STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

Can US attack Iran? What would be it's impact on India?

International Relations

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Background

The United States possesses the capability to take military action in Iran, though such a decision is subject to complex legal and political considerations within the US and faces significant international scrutiny. The potential ramifications of such action for India would be substantial, primarily impacting its energy security, trade, and regional stability.

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US Legal and Political Framework for Military Action

Under the US Constitution, the power to declare war rests with Congress. However, presidents have historically asserted their authority to use military force in the national interest, even without a formal declaration of war, citing their role as Commander-in-Chief. The War Powers Resolution of 1973 attempts to limit the president's ability to engage in hostilities without congressional approval, requiring notification to Congress within 48 hours of introducing armed forces into hostilities and a withdrawal within 60 to 90 days unless Congress authorizes the action.

Despite this, presidents have often bypassed or interpreted the resolution broadly. Recent events illustrate this dynamic. Former President Trump, for instance, asserted constitutional authority for military action against Iran and did not cite statutory authority for strikes in June 2025. While he came close to ordering attacks on several occasions, he also reportedly pulled back due to concerns about a wider conflict and lack of preparedness.

The Biden administration has expressed reluctance to directly strike Iran, fearing a broader Middle East conflict, especially amid ongoing tensions in Gaza and Yemen. However, following attacks on US troops by Iranian-backed militias, pressure has mounted on President Biden to respond, with options ranging from striking proxy groups to targeting facilities within Iran.

Internationally, any US military action against Iran would likely face strong opposition. The UN Security Council has seen many members, including China and Russia, call for de-escalation and oppose the use or threat of force against Iran, emphasizing adherence to the UN Charter. UN experts have also condemned past US military attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities as violations of international law, particularly the prohibition on the aggressive use of military force and the duty to respect sovereignty.

Potential Implications for India

A military conflict between the US and Iran would have significant and multifaceted implications for India:

Energy Security:

India is heavily reliant on oil imports, and the Middle East is a primary source. A conflict would almost certainly disrupt global oil supplies, leading to a sharp increase in crude oil prices. This would severely impact India's economy, increasing inflation and the cost of living.

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Trade and Economy:

Beyond oil, India has considerable trade ties with Iran, including investments in the Chabahar Port, which is crucial for India's connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. Military action and subsequent sanctions or instability would jeopardize these projects and broader trade relations.

Indian Diaspora:

Millions of Indian expatriates reside and work in the Gulf region. A conflict could lead to a humanitarian crisis, requiring large-scale evacuations and impacting remittances, a significant source of foreign exchange for India.

Regional Stability and Geopolitics:

India maintains delicate diplomatic relations with various Middle Eastern countries. A US-Iran conflict would force India into a difficult balancing act, potentially straining its relationships with either side. The increased instability

in the region could also fuel extremism and spill over into other areas, posing further security challenges.

Strategic Autonomy:

India prides itself on its strategic autonomy. Navigating a major conflict involving two key international players would test India's ability to maintain its independent foreign policy stance. In conclusion, while the US has the military capacity and a president can assert authority for military action, such a decision involves navigating complex domestic legal frameworks and international opposition. For India, the consequences of a US-Iran military conflict would be overwhelmingly negative, primarily affecting its energy security, economic interests, and the well-being of its diaspora, while also presenting significant geopolitical challenges.

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