

3. US-ISRAEL-IRAN WAR – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Following the launch of Operation Epic Fury (U.S.) and Operation Roaring Lion (Israel), the geopolitical landscape has shifted fundamentally with the confirmed death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The ongoing escalation involving Iran, the United States, and Israel represents one of the most serious security crises in West Asia in recent decades.

Missile and drone attacks targeting U.S. military facilities in Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, and Jordan indicate a shift from indirect proxy confrontation to more direct military engagement. The crisis has been further intensified by Iran's threats to disrupt shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy chokepoint.

1. Immediate Developments in the Conflict

1. Iran's Retaliatory Attacks

- Iran launched missile and drone strikes targeting U.S. military facilities in Gulf countries such as Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, and Jordan.
- These bases host U.S. military assets that support operations in the Middle East and provide regional security guarantees.

2. Closure Threat to the Strait of Hormuz

- Iran has threatened and targeted commercial tankers in the Strait of Hormuz.
- Shipping traffic has reportedly declined due to security risks and rising insurance costs.
- The strait is one of the most critical maritime chokepoints for global energy supply.

3. Escalation from Proxy War to Direct Confrontation

- Earlier conflicts were largely fought through proxies such as militias and armed groups across the region.
- The current phase reflects a transition toward direct interstate confrontation, raising fears of a wider regional war.

2. Background of the Current Escalation

1. Long-standing Hostility and Ideological Rivalry

- The rivalry dates back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, which overthrew the U.S.-backed Shah and established an Islamic Republic.
- Since then, Iran has adopted a strong anti-West and anti-Israel ideological posture.
- The United States imposed extensive economic sanctions and designated Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism due to its support for militant groups.
- Diplomatic relations between the two countries have remained severed for decades.

2. Collapse of the Nuclear Deal (JCPOA)

- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed in 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 (US, UK, France, Russia, China, Germany).
- The agreement restricted Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.
- In 2018, the United States withdrew from the JCPOA, initiating a "maximum pressure" campaign through renewed sanctions.
- Iran subsequently increased uranium enrichment levels, expanded nuclear facilities, and reduced compliance with international monitoring.
- Israel and the United States argue that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an existential threat, intensifying regional tensions.

3. The "Gray Zone" and Proxy Warfare

- For many years, the conflict between Iran, Israel, and the United States occurred in the "gray zone", meaning covert or indirect confrontation without full-scale war.
- Iran expanded its regional influence through the "Axis of Resistance", a network of allied non-state actors.

Major groups include:

1. Hamas in Gaza
2. Hezbollah in Lebanon
3. Houthis in Yemen
4. Various Shia militias in Iraq and Syria

- These groups have conducted attacks on Israeli and Western interests, while Israel has carried out airstrikes against Iranian positions in Syria.
- This proxy network allows Iran to project power without engaging in direct conventional warfare.

3. Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

- The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints.
- It is located between Iran and Oman, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- Approximately 20–30% of global oil trade passes through this narrow waterway.

Major exporters using this route include:

1. Saudi Arabia
2. Iraq
3. Kuwait
4. UAE
5. Iran

- Any disruption in this passage can immediately affect global energy markets.

4. Global Implications of the Conflict

1. Energy Shock and Inflation

- Disruptions to oil shipping could lead to a sharp increase in global oil prices.
- Higher crude prices increase transportation costs, manufacturing costs, and electricity tariffs.
- This may trigger global inflationary pressures.
- Economists warn of stagflation, where economic growth slows while inflation rises.

2. Global Supply Chain Disruptions

The Middle East is a major supplier of several critical commodities.

Affected sectors include:

1. Oil and LNG
 - Disruptions could destabilise global energy markets.
2. Fertilizers
 - Many Gulf countries export ammonia and urea used in agriculture.
3. Petrochemicals
 - Plastic, chemical, and industrial manufacturing industries may face shortages.
4. Shipping and Freight
 - Shipping routes may be diverted around Africa, increasing travel time and logistics costs.

5. Role of Major Global Powers

China

- China is the largest importer of Iranian oil.
- Beijing may attempt to mediate the conflict while ensuring continued energy access.

Russia

- Russia could benefit from higher global oil prices.
- Increased energy revenues may strengthen Russia's geopolitical position.

