

West Asia: An Unending Crisis

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Abstract

The Middle East has been a center of power struggle amongst sovereign countries. In today's world, West Asia [Middle East] has geopolitical importance due to crude oil reserves and significant trade routes. Gulf countries have differences based on Shia and Sunni communities, which divides the whole region. This paper explores the intricate complexities of West Asia and the ongoing war. Israel has been fighting for its existence since the beginning of its formation and has faced many attacks from Arab countries, and this is the reason that West Asia has become an epicenter of conflict. The US-Israel –Iran war has created instability and insecurity for other Gulf nations and if they start contributing directly or indirectly in this war, it will be difficult for it to end in the near future. Trade has been disrupted globally, many countries are facing energy crisis, especially Asian countries; and many civilian casualties have been recorded. International organizations like the United Nations have become irrelevant and unsuccessful in establishing international peace and securing interest of sovereign countries. Through a comprehensive review and analysis of secondary data, this paper seeks to address the ongoing conflict in west Asia, reasons behind this conflict and implications on the world.

Keywords: West Asia, Epicenter, Conflict, Instability, Insecurity, Energy, Isreal, War

Introduction

International relations is an incredibly exciting and diverse field of study because it addresses some of the most pressing problems influences the lives of everyone on the planet; matters of war and peace, diplomacy, trade, alliances, treaties, cultural exchanges, the organization of the global economy, the causes and consequences of global inequality and pending global environmental catastrophe.

Joshua S Goldstein wrote, “the movements of armies and of diplomats ,the crafting of treaties and alliances ,the development and deployment of military capabilities –these are the subjects that dominated the study of International relations in

the past and they continue to hold central position in the field.”¹

International relations is highly dynamic and organized into various sub fields including international security, international political economy, international history, international law, and international organizations. In modern times the study of international relations is becoming even more important as our world becomes more interconnected.

The Middle East [West Asia] is one of the most ancient regions of human civilization. Over a period of 1200 years, many different great civilizations and cultures developed within the region. The middle east is also the origin of major

religions including Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the 20th century, the significant stocks of crude oil in the region gave it new strategic and economic importance. West Asia remains a strategically, economically, politically, culturally and religiously highly sensitive region.

Since the formation of Israel as a Jewish country the other nations of Middle East have been hostile towards Israel. The 1948 formation of the state of Israel exacerbated deep rooted tensions in the Middle East triggering not only fighting within Israel and Palestine but also a broader Arab Israel conflict.

The Israel Arab wars refer to a series of conflicts that began with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 escalating long standing tensions in the Middle East. The first war, often termed the 1948 Palestine War or the Israeli War of Independence, saw violent clashes between Jewish militias and Palestinian Arab forces as the British mandate ended. Following Israel's declaration of independence, neighboring Arab nations invaded leading to a significant territorial expansion for Israel and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. The conflict evolved in to the 21st century with the second Lebanon war in 2006 and a return to heightened hostilities in 2023 illustrating the enduring complexity and volatility of Israeli Arab relations.²

From its initial weakened state Isreal has now emerged as a strong military power hardened from years of war. Due to this Iran has always used underhanded tactics such as proxy wars to upend Isreal 's influence and to establish its own control over the region. But the threat to Isreal's existence remains as long as Iran does not back down and continues to wage its own war against Isreal.

Escalation to War

On October 7, 2023, the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched a massive, coordinated surprise attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip. Codenamed "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood," the assault was the deadliest day in Israeli history and the largest-scale invasion of its territory since the Arab Israeli War of 1948.

The Hamas attack on Israel was a major an unprecedented event in the modern history of the Middle East conflict. It triggered a full-scale war in Gaza starting immediately afterward. Hostage-taking, violence, and other alleged war crimes were reported.

In 2024, Hamas continued attacks against Israel through rocket fire from Gaza, including on New Year's Day, while the conflict shifted toward intensive Israeli operations, including the Rafah offensive (May-July) and targeted killings of Hamas leadership, such as Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran (July) and Yahya Sinwar in Gaza (October)

Casualties: Approximately 1,200 people were killed in Israel, primarily civilians. Victims included families in border communities, attendees of the Nova Music Festival (where 378 were killed), and foreign nationals. The exact death toll in Gaza has been bitterly disputed, though as per Lancet global health research approx.70,000 Deaths reported at Gaza since the outbreak of war from Oct. 2023 by the Israel forces.

On June 22, 2025, the United States Air Force and Navy attacked three nuclear facilities in Iran as part of the Twelve-Day War, under the code name Operation Midnight Hammer, in response to the looming threat of Iran's nuclear capabilities.

