



# THE IRAN–UNITED STATES CONFLICT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA: GEOPOLITICAL RECONFIGURATION, ENERGY SECURITY, AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

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## ABSTRACT

*Iran–United States conflict has had a significant impact on the geopolitics of West Asia, on the regional security, energy markets, and maritime trade and strategic relations. The region plays a special role in Indian interests, given its energy needs, huge expatriate population, connectivity efforts, and maritime interests. This paper discusses the transformation of west Asian geopolitics in the wake of the Iran–US conflict and its strategic consequences for India. It is based on academic research and literature, policy research and contemporary sources using qualitative method and addresses the issues of energy security, connectivity, maritime security and India's diplomatic engagement. The paper concludes that India's strategic autonomy and multi-alignment offers New Delhi the flexibility to keep relations with key regional and global actors positive without losing the upper hand in the game of preserving India's national interests. It also suggests that the evolving regional dynamics also offer opportunities to India to broaden its strategic and diplomatic presence in West Asia.*

**KEYWORDS:** Iran–US Conflict, West Asia, India, Strategic Autonomy, Multi-alignment, Energy Security, Chabahar, INSTC, Maritime Security.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

West Asia is so strategically located, it has energy resources, maritime routes and influence on regional and global affairs that it plays a central role in international relations. The part of the region is an important part of India's extended neighbourhood and it also has great significance in its foreign policy, economic development and national security. Historically, India has had extensive relations with West Asia, both in terms of trade and people-to-people relations and has developed these relationships into the contemporary partnerships with Iran, the Gulf countries, Israel and the United States (Bansal, 2012; Dodh, 2016). It is a very significant area for India's energy needs, trade, investments and for the well being of its large overseas community (Gharekhan, 2009; Dodh, 2016).

Historically, Iran has been linked with India and its significance in India's connectivity with Afghanistan, Central Asia and Eurasia; and the fact that it is a geographically close neighbour makes Iran an unique place in India's West Asia policy. India's relations with Iran are bilateral but it has also pursued strategic bilateral projects like the Chabahar Port and the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The initiatives offer India a chance to deepen its engagement with Central Asian and Eurasian markets and build alternative trade corridors for trade in the region (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021; Pal, 2024; Sharma, 2024). Therefore, events in Iran have repercussions on India's economic and strategic agendas.

Since 1979, the relationship between Iran and the United States has been a point of contention in the Middle East. Protracted tensions have been a result of divergent views on Iran's nuclear ambitions, regional security, sanctions and conflicting strategic interests (Aneja, 2010; Saraswat, 2022).

An important diplomatic document for nuclear issue was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which was signed in 2015. But, the pullout of the US from the deal in 2018 and re-imposition of sanctions played its part in reigniting tensions between Washington and Tehran (Kutty, 2019; Saraswat, 2022). These developments also had consequences on India's attempts to foster a positive relationship with both countries.

The conflict has continued to go beyond the limits in 2025-2026, which further shaped the regional security scenario. The strategic significance of West Asia for India has risen due to military confrontation, uncertainty of energy supplies and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz (Chachda, 2026; Reddy, 2026; West Asia Review, 2026). The Strait is notably of great importance due to its importance in international energy transport and its link with India's energy security (IPCS, 2026; Ujiyari, 2026).

Thus, India's West Asian interests are multidimensional in nature. Peace, energy security, Indian diaspora, connectivity, maritime security and diplomatic partnerships are some of the major areas of strategic importance. Meanwhile, India's ties with Iran, the United States, Israel and the Gulf countries offer New Delhi with several options for asserting its national interest. The policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment helps India to remain in the good books of various regional and global actors (Pant & Super, 2013; Kutty, 2019; Pande, 2026).

In the backdrop of this, this paper explores the changing geopolitical dynamics in the west of Asia in the wake of the Iran–United States conflict and its strategic significance for India. It is geared towards energy security, connectivity, maritime security, Indian diaspora, and India's diplomacy. The paper suggests that India can leverage its strategic autonomy



and multi-alignment to safeguard national interest, and at the same time, also boost its economic, diplomatic and strategic engagement in West Asia.

Academically, the study is of qualitative nature, relying on the analysis of academic literature, policy studies, official material and contemporary analyses. It looks at the historical developments of the Iran-USA conflict, the alteration of the regional geopolitical landscape, Indian strategic concerns and policy options for New Delhi. The study aims to ultimately establish that despite the challenges being posed by the changing environment in West Asia, there are opportunities there for India to improve its engagement and strategic influence in the region.

