



Iran- Israel Conflict: Instability in the Middle East

This editorial is based on “ [Step back: On Iran-Israel tensions](#) ” which was published in The Hindu on 17/04/2024. The article talks about the geopolitical concerns of heightened tensions in the volatile West Asia region after Iran's drone and missile attack on Israel.

For Prelims: [Iran](#), [Israel](#), [Middle East](#), [1979 Islamic Revolution](#), [Stuxnet](#), [Gaza Strip](#), [Red Sea Crisis](#), [Israeli air defense system](#), [OPEC \(Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries\)](#), [Two State Solution](#), [Gulf Cooperation Council](#), [European Union](#), [United Nations](#), [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action \(JCPOA\)](#)

For Mains: Historical Background of Relations Between Iran and Israel, Key Events that Led to Iran's Attack on Israel, Impact of Iran- Israel Conflict on the World

Iran launched a significant attack on Israel, deploying over 300 projectiles, including approximately 170 drones, cruise missiles, and over 120 ballistic missiles. This action was widely seen as retaliation for a deadly strike on Iran's consulate in Damascus, Syria.

The attack signals a significant escalation in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran, moving beyond previous skirmishes involving [Israel and Hamas](#). This event highlights the intensifying tensions between two of the [Middle East's](#) staunchest adversaries and underscores the potential for further conflict in the region.

What is the Historical Background of Relations Between Iran and Israel?

▪ Pre-1979 Iran-Israel Ties:

- Iran was one of the first countries in the region to recognise Israel after its formation in 1948.
- In 1948, the opposition of Arab states to Israel led to the first Arab-Israeli war. Iran was not a part of that conflict, and after Israel won, it established ties with the Jewish state.
- According to an analysis from the **Brookings Institute**, Israel, under its first **Prime Minister David Ben Gurion**, adopted the "**periphery doctrine**" to counter Arab hostility by forming alliances with non-Arab, mainly Muslim, countries in the Middle East. This strategy focused on forging partnerships with nations like Turkey and pre-revolution Iran, which shared a pro-Western orientation and felt isolated in the region
- **Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi**, who ruled Iran from 1941 to 1979, pursued a **pro-Western foreign policy**. Despite facing an economic boycott from Arab states, Iran maintained diplomatic ties with Israel and even continued to sell oil to Israel during this period.

▪ The 1979 Revolution:

- A religious state was established in Iran after the Shah was overthrown in the **1979 Islamic Revolution**. The regime's view of Israel changed, and it was seen as an **occupier**

of Palestinian land.

