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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

A Path to Peace in West Asia — Beyond the Military Calculus

 THE HINDU

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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 The Hindu

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The Hindu

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"What diplomatic architecture is necessary for sustainable de-escalation in West Asia, and what role — if any — can India play in this process?"

THE CORE ARGUMENT

The military logic of the US-Iran confrontation is well-understood: American strikes to degrade Iranian nuclear and missile capacity; Iranian retaliation through proxies and direct attacks on Gulf infrastructure. But The Hindu argues this military calculus is self-defeating — Iran's nuclear knowledge cannot be bombed away, and military degradation without political resolution simply defers the next escalation cycle. The editorial calls for a return to the diplomatic architecture of the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** — the 2015 nuclear deal that successfully capped Iran's enrichment capacity for five years before the US withdrew under Trump in 2018. The question is not whether diplomacy is possible, but whether key actors have the political will to choose it over military dominance.

WHY MILITARY SOLUTIONS ARE INSUFFICIENT

MILITARY ACTION	LIMITATION
Strikes on nuclear facilities	Iran's enrichment knowledge and centrifuge capacity dispersed across multiple hardened sites; cannot be permanently eliminated
Proxy degradation (Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthi)	Iran rebuilds proxy networks — has done so after every previous attrition
Naval blockade of Hormuz	Economically devastating to all; Iran can sustain asymmetric attacks; no diplomatic resolution achieved
Regime change	No viable post-regime order; Iranian civil society does not want foreign-imposed government

THE JCPOA ARCHITECTURE — WHAT WORKED

The **2015 JCPOA** (Iran nuclear deal) was a landmark arms control agreement:

PARAMETER	JCPOA PROVISION
Uranium enrichment	Limited to 3.67% (far below weapons-grade 90%)
Centrifuges	Reduced from ~20,000 to ~6,104 operational
Stockpile	Capped at 300 kg (down from 10,000+ kg)
Inspections	IAEA access to declared and undeclared sites
Sanctions relief	Phased removal of nuclear-related sanctions
Duration	Core provisions 10–15 years

What broke it: US withdrawal under Trump (May 2018) → Iran restarted enrichment (now at 60%+, approaching weapons-grade) → diplomatic trust collapsed → JCPOA effectively dead.

THE PATH BACK — DIPLOMATIC PREREQUISITES

The editorial argues that de-escalation requires sequential diplomatic steps:

- ① **Immediate ceasefire:** Mediated by Oman (which has historically served as Iran-US back-channel) or Qatar
- ② **Prisoner/hostage release:** Confidence-building measure; currently multiple nationals held on both sides
- ③ **Strait of Hormuz guarantee:** International maritime monitoring mechanism — India, China, EU, and Russia as co-guarantors (not just US)
- ④ **JCPOA 2.0 negotiations:** Updated deal incorporating Iran’s current enrichment status; US sanctions phased removal linked to verified rollback
- ⑤ **Regional security dialogue:** Including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel — a West Asia security architecture comparable to OSCE in Europe

INDIA’S POTENTIAL ROLE

India has unique diplomatic assets in West Asia:

- **Trusted by Iran:** Chabahar investment; long pre-sanctions relationship; no history of military intervention
- **Trusted by Gulf Arabs:** Largest diaspora; India-Saudi oil partnership; I2U2 membership
- **Credible to Israel:** Deep defence ties; no UN veto against Israeli interests in recent years
- **Acceptable to US:** Quad partner; not seen as adversarial

The constraint: India has not cultivated an active mediation role in West Asia. India’s “strategic autonomy” has been expressed as non-participation rather than as active bridge-building. The 2026 crisis may require India to choose engagement over abstention.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — International Relations:

- JCPOA — parties, provisions, US withdrawal, current status
- India-Iran relations — Chabahar, INSTC, strategic importance despite sanctions
- West Asia geopolitics — US-Israel-Iran triangle; Gulf state positioning
- India’s role in multilateral diplomacy — UN Security Council, G20, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)
- Non-Alignment 2.0 — India’s approach to great power competition

UPSC RELEVANCE

“India’s most valuable diplomatic currency in West Asia is its trust surplus with all parties — a surplus that will depreciate rapidly if not invested in active peacebuilding.”

FACTS CORNER

- **JCPOA parties:** P5+1 (USA, UK, France, China, Russia + Germany) + Iran + EU as coordinator; signed July 14, 2015
- **IAEA monitoring:** International Atomic Energy Agency conducted 24/7 inspections under JCPOA; Iran currently limits IAEA access to declared sites only
- **Iran’s current enrichment:** 60% purity as of early 2026 — below weapons-grade (90%) but above all civilian uses (3–5%); Iran has sufficient enriched stockpile for 3–4 bombs if further enriched
- **Oman’s mediation role:** Oman has historically served as US-Iran back-channel — facilitated the 2013 secret talks that led to JCPOA; Muscat has diplomatic relations with both
- **Qatar’s role:** Qatar hosted Hamas leadership; mediates Israel-Gaza ceasefire talks — positioned as neutral broker
- **INSTC:** International North-South Transport Corridor — 7,200 km **multimodal** route; India, Iran, Russia as key nodes; competes with Suez Canal route
- **SCO (India-Iran):** Iran became full SCO member in 2023 — creating a framework where India and Iran are in the same multilateral body, alongside Russia and China
- **Saudi-Iran rapprochement (2023):** China brokered normalization of Saudi-Iran relations in March 2023 — demonstrating that China is positioning itself as a West Asia peacemaker, a role India has not pursued

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