In current ongoing conflict as of March 2026, the Middle East is experiencing intense, widespread turmoil marked by a direct, multi-front war between a US-Israeli coalition and Iran, initiated by strikes on February 28, 2026. This conflict has led to the death of Iran's Supreme Leader and several members of the leadership, significant degradation of Iranian missile production and military infrastructure. The US and Israel have also targeted key sites linked to Iran's nuclear programme which Iran insists is entirely peaceful and Iranian oil and gas sites.

They include Kharg Island, home to a major oil terminal that is considered Iran's economic life-line.

Israel also targeted South Pars, part of the world's largest natural gas field.

The crisis has caused regional instability, including blocked shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and

ongoing conflict in Lebanon, Yemen, and the Gaza Strip.

In response to these attacks Iran has launched missiles and drones at US allies across the Gulf hitting US military locations, oil and civilian areas in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar and United Arab Emirates [U.A.E.] Kuwait, Jordan and Cyprus.



Source: BBC News

Causes of Conflict

1. Religious Differences: Iran governed by Shia Islamic principles and Israel a predominately Jewish state, are divided by stark religions and ideological differences. These fundamental disparities have fueled mutual distrust and animosity over the decades.

Iran's support for anti-Israel terrorist groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza and Shia militias in Iraq all seen by Israel as direct threats to its security.

2. Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran and Israel both are locked in a struggle for the regional dominance with opposing interests in conflict such as the Syrian civil war and the Yemen crisis. Iran backed the Assad regime in Syria and the Houthi rebels in Yemen while Israel works to counter Iranian influence in these areas.

3. Iran's Nuclear Program: Iran's nuclear program is one of the main reasons behind this war. Israel and US fear that the program is moving towards nuclear weapons which has led to rising

tensions among these countries. Israel has been a fierce critic of the Iran's nuclear deal [Joint comprehensive plan of Action] and has undertaken both overt and covert actions to disrupt Iran's nuclear progress.

4. Iran's Proxy War: The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the most prominent practitioners of proxy warfare. Since the early 1980s, Iran has placed proxy wars at the center of its grand strategy.⁴ Iran has established specialized units within the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for the purpose of indirect interventions and united them under the name of Quds Force.⁵ Through the Quds Force (QF) and its antecedents, Iran has cultivated a network of proxies.⁶ Iran's proxy war strategy has provided significant advantages, allowing the country to expand its regional influence and build deterrence postures against adversaries by utilizing non-state armed groups. This approach also enables Iran to project power throughout the region while minimizing the risks and costs associated with direct intervention

The relationship between Iran and Palestinian groups, mainly Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), began in the early 1990s as part of Iran's strategy to increase its influence in Palestine.⁷ When Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, Iran's support for the organization significantly intensified, ensuring that Hamas became Iran's most prominent Palestinian partner.⁸

Iranian support for Hamas is multifaceted, involving financial assistance, military training, intelligence sharing, and the provision of advanced weapons systems.⁹ U.S. and Israeli sources estimate that Iran provides between \$70 million and \$100 million to Hamas annually.¹⁰ Moreover, IRGC-QF officers and Lebanese Hezbollah commanders have been providing basic and advanced military training to Hamas members since the 1990s. Additionally, Iran supplied Hamas with rockets, including Grad, Fajr-5, and M-302, significantly enhancing Hamas's military capabilities and enabling it to strike Israel from Gaza.

Iran also transferred the expertise to produce rockets and ammunition domestically, modeled

after Hezbollah's strategy in Lebanon. Iran's relationship with Hamas brought several strategic benefits for Iran. Initially, by supporting Hamas and enhancing its ability to strike Israel, Iran has created an additional layer in its forward defense strategy, alongside Lebanese Hezbollah, and can indirectly apply pressure on Israel. Furthermore, the Palestinian cause, coupled with Iran's backing of Palestinian factions, enhances Iran's soft power and popularity in the Islamic world. Iran's partnership with Hamas also enabled Iran to project influence in the Palestinian territories and broaden its geopolitical reach.¹¹

Iranians themselves have endured years of economic turmoil, made worse by US and EU sanctions on Iran's oil sector over its alleged nuclear ambitions, financial links to international terrorism and human rights abuses. Over the New Year, authorities launched a deadly crackdown on protesters following the sharp collapse of the country's currency. While reporting restrictions make the exact death toll impossible to know, reports from inside Iran suggest as many as 30,000 people were killed by their own security forces. Although it is ruled as a theocracy with only limited power delegated to its elected parliament, Iran is culturally and ethnically diverse. Under the Islamic Republic rule, reformist movements have been repeatedly throttled and while there are a number of opposition parties with widespread support, their leaders are either in exile or under heavy state surveillance.

