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IRAN WAR : International Perspective

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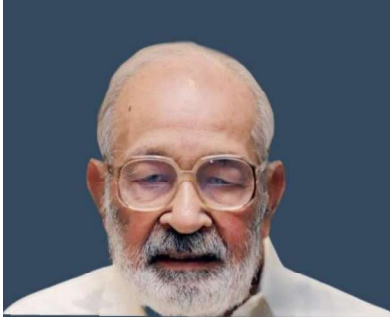
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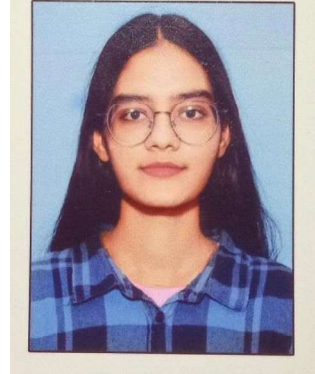
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Preface

This special issue of **FPRC Journal (66)** focuses on

IRAN WAR : International Perspective

The manifold issues involved in the process have been identified by distinguished contributors of this special volume. They have also visualised the way forward in view of contemporary world politics scenario.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to contributors who have shared our sentiments and accepted our invitation to enrich the contents of the Journal. They have always been a source of strength to us.

Dr. Mahendra Gaur

Director

Dr. Indira Gaur

Mg. Director

FPRC JOURNAL-66

Focus: IRAN WAR : International Perspective

Questionnaire:

Q 1. How do you look at Trump's action in Iran: * Disruptor or Reformer?*

Q 2. It appears Trump has not learnt from the history. Do you agree?

Q 3. What are the stakes for Israel in its war with Iran? *

Q 4. It's difficult to treat Israel and Iran differently on their nuclear ambitions and advanced missile programs.*

Do you agree?

Q 5. India's silence on Iran war was woefully weak choice, especially for a country that commands attention on the global stage. How far do you agree?

conflict. Iran plays a crucial role in energy security, connectivity initiatives such as the Chabahar Port, and regional stability in West Asia. Concurrently, India maintains strong strategic relationships with Israel in defense, technology, and intelligence collaboration, while also fostering close ties with the United States and Gulf Arab nations. Publicly aligning with either faction could jeopardize essential national interests. India's prudent diplomacy exemplifies its enduring strategic autonomy—eschewing alignment while retaining the flexibility to engage with all parties. Public restraint does not inherently equate to diplomatic inaction; frequently, discreet diplomacy proves more effective than overt declarations in times of crisis. Nonetheless, the criticism holds merit as India aspires to be recognized as the "voice of the Global South" and as a responsible global power. In such instances, moral clarity and visible leadership are crucial. A more pronounced public appeal for de-escalation, civilian protection, and adherence to international law could have bolstered India's credibility without necessitating a partisan stance. Therefore, India's strategy was pragmatic yet fell short in terms of symbolic leadership. It safeguarded immediate interests, but it may have diminished the perception of India as a self-assured global agenda-setter. While silence can be a strategic choice, for emerging powers, excessive caution may also be interpreted as indecisiveness.

9) Prof. Arabinda Acharya

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IRAN WAR: International Perspective

Background

In 2007, my school (Rajaratnam School of International Studies – RSIS in Singapore) hosted the Foreign Minister of Iran, Manouchehr Mottaki, amidst speculations about an impending strike on Iran by Israel with Washington's support. The main targets were Iran's top leadership and nuclear scientists and nuclear installations. I took advantage of the presence of a key leader of the reclusive regime to speak to the Minister and later co-authored an op-ed titled "What if Iran is Attacked?" which was published as a commentary by my school.

The article outlined several key risks that an attack on Iran would likely trigger immediately - multi-pronged retaliation by Tehran by utilizing its regional proxy networks (Hezbollah, Hamas), asymmetric capabilities and regional influence. Tehran had the ability to use its naval capabilities in the Persian Gulf, especially the Strait of Hormuz, potentially targeting and disrupting global energy security, and supply chain among others.

At the time, Iran could also have leveraged its influence to destabilize Iraq and Afghanistan, and exploited its hold on Al-Qaeda for retaliation. While Iran is a Shi'a state and generally

does not support the Sunni Al-Qaeda, it held several senior Al-Qaeda figures including many members of Osama bin Laden's family, in custody.

Tehran could also have leveraged its own nuclear and missile arsenal to fight back.

There was also no guarantee that sanctions or ban on Iran's oil exports would have severely damaged the economy of the country in the short term.

