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by Amit Pratap
Singh
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Article - 1 : How Iran sees the war

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How Iran Sees the War

External Escalation, Internal Consolidation

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March 20, 2026



At the funeral of Iranian security chief Ali Larjani, Tehran, March 2026
ALAA AL MARJANI / REUTERS

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Context

Iran sees the war not only as an external military attack, but also as an opportunity to restore deterrence abroad & strengthen the regime at home.

Facts

The war began in late Feb 2026; even after three weeks, Iran's command system was still functioning.

Iranian officials claimed only 20% of Iran's capabilities had been used earlier & the war widened through the closure of the strait of Hormuz.

Ali Hosseini Khamenei's assassination was followed by Mojtaba Khamenei's rapid elevation.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) is the key historical example used to explain how war can consolidate the regime.

Analytical Crux

A foreign war does not always weaken a regime politically; sometimes it can strengthen it. Iran is fighting on two fronts at the same time: outside, it wants to raise the military and economic cost for its enemies; inside, it wants to turn fear, martyrdom and nationalism into support for the state. The Iran-Iraq War shows that external attack can help the Islamic Republic consolidate power instead of collapse. So, the real struggle is not only about military destruction, but also about who shapes public emotion and political legitimacy. In this sense, outside pressure meant for regime change may end up giving the regime a new basis for survival.

Theoretical lens + Verbatim Quotes

Deterrence – “It based its strategy on a plan to cause maximum chaos in hopes of restoring deterrence – which is exactly what it has done.”

“Tehran thus shifted its military strategy away from a doctrine of forward defense – or confronting its adversaries via proxies and beyond its borders – and toward one geared toward raw offence.”

Article - 2 : India's Iran stance does fuel a foreign policy debate

India's Iran stance does fuel a foreign policy debate

A debate, for the most part civilised, is going on in India about foreign policy. The provocation for the debate is the ongoing Israeli-American war on Iran, now in its third week and India's response to it. I belong to the tribe of 'professional' diplomats. We consider ourselves experts with special skills to propound on foreign policy issues. It is true that we are trained to read between the lines and to research whatever issue occupies the attention of the international community at a given time. However, it is not as if we are born with a particular gift for foreign policy; the gift or expertise is cultivated over a period of time. Almost anybody can handle foreign policy with experience and exposure to the issues. Everyone has an opinion on foreign policy, and it would not be correct to dismiss those opinions as ill-informed or irrelevant.

The two sides

The debate is argued between those who generally support the government's stand on the war, which began on February 28, and those who criticise it as weak-kneed or surrendering to the Americans, or as hostile to Iran, a close and civilisational friend. The deliberate decision not to condole the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has come in for particular criticism.

Foreign policy is an instrument in the hands of the government to protect and promote the country's national interests. It follows that it is within the province of the government of the day to define what the national interests are and how to protect them. Some interests are sui generis, such as defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. For a country such as India, the improvement in the standard of living of its citizens is an extremely important objective.

In a highly globalised and interdependent world, this task imposes on the government the duty to chart its policy with deliberation and calculation. A government led by one party may take one position whereas a government led by another party may take another. The same party may take one position when in opposition but might pursue that very policy when in power. The Congress-led government under Manmohan Singh decided that obtaining the nuclear deal



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New Delhi's Iran policy may be influenced by U.S.-Israel dynamics in the war

with America was in India's interest whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party at the time opposed the deal. Once in power, it went beyond what even the previous government had not agreed; it absolved the suppliers of nuclear reactors from any liability, for accident or defect in the reactors.

Foreign policy often is, but should not be, influenced by the ideological orientation of the ruling party. If it is to adhere strictly to the objective of promoting national interest, it cannot afford to be too concerned about principles or rights and wrongs. At times, a particular position might offend our sense of justice or morality, but the government of the day will have to make an objective decision, even if it is not popular.

Equally important, the government must explain to the people the rationale for its decision. In a democracy, this is extremely important. People, certainly the Indian people, are fully capable of understanding and approving or disapproving of the government's actions.

Labels and policy

Much time and intellectual energy is spent on giving a label to foreign policy. The one currently in fashion is 'strategic autonomy'. By adding the word 'strategic', it sounds profound and gives the impression of a concept beyond the understanding of ordinary citizens. But then, why 'autonomy'? Why not 'independent'? Is not independence more precious than autonomy? P.V. Narasimha Rao used to say that Kashmiris can have as much autonomy as they want, but not independence. In any case, why give any label at all? How many countries have given adjectives to their foreign policy? If a name has to be given, just call it 'independent'.