## 2. THE IRAN-UNITED STATES CONFLICT: HISTORICAL ROOTS AND RECENT ESCALATION

Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, Iran and the United States have been engaged in a rivalry that is central to West Asian politics. But the clash has been over disagreements on Iran's nuclear programme, regional security, sanctions and distribution of political and strategic power in West Asia (Aneja, 2010; Saraswat, 2022). The nuclear issue has been at the heart of the conflict, but the competition has grown to include more general concerns about regional security, military power and geopolitical hegemony.

An important diplomatic agreement to address concerns about Iran's nuclear programme was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement, which ended in 2015. The deal set in place some limitations on Iran's nuclear program, in exchange for relief from some sanctions, and paved the way for negotiations between Iran and the international community. The withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA in 2018 and the imposition of the sanctions again helped lead to a new spark of tension between Washington and Tehran (Kutty, 2019; Saraswat, 2022). India found these developments very important, as New Delhi was interested in maintaining its traditional ties with Iran, while at the same time building strategic ties with the U.S. For India these developments were important because New Delhi wanted to continue its old relationship with Iran and strengthen its strategic partnership with the U.S.

The conflict then escalated into a regional security issue in 2025–2026. Greater tensions in West Asia due to military escalation between Iran, the United States and Israel and greater energy supply, maritime trade, and regional security concerns (Reddy, 2026; Chachda, 2026). Because of its significance in the international transport of energy, the Strait of Hormuz gained greater importance. The continuous disruptions to the waterway can impact the global energy markets and nations with a significant economic and energy reliance on the Gulf region (IPCS, 2026; Ujjari, 2026).

The conflict has also illustrated the intertwinement of West Asian geopolitics. The developments of Iran and the United States have effects on the Gulf region, regional security alliances and large external powers. This has led regional actors to re-evaluate their strategic priorities and boosted the significance of diplomatic engagement and regional stability (The Week, 2026). These developments are especially significant for India as West Asia is closely linked to India's

energy security, trade, interests of the Indian diaspora and maritime environment.

India's policies have always been based on strategic autonomy, dialogue and positive engagement. It has a wide diplomatic outreach arrangement to safeguard its national interest through its relationship with Iran, the United States, Israel and the Gulf countries. This is because of India's multi-alignment approach, which enables it to have independent ties with various power hubs without falling into the temptation of relying excessively on one strategic partner (Pant & Super, 2013; Kutty, 2019). This diplomatic fluidity can be of great benefit in times of regional turmoil.

The Iran-US conflict is therefore not just a conflict between two nations. It forms part of a broader shift in the strategic landscape of West Asia, relating to energy security and access, maritime trade and shipping, and regional partnerships and connectivity. The evolving landscape also poses significant challenges and opportunities for India to bolster its diplomatic efforts, expand strategic partnerships, bolster maritime capabilities, and play a role in regional stability.

### 2.1 The Nuclear Issue and the Evolution of US-Iran Tensions

The nuclear issue has been a main point of contention between Iran and the United States. A diplomatic solution for reducing Iran's nuclear program and tensions through negotiations was offered by the 2015 JCPOA (Kutty, 2019). The following withdrawal of the USA from the deal weakened this diplomacy and helped in lifting economic pressure on Iran (Saraswat, 2022).

The changing nature of the nuclear standoff has been a reminder to India of the need of an independent foreign-policy stance. New Delhi has maintained vital economic, historical and connectivity ties with Iran and strengthened its strategic ties with the United States. This is in line with India's strategic autonomy and its capacity to build positive ties with other countries with conflicting or divergent interests (Pant & Super, 2013; Saraswat, 2022).

The Iran-US confrontation then goes beyond the nuclear issue to regional security, energy supplies, access to the ocean and geopolitical influence. These entangled processes have been exacerbated in 2025–2026 (Reddy, 2026; Chachda, 2026). This is further underlining the need for India to have a diversified partnership with the regional players in West Asia, with a clear policy of strategic autonomy and persistent efforts for engagement.

## 3. RECONFIGURATION OF WEST ASIAN GEOPOLITICS

The Iran-United States conflict has helped to create some significant shifts in the geopolitical landscape of West Asia. The consequences of its confrontation with Tehran and Washington are not just limited to the Gulf states, Israel and other regional players, but also play into the strategic calculations of big powers outside the region. The war has heightened security-related concerns around the region, energy supplies, shipping and connectivity, and has led to a rethinking of states' strategic priorities (Reddy 2026; Chachda 2026). These developments matter to India partly as West Asia is closely linked with its energy security and economic interests as well as the Indian diaspora and expanding strategic interests.