That time there was no explicit threat of attack on Iran by the U.S. The threat of attack was from Israel. Many experts noted that it could be very difficult for any country – the U.S. and Israel included – to take out Iran's nuclear capabilities in a single strike, thus leaving Iran in a position to retaliate. The attacks did not take place though selected Iranian nuclear scientists were neutralised in targeted operations which Iran attributed to Israel and the U.S.

The situation is not the same now. Middle East is much more polarized than before. Many countries in the Arab world do not see each other as united like before. Instead, these countries have shifted partnerships and allies. Countries in the Levant and Sahel have weakened significantly due to the instabilities created by the Arab Spring. New actors of consequence have emerged, notably the Houthis in Yemen and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), with its presence beyond the Middle East. The terrorist groups on the fringe in the past have regrouped and gaining strength. Groups like Hamas and Hezbollah have weakened significantly, despite being in government in Gaza and Lebanon respectively and despite Teheran's support in terms of weapons and logistics. In fact, both the groups have almost been wiped out due to Israel's latest military offensives and targeted killings of most of their top-ranking leaders. ISIS has been significantly degraded with the loss of the so-called Islamic State due to US- led military campaigns.

Though all these should have been good news to the U.S. and its allies, the Arab Spring induced regime changes in many countries notably Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, which were traditional allies of the U.S., has put severe stress on Washington in terms of bilateral relations and diplomatic influence.

At the same time the U.S. remain steadfast to defend and protect Israel against existential threats being peddled by Iran and its proxies.

This is a brief background to explain the current skirmishes in the Middle East involving the U.S., Israel and Iran that not only has destabilised the Middle East but also the entire world in many significant dimensions.

Q.1. How do you look at Trump's action in Iran: Disruptor or Reformer?

During the Trump presidency, the Middle East's geopolitical architecture is undergoing unprecedented structural transformation, intense systemic warfare, and the collapse of traditional diplomatic paradigms. The U.S. foreign policy machine has been a 'status quo-exploding meteorite' in the region aggressively destroying existing diplomatic arrangements while ostensibly attempting to build new regional security coalitions.

U.S. strategy could have managed to institutionalize an Arab-Israeli defense web, based on an ideology of "peace by subjugation" and maximalist aims. But the cost of this realignment has been tremendous in strategic and human terms, including a disastrous regional war, a rupture of transatlantic alliances, a reversal of socioeconomic gains in the Arabian Peninsula, and the entrenchment of a highly radicalized, praetorian regime in Tehran after targeted decapitation strikes resulting in killings high echelons of the regime including Supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

The crisis of 2026 can be traced directly to the systemic collapse of the multilateral consensus established by the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In May 2018, President Trump formally removed the United States from the deal, reimposed tough

secondary sanctions on Iran's vital energy and banking sectors, defending its actions on a maximalist interpretation of Iranian regional behaviour, including funding proxies like Hezbollah and Hamas and a major military build-up. The immediate outcome of this "maximum pressure" campaign was to alienate Washington from its traditional European allies (France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the European Union), who tried to save the deal by expanding the EU blocking statute to prevent European companies from complying with U.S. sanctions.

Maximum pressure devastated Iran's economy, but failed totally in its primary objective of halting Tehran's nuclear program. Iran's response was a campaign of strategic defiance, forgoing JCPOA constraints in 2019 and aggressively advancing uranium enrichment. The outcome was that Iran was pushed to the brink of nuclear latency, ensuring that any future diplomatic engagement would be conducted under the shadow of an advanced, unencumbered Iranian nuclear apparatus.

Meanwhile, the U.S. brokered a vital structural overhaul of regional alliances with the 2020 Abraham Accords that created diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, shattering a decades-old Arab consensus that there could be no normalization with Israel before Palestinian statehood. The first phase (2020-2024) focused mostly on bilateral economic growth, with key events including the 2022 Israel-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement built on a shared sense of Iran being an existential danger and a drive towards technological unification.

Notwithstanding the merits, sceptics had often cautioned that the Accords skirted the region's most dangerous flashpoints. Many worried that the arrangements under the Accords would leave both the Palestinians and Tehran isolated and would ultimately lead to a violent structural response.

In January 2025, Trump administration pushed an expedited extension of the Accords into a major security architecture under an active deterrence theory. Trump handed Iran a hard 60-day ultimatum to terminate its nuclear program entirely. On its own Iran offered a three-step plan for de-escalation, which Washington dismissed out of hand, demanding unconditional unilateral dismantlement. By May 2025, the discussions had further broken down, partially due to provocative moves by the U.S., including military operations against Houthi sites in Yemen and a plan to rebrand the Persian Gulf as the "Arabian Gulf."

