

The Tripartite Pressure: USA, Israel, and Iran — Consequences for West Asian Stability and India's Diplomatic Strategy

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Abstract:

The intensification of military confrontation between the United States and Israel on one side and Iran on the other—ranging from the June 2025 strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities to the major joint operation launched on 28 February 2026—has pushed West Asia into one of its most volatile phases in decades (Al Jazeera, 2026; BBC News, 2026; Brookings Institution, 2026). With this has come an increased economic and strategic involvement of India in the region, which includes energy reliance on Gulf producers, connectivity initiatives, including the Chabahar Port deal, and increased defence relationships with Israel (Embassy of India, Tehran, n.d.; Reuters, 2024). The paper examines the effects of the changing U.S.-Israel-Iran triangle on West Asian security and limits or facilitates the diplomatic choices of India.

Using recent news stories, think-tank evaluations, and official economic statistics, the paper first charts significant moments in the ongoing conflict and places them in the context of protracted U.S.-Iran and Israel-Iran antagonisms. It then assesses the consequences of regional stability, escalation risks, energy and maritime security, as well as intra-regional alignments. Lastly, it looks into the West Asia policy of India, based on the strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, and evaluates the current change in strategy of New Delhi to safeguard its interests in sanctions, war, and great-power competition. The article presents the view that India stands under increasing pressure as it struggles to reconcile its relations with Washington and Tel Aviv and its long-term interests in Iran and the region.

Keywords: West Asia, India's West Asia policy, U.S.-Iran conflict, Israel-Iran rivalry, Chabahar Port, energy security, strategic autonomy.

Introduction

The latest cycle of confrontation between the United States, Israel, and Iran has transformed the strategic landscape of West Asia. What began as a long-running “shadow war” has escalated into overt, large-scale military exchanges. In June 2025, the United States and Israel allegedly attacked some of the most important nuclear plants in Iran, a measure that most observers viewed as an attempt at weakening the nuclear and missile capacities of the Tehran government (BBC News, 2026; Brookings Institution, 2026). In February 2026, the U.S.-Israeli campaign resulted in almost 900 strikes within about a dozen hours targeting the Iranian missiles, air defense, and military installations in various locations (Atlantic Council, 2026; Britannica, 2026). The killing of civilians, such as the reported bombing of an elementary school, has added to the level of international apprehension of humanitarian effects and the dangers of unchecked escalation (CNN, 2026).

These changes continue to resound in West Asia, which is already defined by civil wars, proxy wars, and great-power competition. The arc of the possible escalation includes the Gulf monarchies, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Eastern Mediterranean, with key energy and maritime chokepoints, in particular, the Strait of Hormuz, being at the centre of global scrutiny (Britannica, 2026; Al Jazeera, 2026). The

possibility of broader disruption to the economy is highlighted by the attacks of Iran on its energy infrastructure, including the reported assaults on a Qatari gas field following previous attacks on South Pars facilities in Iran itself (The Economic Times, 2026).

To India, these changes are multi-dimensional. The interests of New Delhi in West Asia are enormous: it not only imports crude oil in large quantities, but also hosts millions of Indian workers, and is becoming more and more attracted to the area as the centre of connectivity initiatives between India and Europe and Central Asia (IASGyan, 2026; Firstpost, 2026). India has established strong strategic relationships with the United States and Israel, especially in the area of defense and technology, and is also investing in a long-term relationship with Iran, especially with the Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) (Reuters, 2024; CeSCube, 2026).

In the paper at hand, the author discusses the so-called tripartite pressure, which the U.S.-Israel-Iran triangle imposes on the stability of West Asia and on India's diplomatic policy by India. It asks three interrelated questions:

1. How do recent U.S.–Israel strikes on Iran fit into the longer-term patterns of conflict and deterrence in West Asia?
2. What do the key consequences of such confrontation mean to the stability of the region, in terms of energy and maritime security?
3. How is the policy of West Asia of India changing with the turn of events, and what are the limitations and opportunities available to New Delhi?

The paper is a qualitative study of the current events, a secondary literature on West Asian geopolitics, and simple economic statistics on the trade between India and Iran and the rest of the world in general. The goal is not to provide a detailed operational history of the 2025–26 conflict, but to interpret its strategic meaning for regional order and for India's foreign policy.

Literature Review

Academic and policy literature on West Asia has long emphasized the centrality of the U.S.–Iran relationship in shaping regional order. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the relations between Washington and Tehran fell to a state of persistent hostility, which included sanctions, proxy warfare, and regular military conflicts. Studies of past crises, including the 1980s “Tanker War,” the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the 2019–20 tensions over the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, underscore the fact that U.S.–Iran escalation has frequently spilled over to third countries and the sea (Brookings Institution, 2026).