Among the key aspects of the evolving regional landscape, you'll find the increasing relevance of strategic diversification. The Gulf countries have increasingly been doing their best to keep all major powers on board as they strive to safeguard their economic and security interests. Geographically, Iran still plays an important role due to its geographical location and energy resources, to its influence on important regional routes. Meanwhile, the Chinese and Russian economic and strategic linkages with Western Asian states have grown. These are signs of a new regional order becoming more intricate, characterised by the influence of more than one power (IPCS 2026; The Week 2026).

The changing geopolitical environment also has an important connectivity dimension. India's participation in the Chabahar Port is a significant channel for the connection between India and Afghanistan and Central Asian markets, while the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) opens up possibilities to enhance trade ties between India and Russia and other markets in the wider Eurasian region (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021; Pal, 2024; Sharma, 2024). India's desire to deepen economic and strategic ties between South Asia, West Asia and Europe (Chellaney, 2026) is further demonstrated through its interest in wider connectivity schemes, like the India – Middle East – Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). India, therefore, needs to increasingly focus on diversifying and strengthening its connectivity routes, which are vulnerable to regional instability.

The conflict has also heightened the strategic importance of the Arabian Sea and western Indian Ocean. Maritime links between West Asia and the Indian Ocean are vital to both the energy and commercial trade between the two regions. Hence, events in the Strait of Hormuz and the wider Arabian Sea region impact India's maritime security and economic interests (IPCS, 2026; Pacific Forum, 2026). As India's naval strength has increased and it has proven its own presence in the Indian Ocean, the country is building a critical infrastructure for the security of sea lanes, commerce and regional peace.

The other factor is the increasing involvement of China and Russia in the affairs of the West Asian region. China's economic ties with Iran and the Gulf states and Russia's strategic ties with Iran highlight the growing variety of external partnerships available for regional states. This evolving scenario underscores the need for India to have its own independent linkages in the region. India's location and economic potential and the traditional linkages it has had with the West Asian countries gives it ample scope to further strengthen the cooperation with these countries.

India's strategic autonomy and multi-alignment continue to be key tools in adapting to these shifts. New Delhi also enjoys good relations with Iran, Israel, the Gulf countries and the United States, which pave the way for cooperation in various fields while keeping the country free from any single geopolitical bloc (Pant & Super, 2013; Kutty, 2019). This would give India diplomatic leeway and enable it to protect national interests in uncertain times of the region. The significance of India's multi-alignments in its relationship management with West Asia also continues to be stressed upon in contemporary evaluations (IPCS, 2026).

Thus, the reconfiguration of the geopolitics of the west Asian region offers challenges as well as opportunities to India.

India's energy and trade routes are at risk of disruption, and its multifaceted diplomatic engagements and connectivity programs and maritime power offer opportunities for greater engagement with the region. The evolving landscape can then reinforce India's contribution to the stability, connectivity and economic cooperation in West Asia, and help New Delhi play a more important role in the region.

**Table 1. India's Key Strategic Interests in West Asia**

| Strategic Interest | Significance for India                  | Conflict Implication   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Energy             | Oil, LNG and LPG supplies               | Supply and price risks |
| Diaspora           | Indians living and working in West Asia | Safety and evacuation  |
| Connectivity       | Chabahar and INSTC                      | Route disruption       |
| Maritime Security  | Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean            | Greater security needs |
| Diplomacy          | Iran, US, Israel and Gulf states        | Sustained engagement   |

**Source:** Compiled by the author based on Gharekhan (2009), Omidi and Noolkar-Oak (2021), Pal (2024), Sharma (2024), IPCS (2026), Ujyari (2026), and Pacific Forum (2026).

The evolving geopolitical scenario in the Middle East and its impact on India's strategic concerns are clear and significant both in the immediate and the long-term. The ties that India has with the region are economic, energy, connectivity, maritime security, and people-to-people ties. Therefore, India has to balance its immediate national interests in the Iran–United States conflict with building its long-term strategic presence in the area. India's diverse partnerships and policy of strategic autonomy offer an important ground for these goals (Pant & Super, 2013; Kutty, 2019).

#### 4.1 Energy Security

One of the most significant aspects of India's interests in West Asia is energy security. The gulf region continues to be a significant source of imported crude oil, natural gas and petroleum products to India. As a result, any disruptions in the energy supply chain – whether in the production, transport, or maritime sectors – can impact the cost of energy and overall economic stability in India (Gharekhan, 2009; IPCS, 2026). The Strait of Hormuz is especially relevant due to the fact that disruptions in the flow of energy through the strait can impact energy supplies flowing from the Gulf to international markets.

