

# How a Distant War Affected Plastic Bags

When most people think about war in a distant land, they imagine soldiers and explosions but not empty shelves at their local stores. However, the war between the U.S. and Iran that broke out in late February 2026 has created an unexpected shortage of plastic bags in Taiwan, South Korea, and other parts of Asia. The reason is simple: most plastic products are made from petrochemicals. When the conflict threatened the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway carrying one-fifth of the world's oil and natural gas, energy prices shot up. Higher oil prices mean higher costs for making everything from plastic bags to disposable cups.

By late March, the impact had moved from the news into people's everyday lives. In Taiwan, plastic bags at many stores were selling out fast. Some food stalls stopped offering free plastic bags, and there were reports of market vendors' bags being stolen. In South Korea, the government limited how many garbage bags each person could buy. This "plastic bag panic" was a sign of a supply chain breakdown. Even if the war ends soon, it will take time for supply



chains to recover, and higher prices may continue for months or even years.

However, this crisis may also be a turning point. Environmental groups point out that rising plastic prices could be the push society needs to reduce its dependence on single-use plastics. People can take this chance to make it a habit to bring their own reusable bags and utensils. This could not only address the shortage but also help protect the environment. Sometimes, a crisis is what it takes to build better habits for the future.