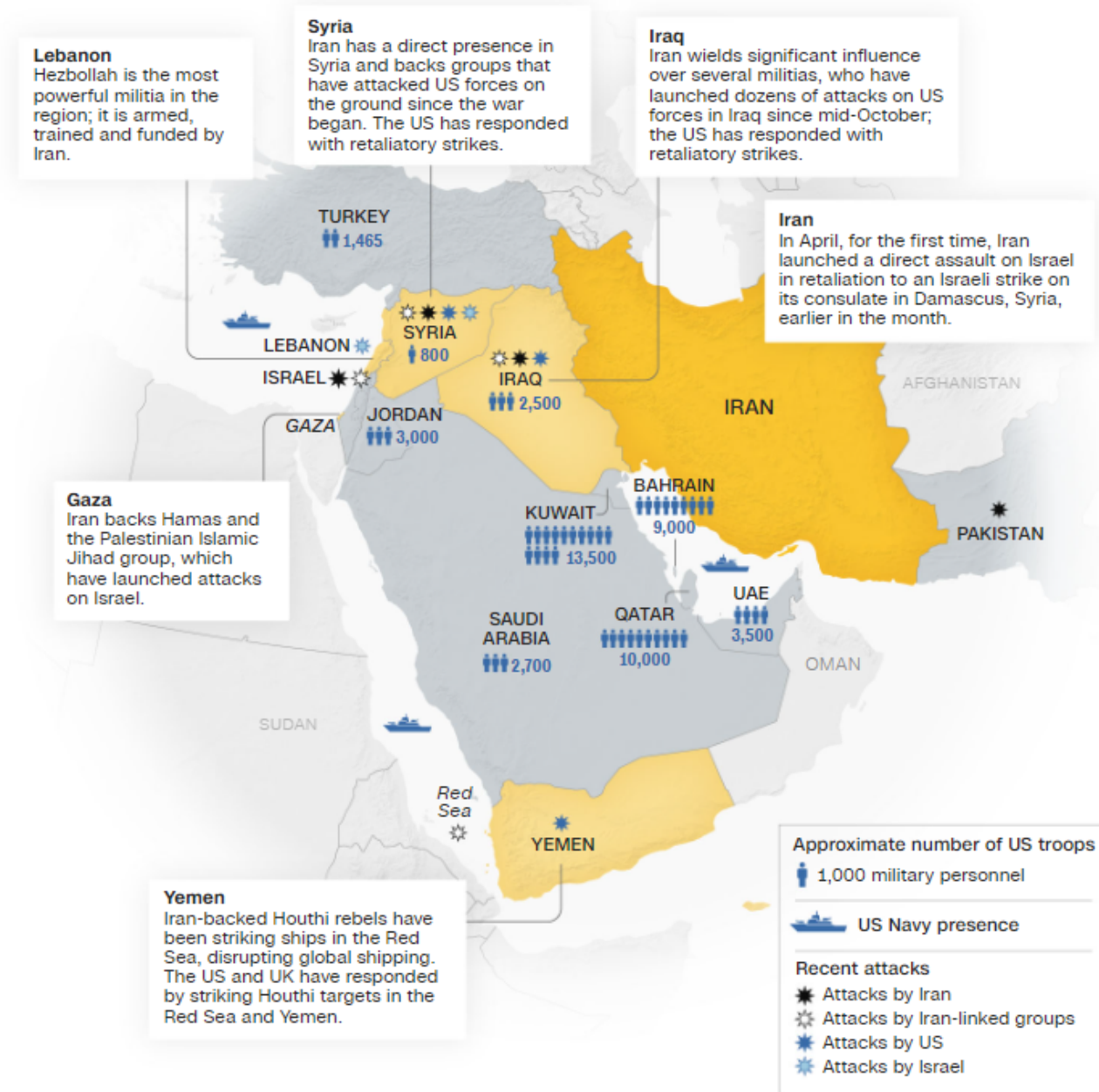
- Israel's Iranian Supreme **Leader Ayatollah Khomeini** termed Israel "**Little Satan**" and the United States the "**Great Satan**", seeing the two as parties interfering in the region.
- Iran also sought to grow its presence in the region, challenging the two major powers Saudi Arabia and Israel - both of whom were US allies.

▪ A Shadow War after 1979:

- As a result, the ties between the countries worsened. While Israel and Iran have never engaged in direct military confrontation, both have attempted to inflict damage on the other through proxies and limited strategic attacks.
- In the early 2010s, Israel targeted several facilities and nuclear scientists in a bid to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons.
- In 2010, the US and Israel are believed to have developed [Stuxnet](#), a malicious computer virus. It was aimed at attacking a uranium enrichment facility at Iran's Natanz nuclear site and was the "**first publicly known cyberattack on industrial machinery**".
- Iran, meanwhile, is seen as responsible for funding and supporting several militant groups in the region that are anti-Israel and anti-US, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and [Hamas](#) in the [Gaza Strip](#).
- This support was why concerns of a widening conflict or a confrontation have been raised in the last few months.



Iran-backed groups in the Middle East and major US military deployments



What are the Key Events that Led to Iran's Attack on Israel?

- **Withdrawal from Iran's Nuclear Deal:** In 2018, Israel hails US withdrawal from [Iran's nuclear deal](#) with world powers after years of lobbying against the agreement, calling Trump's decision "a historic move".
- **Assassination of Iran's Army General:** In 2020, Israel welcomes the [assassination of General Qassem Soleimani](#), commander of the overseas arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, in an American drone strike in Baghdad. Iran strikes back with missile attacks on Iraqi bases housing American troops.
- **Hamas Missile Attack:** In October 2023, Hamas (the Iran-backed terrorist group) launched a missile attack targeting Israel. In response, Israel conducted airstrikes on Gaza.
- **Israel Raids and Attacks Medical Facilities:** In November 2023, Israel started conducting raids and attacking medical facilities as Hamas was reportedly operating from these hospital buildings and carrying out their warfare.
- **Houthi Group's Red Sea Incident:** In November 2023, The Iran-backed Houthi group, based in Yemen, landed their helicopter on the Galaxy Leader cargo vessel as it was passing via the Red

Sea. This marked the start of the '[Red Sea Crisis](#),' which eventually led to supply chain issues.

