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COUNCIL FOR STRATEGIC AND DEFENSE RESEARCH

APRIL 2026

War in West Asia

VANTAGE



Conflicts, consequences, and Indian views.

Perspectives by

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What is VANTAGE?

Conflicts and tensions are a near-constant feature of the international landscape, erupting across regions and altering, in both small and large ways, how the world works. They reshape energy markets, redraw alliances, disrupt trade routes, upend security architectures, and affect the daily lives of ordinary people far from the front lines. What unfolds in West Asia, Eastern Europe, the Indo-Pacific, or anywhere in between carries direct consequences for India. Its energy dependencies, diaspora footprint, defense partnerships, and growing strategic ambitions ensure that few of these conflicts remain distant.

VANTAGE is CSDR's periodic publication that examines active conflicts in real time, asks what they mean for the international order, and captures authoritative Indian perspectives on the consequences that matter most: global stability, regional balances of power, energy and trade, and India's own strategic choices.

Each edition takes a single conflict, ongoing or at an inflection point, and puts it to a curated panel of Indian practitioners, diplomats, academics, and strategic thinkers. Two or three pointed questions structure the conversation. Contributors speak in their individual capacity; CSDR does not endorse any single view.

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Recommended Citation:
VANTAGE. April 2026. War in West Asia. New Delhi: Council for Strategic and Defense Research.

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The expert representation in each VANTAGE does not reflect the diversity of experts in India, across gender, institution, profession, religion, region, or any other metric. Each issue features views of experts who responded to our questions within the stipulated time and in the required format.

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War in West Asia

Context

The US/Israeli war on Iran was paused through a two-week ceasefire on April 8, 2026. Since February 28, these strikes have killed multiple Iranian political and military leaders, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani, and have significantly degraded Iranian military capabilities. However, Iran's retaliation has maintained a steady rate of fire (of drones and cruise/ballistic missiles) and has successfully imposed an *implied* blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran insists that the Strait is open to states except the US and Israel. Still, the threat of attacks alone has caused a spike in war risk premiums, which has been sufficient to dissuade crossings without Iranian authorization. Moreover, the Islamic Republic has proved resilient, with military operations and political decision-making showing continuity despite the loss of key leaders.

Since the war began, Israel has adopted a strategy of inflicting maximum pain, with strikes on Iranian energy facilities, education institutions, hospitals, and cultural edifices alongside consistent strikes on military, nuclear, and desalination facilities. US strikes have alternated among these targets, amid constantly shifting war aims. Iran's retaliation strategy has focused on horizontal escalation, designed to extract severe international economic costs as a result of continuing US/Israeli bombardment. Iran has struck all GCC states thus far, focusing on US military infrastructure in these states, which is being used in strikes against Iran. However, Tehran has also struck major energy hubs in Gulf Arab states, reciprocating Israeli attacks on Iranian energy. This has caused oil production in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar to grind to a halt, and Saudi Aramco has partially halted operations, while the UAE faces a cross-sectoral crisis due to Iranian attacks targeting the Emirates with larger volleys.

Presently, Washington has imposed an April 6 deadline on Tehran to reopen the Strait, and has (effectively) threatened ground action should Iran fail to comply. However, Tehran views this conflict as categorical evidence of Washington's bad faith, given that February 2026 was the second time the United States attacked Iran in the midst of negotiations, and despite Iran's effective acceptance of most demands in Muscat.

From Iran's perspective, stepping away from an escalation domination approach is not an option. For Israel, the means are arguably ends in themselves; the weaker Iran gets, the better for Israeli security. For the United States, the war is following an arbitrary path. While the US ultimately continues to focus on drawing Iran into a deal on Washington's terms, Tehran now seeks guarantees against future attacks, reparations, and recognition of Iran's right to enrich uranium within NPT limits. US/Israeli attacks on Iran continue, while Tehran continues to rebuff ceasefire negotiations, given its success in raising the global cost of Washington's/Tel Aviv's war.

For New Delhi, the stakes are high. India relies heavily on the Gulf Arab states for its crude oil, natural gas, and fertilizer needs. The GCC is also India's largest trading partner, all Gulf Arab states (except Bahrain) have comprehensive strategic partnerships with New Delhi, and Indians form the largest diaspora group in the Gulf. On March 10, India invoked the Essential Commodities Act in the energy sector for the first time in decades amid a massive supply disruption. The significance of the war's direct impact on Indian households is evident in the government holding daily multi-ministerial public briefings since March 23.