On June 21, 2025, the U.S. and Israel began a pre-emptive "Twelve-Day War" after the IAEA claimed Iran has collected record levels of military-grade uranium. B-2 stealth bombers and Tomahawk missiles made strikes on critical Iranian nuclear sites at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. Iran responded with highly-targeted, low-casualty attacks on Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base. This act of vengeance bred a fatal complacency in Washington, supporting the assumption that Tehran would accept ongoing tactical destruction in order to preserve regime survival.

On February 28, 2026 was U.S. and Israel launched a daytime decapitation attack on a heavily-guarded Tehran bunker that killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his family members.

However, the assassination did the exact opposite of what was desired. It did neither bring down the regime or lead to a democratic transition. It unleashed Khamenei's philosophy of borderless war. Iran let loose its "Ring of Fire" in the region, launching surprise retaliatory

strikes against the U.S. bases in Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and Iraq. One of Iran's proxies – Hezbollah- mobilized its special forces, while the IRGC Navy announced a total blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, literally weaponizing the world energy supply chain. Later, the Yemeni Houthis stepped in.

At the same time, the sudden political vacuum propelled Iran's transformation into an intensely military praetorian state completely under the control of the IRGC. The conflict, coupled with severe bombing, led the IRGC to skip the regular electoral procedures and force a tight election on March 8, 2026, to select Khamenei's second son (even though reportedly injured and disfigured), Mojtaba Hosseini Khamenei, as the third Supreme Leader. Mojtaba's rise fit a "Khamenei 2.0" scenario: a violent enforcer with deep ties to the military establishment and enormous offshore financial networks.

The decapitation strikes also devastated civilian moderates and gave absolute power to handline military groups structurally incapable of compromise, ensuring a dictatorship much more radical, entrenched and antagonistic to U.S. interests than the one before it.

The war was a fiasco, but it also accelerated the swift and forced transformation of the Abraham Accords into a fully institutionalized military alliance. The existential threat posed by Iranian ballistic missiles spurred CENTCOM to build a multilateral air-defense matrix that fundamentally incorporated the signatories to the Accords, and even non-signatories like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The alliance rapidly pushed forward with established unified command centres, regional cyber defense and a greater geographic scale.

But the integration revealed a serious dilemma of asymmetric dependence. The Gulf states bore the brunt of the war's physical and economic costs — the destruction of desalination plants in Bahrain and the near destruction of energy infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and Qatar — but had no operational input into Washington's military choices. Gulf leadership, in turn, started quietly hedging their geopolitical bets, deploying sovereign resources into European military sectors and pursuing non-dollar settlements to build resilience against US-centric shocks.

At home in the U.S., the conflict resulted in a tremendous backslide in social and political transformation. Instead, under the pretence of national security, the Arabian Peninsula was subjected to hyper-militarized public control, strict state censorship and severe internal repression, replacing pre-war modernization programs such as Oman's Vision 2040 and social liberalization in Saudi Arabia.

The conflict also very seriously undermined Western unity. European allies, who saw the subsequent conflict as a rash US 'war of choice', were blindsided by the unconsented decapitation attack of February 2026. Key NATO members turned down Washington's request for naval help in securing the Strait of Hormuz, bringing vocal rebuke from President Trump and speeding up Europe's drive for strategic autonomy.

China rapidly filled this strategic void. Beijing played a diplomatic game, not intervening militarily and using its huge consumption of Iranian oil as a trump card. Most disturbingly, Chinese military planners began to closely analyse Iran's blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, examining the precedent of a regional power successfully closing a global maritime chokepoint for future applications in the Taiwan

Due to unsustainable systemic costs, Pakistan brokered a short-term ceasefire between the US and Iran in April 2026. High-level delegations from Iran and the United States attended the

historic Islamabad Talks, led by US Vice President JD Vance and Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf. But negotiations soon failed over competing maximalist demands. Washington sought permanent nuclear dismantling and a reopened Strait of Hormuz and Iran pushed on extensive regional ceasefires, quick sanctions relief and war reparations. Within 24 hours the talks broke down as neither side was prepared to compromise on basic imperatives.

The diplomatic setback was followed by a brutal war of economic attrition by the U.S. On April 13, 2026, President Trump authorized a total naval blockade of all Iranian ports. CENTCOM and INDOPACOM maintained the blockade with harsh interdictions that cost Tehran an estimated \$500 million a day. Iran replied by formalizing blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and threatening marine swarm strikes. The world economy is trapped in the crossfire of absolute financial strangulation.