The best definition of foreign policy was given by Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter to Einstein written a few weeks before India's independence. Foreign policy, Nehru wrote, essentially is selfish. The only principle it follows is the principle of national interest.

The Narendra Modi government is essentially following Nehru's foreign policy, that is 'selfish' foreign policy. Its approach to the Iran war seems to be based on a cold calculation that India has too much at stake with America and the Gulf states. America is India's largest trading partner, and India needs its support for state-of-the-art

technology, especially for developing India's defence capabilities. As for the Gulf countries, nearly 10 million Indians are working there. Their welfare is of overriding concern. They send hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of remittances back home. Collectively, the Gulf countries are a most valuable source for India's energy needs.

Application of 'strategic autonomy'

These are valid considerations. Nevertheless, within the parameters of these factors, the government could and should have shown some 'strategic autonomy'. No harm would have been done if the assassination of Ayatollah Khamenei had been condoned or if the External Affairs Minister rather than the Foreign Secretary had signed the condolence book in the Iranian Embassy in Delhi. Since the Prime Minister did speak to the Iranian President to press for the safety of the 9,000-strong Indian community in Iran, would it not have been proper for him to also express condolences for the assassination?

His telephone conversations with the leaders of the Gulf states would surely have ensured their support to take care of India's citizens living there. The fact that Iran has allowed oil tankers destined for India safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz speaks not so much to the success of India's diplomacy as to the graciousness of the Iranians. Despite India's unfriendly attitude, Iran took a friendly approach towards India. In the final analysis, India needs to be on the winning side. The government has obviously concluded that the Israeli-American coalition will come out the winner and that Iran will be defeated or surrender.

There is also the question of the Prime Minister's visit to Israel (February 25-26, 2026), its timing more than the visit per se. It was evident from watching his address to the Israeli Knesset that he was deeply moved by the warm reception that was accorded to him by its members. His visit was a demonstration of the ideological affinity that he feels with Israel and, more so with its Prime Minister. That Israel and the U.S. were going to attack Iran any day was known to all those following such matters. The timing of the visit was unfortunate.

Let the debate continue.

Context The debate over

India's response to the Israel - U.S. war on Iran. Article argues that while India's stand is driven by national interest, it could still have shown greater balance and strategic autonomy.

Facts

● America is India's largest trading partner.

● Nearly 10 million Indians work in the Gulf.

● Indians send hundreds of billions of dollars in remittances.

● There is a 9,000-strong Indian community in Iran whose safety is a key concern.

Analytical Crux

The foreign policy is finally a question of national interest, but the way that interest is pursued also matters. India's cautious stand on Iran is shaped by hard realities such as ties with the U.S., dependence on the Gulf, energy security & the safety of Indians abroad. At the same time, the strategic autonomy should mean balanced and independent signalling, not complete silence on a friendly country like Iran. The good foreign policy is not only practical, but also diplomatically sensitive and politically explainable. So, the real debate is not whether India should protect its interests, but how it should do so without appearing one-sided.

Theoretical lens + Verbatim Quotes

“The one current in fashion is 'strategic autonomy'.”

“Foreign policy, essentially is selfish. The only principle it follows is the principle of national interest.”

- Jawaharlal Nehru

“The Narendra Modi government is essentially following Nehru's foreign policy, i.e. 'selfish' foreign policy.” - R. Gharekhan

Article - 3 : Moscow & Beijing's divergent interest in middle east conflict



Context Although China & Russia are both close to Iran, they are not acting as one united camp in the Middle East conflict because each is guided by its own national interest.

Facts

The Strait of Hormuz carries over 20 percent of global oil supplies.

Over 80 percent of Iran's shipped oil goes to China.

China and Iran signed a 25-year strategic partnership in 2021.

Iran signed the JCPOA in 2015 with the P5+1.

Russia entered the Syrian conflict in 2015.

Analytical Crux

China, Russia and Iran should not be seen as one solid anti-US bloc. Russia looks at the region mainly through military reach, Syria and great-power status, while China looks at it through oil, trade and diplomacy. That is why both support Iran only up to the point where their own interests are safe. Neither country wants to openly fight Iran's war. In the bigger game, both gain if the US gets pulled deeper into the Middle East, because that reduces American focus on Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific.

Theoretical lens + Verbatim Quotes

"For China, Iran's role as a disruptor of US influence in the Middle East has been utilitarian for Beijing."

- Kabir Taneja

"Finally, beyond their individual objective and complexities, Russia and China share a common interest: ensuring that the US becomes strategically, politically and tactically entangled in the Middle East once again."

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