In this light, CSDR posed the following questions to practitioners, experts, and academics from India.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

Where the experts converge — and where they split

POINTS OF CONSENSUS

The US-led security order in West Asia faces its gravest test since the Gulf War

India must not play zero-sum politics in West Asia

Iran has shown regime resilience, not the regime change the US and Israel sought

India's energy, diaspora, and connectivity stakes make this conflict directly consequential

POINTS OF DIVERGENCE

Is US primacy in West Asia fundamentally declining?

Significantly diminished | US remains central | Too early to say

Has India's response to the conflict been adequate?

Needs more proactivity | Broadly adequate

Does the India-Israel-Iran balancing act still hold?

Tenable with care | Under real strain | Balance overstated

● Holds this view ○ Different position

CSDR Vantage, April 2026

Is India's Israel-Iran balancing act tenable? Where the experts stand

Tenable — dehyphenation holds | Under strain | Balance overstated

POSITION A

"Dehyphenation has served India well and should continue with greater clarity and assertion"

POSITION B

"The balance must be maintained but requires more active management — India cannot stay passive"

POSITION C

"Equal balancing is a myth — India's Israel relationship is strategic; Iran ties are constrained and largely nostalgic"

CSDR Vantage, April 2026

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?



Prof. Happymon Jacob

Founder & Director, CSDR
Distinguished Visiting Professor,
Shiv Nadar University (SNU)
Founder & Editor, India's World

Yes, it is. The US-led order in West Asia broadly rested on three pillars: security guarantees to Gulf monarchies, containment of Iran, and freedom of navigation. While none of the three were ever fully achieved, they held well enough, some more than others, to create and sustain a regional order for decades.

The US-Israel war against Iran has brought all three into question. Washington could not prevent Iranian strikes on its Gulf partners. It could not keep the Strait of Hormuz open. And Washington's war exposed its traditional Gulf partners to severe costs they had no say in incurring. The credibility of the US-led order has taken a serious beating.

India's response to the war reveals something uncomfortable about its vision of multipolarity. Multipolarity should have allowed Delhi to leverage American overreach to assert its own independent agency in a war in its near abroad. India hedged, silently watched, and eventually adjusted tactically when Tehran took the Strait. India's tactical adjustment is perhaps a testament to the fact that, while it loves the idea of multipolarity, it's a bit too conservative to thrive in the chaos it brings.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

There is little doubt that the balance is under strain. It was always more fragile and testy than Delhi acknowledged. India's defense partnership with Israel is strategic and growing. India's ties with Iran are functional but constrained by sanctions, American pressure, and India's own reluctance to bear the costs of a genuine partnership with Tehran. The war has made it even harder to sustain that shaky balancing act.

That said, the balance remains necessary: while Israel is a defense partner, Iran occupies, as we saw, a geographical position India can ill afford to ignore. The answer is not to choose, but to manage the relationship with greater clarity and sophistication, and with less sentiment. India must stop believing that its relationship with Iran is stronger than it is and stop pretending that the relationship with Israel costs nothing. The war has made both relationships more expensive. A new balancing should start with some honest accounting.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?



Lt Gen D S Hooda (retd)

Co-founder, CSDR
Former Northern Army Commander, Indian Army

The US-led order in West Asia rested on providing security guarantees to the Gulf monarchies and Israel, containing Iran and its proxies, and ensuring freedom of navigation and energy security. This system is clearly under strain, even as the US military power remains central to the architecture. With the Gulf states facing repeated attacks from Iran, there are doubts over the effectiveness of the US security umbrella. The disruption to the Hormuz disruption raises questions about the US's ability to guarantee energy security. However, it is also clear that the Gulf states currently see no option but to remain aligned with the US.