As of May 2026, the legacy of the second Trump administration in the Middle East is a deeply dichotomous one. The U.S. as a disruptive power destroyed the old diplomatic systems and substituted them with kinetic subjugation, triggering a large regional struggle., the blunt-force actions of a pseudo reformer wrought a structural realignment that decades of sophisticated diplomacy could not, precipitating the realization of a tightly integrated, multilateral Arab-Israeli defense architecture.

.At the same time, the strategic price remains high. The U.S. did construct an unparalleled security alliance, but it did so by eviscerating Iranian moderates, elevating a radicalized praetorian dictatorship, alienating European allies, and imposing vast domestic repression across the Gulf. The bottom line is that regional stability now depends on two very fragile variables: will the newly constructed CENTCOM defense architectures hold up against severe domestic political backlash and; can the broken diplomatic channels be restored before the continuing war of economic strangulation degenerates once again into catastrophic regional violence?

2. It appears Trump has not learnt from the history. Do you agree?

Historically, Washington has grappled with the fallout of large-scale ground interventions, in several instances like in Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan and Iraq, among others, prompting a shift toward avoiding 'forever wars' and no (American) 'boots on the ground wars'. However, persistent escalations in the current war—including direct clashes, maritime conflict in the Gulf of Hormoz, and regional proxy attacks—have drawn American military and diplomatic assets back into the region

Initially, in this war Trump appeared have attempted to deploy a lighter military footprint, integrated regional air defenses, and multilateral partnerships rather than unilateral ground operations that Washington did in Afghanistan & Iraq. The supporters of the Trump administration argued that Washington has successfully managed escalations through defensive deterrence and backchannel diplomacy, while critics suggest the administration remains reactive, over-reliant on tactical military deterrence, and unable to extract itself from regional dynamics dictated by local allies.

As the war escalated, the 'Operation Epic Fury' shattered previous assumptions of a controlled, low-intensity proxy standoff. The conflict has seen unprecedented decapitation strikes on the clerical and military leadership in Iran direct military retaliation across multiple

borders, severe disruptions to the global energy supply via the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and a fragile ceasefire.

This rapid transition to high-tempo, multi-domain warfare presents an entirely new set of real-time developments that shape the analysis of strategic adaptation for the concerned and stakeholder countries.

A major strategic contradiction has been is the widening gap between formal diplomatic posture and raw operational reality, particularly regarding regional alliance management. While regional partners in the Gulf publicly and privately asserted that their territories could not be used for offensive actions due to fear of retaliatory strikes, U.S. operational execution effectively bypassed these restrictions.

The rise of what analysts call 'flexible realism' shows that under crisis conditions traditional borders of host-nation consent melt in favour of immediate tactical military requirements. This divergence also brings to light a major friction point between the long-term political objective of regional integration and the immediate operational needs of high-stakes conflict.

It is also important to look critically at the limits of deterrence against an ideologically driven adversary. While the joint campaign successfully degraded immediate military capabilities, it did not compel the expected rapid diplomatic capitulation. Instead, Tehran adopted an asymmetric strategy of horizontal escalation—unrestrained retaliation targeting regional infrastructure and set in motion maritime assets under its de facto control in the Hormuz Strait to maximize economic strain. This validates a key strategic lesson that military dominance from the air does not automatically translate into political compliance, especially when an adversary is willing to absorb immense internal damage to sustain its ideological mission.

External competitors particularly Beijing, capitalized on this high-intensity engagement, securing massive asymmetric advantages—extracting energy leverage, operational intelligence on Western military capabilities, and diplomatic capital—without incurring any direct operational risk. All these are coming with U.S. munitions depletion, the operational limits of sustained high-tempo campaigns, and how these constraints affect long-term strategic posture and global deterrence priorities.

This also means the failure of Washington to align overwhelming military power with a coherent political end-state. The decapitation of the adversary's central leadership, while a major tactical feat, has repeated the historical errors of past interventions by triggering a highly volatile power vacuum rather than a stable transition. This disconnect also demonstrates that the core lesson of matching military operations to post-war stabilization has been largely bypassed like in the past.