In line with this, there is a considerable literature on the Israel-Iran confrontation. Experts and researchers present this as a complex battle that involves issues related to the spread of nuclear weapons, the encouragement of conflicting non-state groups (especially Hezbollah and multiple militia groups in Syria and Iraq), and the desire to gain dominance in the region. The number of studies cites an ongoing tendency of covert actions, cyber-attacks, and partial strikes that did not involve full-fledged war but could produce a constant risk of an error (Council on Foreign Relations, 2026; Eurasia Review, 2025).

Subsequent commentary has given more emphasis on the apparent collapse of this model of a shadow war after 2025. It is estimated by think-tank evaluations that the attacks by the U.S and the Israelis on Iranian nuclear and missile bases in mid-2025 and the resultant escalation in 2026 have resulted in a qualitatively new stage of confrontation, with greater scale operations and more overt and public active participation by both parties (Atlantic Council, 2026; Middle East Report, 2026). It is also highlighted in the analysis how the conflict overlaps with the larger realignments of the region, such as the Abraham Accords, changing Saudi-Iranian relations, and the U.S. force posture in the region (CeSCube, 2026).

The West Asia policy of India has grown considerably within the past decade in the literature. The policy has traditionally been defined by the policy of “Look West” and then by its successor policy of the “Link West” policy, wherein India has focused more on energy security, diaspora welfare, counterterrorism cooperation, and increasing economic and technological connections (WGI, 2025). Researchers observe that India is attempting to keep its strategic independence through balancing its ties with other regional

powers such as Israel, Iran, and the Gulf monarchies, and enhancing its strategic relationship with the United States (Raksha Anirveda, 2025; IASGyan, 2026).

More recent developments are on new connectivity projects, including the International North-South Transport Corridor, which partially depends on Iranian ports, and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMAGEC), which depends on strong collaboration with Gulf countries and Israel (Firstpost, 2026). According to the commentators, the war involving Iran, Israel, and the U.S. endangers these projects, and India needs to revisit its sequencing and investment priorities (Firstpost, 2026; Jerusalem Post, 2026). Evaluations of the editorial perspective underline that the Indian approach to the West is also becoming strained, yet also emphasize how India remains interested in ensuring the project of Chabahar remains, in spite of sanctions and conflict, a living thing (Jerusalem Post, 2026; Reuters, 2024).

Collectively, this literature implies 3 important themes. First, the U.S.–Israel triangle has always been a structurally conflictual relationship over the decades, but the present stage is characterized by increased intensity and exposure. Second, regional stability is increasingly tied to energy and connectivity infrastructures that transcend traditional security borders. Third, India’s West Asia policy—built on multi-alignment and risk diversification—is being tested by simultaneous pressures from Washington, Tel Aviv, and Tehran, as well as by the economic fallout of war.

The Tripartite Strategic Triangle: USA, Israel, and Iran

The U.S.-Israel-Iran triangle is based on asymmetrical yet reinforcing relationships. The U.S and Israel have one of the closest security relationships in the entire world and have united their efforts on issues related to military assistance, joint intelligence, and harmonization on matters of regional threats. Over decades, the different governments of the United States have positioned Iran as one of the key destabilizing participants in the West Asian region, citing its missile program, nuclear aspirations, and maintenance of armed non-state entities (Council on Foreign Relations, 2026).

To Israel, Iran is a strategic as well as ideological enemy. The prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran is an existential threat to Israeli policymakers, and the system of allies that Hezbollah has established in Lebanon, up to militias in Syria and Iraq, is regarded as a deterrent and coercive instrument deployed forward against Israel. Such an understanding is the basis of years-old Israeli policy of targeted attacks on Iranian officials and infrastructure in Syria and alleged underground operations in Iran.

Iran, in its turn, describes the United States and Israel as imperial and colonialists who want to restrict or reverse the Islamic Republic. The elites of Iran also promote a story of resistance, tying resistance to U.S. bases and sanctions to aid in the axis of resistance actors in the region. In this light, the Iranian missile and nuclear developments are commonly explained as countermeasures to threats by regime change agents.

A short-lived tension reduction between the two parties was achieved through a pact called the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that imposed restrictions on the nuclear operations of Iran in return for the sanctions. This framework was, however, undermined by the U.S. departure from the deal as well as the new sanctions and regional incidents. It is within this context that one can view the 2025 and 2026 strikes as steps towards an escalatory strategy operating as part of a series of long-term spiral of deterrence and counter-deterrence.