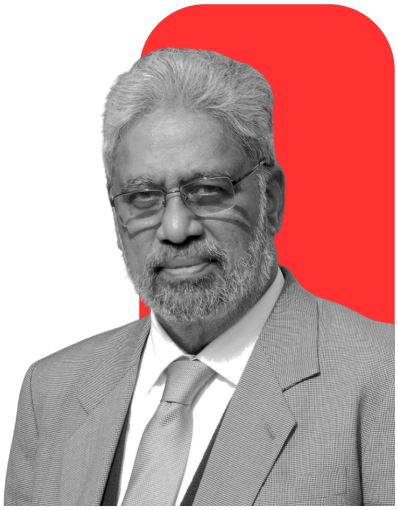
India's vision of multipolarity, in which multiple balancing centers coexist under conditions of relative stability, is also being tested. While at one level the war shows the costs of US hegemony- strengthening the need for multipolarity- it also shows that India remains dependent on stability provided by others, including the US.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

While the war has made the balancing harder, it should not be seen as a zero-sum game. India's interests in Israel and Iran are in different spheres. India has a deep defense and technology relationship with Israel. While ties with Iran have diminished, it remains important for regional geography, access, and future energy needs. India would have to be clear-eyed in compartmentalizing the relationship with the two countries and making decisions based on national interests.

To be certain, this is harder than stated, but it would be wise to await the outcome of the war rather than taking a rigid or ideological stance at this stage. How Iran emerges from the war would have an important bearing on India's foreign policy choices.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?



Prof. C Raja Mohan

Distinguished Fellow, CSDR
Distinguished Professor & Senior Fellow Designate, MJIAS

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has dominated the regional order in the Middle East. Post-Soviet states could not sustain Moscow's past salience. China's influence in the region is growing, but it is predominantly commercial. The war against Iran is unlikely to change the US dominance in the region. The Arab and Islamic support for Trump's Gaza peace plan has reinforced US primacy in the region. The fear of Iran will leave much of the region even more dependent on the US for security. The main source of American diminution in the Middle East is domestic and rooted in calls from the political left and right for a reduced commitment to the region. A section of the strategic community suggests pivoting away from the Middle East toward Asia to address an assertive China. These voices have not yet prevailed over Washington's policy.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

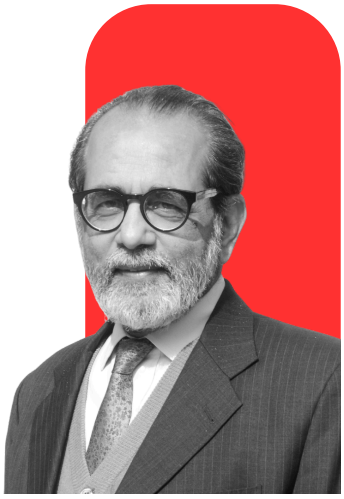
I don't see India trying to 'balance" its relations with Israel and Iran. The idea that Delhi seeks "balanced relations" with all the major actors in the Middle East is a myth. Equally problematic is the proposition that India must remain neutral in the region's inter-se conflicts. India pursues relations with all the major regional actors on their own merit. Relations with Israel have acquired a strategic character, while the engagement with Iran remains constrained by the Western sanctions against Tehran and their secondary effects on India's policy. Iran's heft is also limited compared to India's deep and growing economic interdependence with the Arab Gulf, which is more hostile to Tehran than Tel Aviv. This dynamic could change someday and bring India's natural synergies with Iran into play. At that moment, Iran and Israel might go back to their natural alliance, so evident before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

The outcome of the Israel/US - Iran conflict is difficult to predict at this stage, as all three participants have different drivers and objectives. Of the three, clearly the US is the most unpredictable, and that has implications for Israel. However, it is clear that instead of 'regime change' in Iran, which the US and Israel were banking on, what has emerged is 'regime resilience'.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

The Modi government has sought to distance itself from the foreign policy of preceding governments. The Modi government describes its foreign policy as realist and guided by the national interest; this is the justification India has employed to explain its outreach to the GCC countries (as major energy suppliers, trading partners, and hosts to a large Indian diaspora) and its absence of criticism of the US. However, it is difficult to reconcile the 'national interest' argument with either the timing of Modi's Israel visit or the lack of condolences at a political level at the killing of the Supreme Leader of Iran. These actions clearly reflect a foreign policy driven by ideology and Prime Minister Modi's personal diplomatic preferences.