Another important development is the erosion of trust between the U.S. and its regional and global allies. Although the Trump administration's deployment of a "flexible realism" strategy to defy local basing limits and unilaterally move important air defenses from other key locations has produced a short-term operational freedom, it has also engendered serious diplomatic conflict. Now regional partners are actively hedging their security plans, realizing that in crisis times, traditional security guarantees might be disregarded. The operational override underscores a fundamental contradiction: The Trump administration has undermined the very web of reliable allies necessary for long-term regional deterrence and maritime security in its pursuit of unilateral military dominance.

Q 3: What are the stakes for Israel in its war with Iran?

The stakes in the February 2026 joint U.S.-Israeli “Operation Epic Fury/Roaring Lion” are profound and multidimensional for Tel Aviv. Israel, despite its unmatched tactical superiority, has been plunged into a permanent high-intensity mobilization – what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the “Super-Sparta” model – that severely tests its military limits, economic survival, global alliances and domestic cohesion.

From a military perspective, Israel’s primary interest is to eliminate the existential threat of a nuclear-threshold Iran that has a large arsenal of ballistic missiles. The first strikes of the 2026 war managed to kill Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, destroy about 250 air defense systems, and severely damage Iran’s missile launchers. But Israel is faced with the stark reality that there are absolute limits to conventional airpower; Iran’s most important nuclear and missile facilities have survived because they are located in deep-underground facilities, like the fortified “Pickaxe Mountain”.

Israel’s multi-layered air defence systems, highly sophisticated and prohibitively costly, are being economically drained by asymmetric warfare. The upgraded David’s Sling system has been successful in intercepting long-range ballistic threats, but the interceptors cost about \$1 million each, and Arrow 3 interceptors are priced at more than \$2.5 million. Meanwhile, proxies such as Hezbollah have adapted by deploying cheap, un-jammable fiber-optic tethered First-Person View (FPV) drones, which still inflict casualties and bypass traditional electronic warfare. Thus, the concern is whether Israel can maintain deterrence without being financially and materially exhausted by cheaper, mass-produced adversary technologies.

The switch to a permanent war footing has generated a systemic macroeconomic crisis, permanently foreclosing Israel’s historic “peace dividend”. The first 2026 defense budget of NIS 112 billion has exploded to NIS 144 billion on the back of the immediate direct costs of the war and huge long-term procurement plans for the military, with daily war expenses hitting NIS 1.5 billion. Consequently, the debt-to-GDP ratio for Israel is expected to hit 70% by 2026, and could be as high as 83% by 2035, which will greatly increase the cost of servicing the debt, and endanger the displacement of important civilian investments.

Most importantly, the war puts at risk the Israeli high-tech sector, the main economic engine of the country, which accounts for 20% of GDP and more than 50% of exports. A recent survey by the Israel Innovation Authority found that half of Israeli tech companies are severely short-staffed, with more than 25% of employees out due to reserve duty, closed schools and continued security limitations. This has led to major delays in product development for 42% of companies and has had a serious impact on capital raising efforts. Israeli start-ups are considering moving their core Research and Development (R&D) operations overseas in an aggressive push to maintain stability and reassure global investors, threatening the country’s long-term sovereign economic independence for the first time.

Moreover, the weaponization of maritime chokepoint has alienated global partners suffering the economic fallout and created the perception that Israeli operations dragged the world into an economic earthquake unnecessarily.

The U.S.-Israel alliance is also under immense strain. The war is massively unpopular in the US and the U.S. administration under President Trump has signalled a desire for strategic disengagement. Trump has called on both sides to agree a peace deal, while U.S. officials have controversially said that it is no longer an American responsibility to secure the Strait of Hormuz. Washington is trying to strike a deal with Iran and threatening to walk away from

the conflict, while Israel holds emergency security cabinet meetings and prepares for renewed hostilities, risking the loss of its steadfast superpower guarantor.

Israel's regional architecture has been violently reshaped. The GCC governments realized that their bilateral defense accords with the U.S. were not enough to deter Iran from retaliating against their own infrastructure. Israel covertly exchanged air defense technology during the battle, and the Abraham Accords have enhanced security cooperation as they attempt to hedge security with other world powers, underscoring the value of Israeli participation.

The geopolitical tectonic plates have fully shifted on Israel's northern borders. The complete collapse of the Assad regime in Syria in late 2024 removed a key Iranian state ally, but unleashed a volatile sectarian insurgency and the rise of a Sunni Islamist transitional government. This compelled Israel to invade the Quneitra buffer zone to keep advanced weapons out of the hands of the rebels. In Lebanon, the creation of a sterilized "Yellow Line" buffer zone and the degradation of Hezbollah's arsenal have failed to make the evacuated northern Israeli residents feel safe to return, as the proxy still has some 15,000 rockets and lethal drone capabilities, leaving the border perpetually tense.

