



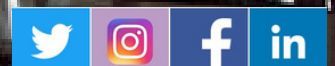
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# ONGOING ISRAEL-IRAN CONFLICT : CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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### Introduction

Till April 1 Israeli attack on the Iran Consulate at Damascus, Iran was fighting with Israel using proxies. Within 13 days of the attack, Iran has now entered the conflict directly. This has led the West Asian region into a wider conflagration, with Gaza already burning under continued attack by Israel. On 1 April 2024, an airstrike by Israel destroyed Iran's consulate building in Damascus, Syria, resulting in the deaths of seven Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officials, including top commanders. In retaliation, Iran launched unprecedented wave of strikes towards Israel on 13 April, which lasted approximately five hours. Iran launched more than 185 explosive drones, fired around 36 cruise missiles and around 110 Surface to Surface Missiles. Most of them were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome Air defence system, along with fighter jets of Israel, US, UK and Jordan.<sup>1</sup>

The target was Nevatim Air Base located in the Negev desert, which is a primary airbase housing Israel's F-35 fighter jets. It was a key target due to its strategic importance in Israel's air defence and is believed the base which was instrumental in launching the attack on Iranian Consulate. However, Israeli air defence systems managed to intercept the majority of these attacks, minimizing potential casualties and damage.

In response to the Iran's strike, Israel retaliation is being seen with anticipation and bated breath. US president, Joe Biden has even warned his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu that in case of a counter-attack by Israel, US will not take part and will not support the offensive. There are calls from all quarters to observe restraint and Israel have been advised to avoid dragging the issue to prevent further escalation

and step away from ‘**the edge of the cliff**’ of escalation in the Middle East. Any further escalation between the arch West Asia foes would widen the conflict in the region. It is widely accepted that with the recent attack by Iran on Israel, Iran has further stepped towards the destabilisation of the region and risk provoking an uncontrollable regional escalation, which should be avoided at all cost. Iran needs to seriously exercise restraint and cease any further attacks.

### **Iran’s Military Might vs Israel Army**

A comparison of the military might of the two west Asian countries presently embroiled in a conflict clearly brings out the fact that Iran’s military is stronger and larger in number as compared to Israel. However, it lags behind the Israel Army in terms of sophisticated weaponry and the high quality of trained personnel possessed by Israeli Army. Iran has an Army of 5,80,000 and around two lakh trained reserve personnel which form part of both the Army and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards also operate the Quds Force, which is an elite force in charge of training and arming the huge network of proxy militias spread across the West Asia which include the Hamas in Gaza presently involved in a murky conflict with Israel since 07 October 2023, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen.<sup>2</sup>

Although Iran has superiority in numbers, it lacks the same in the sophistication and vintage of its arsenal. The tanks and armoured vehicles held with the Iranian Army are of World War II era and most of them are out of operation due to lack of spare parts to replace the faulty ones. Similarly, its aircrafts and naval vessels are of 1940-80 vintage and are mostly grounded.

Iran has achieved indigenisation in manufacture of missiles and drones, as the priority of Iranian Government is defence production. This has resulted in a large inventory of drones, with ranges up to 2500 km, held with the Iranian Army. The drones have low flying capability to evade enemy radars which helps them to go undetected. In terms of missile production, Iran has the largest stockpile of ballistic missiles in West Asia, which have ranges upto 2000 km and has the ability to hit any target in the region. To top it all, Iran’s military bases and arsenal storage facilities are widely dispersed, in heavily fortified and underground facilities, with a formidable air defence to locate and destroy any enemy aircrafts in vicinity.

The supremacy of Israeli Air defence can be clearly seen in the attack by Iran on Israel, which involved firing more than 300 missiles and drones, out of which most were shot down by Israel’s Iron Dome defence system, thus causing only modest damage in Israel. The Iron Dome System has been designed to shot down short-range rockets and has a success rate of over 90 %.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Israel possesses sophisticated Air defence systems as follows: -

- **Patriot Missile Defence System.** It is one of the oldest systems possessed by Israeli Army which was first used during the Gulf war in 1991 to intercept the Scud missiles fired by Iraq.
- **Arrow Missile Defence System.** It intercepts long-range missile and is used outside the atmosphere.
- **David’s Sling Missile Defence System.** It intercepts medium range missiles.