Amb. Rakesh Sood

Distinguished Fellow, CSDR
Former Diplomat, GOI

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

The second Iran-US/Israel war has set in motion global strategic shifts with historic consequences. The six Gulf Cooperation Council countries and much of the world will be reviewing their security postures and military doctrines, reassessing their financial architecture, supply chains, and energy dependencies. Iran's ability to militarily face off against two of the most powerful militaries will compel the GCC to recalculate the cost of an elusive US security umbrella.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

All countries, including India, would have noted the reputational damage to the GCC, which had assiduously promoted itself as a safe haven for capital and technology and a magnet for global talent. Throughout the weeks-long war, India remained engaged with all sides, astutely preserving its equities. Indian firms should now position themselves for post-war reconstruction and economic opportunities in West Asia. We should also engage our friendly neighbors in discussions on mutually beneficial geoeconomics frameworks.



Amb. Gaddam Dharmendra

Nonresident Senior Fellow
Carnegie India
Former Diplomat, GOI
Former Dean, Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, MEA

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?



Amb. Ajay Bisaria

Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation
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For decades, US strategy in West Asia rested on four pillars: support for Israel, containment of Iran, protection of the petrodollar system, and security guarantees for Gulf partners. The US–Israel–Iran conflict of March 2026 marks a significant departure from this framework. Washington has demonstrated a willingness to be steered by Israeli strategic priorities, including the pursuit of a regional order that entrenches Israeli primacy and neutralizes Iran and its proxies.

More significantly, the US appears prepared to absorb medium-term regional instability, heightened risks to Gulf states, and longer-term repercussions for the global economy. The ultimate outcome of the Iran conflict will determine whether Iran is decisively contained, enabling a new regional order, or whether a more balanced multipolar equilibrium re-emerges, with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran as the principal centers of power.

India has a higher stake in West Asian stability than most extra-regional actors. Its interests require a careful balancing of relations across regional fault lines. In this context, a more proactive diplomatic role is both feasible and necessary. As BRICS chair and a G20 member with expanding strategic influence, India is well-positioned to articulate a stronger case for de-escalation and regional stability and should be prepared to exercise that role.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

India's relationship with Israel extends well beyond the label of a "Special Strategic Partnership." Defense and technology cooperation form the core of the relationship, even as India continues to support Palestinian statehood and maintain robust ties with Iran and the Gulf Arab states.

At the center of this balancing act lies the Iran paradox. India has long viewed Iran as a strategic gateway to Central Asia and a critical energy partner, reflected in its investments in Chabahar port and the International North–South Transport Corridor. This approach is fundamentally at odds with Israel's objectives of militarily degrading Iran and pursuing regime change.

Even prior to the current conflict, the growing interdependence in defense and intelligence between India and Israel would have raised concerns in Tehran. Perceptions of India aligning with Israel-led initiatives—such as the proposed "Hexagon Alliance" against so-called radical axes—would only have reinforced Iranian anxieties.

India must nevertheless maintain the balance and sustain relations with all the camps in West Asia. The conflict is unfolding next door, and India is a key stakeholder as its energy and diaspora interests get threatened.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?



Amb. Anil Trigunayat

Distinguished Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation
Former Diplomat, GOI

After the ongoing war ends, the regional security architecture, with the US as the guarantor of security, is likely to be transformed significantly. USA's prestige as a security provider has been dented and cannot be improved as long as its primary objective remains support to Israeli hegemonistic ambitions in West Asia. Frequent resort to strategic ambiguity by Washington does not augur well in the short and medium term, as it is not interested in genuinely addressing basic issues such as Palestine.

New Delhi also appears to be in a bind. While India is talking to all regional leaders and warring parties, its inability to be a robust regional player limits its credibility as a decisive actor due to an inherent lack of risk-taking, since major regional countries expect India to play a bigger role. Pakistan, unfortunately, has once again become relevant and, along with Türkiye, could, as in the past, further work to undermine our newly acquired strategic heft in the region. Multipolarity, in my view, will remain a theoretical concept at least in geopolitical and geo-technological contexts. India is also the chair of BRICS and will host IAFS summits this year, which provide us opportunities to advance our leadership if cards are played well during the 'Trumpian flux'.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

Both Iran and Israel are mindful of India's aversion to alliances. They also understand our policy of dialogue, diplomacy, and de-hyphenation and accept us as a given. India cannot indulge in zero-sum games in West Asia, since the stakes are very high. Hence, the approach followed during the past decade appears to have paid good dividends and could be pursued with little more clarity and assertion. Perceptions matter in this Information Age and should be managed carefully.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

The US has been the chief security provider of the Gulf States since the Second World War. Despite its overwhelming military superiority, it has been unable to keep the Persian Gulf open. The US went to war against Iran to protect the interests of Israel; the Gulf allies had cautioned against the military option. They do not influence American policies, but have suffered the collateral damage of war. This has raised questions about the validity of assumptions on which the old security order was based.