The Iran–US conflict thus makes it all the more significant that India is following the policy of diversification of energy sources. India has built its energy connections with more countries and more sources, thus minimizing excessive dependency on any single source. This diversification can help to bolster India's energy security and improve its ability to navigate global energy market volatility (Ujyari, 2026). All this is supplemented by India's increasing investment in renewable energy and alternative energy sources.

The war also presents India with the need to keep its relations with the Gulf countries stable. India can not only boost its energy security with partnerships with Saudi Arabia and other UAE neighbours like Qatar and elsewhere in the region, but also do so to enhance trade and investment ties. India's



multi-alignment policy is a practical policy as it can be seen in its dealings with various energy-producing nations.

#### 4.2 Indian Diaspora and Economic Interests

Another significant aspect of India's relationship with West Asia is the Indian community around the globe. Indian citizens residing and working in the Gulf region in various fields like construction, healthcare, information technology and services and trade etc. The presence has resulted in a huge social and economic linkage with West Asian countries (Dodh, 2016; Ujyari 2026).

During such times of conflict in the region, there will be more emphasis placed on safeguarding the safety and welfare of Indian citizens while abroad. India has proven its ability to carry out evacuation and consular operations in the past in times of regional crises. The learning acquired from such operations enhances India's capacity to effectively respond to future emergencies.

India is also home to a large number of Indians working in the West Asia countries and their remittance is also a crucial factor for India's economy. Stable relations with the host countries is therefore also relevant both from a humanitarian and an economic point of view. The Indian foreign policy towards the Gulf countries offers a vital platform for safeguarding these interests and enhancing the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

#### 4.3 Chabahar Port and Connectivity

Connectivity is an integral factor of India's strategic ties with Iran. Chabahar Port is also a major port for India to access Afghanistan and Central Asia and lessens India's reliance on traditional ports that may be geographically or geopolitically limited (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). The port is thus of strategic value beyond its function as a commercial port.

Another connectivity opportunity is the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The corridor can also enhance India's role in the emerging trade routes of the Eurasian landmass, connecting India to Iran, Russia and Central Asian countries via multimodal transportation links, as noted by both Pal (2024) and Sharma (2024). With a shifting geopolitical landscape, the ability to develop resilient connectivity networks has become a priority.

India's connectivity agenda is also focused on the India – Middle East – Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Chabahar, INSTC and IMEC are part of India's grand vision of establishing multiple corridors between South Asia and West Asia, Central Asia, Russia and Europe. Progress in these initiatives can bring about better economic integration and influence within India.

#### 4.4 Maritime Security

Maritime security is also becoming a critical issue for India in the backdrop of the Iran-US conflict. The Arabian Sea and western Indian Ocean are important for energy imports, trade and other economic activities in India. Thus, any instability in the vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz or the other maritime corridors traversed by India can have repercussions for the country's interests (IPCS, 2026; Pacific Forum, 2026).

The development of India's naval strength and maritime surveillance systems is another advantage that will help in addressing such developments. Increase in awareness and

collaboration with regional partners and protection of commercial shipping can enhance India's efforts to protect its interests. India's presence in the Indian Ocean can also enable the Indian government to contribute to the broader Indian Ocean region's stability.

India, with its existing naval presence and partnerships in the region, could play a proactive role in safeguarding freedom of navigation and facilitating maritime cooperation and secure sea lanes, not just during crisis situations. The move would boost India's credentials as a key security player in the broader Indian Ocean neighbourhood.

#### 4.5 Diplomatic Engagement and Strategic Autonomy

One of India's most significant strategic assets in West Asia is its relationship with Iran, the United States, Israel and the Gulf countries. They enable India to have a communication link with various regional and global actors while safeguarding its own foreign-policy agendas (Pant & Super, 2013; Kutty, 2019).

The Iran-US conflict is a real-world example of the strategic autonomy of India. The aim of India is not to join any competing geo-political groups, but to keep possession of enough strategic flexibility to engage in cooperation with various partners as per national interest. This helps New Delhi to talk to the US on defence and technology, Iran on connectivity and regional cooperation, Israel on technology and security, and the Gulf countries on energy, investment and trade.