- **Escalation of Israel's Ground Offenses:** In December 2023, Israel's ground offenses in the Gaza Strip intensified at a rapid pace. This led to an increase in the death toll and the number of refugees. India urged for an 'early and durable resolution' between the warring nations.
- **Airstrike on the Iranian Embassy:** A suspected Israeli air strike on the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus kills seven officers of the **Islamic Revolutionary Guard**, including two senior commanders. Israel neither confirmed or denied responsibility.
- **Iran's Missile Attack on Israel:** In April 2024, Iran launched a missile attack on Israel. The attack was, allegedly, in response to a suspected Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Syria. This marked the first instance of Iran directly targeting Israel from its domestic territory.
- **Israel's Multi-layered Air Defence:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) claimed that the [Israeli air defense system](#) intercepted 99% of the incoming projectiles from Iran. The United States, the United Kingdom, France, and other Middle Eastern allies also helped defend Israel.

IRON DOME TO ARROW: COMPONENTS OF AIR DEFENCE

Israel intercepted 99% of missiles and drones that Iran launched on Saturday night, Israel's military said. None of the 170 drones and 30 cruise missiles entered Israeli territory, though a few of the 110 ballistic missiles that Iran fired did. Israel is at least 1,000 km away from Iran — with Iraq, Syria, and Jordan in between

IRON DOME

For short-range rockets and shells, like the ones fired from Gaza. Developed by Rafael Advanced Defence Systems; world's most successful missile defence system with 90% success rate, according to the company. Operational since 2011. (right)



RADAR UNIT

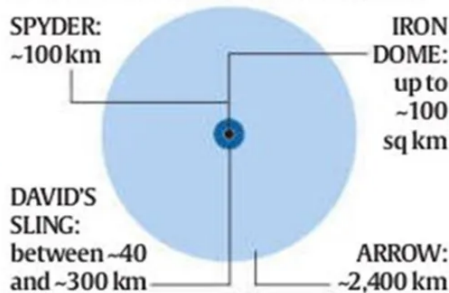
detects airborne rocket/shell, transmits data to the control unit.



Illustration: Suvajit Dey; Photos: Reuters, Rafael Advanced Defence Systems; Information: AP, Rafael, CSIS



RANGE OF ISRAEL'S AIR DEFENCE MISSILES: FROM 100-2,400 KM



DAVID'S SLING

Intermediate layer of air defence system, for ballistic and cruise missiles and longer-range rockets. Developed by Rafael Advanced Defence Systems along with American defence contractor Raytheon. Carrier has upto 12 Stunner interceptors, according to the firm. Operational since 2017. (above)



SPYDER

Family of multirange mobile air defence systems to defend large areas against aerial attacks by fighter and bomber aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles, UAVs. All-weather system can be activated within seconds of a target being declared hostile, according to the manufacturer Rafael. (above)

ARROW

A mobile system consisting of hypersonic anti-missile interceptors, ground-based 'Green Pine' missile defence radar, early warning radar, and command and launch control centres. Arrow 3 is most modern, longest range interceptor. Range 1,400 miles-plus, altitude 62 miles; meant for targets in the upper atmosphere.

How the Iran-Israel War May Impact the World?

- **Possible Israeli Response May Increase Regional Escalation:**

- Given the widely held Israeli belief that a nuclear-armed Iran is an existential threat to Israel, retaliation cannot be ruled out of the decision-making matrix.
- Failure of diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions or negotiate a peaceful resolution could leave military action as the only option, increasing the likelihood of regional escalation.
- **Potential to Disrupt Oil Supplies:**
 - Iran is the third-largest producer of crude oil within [OPEC \(Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries\)](#). If the tensions between Iran and Israel escalate further, the supply of crude oil prices will be severely disrupted.
 - This will hit Indian share market sentiment as India is the third-largest consumer and importer of crude oil, importing over 80% of its crude oil needs.
- **Spike in Inflation and Capital Outflow:**
 - If geopolitical tensions increase from hereon, commodity prices will move up due to supply disruptions. Globally, inflation will remain high due to geopolitical tension as it will affect crude oil prices and other commodity prices such as copper, zinc, aluminium, nickel, etc.
 - As a result of these concerns, investors are expected to become cautious and may move their money out of riskier assets like Indian stocks and into safer options like [gold \(bullion\)](#).
 - Bond prices may fall, the cost of credit may rise for companies, and stock markets may fall both because of reduced profitability of the corporate sector and heightened uncertainty.
- **Trade and Travel Disruptions:**
 - Apart from oil prices being affected, trade and travel could also be hit in the likelihood of an Israel-Iran all-out war. Aviation and shipping sectors could be disrupted.
 - In fact, several countries in the region, including Iran, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel, temporarily closed their airspaces, opening it later, albeit with restrictions.
 - Experts have noted that India's exports to Europe would be disrupted in wake of the renewed Iran-Israel tensions.
- **India's Strategic Dilemma:**
 - India's long-standing strategic relationships with both Iran and Israel present challenges on both policy and operational fronts.
 - India values its strategic partnership with Israel, which includes defense cooperation, technology exchange, and intelligence sharing. However, India also maintains historical and economic ties with Iran, including energy imports and infrastructure projects.
 - India seeks to maintain stability in the Middle East to safeguard its interests, including energy security and the welfare of its diaspora.

