



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**ESCALATION SPIRAL: ON THE
ISRAEL-IRAN CONFLICT**

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Context

- The recent **Israel and Iran conflict** has plunged West Asia into its most dangerous crisis that has **far-reaching geopolitical and humanitarian consequences** since the Arab-Israeli War 1973.

Historical Background: Israel & Iran

- Strategic Partnership (1948–1979):**
 - Israel was founded in 1948, Iran was one of the few Muslim-majority countries to **maintain informal ties** with it.
 - Both shared strategic interests, particularly in **countering Arab nationalism and Soviet influence**.
 - It led to extensive cooperation in intelligence, trade, and military affairs, often under the framework of **Israel's 'Periphery Doctrine'**, which sought **alliances with non-Arab states** like Iran and Turkey.
- Islamic Revolution (1979–1990s):**
 - The **Iranian Revolution (1979)** led by **Ayatollah Khomeini**, severed all ties with Israel and branded it the **'Zionist Regime'**.
 - Iran adopted an **anti-Israel stance**, supporting **Palestinian resistance movements** and referring to **Israel as the 'Little Satan'** alongside the **US, the 'Great Satan'**.
- Proxy Conflict and Nuclear Tensions (1990s–2010s):**
 - Tensions escalated as **Iran supported groups like Hezbollah and Hamas**, while **Israel viewed Iran's nuclear ambitions** as an existential threat.
 - The two countries engaged in cyber warfare, assassinations, and indirect military confrontations, particularly in **Syria and Lebanon**.



- Open Hostility (2020s–Present):**
 - The relationship has deteriorated **into direct conflict**, with missile strikes, sabotage operations, and assassinations on both sides.
 - Recently, Israel launched **Operation Rising Lion**, targeting over 170 sites across Iran, including **nuclear facilities at Natanz and Khondab**.
 - The strikes killed several high-ranking Iranian officials and scientists, **prompting Iran to respond** with a barrage of **over 200 ballistic missiles and 100 drones** aimed at Israeli cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Global Impacts After Deepening Israel-Iran Conflict

- **Energy Markets in Turmoil:** With Iran's oil facilities targeted and the **Strait of Hormuz—a vital chokepoint for nearly 20% of global oil**—under threat, **Brent crude** has **surged over 6%** and **West Texas Intermediate** by more than 5%.
- **Inflation and Economic Strain:** Countries heavily reliant on imported oil face rising fuel costs, **inflationary pressure**, and **potential balance-of-payment issues**.
 - ♦ Countries which don't import Iranian oil directly, are affected due to their **fuel prices being pegged to global benchmarks**.
- **Shipping and Trade Disruptions:** If Iran retaliates by targeting tankers or closing the Strait of Hormuz, global shipping lanes could be severely disrupted, affecting container traffic.
- **Diplomatic Fallout and Strategic Realignments:** The conflict has derailed U.S.-Iran nuclear talks.
 - ♦ It raises the risk of US military involvement, especially if American bases in the Gulf are attacked.
 - ♦ Meanwhile, global powers like Russia and China are recalibrating their positions, potentially reshaping alliances.

Implications For India

- **Energy Security and Economic Strain:** India imports over 80% of its crude oil, much of it via the **Strait of Hormuz**.
 - ♦ Past Gulf tensions have shown how even short-term instability can rattle India's energy markets.
- **Trade Disruptions:**
 - ♦ **Basmati Rice Exports:** Iran is a major buyer of Indian Basmati rice. The conflict has already disrupted shipments, affecting exporters in Punjab and Haryana.
 - ♦ **Strategic Goods:** Trade in fertilizers, dry fruits, and urea—key imports from Iran—may be affected by sanctions or logistical hurdles.
- **Connectivity Projects at Risk:** India's ambitious **Chabahar Port**, and **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, which passes through Iran, faces delays and uncertainty.
 - ♦ It **undermines India's efforts** to diversify trade routes away from **China-backed corridors**.
- **Diplomatic Balancing Act:** India has taken a **neutral stance**, urging both sides to de-escalate and resolve issues through diplomacy.
 - ♦ **India distanced itself from a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) statement** condemning Israel, emphasizing its independent position and interest in regional stability.
 - ♦ The **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** emphasized that *'existing channels of dialogue and diplomacy should be utilised to work towards a de-escalation of the situation and resolving underlying issues'*.
- **Evacuation and Citizen Safety:** India launched **Operation Sindhu** to evacuate its nationals from conflict zones, including students and workers transiting through Armenia.
 - ♦ It underscores the human dimension of the crisis for India.

Way Forward for the Israel-Iran Conflict

- **Rebuilding Diplomatic Channels:** The derailment of **US-Iran nuclear talks** following Israel's airstrikes have left a **political vacuum**.
 - ♦ There is a need for the **US, Russia, and the European Union** to **re-engage both parties** and restore dialogue mechanisms that were previously in place under the **JCPOA framework**.
- **Regional Mediation and Confidence-Building:** Regional actors like **India, Turkey, and Qatar** could play a constructive role in mediation.
 - ♦ India, in particular, with its **historical ties to both nations** and its neutral stance, is well-positioned to **facilitate backchannel diplomacy**.

- ♦ There is also a need for **confidence-building measures**, such as mutual ceasefire agreements and third-party monitoring of sensitive sites.
- **Addressing Domestic Political Pressures:** There is a need for international diplomacy to account for **internal dynamics of Israel and Iran**, offering off-ramps that allow **both to de-escalate** without appearing weak.
- ♦ **In Israel**, the Prime Minister faces internal dissent and coalition instability, while in **Iran**, hardliners are leveraging the crisis to consolidate power.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] How has the ongoing Israel-Iran conflict challenged India's strategic autonomy? What ways can India balance its diplomatic commitments amid escalating tensions in West Asia?