It is not a two-sided conflict but a dynamic system, which is the triangle. The decision to escalate is influenced by U.S. domestic politics, Israeli perception of a threat, and the internal power struggles of Iran. Meanwhile, regional and extra-regional forces, like Russia, China, Gulf states, and European powers, aim to affect or ensure against consequences, making it more difficult to calculate the strategy.

Recent U.S.–Israel Strikes on Iran and Escalation Dynamics

Several spiraled U.S.-Iranian hostilities have been recorded since mid-2025. U.S. and Israeli troops allegedly attacked several Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2025, an attack that Russia publicly declared as an unprovoked aggression attack (Brookings Institution, 2026). Analysts indicate that the strikes were meant to slow down the nuclear program in Iran and damage missile systems; however, they also heightened the possibility of Iranian retaliation on the U.S. assets and regional allies.

Hundreds of U.S.-Israeli strikes against Iranian military targets occurred on 28 February 2026. It is reported that approximately 900 strikes were carried out in twelve hours targeting the launchers of missiles, the air defense, and the command-and-control nodes in Iran (Atlantic Council, 2026; Britannica, 2026). According to the observations of regional observers, Gulf states were not caught unawares as they monitored mounting tensions and contingency planning, although most did not wish to be part of it (Middle East Report, 2026).

The following days were marked by additional cases of Iranian drone and missile attacks on the U.S. and Israeli-linked targets and the U.S. and Israeli retaliation. A U.S. strike on an elementary school, which was reportedly caused by outdated intelligence, was one of the controversial moments as it questioned how the targeting process and civilian safety should be done (CNN, 2026). Iran also reportedly retaliated by striking energy infrastructure, including a Qatari gas field, while the United States denied direct involvement in some of these episodes (The Economic Times, 2026).

Table 1 summarizes selected key strikes since 2025, illustrating the pattern of escalation.

Table 1- Selected U.S.–Israel Strikes on Iran, 2025–2026

Date	Primary target type	Stated/assessed objective	Reported Iranian response	Main sources
June 2025	Nuclear facilities, missile infrastructure	Degrade nuclear program and missile capabilities	Condemnation; threats of retaliation; limited attacks via proxies	Brookings Institution (2026); BBC News (2026)
28 Feb 2026	Missile sites, air defenses, C2 infrastructure	Reduce Iran’s capacity for missile/drone attacks; reassert deterrence	Missile/drone launches against U.S./Israeli-linked targets	Atlantic Council (2026); Britannica (2026); Middle East Report (2026)
Early March 2026	Urban-area target (alleged school hit)	Target suspected military asset; civilian casualties disputed	Intensified rhetoric; calls for accountability; further attacks on U.S./allied interests	CNN (2026); Al Jazeera (2026)
March 2026	South Pars-related energy facilities (by Israel/U.S.)	Deny Iran revenues and leverage from gas/oil exports	Iranian strike on Qatari gas infrastructure; maritime threats in the Strait of Hormuz	The Economic Times (2026); Al Jazeera (2026)

These episodes unveil three significant aspects of the ongoing war. First, there is an obvious shift toward larger, more open operations, away from the deniable or limited strikes of previous years. Second, economic infrastructure and energy infrastructure are increasingly being targeted by military operations, escalating the economic interests in the entire world. Third, the risk of miscalculation, either due to faulty intelligence, technical mistakes, or misunderstanding of intentions, has increased, as seen through claims of civilian deaths and disputed stories.

Implications on Stability of West Asia.

The intensifying U.S.-Israel-Iran war has far-reaching consequences on stability in West Asia. At the very least, four dimensions can be distinguished: escalation risk, regional alignments, energy and maritime security, and domestic political impacts among regional states.

Escalation and conflict diffusion: The high-scale 2026 strikes and the ensuing Iranian reactions have augmented the potential of unwanted or unmanaged escalation. The ability of Iran to attack U.S. bases, Israeli cities, and shipping routes with missiles, drones, and proxy organizations is still a pressing concern. The United States and Israel, in their turn, have an overwhelming conventional superiority, which

provokes concerns that any serious Iranian attack might cause even greater retaliation (Britannica, 2026; Council on Foreign Relations, 2026).

Regional interests: The Gulf states, Israel, and Turkey among others are interested to protect their security and economic interests. Although most of the Arab Gulf kingdoms have been historically used to the protection of the U.S., they are also intimidated by the fact that they could be targeted by Iranian revenge in case they are seen to be condoning the U.S. or Israeli activities. Others have silent security cooperation with Israel; others insure against this by having diplomatic channels open with Iran. According to editorial commentaries, the Gulf leaders could foresee the 2026 strikes, but it was in their interest not to be overtly aligned, which resembles a larger trend of having more autonomous regional foreign policies (Middle East Report, 2026).