RISING ENERGY DEMAND

FINANCIAL YEAR	OIL IMPORT DEPENDENCY*
2023-24	87.7
2022-23	87.4
2021-22	85.5
2020-21	84.4
2019-20	85
2018-19	83.8



What Could be the Possible Solutions to De-escalate the Iran - Israel Conflict?

- **Sustainable Ceasefire and Two-State Solution:**
 - Israel should accept a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza as soon as possible, open the borders for international humanitarian aid to Gaza, and respect the [UN resolutions](#) to end the 70-year-old crisis by realizing a [two-state solution](#).
 - The two-state solution is the only feasible way ahead for long-term security, peace and stability in the region. It is not an easy goal, but both sides are familiar with the challenges and opportunities.
- **Dialogue and Diplomacy:**
 - An international initiative must mediate a sustainable ceasefire between Israel and Iran. Encouraging both countries to engage in direct talks facilitated by international mediators could help build trust and find common ground.
 - Iran and Israel could engage in direct talks facilitated by a neutral third party, such as the [European Union](#) or the [United Nations](#).
- **Addressing Nuclear Proliferation Concerns:**
 - Iran could adhere to the terms of the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action \(JCPOA\)](#) and allow international inspections of its nuclear facilities to ensure compliance with the agreement.
 - In return, Israel could recognise Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy and commit to refraining from military strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities.
- **Regional Cooperation:**
 - Promoting cooperation between Iran and Israel within the framework of regional organizations, such as the Arab League or the [Gulf Cooperation Council](#), could help address shared security concerns and foster stability in the Middle East.
 - Developing a comprehensive regional security architecture that addresses the concerns of all stakeholders in the Middle East could contribute to stability and reduce the likelihood of conflict between Iran and Israel.
- **Long-Term Vision for the Middle East:**
 - Regional powers could work together to establish a comprehensive security architecture for the Middle East, including confidence-building measures, arms control agreements, and mechanisms for resolving conflicts peacefully.
 - Addressing underlying issues, such as historical grievances, territorial disputes, and religious extremism, can help create an environment conducive to peace and reconciliation.
- **Normalization of Relations:**
 - Iran and Israel could take steps towards normalizing diplomatic relations, such as exchanging ambassadors, reopening embassies, and facilitating people-to-people exchanges, similar to the [peace agreements between Israel and some Arab states like the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain](#).

Conclusion

The repercussions of ongoing instability in the Middle East extend to the [Global South](#) and Global Governance. Therefore, it is crucial for the international community to urge all parties to refrain from violence and prioritize diplomatic negotiations for solutions. Embracing responsible and balanced policies is imperative to prevent long-term instability and alleviate the region's crisis.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the potential implications of the Iran-Israel conflict on global peace and stability. Suggest measures to ensure long-term stability in the Middle East region.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Mediterranean Sea is a border of which of the following countries? (2017)

1. Jordan
2. Iraq
3. Lebanon
4. Syria

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Ans: C

Q. Which one of the following countries of South-West Asia does not open out to the Mediterranean Sea? (2015)

- (a) Syria
(b) Jordan
(c) Lebanon
(d) Israel

Ans: B

Q. The term “two-state solution” is sometimes mentioned in the news in the context of the affairs of (2018)

- (a) China
(b) Israel
(c) Iraq
(d) Yemen

Ans: B

Mains

Q. “India’s relations with Israel have, of late, acquired a depth and diversity, which cannot be rolled back.” Discuss. (2018)