Overall, the Iran-USA conflict poses big challenges to India's energy, economic, connectivity and security interests. But the different kinds of partnerships, the geographical location, the economic potential and strategic independence in India offer significant possibilities to deal with these issues. The crisis thus reinforces the need for India to keep its engagement with West Asia and its growing role as a leading strategic partner in the region going.

### 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this context, the evolving geopolitical landscape of West Asia demands India to proceed proactively and flexibly, ensuring the country's national security and deepening its engagement in the region. The present Indian policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment is a solid base for such a policy. The following steps can add to the strength of India's position.

#### 5.1 Strengthening Energy Diversification

India needs to further diversify sourcing of its crude oil, natural gas and other energy supplies to minimize the effect of geopolitical uncertainty. To boost the energy resilience of India, there is a need for greater cooperation with the Gulf producers and in investing in renewable energy, alternative energy technologies and building strategic petroleum reserves (Gharekhan, 2009; Ujyari, 2026).

#### 5.2 Enhancing Connectivity Initiatives

India needs to continue to invest and be involved in the diplomacy of Chabahar Port, INSTC and IMEC. Multiple connectivity corridors can facilitate India's linkage with Central Asia, Russia, West Asia and Europe, as well as minimize vulnerabilities to congestion on any single route (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021; Pal, 2024; Sharma, 2024). Better



coordination with partner countries can also contribute to the commerciality of these corridors.

### 5.3 Strengthening Maritime Security

India needs to improve the surveillance and cooperation in the Arabian Sea and western Indian Ocean. More sharing of information, energy and naval readiness, and coordination with regional partners, can help to secure commercial shipping and energy lines (IPCS, 2026; Pacific Forum, 2026). India's proven maritime capabilities can also play a role in contributing to the stability of the region.

### 5.5 Promoting sustainable economic growth and development

India must further enhance the emergency preparedness and consular arrangement for Indian citizens in West Asia. In a context of regional instability, a swift response can be achieved through dedicated evacuation planning, coordination with host governments and communication systems (Ujiyari, 2026).

### 5.5 Maintaining Strategic Autonomy

India's policy of 'constructive engagement' with Iran, the U.S., Israel and the Gulf countries should continue. This will help New Delhi continue to navigate the waters of protectionism through strategic dialogues with a variety of partners without being overly reliant on any one strategic relationship (Pant & Super, 2013; Kutty, 2019). India's diplomatic manoeuvrability may also help it play a role in dialogue and de-escalation in the region when tensions rise.

### 5.6 Regional role of India is growing

India needs to leverage its growing international stature, diplomatic strength and economic power to foster peace, trade and connectivity in the region. There is a need for greater cooperation with West Asian nations in technology, healthcare, infrastructure, maritime security and renewable energy among others to strengthen bilateral ties between India and the region. A pro-active stance will help India to go beyond responding to regional crises and build its stature as a kind of long-term partner in the region.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Iran-U.S. confrontation has played an important role in reshaping the geopolitical landscape of West Asia, affecting many aspects of energy security, maritime trade, regional connectivity and strategic partnerships. The shifting regional geopolitical landscape reflects the ongoing significance of West Asia for India's economical and geopolitical interests. Regional stability is therefore also an integral part of India's national security goals, given the geographical proximity, the size and extent of economic interdependence, the large Indian diaspora and increasing maritime and connectivity interests.

The war underscores the importance of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment for India. India's simultaneous interaction with Iran, US, Israel and the Gulf countries give New Delhi some flexibility in diplomacy and also allows it to safeguard its interests in various spheres. While India's security role is significant in the region, it can also be useful to leverage its economic potential, connectivity and diplomatic outreach to

support stability and cooperation in the region (Pant & Super, 2013; Kutty, 2019).

The study has proven that energy security, connectivity and maritime security will continue to be the key concerns in India's West Asia policy. Energy diversification, further development of Chabahar and INSTC, further development of broader connectivity projects, and the enhancement of maritime capabilities can help build India's resilience to regional disruptions. Meanwhile, safeguarding the Indian community abroad and building positive diplomatic relations with all stakeholders should also continue to be a priority.

India is also likely to have great opportunities to emerge from the changing geopolitical order. As India's sphere of influence, its economic power, and ties with West Asian nations are expanding, it has the potential to engage in a more meaningful way in regional diplomacy and economic engagement. Thus, the Iran-US conflict cannot be seen as a source of problems for India alone. It also provides opportunities to New Delhi to further deepen the strategic partnership, further strengthen the connectivity, improve energy resilience, and consolidate New Delhi's role as an important and responsible player in West Asia.

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