Deep "strategic fatigue," exhaustion among reserve forces, and the collapse of small businesses in the geographic periphery are all being grappled with inside Israeli society. To tackle this, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) developed a new National Security Doctrine, stressing that military strength must be supplemented by societal resilience and diplomatic engagement.

The doctrine is firmly against unilateral territorial annexation in Judea and Samaria, which it says could lead to a binational state with an Arab majority. Instead, it recommends a policy of "Hedging" (demographic and political separation from the Palestinians) and "Strategic Positioning" (building a regional defense coalition with moderate Arab states and empowering a reformed, deradicalized Palestinian Authority). Furthermore, it emphasizes the fact that the only thing that will heal the country is the successful return of all hostages, warning that the failure to secure their return will permanently rupture the social contract.

In the end, Israel's stakes are much more than just Iran's nuclear facilities. These (stakes) are the core viability of the Israeli economic model, the resilience of its key international alliances, the management of volatile borders, and the preservation of its internal democratic and social unity in an age of perpetual war.

Q: 4 It's difficult to treat Israel and Iran differently on their nuclear ambitions and advanced missile programs. Do you agree?

A deep structural paradox is increasingly destabilizing the geopolitical equilibrium of the Middle East: the differential treatment of the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and advanced delivery systems held by Israel and Iran by the international community. This systemic double standard, which over the years has been managed through diplomatic shielding and economic coercion, has become ever more untenable. The war exposed the severe limitations of this paradigm, demonstrating how differential treatment could trigger regional arms races, incentivize asymmetric warfare, and undermine the global non-proliferation regime.

The geopolitical problem, at its heart, is the blunt doctrinal and historical asymmetry in the nuclear architectures of the two countries. Israel has a very advanced nuclear program but it is unacknowledged and outside the scope of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Israel's arsenal, centered at the unmonitored Dimona complex in the Negev desert, is estimated to contain between 90 and 400 nuclear warheads, backed by a strong triad of delivery systems comprising Jericho ballistic missiles, F-15 and F-16 fighter jets, and Dolphin-class submarines. And despite this enormous capacity, Israel is not bound by international oversight, thanks to a decades-old policy of "nuclear ambiguity" codified in a secret 1969 agreement with the U.S.

To be sure, Washington, is actively providing a diplomatic shield for this arsenal, using its United Nations Security Council (UNSC) veto power and routinely violating its own domestic laws. The U.S. Foreign Assistance Act and Arms Export Control Act prohibit economic and military assistance to countries pursuing unsafeguarded nuclear capabilities. But successive U.S. presidents have repeatedly relied on executive overrides to guarantee the unimpeded flow of billions of dollars in military assistance to Israel without requiring non-proliferation compliance.

Iran's nuclear program, by contrast, is what analysts term a "compliance trap." Iran, an NPT state party, has been under intense international scrutiny, harsh economic sanctions and kinetic sabotage for procedural deviations, while insisting that its program is strictly peaceful. After the collapse of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran systematically expanded its enrichment capabilities, bringing the country to the status of a nuclear threshold state before the onset of the 2026 regional war, having accumulated over 440 kilograms of uranium enriched to 60 percent.

Though the June 2025 strike to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure, dealt catastrophic damage to key facilities like the Natanz and Fordow enrichment plants and the Arak heavy water reactor, this campaign was a strategic error in that it sought to neutralize the threat at its core. This operation did not wipe out Iran's last underground stockpiles and nuclear know-how underneath, unlike the previous pre-emptive attacks in Iraq and Syria. The strikes probably changed Tehran's risk calculus by showing that compliance with international monitoring merely gave the West coordinates for bombardment, inadvertently perhaps increasing the odds of a secret dash to weaponization. Diplomatic efforts to manage fallout from this remain tenuous; as of May 2026, peace talks were stalled, and U.S. Vice President JD Vance said that proposals for Russia to take custody of Iran's highly enriched uranium were "not currently" part of the U.S. plan, although he did not rule out other arrangements in the future.

Dealing with this double standard is tough and goes very deep into advanced delivery systems. Then in early 2026 Iran retaliated in Operation Epic Fury, unleashing unprecedented salvos of ballistic missiles and drones against Israel, the Gulf States and U.S. military installations in response to the attacks on its nuclear sites. This war showcased a major shift in aerospace combat. Iran's medium-range ballistic missiles are now equipped with manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles (MaRVs) and advanced guidance systems that allow for highly precise impacts thus complicating interception efforts. In addition, Iran demonstrated its willingness to break the self-imposed 2,000-kilometre range limit by launching modified space launch vehicles in the direction of the far-away U.S.-U.K. base at Diego Garcia, demonstrating that it has the latent technical capability to strike targets deep inside Europe.