In a complex situation, countries base their policies on their conception of national interests. Continuation of the war, which is straining India's economy, is not in our interest. There should be a call for an immediate end to Israeli and US bombing of Iran, followed by cessation of Iranian attacks on Gulf countries and opening of the Persian Gulf to international navigation.



Amb. D P Srivastava

Distinguished Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation
Former Diplomat, GOI

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

India buys defense equipment from Israel; it does not have a military alliance with that country. We have historical relations with Iran. Balancing relations with the two countries, which regard each other as an existential threat, is indeed difficult. The balance can be maintained as long as Israel and Iran are not at war with each other. This is not the case now.

India has to factor in its long-term interests in its relationship with Iran, which is energy-rich and provides India with connectivity to Afghanistan through Chabahar and to Central Asia through the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC). Both countries have worked together in Afghanistan before. Iran has now also emerged as the gatekeeper to the Persian Gulf, which is India's link to energy supplies, trade, and investment with Gulf countries.



Amb. TCA Raghavan

Former Diplomat, GOI

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

The spectrum of possibilities posed by the US-Israel vs. Iran conflict is wide and diverse. At one end is the hypothesis that, much as the decade from 1979 to 1989 heralded Soviet decline, 2026 may well mark the beginning of the decade that will, in the future, be termed one that encapsulates US decline. At the other end is the view that US military defeats, whether in Vietnam or Afghanistan, or even the defeat of its grand strategy as in Iraq, do not translate into erosion of US global influence in any meaningful sense.

But we are still too close to the conflict to assess its full consequences. In my view, India's response is less guided by vision and is more a function of the weight of relationships with the Gulf States, the US, and Israel. Our response is also more tactical - essentially defensive and trying to reduce the immediate negative consequences for ourselves to the extent possible.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

At this stage, it is difficult to assess what kind of Iran and Israel will finally emerge from this conflict. If assessments of a shift of public opinion in the West against Israel are accurate, then the final outcomes of this conflict are even more unclear. In general, however, balancing adversarial sets of relationships is not a novel or unique situation for any country's diplomacy. For India, the real challenges that emerge from this conflict are prosaic, even familiar: you have to deal with your neighborhood as it is, not as you would like it to be. Notwithstanding the evident asymmetries in the US-Israel conflict vs Iran, or in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, grand strategic thinking hoping to achieve once-and-for-all solutions has been upended by resistance powered by nationalism and patriotism, imposing costs not anticipated at the outset of the conflict. This simple lesson of unexpected resilience merits constant recall.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

The second US-Israeli attack on Iran and Iran's horizontal escalation against the Gulf States have long-term implications for the US-led security architecture in the Persian Gulf. Iran's ability to wage a war of attrition against the Gulf States and its control of the Strait of Hormuz are creating a highly securitized Gulf view of Iran. As security becomes the prime concern, the Gulf States will have no choice but to deepen their security ties with the United States. During the short-lived phase of de-escalation and dialogue in West Asia, India had pursued a geoeconomics-focused engagement with the US and its regional allies. Amid renewed instability and deepening faultlines, India will revert to a policy of bilateralism and balance with various actors to safeguard its own interests.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

Given the geographical proximity and economic importance of the Persian Gulf region and broader West Asia to India, New Delhi cannot adopt a zero-sum approach to relations, where improving relations with one side comes at the expense of the other. Neither can India be forced to import the strategic vision of other actors. India's interests are too diverse to be pursued through narrow notions of friends and enemies. While India-Israel ties have their own logic and depth, India-Iran ties have shown remarkable perseverance despite various pulls and pressures. New Delhi will have to maintain an independent, proactive, and adaptive approach to a region vital to our security and prosperity.



Dr. Deepika Saraswat

Associate Fellow, West Asia Center, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?