### **Response of USA & UK to the Ongoing Iran-Israel Conflict**

During the recent tensions between Israel and Iran, the United States and the United Kingdom played instrumental roles in supporting Israel's defence against Iranian drone and missile attacks. U.S. forces actively engaged Iranian drones over Jordan, Iraq, and Syria as part of their steadfast commitment to Israel's security. This included intercepting drones that threatened Israeli territory, highlighting the ongoing American military support in the region. Simultaneously, the Royal Air Force (RAF) conducted operations from bases in Cyprus, primarily focusing on maintaining air security over the region and intercepting any Iranian drones that entered their operational area. This effort was coordinated while continuing RAF's regular missions against the Islamic State, ensuring comprehensive coverage and support. In addition, Jordanian forces were reported to have engaged and neutralized numerous Iranian drones traversing through northern and central Jordan, further preventing potential attacks on Israel.

The United States' approach to the escalating situation has been multifaceted. President Joe Biden has openly expressed strong support for Israel, affirming his and the nation's stance, along with a pledge to uphold the security commitments to Israel. While the U.S. maintains support for Israel, there is also a pronounced caution to prevent further escalation into a broader regional conflict. U.S. diplomats have been actively working to mediate the tensions, urging Iran to restrain its military actions and avoiding direct military confrontation between the U.S. and Iran.<sup>4</sup>

### **Russia's Role in the Israel-Iran Tensions**

Russia's stance in the escalating tensions between Israel and Iran is complex, reflecting its broader strategic interests in the region and its relationships with both countries. Over recent years, especially following the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has significantly strengthened its ties with Iran, enhancing both defence and economic collaborations. This relationship has positioned Iran as a pivotal military supplier to Russia, notably in the realms of Unmanned Aerial Systems (Drones), which Iran supplied to Russia and have been deployed in various military operations, against Ukraine. In addition, Iran has provided Russia with precision-guided weapons, helping alleviate shortages in the Russian arsenal. This support has cemented a closer bond between Moscow and Tehran, particularly as both face international sanctions and geopolitical isolation.

In essence, Russia's strategic decisions and alliances in the context of the Israel-Iran conflict are crucial and continue to have profound implications for regional dynamics and broader global power structures. The evolving relationship between Russia and Iran is a critical element in understanding the current and future landscape of Middle Eastern geopolitics.

### **Response of the Arab Countries**

The escalating tensions between Iran and Israel have elicited significant responses from various Arab nations, each navigating the complex geopolitical landscape differently:

- **Gulf States' Caution to the US.** Countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, and Kuwait have expressed concerns about the use of American military bases within their territories for launching strikes against Iran. These Gulf states have taken steps to limit the potential use of their territories and airspace for US-led retaliatory actions against Iran, aiming to avoid entanglement in a broader conflict.

- **Qatar's Diplomatic Role.** Qatar has been proactive in trying to mediate the conflict, urging Iran to show restraint. Given its unique diplomatic relations, Qatar plays a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue and potentially easing tensions between the conflicting parties.
- **Iran's Warning to Arab Nations.** Iran's Defense Minister, Brig. Gen. Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, has issued warnings to any nation that might assist Israel in carrying out attacks against Iranian targets. He emphasized that such cooperation would prompt a decisive response from Iran, signaling the high stakes of regional involvement.
- **UAE's Restrictions.** The UAE has taken a cautious approach by increasingly restricting the use of its military facilities for launching operations against Iranian proxies. This reflects a broader trend among Arab nations seeking to limit their involvement in military conflicts between the US and Iran.
- **Closure of Airspace.** In response to the conflict, several Middle Eastern countries, including Lebanon, temporarily closed their airspace as a precautionary measure to ensure national security. Jordan and Iraq, which had also closed their airspace, have since reopened it.

Thus, Arab nations are carefully managing their roles and responses to the Iran- Israel tensions. Their strategies reflect a desire to maintain regional stability and security, while avoiding escalation into a wider conflict. Their actions underscore the delicate balance they must strike between regional alliances and their own national security interests.