While U.S. and Israeli multi-layered defense architectures, employing advanced interceptors such as the Arrow-3, THAAD and SM-3, achieved great success in limiting civilian casualties, the economics of this “salvo competition” are heavily weighted in favour of the Iranian offense. Israel and the United States quickly blew through their worldwide stocks of multimillion-dollar interceptors trying to shoot down mass-produced Iranian munitions. Iran also adapted its tactics to increase the pressure on these defences, using high-altitude cluster munition dispersals to overwhelm point defences and deliberately targeting multi-billion-dollar early warning radars such as the AN/FPS-132 in Qatar and the AN/TPY-2 in Jordan. The systematic blinding of allied defence networks proved that relying indefinitely on expensive, static air defences against a heavily industrialized missile power is an economically and strategically unsustainable approach to regional containment.

Ultimately, the practice of diplomatic hypocrisy and military coercion does not promise security in the Middle East. The stark contrast between Israel’s protected nuclear immunity and the forceful international pressure on Iran conveys a dangerous message to the wider region. Israel's secret nuclear arsenal ensures its territorial sovereignty, but Iran's NPT compliance leaves it vulnerable to pre-emptive bombardment. Regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Turkey have ever greater incentives to pursue their own nuclear latency. This systemic inequity also undermines long-standing multilateral initiatives, such as the efforts by Egypt and Iran to create a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East, which routinely gets hung up over Israel’s unwillingness to declare its arsenal.

In sum, the effort to differentiate Israel and Iran on their nuclear and aerospace programs has produced exactly the results the non-proliferation regime was designed to prevent. It has locked the region into an inescapable cycle of proliferation, triggered devastating wars of attrition characterized by unsustainable defence economics, and fatally eroded the moral and legal authority of global arms control frameworks.

Q:5 India's silence on Iran war was woefully weak choice, especially for a country that commands attention on the global stage. How far do you agree?

The 2026 the U.S.-Israel war against Iran put India’s core foreign policy philosophy of “strategic autonomy” and multi-alignment to the test. As the regional firestorm widened, New Delhi adopted a position of deliberate diplomatic silence, avoiding overt condemnation of the U.S.-Israeli strikes, while striving to retain its complex relationships with Tehran and Gulf governments. But this passive neutrality exposed severe deficiencies in India’s macroeconomic stability, energy security and geopolitical clout and has necessitated an urgent recalibration of its policy architecture.

India’s structural energy dependencies produced the war’s most immediate policy crisis. India imports around 45 percent of its crude oil, 66 percent of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) and a massive 90 percent of its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from the Middle East. When Iran retaliated by closing access to the Strait of Hormuz, global oil markets convulsed, pushing Brent crude prices up and disrupting the flow of vital fuels to India.

The rupture revealed the flaws in India’s energy hedging infrastructure. India’s Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) are modest relative to its peers such as Japan and China, with just 21 million barrels, and were only two-thirds full at the outset of the war. That means the country had over five days’ worth of emergency imports. The dire fuel crunch caused Prime

Minister Narendra Modi to urging unprecedented austerity measures in May 2026, calling on residents to drive less, work from home and cut gold buying.

At the macro level, the crude oil price shock, caused the government to hike domestic fuel prices to upset the losses by production units. The Reserve Bank of India also spent an estimated \$40 billion of its foreign exchange reserves to safeguard the quickly depreciating rupee against large capital outflows and a mounting energy import bill.

Further complicating matters for New Delhi was the safety of nearly 9 million Indian expats in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, who provide remittances of almost \$135 billion yearly. This vital demographic and financial lifeline have been caught in the crossfire of Iran's "second order coercion" strategy to target Gulf states to pressure the U.S. and essentially holds India's current account balance hostage.

India's diplomatic prudence has also affected its critical infrastructure initiatives, particularly the Chabahar Port in Iran. Chabahar was expected to be India's largest access point to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing neighbouring Pakistan, but has become a "damaged asset."