Dr. Stanly Johny

International Affairs Editor
The Hindu

The conflict has reinforced a broader trend: the US's diminishing ability to shape geopolitical outcomes in West Asia. President Trump gravely miscalculated Iran's response. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has trapped the US in the conflict, while Iranian strikes at US bases across the region have punctured the narrative that a US military presence by default offered security to the host country. As it turned out, the host countries were protecting the U.S. assets, not the other way around.

Before the war, India signaled a tilt towards the US-Israel axis--the Prime Minister went to Israel as it was preparing for the war; India refused to condemn Ali Khamenei's assassination or the attack on the Iranian school. But once it became clear that Tehran was not falling and that Tehran had taken control of the Strait, New Delhi reached out to Iran to establish a bilateral mechanism to protect its interests.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

The war and its unfolding consequences reinforce the case for strategic balancing as vital to safeguard India’s multifaceted interests. West Asia is India's extended neighborhood, and Iran is practically a next-door country. Israel, a close partner, has brought this war to India's vicinity, triggering a global energy shock that could hit the Indian economy hard. India should ideally speak against a conflict that threatens both its economic rise and the physical safety of millions of Indians living in the region.

It also underscores the need for energy diversification. Allowing Washington to dictate whom India should buy oil (or gas) from is not a sustainable policy for the world’s fourth-largest economy, which is dependent on external energy supplies. As West Asia remains fractious, India must preserve its balance between the Arab World, Israel, and Iran. Israel is a distant defense partner; Iran is a daily geopolitical reality and a potential gateway to Central Asia. India must maintain stable ties with all three pillars — a tilt towards one country (in this case, Israel) carries unintended consequences, including giving Pakistan more room for diplomatic maneuver. India’s interests are best protected in regional stability, and it should work towards ensuring it.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?



Col Rajeev Agarwal (retd)

Senior Research Consultant, Centre for Geopolitics and Strategic Studies, Chintan Research Foundation

Yes, this is definitely the biggest ever stress test for the US in West Asia. The US, which has for decades underwritten regional security in the Gulf, finds itself on the receiving end, as it is part of the conflict. This war has also brutally exposed the fragility of the security architecture and the ineffectiveness of America's security guarantees that it has been promising in the region for decades. With Iran putting up an equal fight, it is unlikely that the war will end in a total and decisive victory for the US-Israel combo. In negotiation, therefore, someone else may later be required to underwrite the region's future security.

As regards India, its initial response raised questions about its ability to exercise strategic autonomy, as it appeared influenced by US pressure and an obligation to side with Israel. However, once India commenced direct dialogue with Iran, things seemed to have balanced out. As a result, India has been relatively successful in safeguarding its energy security interests and the security of Indians abroad. On multipolarity, this war could prove an acid test for India as it chairs the BRICS presidency this year. With major BRICS partners actively involved in the conflict, it may prove difficult for India to repeat the success of its 2023 G20 presidencies in evolving a consensus within BRICS this year.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

The beauty of India's foreign policy over the past decade, especially in West Asia, has been its ability to dehyphenate its ties with countries in the region. Its defense and security ties with Israel have progressed rapidly, but it was quite clear to Iran and other countries in the Gulf region that those ties did not come at their cost. Separately, despite India buckling under American pressure on issues related to Iran, such as the stoppage of crude oil imports after May 2019 or the recent decision to exit India's stakes in the Chahbahar port in February 2026, India has been able to maintain its ties with Iran reasonably well. The credit for it, however, should go more to Iran, which has accommodated India's inhibitions at the cost of maintaining civilizational links with a growing global power, India.

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

The post-Cold War US-led order in West Asia collapsed after the terror attack of 9/11 on the U.S. by Al-Qaeda. Since then, the U.S. has been more of a reactive force, containing Islamic fundamentalism, the Iranian nuclear program, as well as its outreach into Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. The current war was expected for some years since Israel and the Gulf states have been seeking proactive, aggressive military action from the U.S. against Iran. So, it's not a stress test for the parties involved. India didn't offer solidarity to Iran, nor did it condemn the U.S.-Israel strikes, which, to me, is in the best Indian national interests at the moment. Multipolarity in West Asia isn't anyone's vision.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

India has been deepening its defense partnership with Israel for the last twenty-five years, and there are new areas of comprehensive joint collaboration, including agriculture, space science, and AI. Iran can't match Israel's influence on Indian foreign policy. There is nothing to balance, hence. More interestingly, India withdrew from the international political scene in relation to Iran from 2008 onwards, after signing the Indo-US nuclear deal. With Iran, it's more about nostalgia than any significant bilateral deal that India has to concern itself with.