## **Role of the UN**

UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed a strong condemnation of the recent Iranian attack on Israel, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and highlighting the risk of a devastating region-wide escalation. He emphasized the urgent need for both the West Asian nations to exercise maximum restraint to prevent a further deterioration of the situation. He also condemned the attack on Iran's diplomatic premises in Damascus, underscoring the importance of respecting international norms regarding the inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises.<sup>5</sup>

In response to the crisis, an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council was convened at the request of Israel. This meeting underscores the international community's recognition of the gravity of the situation and the critical need for collective action to maintain regional stability.

The Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations articulated Iran's stance, arguing that their actions were a response to provocations. This statement highlighted Iran's perspective of acting in self-defence and responding to perceived aggressions, thereby justifying their actions on the international stage.

The ongoing diplomatic engagements at the UN showcase the complexity of the Iran-Israel conflict and the global concern regarding the potential for further escalation. The UN's involvement is pivotal, reflecting the body's role in fostering international diplomacy to manage and, ideally, resolve high-stakes geopolitical conflicts. The dialogue at the UN aims to balance regional concerns with global peace and security imperatives, striving to mediate the conflict through negotiation and peaceful resolutions.

## Analysis of the Conflict

**Escalation Risks.** The current exchanges between Israel and Iran hold the potential to escalate into a broader regional conflict. This risk is compounded by Iran's tactical movements and alliances, which could inadvertently draw in various state and non-state actors from across the region, further destabilizing the Middle East.

**Diplomatic Interventions.** Efforts to mediate and de-escalate tensions are crucial. The United Nations, along with other international bodies and key states, are pushing for restraint and dialogue. Notably, interventions from global powers and regional actors will be pivotal in curtailing the spread of the conflict and fostering negotiations. Additionally, U.S. diplomatic movements, including those by the Secretary of State, emphasize a strong presence and a message of deterrence to maintain regional stability and prevent further escalation.

**Potential for Negotiations.** Despite the severe current hostilities, there remains a window for diplomatic engagements, possibly through the United Nations or backchannel efforts by influential countries. The complexity of the political relationships in the region, including Iran's strategic goals and Israel's defensive posture, suggests a complicated path to negotiations.

**Security Measures.** Israel is likely to remain on high alert and may further enhance its defensive and offensive capabilities in response to ongoing threats. The potential for broader conflict necessitates robust security measures and preparedness.

**Role of Major Powers.** The U.S., Russia, and regional players like Jordan and the Gulf States will play crucial roles in shaping the outcomes of this conflict. Their diplomatic, military, and economic actions will influence the strategic decisions of Israel and Iran moving forward.

## Implications for India

In the ongoing conflict in the West Asian region, [India](#) finds itself in a delicate position, striving to maintain robust ties with both Israel and Iran. Israel is a major supplier of defence to India along with the US, France and Russia and a key partner in [technology](#) and agriculture. India and Israel have strong concerns about terrorism, as both the countries have suffered loss of life of their citizens during the 26/11 [Mumbai](#) terror attacks. Israel has always helped India during times of crisis, including the [Kargil war](#) in 1999. Conversely, Iran has been a significant source of oil for India and a crucial point in accessing Central Asia and [Afghanistan](#). India has managed to maintain a strategic relationship with Iran and both countries have shared concerns on terrorism emanating from Pakistan and Afghanistan. In addition, India and Iran have similar concerns on Taliban's treatment of minorities and the lack of an inclusive and representative government in Kabul.

Beyond direct economic and diplomatic impacts, Iran-Israel conflict also influences India's broader strategic interests in the region. The West Asian region is also home to 9-million strong Indian expatriates who contribute significantly to India's [economy](#). Any further escalation of the conflict will endanger their life and will lead to a complex logistical challenge of repatriation, as seen during the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. Thus, the impact for India of escalated conflict between Israel-Iran will be far greater than Russia-Ukraine war, keeping in view its wide-ranging interests from energy to connectivity in the West Asian region including the responsibility of ensuring the safety and security of the Indian expatriate community. Consequences of Iran-Israel war for

India, which already have borne the brunt of the Ukraine war and disruption in global supply chains, will be significant, both economically as well as strategically.

In conclusion, the trajectory of the Israel-Iran conflict will heavily depend on the effectiveness of international diplomatic efforts to broker peace or at least de-escalate tensions. The interplay of military actions and diplomatic postures by both local and global powers will determine the future stability of the region.

### **DISCLAIMER**

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