Energy and maritime security: Strait of Hormuz and its energy centers are of particular concern. Iranian and Qatari gas attacks and drone and missile attacks on shipping pose threats to the global energy markets and the cost of insuring maritime commerce (The Economic Times, 2026; Al Jazeera, 2026). The energy-importing states such as India, China, and most of the European states, are therefore keenly interested in de-escalation and the safeguarding of the sea lanes.

Domestic politics and legitimacy: In Iran, foreign aggressions may be used to reinforce hardline rhetoric and silence the reformist discourse, at least in the near future. In America and Israel, strategy is debated domestically based on the casualty trends and perception of the success or failure of the operations. In the region, people already struggling economically might view the conflict as a further extension of foreign power games at their own cost and develop anti-American, anti-Israeli, or anti-Iranian feelings, respectively, depending on the local conditions.

Altogether, the war aggravates the preexisting fault lines and generates new uncertainties. To middle powers such as India, which depend on a stable West Asia to supply energy and trade, the destruction of the regional order is very serious both strategically and economically.

Diplomatic Strategy and West Asia Policy of India

The West Asia policy of India has developed from relative distance in the Cold War to active participation in the post-Cold War period. This policy is based on three pillars: energy security, the well-being of the Indian diaspora, and general geo-economic and strategic interests.

Energy and diaspora: West Asia provides India a significant proportion of crude oil and liquefied natural gas imports, and the Gulf producers are in the middle of it. One of the largest expatriate populations in the Gulf is also found in India, with their remittances and well-being being a major concern to New Delhi (IASGyan, 2026; Sunshine Cargo, 2026). Any significant interference with the energy circulation or a massive conflict in the region would have a direct effect on the inflation, growth, and politics within India.

Relations with Iran: India and Iran have a civilizational relationship, and their relationship has been rather stable in spite of the sanctions. Bilateral trade was affected by the cycle of sanctions economically, but it still has some important sectors. Indian statistics suggest that exports to Iran in the year 2024-25 were approximately USD 1.24 billion and imports were approximately USD 0.44 billion, USA 1.68 billion (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2026). Indian basmati rice has been a significant destination in Iran; it took approximately USD 0.81 billion or nearly a quarter of India's basmati exports in the FY 2021 -22 (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2022).

The Chabahar Port project is centrally located strategically. In May 2024, India entered a 10-year deal with Iran to develop and operate Chabahar, envisioning it as an entry to Afghanistan and Central Asia, avoiding Pakistan and supporting the INSTC (Reuters, 2024). Despite U.S. sanctions and periodic pressure, India has sought waivers or creative arrangements to keep the project alive, reflecting its long-term geo-economic value.

Relations with Israel: Since the establishment of full diplomatic relations in 1992, India-Israel ties have grown rapidly, especially in defense, agriculture, and high technology. Israel is a key supplier of advanced military platforms, missile defense systems, and cyber capabilities to India. In recent years, the

relationship has developed a more openly strategic profile, and there have been regular high-level visits and declarations of common interests in counterterrorism and innovation.

The U.S. Relationships: Nine areas of the U.S.-India strategic relationship include defense, the Quad in the Indo-Pacific, technology and supply-chain, and increased trade and investment. Washington considers India a key ally in balancing China, whereas New Delhi appreciates U.S. assistance in defence modernization, as well as institutional reform of the global institutions.

Multi-alignment at pressure: The traditional principle of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy in India consists of the desire to involve multiple centers of power without committing itself to any formal alliance. This has not only been a form of strengthening relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the U.S., but also maintaining links with Iran in West Asia. This has been explained by editorial analyses as a balancing act that India wants to navigate without making zero-sum decisions but in such a way that it enjoys the economic and strategic gains of both sides (IASGyan, 2026; Firstpost, 2026).

Trade-offs in the case of the 2025-26 U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict, however, become sharper as U.S. and Israeli demands to receive political support, impose sanctions, or simply cooperate silently can come into conflict with Indian interests in Iranian energy, connectivity through Chabahar, and the overall regional stability. Domestic constituencies—ranging from business lobbies to diaspora groups and political parties—may also push competing narratives about how closely India should align with any side.

Data and Discussion: India's Stakes under Tripartite Pressure

To clarify the nature and magnitude of India's stakes, this section presents selected data on India-Iran economic ties and on the broader risk matrix affecting India's West Asia policy.

