid Regional Turmoil in The Middle East

By  
Shad Sherko

*Published: June 30, 2026*

Persistent geopolitical instability surrounding the Strait of Hormuz has [renewed the debate](#) about Indo-Pacific energy security and the need to diversify supply sources. However, diversification alone may not eliminate strategic vulnerability, even with alternative suppliers beyond the Gulf for the Indo-Pacific region, because the challenge lies not only in where energy is sourced but also in the maritime networks through which it travels.

Recent warnings from the Australian Food and Grocery Council [highlight](#) how geopolitical instability in the Middle East is already contributing to broader cost pressures across Australia's supply chains, especially through increasing fuel and logistics costs, as an example of a region at the heart of the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific's capacity to decrease its reliance on the Strait of Hormuz is limited not by geography but by a broader network of contested maritime chokepoints influenced by proxy conflicts, especially the Bab el-Mandeb corridor connecting the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. In the event of a disruption in Hormuz, states such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand could theoretically turn to [alternative suppliers](#) in the Americas, Africa, or the Atlantic basin.

However, diversifying suppliers does not necessarily reduce risk. Many of these alternative supply chains still rely on the same vulnerable maritime routes, exposing them to similar transportation and security dangers. For example, Bab Al-Mandeb (Red Sea gateway) continues to face significant [disruptions](#) from Yemen-based Houthi attacks. Meanwhile, Somali pirates have [become more active](#) due to the current regional crisis involving Iran, which raises risk premiums and causes delays in the Gulf of Aden.

As a result, proxy warfare, rather than a formal state blockade, may also limit Indo-Pacific states' ability to rely on alternative supplies. For example, non-state actors and proxy forces (especially in Yemen), along with [regional instability](#), can disrupt the straits without owning them. Under these conditions, proxies can exert [strategic influence](#) over maritime corridors without officially controlling them.

This indicates a shift in the international order where effective control of maritime corridors no longer requires sovereign ownership; disruption capability alone can achieve similar strategic results. Meanwhile, strategic geography links Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb together; disruption in one can increase pressure on the other.

Proxy maritime actors like Yemen-based Houthis disrupt the Red Sea, while Somali piracy networks remain a persistent risk that could increase costs and uncertainty for shipping transiting the Gulf of Aden. As a result, energy security diversification in the Indo-Pacific region is limited not by a lack of alternative suppliers but by the concentration of global maritime energy flows at

politically contested chokepoints. Therefore, these contested chokepoints are truly a security dilemma for the Indo-Pacific's states.

The growing capacity of proxy actors and non-state groups to disrupt these corridors transforms maritime geography into a web of vulnerabilities, undermining the effectiveness of traditional diversification strategies. Therefore, the Indo-Pacific's energy security strategy must consider proxy-driven disruptions within maritime chokepoint networks, rather than relying solely on supplier diversification as a resilience measure.

To address this risk, the Australian Defense Force has participated in coalition-based maritime security operations in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. However, its role has remained limited to multilateral frameworks rather than unilateral action. The escalating instability linked to Iran-related regional tensions and the widening insecurity from the Middle East to the Horn of Africa may increasingly pressure Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand to reassess their strategic posture toward key maritime chokepoints, including the scope, depth, capacity, and autonomy of their future engagement.

This is especially significant as Iran continues to violate the current ceasefire with the U.S. and is eyeing Bab el-Mandeb, the only chokepoint after Hormuz that connects Asia, the Middle East, and Europe with the purpose of inflicting damage on the global economy and achieve a more robust position in its negotiations with Washington.

Unlike Australia and Thailand, countries like Japan and South Korea are highly vulnerable to these threats because they are consistently among the top liquid natural gas and crude oil importers worldwide. This has led Seoul and Tokyo to sign a strategic agreement to strengthen energy cooperation despite longstanding historical disputes.

A collective security action may be necessary if Indo-Pacific countries are to ensure energy security and strengthen domestic resilience amid rising geopolitical instability and the growing prevalence of regionally based asymmetric warfare. State and non-state actors increasingly employ coercion, sabotage, proxy forces, and physical attacks against critical supply lines to undermine political stability and disrupt economic activity. Because global and regional energy markets, maritime trade routes, and supply chains are highly interconnected, disruptions in or around a single country can cascade across the broader region. Consequently, Indo-Pacific nations have a shared interest in strengthening collective maritime security. By working together to deter threats, reduce vulnerabilities, and secure access to vital energy resources, regional states can enhance their ability to withstand external shocks and preserve the economic and social stability upon which long-term resilience depends.

*Shad Sherko is an independent journalist and security analyst specializing in Middle Eastern defense policy, regional proxy dynamics, and cross-border insurgencies. His work focuses on contemporary security threats across the Middle East and beyond. The views of the author are his own.*