Since late December 2025, Iranian security forces have been carrying out mass killings of protesters during the 2025–2026 Iranian protests. As of January 25, 2026, the total number of deaths was estimated to be over 30,000.¹² This makes them some of the biggest massacres in modern Iranian history.^{13, 14} Around 135 security officers have also been killed, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRANA).¹⁵

The Iranian government imposed a near-total internet shutdown during the crackdown, making it hard for people inside Iran to communicate and for the outside world to learn about the killings.¹⁶ Esmaeil Baghayi, a spokesperson for the Iranian

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirmed that security forces shot at protesters.¹⁷ On January 25, Time reported that a list showed 30,304 protest-related deaths recorded in civilian hospitals just on January 8 and 9.¹²

In a speech on January 17, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei acknowledged that "several thousand" people had been killed during the protests.^{18, 19, 20} On January 18, an Iranian official told Reuters that the government estimated more than 5,000 people had died in the massacres.^{21, 22, 23}

Consequences

1. Regional Instability: war is likely to spread to other Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan and Saudi The Arabia. Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis have already attacked Isreal leading to proxy groups joining the war, making it a wider regional war.

2. Impact on Trade: Together with Iran these countries [Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and U.A.E.] are some of the worlds other largest oil and gas producers. These countries produce over 20% of the world's fossil fuels, according to Rystad.

The conflict has already begun disrupting these energy supplies, and gas facilities in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar have following attacks by Iranian drones, while tankers near the strait of Hormuz, a crucial global oil shipping route have also been attacked. Oil export and energy infrastructure have been damaged. Oil prices are increasing globally. Transport and trade routes are affected, and energy prices are rising worldwide.

3. Casualitis & Migration: Civilian casualties and displacements are widespread; destruction of homes, infrastructure, and cities are inevitable disasters of this war. Millions of people may also be forced to migrate. The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) says that 1,464 civilians including at least 217 children have been killed in Iran in the first month of the conflict.²⁴

India's Perspective

- Trade Challenges: Disruptions impact 56% of India's goods exports, and 80% of India's

external trade passes through the affected region.

- Energy Security: As India relies on over 85% of its crude oil needs from imports, the conflict poses a direct threat to its supply chain and economic stability.

The ongoing war in West Asia is significantly affecting Indian manufacturers across various industries such as steel textiles, and alcoholic beverages. These sectors are encountering operational disruptions due to increased freight rates, shipment delays, gas shortages, and payment issues, primarily stemming from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz

There is also the fact that India sends millions of workers to the Gulf countries and is responsible for their safety. Iran US War Significantly threatens nearly 10 million Indians in the gulf region. Risking their safety, employment and remittance flows due to regional instability over 80 lakhs Indians are in the immediate conflict zone [UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait etc.]

Iran has allowed the passage of ships through Strait of Hormuz for friendly nations, like India and has declared that India can play an effective and positive role in reducing tensions. PM Narendra Modi has said, "At a time when the world is fragmented into numerous camps India has managed to build extraordinary bridges from the gulf to the west from the global south to its neighbors. Today India stands as a trusted partner." This highlights India's diplomatic prowess and being an active participant in maintaining global peace.

Findings

The US Israel war is a result of ideological differences between Iran and Israel. The existential battle for Israel and Iran is about regional dominance that both try to enforce, ultimately leading to widespread destruction in both countries. The US-Israeli attack has severely degraded Iran's nuclear infrastructure. The attacks also hit 85% of Iran's petrochemical export capacity, resulting in widespread shutdowns and supply chain failures. The war has heavily affected global energy markets, particularly by threatening traffic through

the Strait of Hormuz. All in all, this war has global repercussions that severely affect the world's economy and is a defining moment for geopolitics in West Asia.

Conclusion

In this contemporary world, we can conclude in the words of Hans J. Morgenthau, "International politics is a struggle for power, whatever the ultimate aim of international politics, power is always the immediate aim."

The attempt of every nation to secure its national interests by means of power, leading to a struggle for power among nations and this is the core, the true reality and the whole warp and woof of international politics.²⁵

The US-Israel-Iran war has transformed West Asia into a battleground. It represents a critical turning point in West Asia geopolitics. This ongoing retaliatory missile and drone attacks has created a situation which raised a big question mark on growth & peace of entire West Asia.

Unresolved tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear program, tensions with Israel are among the many reasons for this war. The failure of diplomatic measures has showcased that international institutions are not capable of managing high stakes geopolitical rivalries.

The war has had far-reaching global consequences. Disruptions to critical energy routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, rising oil prices, and interruptions in global trade have revealed the deep interdependence between regional conflicts and the global economy. In conclusion, the Iran-US-Israel war is not merely a bilateral conflict but a manifestation of broader systemic tensions in international politics which has global repercussions.

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