The port would only be viable if the U.S. would give a sanctions waiver. India signed a 10-year port operation deal in 2024. The exemption was due to expire on April 26, 2026, and the U.S. did not reissue it once the war broke out. But the New Delhi administration has had to rein in its goals somewhat, unwilling to face secondary U.S. sanctions. It has taken Chabahar out of its annual budget and is looking at methods to temporarily shift its operational stakes to Iranian businesses. This capitulation is a pointer to a major policy failure. India's grand geoeconomics corridors are now hostage to American geopolitical dictates and regional volatility.

In a controversial strategic turn in the battle, India moved closer to the "Abraham Accords bloc" by negotiating a broad strategic military framework and energy deals with the UAE on May 15, 2026. The arrangement, designed as an emergency buffer of 30 million barrels for the SPR, formally commits India to an axis grappling to limit the crisis. But it might alienate Iran and its Eurasian backers for ever, while not addressing the hugely asymmetric \$26.53 billion trade gap that India has with the UAE.

The most serious long-term strategic damage has been the erosion of India's diplomatic prestige in its own neighbourhood. New Delhi kept its distance to avoid confrontation with Washington, but created a diplomatic vacuum. Pakistan grabbed the chance, exploiting its historical connections with the Gulf monarchies and its geographical proximity to Iran to organize a two-week ceasefire in April 2026.

Pakistan's advent as an international mediator is a direct threat to India's goal to be the unchallenged hegemon of South Asia. It also highlights the absence of an institutional mechanism in India for mediation of conflicts. Regional states are diversifying their security partnerships away from the U.S. and shifting their attentions to China, Turkey and Pakistan, but not India whose transactional neutrality restricts New Delhi's influence during extreme crisis situations.

New Delhi must understand that strategic autonomy cannot mean silence. The current crisis has shown that trying to please all factions during a kinetic war ends up pleasing none, holding the nation's economic security hostage to decisions made in Washington, Tel Aviv and Tehran. As Dennis Shen noted, the global economy is on the verge of a highly fragmented phase, characterized by the erratic policymaking of the Trump 2.0 administration

and the increasing weaponization of geopolitics. A pure transaction policy will not work in this environment.

India needs to move beyond passive observation and actively invest in building independent crisis management and mediation capacities. If India is serious about donning the mantle of “Vishwaguru,” it must be ready to accept the political costs of shaping global outcomes rather than just trying to survive the storms created by others.

From an economic perspective, the conflict exposed the severe fragility of India’s energy grid. The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz led to a rapid increase in consumer inflation, a paralysis of industry and a devastating depletion of the nation's foreign exchange reserves. Shockingly, it revealed that the country had only five days of strategic petroleum cover. From a geopolitical point of view, India’s failure to obtain a waiver from sanctions has resulted in the neutralization of its most important regional connectivity asset, the Chabahar Port, and thus has placed its gateway to Central Asia under the dictates of American foreign policy. Worse, India’s diplomatic passivity created a vacuum that rival states – notably Pakistan – filled by orchestrating crucial back-channel ceasefires, thus enhancing their regional standing at New Delhi’s direct expense. Such diplomatic usurpation is an assault on the core of India’s claim to be the undisputed leader of the Global South.

If India wants to make a mark on the world stage, it can no longer afford to watch systemic geopolitical shifts from the side lines and has to move from a policy of risk-averse neutrality to one of active, institutionalized strategic engagement.

10) Dr. RAJAT GANGULY

Response to QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How do you look at Trump's action in Iran: Disruptor or Reformer?

My view is that Trump got played by Netanyahu.

It is not a secret that Netanyahu has been convinced for a long time that Israel’s principal enemy is Iran. Tehran under the Ayatollahs has provided support to the main anti-Israeli forces in the region - Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic jihad, Houthis, etc. Along with these groups, Iran stands for the complete destruction of Israel. After every Friday prayers in Iran, ‘Death to Israel’ and ‘Death to America’ are chanted regularly. Netanyahu has argued many times that if this enemy—Iran—is allowed to develop nuclear weapons, he believes Iran will actually use it against Israel. He has repeatedly tried to disrupt Iran’s nuclear enrichment facilities. While these efforts have produced partial results and slowed down Tehran if indeed Tehran planned to build nuclear weapons, these efforts have to completely destroyed Iran’s stockpile of enriched (60%) uranium. Netanyahu has tried to convince several American presidents before Trump, but was not successful. He wants America’s support to achieve two things: (a) find and destroy the enriched uranium stockpile, and (b) reduce Iran’s capacity and intention to wage war against Israel directly and through proxies. To achieve both objectives, he feels there needs to be regime change in Iran. And the dismantling of Iran’s nuclear and offensive military capability. Hence, the need to wage war.