Table 2- Selected Indicators of India-Iran Economic Relations

Indicator	Year/period	Value	Source/notes
India's exports to Iran	2024-25	~USD 1.24 billion	Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2026)
India's imports from Iran	2024-25	~USD 0.44 billion	Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2026)
Total India-Iran trade	2024-25	~USD 1.68 billion	Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2026)
Basmati rice exports to Iran	FY 2021-22	~USD 0.81 billion (~23% of total)	Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2022)
Status of the Chabahar Port agreement	May 2024	10-year operational agreement signed	Government of India & Iran; Reuters (2024)

These data underline that, even under sanctions, Iran remains an important—if not dominant—economic partner for India in selected sectors. The Chabahar Port project adds a strategic overlay that goes beyond trade volumes, promising overland connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia and potentially linking with broader Eurasian corridors.

Beyond Iran, India's exposure to the wider West Asian crisis can be summarized along several risk dimensions.

Table 3- India's Key Risk Dimensions in West Asia under U.S.–Israel–Iran Conflict

Dimension	Illustrative indicators/exposure	Strategic significance for India
Energy security	West Asia supplies a large share of India's crude oil and LNG imports; attacks on Iranian and Qatari gas fields and shipping raise price and supply risks.	Higher import bill, inflation, fiscal strain, need for diversification, and reserves
Maritime security	Shipping lanes through the Strait of Hormuz are critical for India's trade; increased attacks on vessels and insurance costs	Threat to trade volumes and logistics; pressure to coordinate naval presence
Diaspora welfare	Millions of Indian workers in Gulf states are affected by conflict, economic slowdown, or political backlash.	Domestic political concern; need for evacuation contingencies and consular outreach
Connectivity projects	Chabahar Port and INSTC rely on a stable Iran; IMEC depends on cooperation with Israel and the Gulf states.	Potential delays, re-routing, or rebalancing between corridors
Strategic partnerships	U.S. and Israel expect support; Iran expects continued engagement; Gulf states hedge between powers	Pressure on India's multi-alignment and "strategic autonomy" narrative

These risk categories illustrate how the tripartite pressure of U.S., Israeli, and Iranian actions compresses India's policy space. The more intense and prolonged the conflict, the greater the likelihood that India will face explicit choices—such as voting patterns in international forums, compliance with sanctions regimes, or participation in maritime coalitions—that constrain its ability to maintain equidistance.

Meanwhile, the crisis creates some opportunities. The high importance and consumption of energy by India as a stakeholder in the de-escalation process, as well as its status as a high-trading country, makes India have diplomatic leverage. Its ties between worlds, such as positive relations with Israel and the Gulf on the one hand and constant communication with Iran on the other, allow New Delhi to become a potential interlocutor, although unlikely to be a formal mediator. Furthermore, the war-induced shock can potentially hasten the process of diversifying energy in India, spending on renewable sources, and the development of strategic reserves.

Conclusion

The escalating conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran has brought about a perilous era to the west asia. The mass strikes of 202526, which are aimed at nuclear plants, missile bases, and more and more energy facilities, are the symptoms of the transition to shadow war to an open war with international consequences. The consequences on the stability of the region are immense: an increased risk of escalation, unstable regional alignment, and a threat to energy and maritime security, with serious consequences.

This threefold pressure is a trial and a turning point for India. The West Asia policy of India has been a longstanding conviction of strategic independence and multi-alignment that has helped New Delhi to develop concurrent partnerships with Washington, Tel Aviv, Tehran, and the Gulf capitals. Its economic interests, be it energy imports and diaspora remittances or connectivity initiatives such as Chabahar, are closely bound to the peace in the region, as well as transportation predictability.

The information analyzed in this section demonstrates that, despite sanctions, India's trade with Iran is not insignificant in such important areas as basmati rice, and the Chabahar Port plays a major role in India's dreams of the connectivity of the continent. Meanwhile, India is bound by its defense and technological relationship with Israel and their overall strategic alignment with the United States to act at will regarding Western preferences on sanctions and its security programs.

In the future, the Indian diplomatic policy may follow three main pillars. To begin with, vigorous participation in multilateral forums and silent diplomacy to facilitate de-escalation and the safety of freedom of navigation in the Gulf. Second, faster generation of diversity in energy sources and improvement of strategic reserves to address the issue of supply shocks. Third, it should be calibrated in such a way that it retains its core strategic benefits with the United States and Israel and retains sufficient contact with Iran to make Chabahar viable and maintain a minimum level of political leverage in Tehran. The U.S.–Israel–Iran triangle will remain structurally conflictual in the foreseeable future. India cannot resolve this triangle, but it can—and must—shape its West Asia policy to navigate the pressures with prudence, flexibility, and a clear sense of its long-term interests.

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