United States

- The U.S. maintains extensive military presence across Gulf bases to secure maritime routes and protect allies.

6. Impact on India

1. Energy Security Risks

- India imports around 85% of its crude oil requirements.
- Rising oil prices could lead to higher fuel prices, inflationary pressures, and stress on India's fiscal balance.
- Shipping insurance premiums and war-risk surcharges may increase import costs.

2. Safety of the Indian Diaspora

- Around 8–9 million Indians live in Gulf countries, making it one of the largest expatriate populations.
- Escalation could require large-scale evacuation operations.

Past evacuation missions include:

1. Operation Raahat (Yemen, 2015)
 2. Operation Ganga (Ukraine, 2022)
- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) is monitoring the situation.

3. Trade Disruptions

Exports affected:

1. Agricultural products
2. Textiles
3. Engineering goods

Imports affected:

1. Fertilizers
2. Petrochemicals
3. Energy resources

- Maritime insecurity could delay shipments and increase freight costs.

4. Strategic Connectivity Projects at Risk

1. Chabahar Port (Iran)
 - Provides India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia while bypassing Pakistan.
 2. I2U2 Grouping
 - Strategic partnership between India, Israel, UAE, and the United States focusing on technology and infrastructure.
 3. India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC)
 - A proposed trade corridor linking India with Europe via the Middle East.
 4. India's Gulf Partnerships
 - Strong economic relations with UAE and Saudi Arabia.
- Escalation may complicate India's balancing diplomacy among regional actors.

7. Way Forward for India

1. Diversification of Energy Sources

- Expand crude imports from:
 1. Africa (Nigeria, Angola)
 2. Latin America (Brazil, Venezuela)
 3. United States
 - Increase investments in renewable energy and green hydrogen.

2. Strengthening Strategic Petroleum Reserves

- India has established Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to store emergency crude supplies.
- Expanding reserve capacity can provide a buffer during supply shocks.

3. Diplomatic Engagement

- Maintain balanced diplomacy with:
 1. Iran
 2. Israel
 3. Gulf countries
 4. United States
- Promote dialogue and de-escalation through international forums.

4. Enhancing Maritime Security

- Strengthen naval surveillance in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean Region.
- Protect Indian shipping lanes through naval deployments and joint patrols.

5. Diaspora Protection

- Prepare evacuation contingency plans for Indians in conflict zones.
- Strengthen coordination between embassies, airlines, and naval forces.

6. Multilateral Conflict Resolution

India can advocate peace through forums such as:

1. United Nations
 2. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)
 3. BRICS
- Diplomatic mediation and ceasefire negotiations remain critical to preventing further escalation.

8. West Asia and Its Significance in Global Politics

Geographic Scope

West Asia (Middle East) includes countries such as:

1. Armenia
 2. Azerbaijan
 3. Bahrain
 4. Cyprus
 5. Georgia
 6. Iraq
 7. Israel
 8. Jordan
 9. Kuwait
 10. Lebanon
 11. Iran
 12. Oman
 13. Palestine
 14. Qatar
 15. Saudi Arabia
 16. Syria
 17. Turkey
 18. UAE
 19. Yemen
- The region lies at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Strategic Importance

1. Energy Resources

- West Asia holds some of the largest oil and natural gas reserves in the world.
- Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and UAE dominate global energy markets.

2. Strategic Maritime Chokepoints

Key chokepoints include:

1. Strait of Hormuz
 2. Bab-el-Mandeb Strait
 3. Suez Canal
- Disruptions in these routes can severely affect global trade and energy flows.

3. Religious Significance

- Mecca and Medina – Islam
- Jerusalem – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

- Religious tensions often intersect with political conflicts.

4. Geostrategic Location

- West Asia connects Asia, Africa, and Europe, making it a hub for trade routes, military deployments, and strategic alliances.

5. Major Power Competition

External powers competing for influence include:

1. United States – military alliances and security partnerships
2. Russia – strategic military presence and energy diplomacy
3. China – economic investments and energy trade.

Conclusion

West Asia is undergoing a profound geopolitical transformation marked by strategic competition, proxy conflicts, and shifting alliances. The current escalation involving Iran, Israel, and the United States has serious implications for global energy markets, supply chains, and international security. For India, maintaining strategic balance, energy security, and diaspora safety will remain central priorities as the crisis unfolds.

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