Dr. Khvinraj Jangid

Professor & Director, Jindal Center for Israel Studies, O P Jindal Global University

Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

It appears that this US-led world order is yet to stand the test of this war for two reasons: (i) the decision to go to war underlined US unilateralism. This display of unilateralism is more blatant in the Trump II period. This war also demonstrates a close US -Israel partnership seen from the security prism. The Gulf countries are equally culpable in this attack. (ii) While the Trump administration was eager to end the war in Ukraine, its transatlantic partners felt betrayed, as Russia is a major security concern. Extortion to pay for defense and its non-committal attitude toward Ukraine have also prompted Europe to bolster its security.

How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

Both these cases made the UN irrelevant in the world order. This rise in unilateralism should make India rethink its priorities. India is likely to argue for a rule-based order. It will also prioritize bilateral ties and plurilateral organizations that will help it to tide over the prevalent uncertainty. India will balance its ties with both Israel and Iran. These ties are at different levels, and there is no zero-sum response from either Israel or Iran to India's relations with both countries.



Dr. Smruti Pattanaik

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Is this conflict a stress test for the US-led order in West Asia — and what does India's response signal about its own vision for multipolarity?

The Israel-USA-Iran conflict does indeed constitute a stress test for the post-Gulf War order in the Middle East. The evidentiary threshold for what constitutes a threat to regional peace has been lowered considerably by America's 'declared' casus belli, hypothecating regional security to Israel's sense of insecurity. The American inability to prevent Iranian attacks on its Gulf neighbors is likely to strengthen the argument that US military bases do not serve the interests of the Gulf states that they were meant to serve post-1991. It would be in the interest of the Arab Gulf states to establish a regional security architecture without relying on the American shield and, if possible, to open dialogue with Iran.

A lack of an Indian response could be taken as indicating a lack of a clear vision of multipolarity. Transactionalism is a poor substitute for coherent policy.

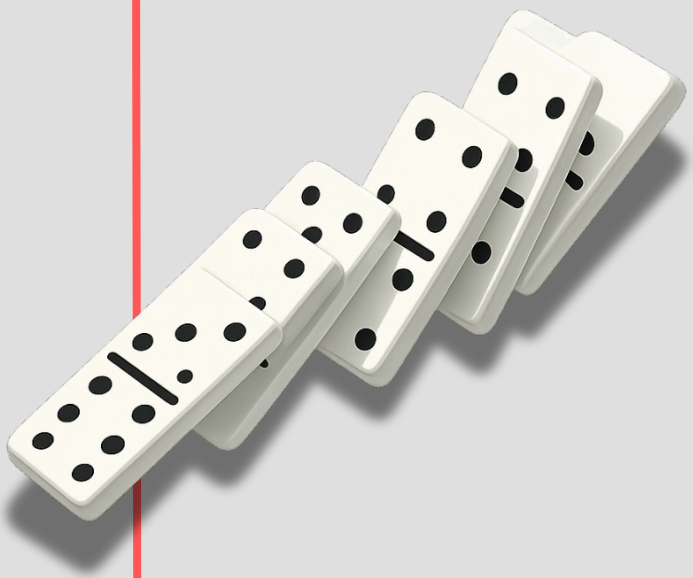


Prof. Kingshuk Chatterjee

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How should India balance its deepening defense partnership with Israel against its historically functional ties with Iran — and is that balance still tenable?

India is the largest customer of Israeli defense exports. Iran is geographically among our closest neighbors, has oil and gas reserves, and thus entails the lowest transportation costs. Additionally, Tehran and New Delhi have shared strategic convergences in the neighborhood (especially Afghanistan). There is no reason to assume either Tel Aviv or Tehran would seek a mutually exclusive approach in their future relations with New Delhi. India could easily criticize either, and/or help mediate, without fearing either would want to shut New Delhi out. It might actually add to India's leverage with the two if India appears to have a little concern for either, as friends do when other friends are in a jam.



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