



RCAS Report

US-Israel Joint Strikes on Iran: Impacts on Small Countries

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About RCAS

香港亞洲研究中心| The Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS) is a nonprofit research organization focusing on Asian affairs. It is a newly established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng in Haikou and subsequently moved to Hong Kong in September 2023. We currently have an international research team with nearly 100 resident/nonresident researchers from China and other countries.

RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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The US and Israel launched joint strikes against many key targets in Iran killing its spiritual leader Ali Khamenei and a large number of top-ranking military and political figures in the first wave itself. Trump virtually declared victory and asked the Iranian Army and the Republic guard to lay down weapons and surrender. Trump also asked Iranian people to take over the administration of the country making use of the opportunity and favorable situation created by the joint US-Israel attacks.

However, it was not the case on the ground in Iran. The swift and comprehensive victory US and Israel probably hoped could not be achieved. Iran started launching ballistic missile and drone attacks on Israel targets as well as US military targets in the Gulf region including Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain.

Iran used large number of missiles and drones to overwhelm the air defence systems in Israel as well as Gulf countries. Some of Iranian Missiles and drones hit their intended target and created large scale destruction forcing the suspension of commercial flights in the whole Gulf region. Iran also threatened to close strait of Hormuz, which is the main sea lane for energy traffic out of Persian Gulf, bringing the shipping movements through the same to zero.

On day three, both sides continued to attack targets and Iran expanded their attacks targeting energy exploration platforms and US fighter jets. The snap victory hoped is not materializing.

There is every sign that this conflict will continue for some time until all sides agree to come to the negotiation table. Iran has ruled out negotiating with the US and stated that it is their right to target US bases in the Gulf and Israel since they were attacked first.

The Gulf countries have released a joint statement condemning Iranian attacks and asked Iran to stop these attacks with immediate effect and stated that they have the right to use responsive military force against Iran. The UAE recalled its ambassador to Israel and closed its embassy in Iran, signaling a severe fracture in regional stability.

Lebanon-based Hezbollah joined the retaliation by firing rockets and drones into northern Israel, leading to further Israeli strikes on Beirut. Great Britain, France, and Germany (the E3) have officially announced they are prepared to take “defensive action” alongside the U.S. and regional partners against Iran.

UK has authorized the U.S. to use British military bases (including Akrotiri in Cyprus) for “specific and limited defensive purpose” to destroy Iranian missile launchers at their source. The Akrotiri British base too came under a possible Iranian drone attack with limited success. British fighter jets are already active in the region, intercepting Iranian drones and missiles targeting allies.

Reports indicate France has deployed an aircraft carrier and is mobilizing strategic assets to protect partners like Jordan and Gulf states. While historically cautious, Germany is reportedly considering joining the campaign to stop Iranian attacks on regional countries.

President Trump stated that the U.S. would continue its campaign for several weeks and warned Iran of “force that has never been seen before” if attacks persist. Despite initial losses and waves of subsequent attacks, Iran continues to carry out retaliatory attacks with a certain degree of success.

There is every sign that this conflict would escalate to involve the entire Gulf region and with the involvement of outside gulf countries it could only escalate and right now there is no sign of all sides coming for a negotiated settlement through diplomacy.

Persian Gulf countries are the major oil and gas producing and supplying countries to majority of countries in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific countries. Many of these countries other than major powers do not have strategic reserves in Oil and Gas. They depend on continuous supply lines of ship-by-ship through the strait of Hormuz. Iran stated that the Strait of Hormuz will not be closed for seaborne trade.

However major and minor shipping lines will hesitate to use this region until it stabilizes. Shipping through a war zone would incur heavy insurance and war-risk-premium. All these will add to the price and supply of oil.

As of March 2, 2026, oil prices have surged due to intensifying military conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran, primarily driven by fears of a major supply disruption in the Middle East. Brent Crude prices jumped by as much as 13% in early trading to reach a 14-month high of \$82.37 per barrel. As of midday, it has stabilized around \$78 – \$79 per barrel, up roughly 8-9% on the day.

This factor will affect national security and foreign policy of many other countries which are not involved in this conflict as there likely to be a shortage of fuel to run their militaries, especially the navies and maritime reconnaissance arrangements.

Countries such as Sri Lanka has urged all the parties to the conflict to come to a negotiated settlement and the need for de-escalation of tension. In the case of Sri

Lanka there is a large number of its citizens working in Gulf Countries. The safety of this segment of people is a major concern for Sri Lanka. The remittance they earn and transfer to Sri Lanka is one of the major pillars of country's economy. This too can suffer from the evolving situation.

Another major pillar of Sri Lankan economy is tourism. Gulf countries have been the main aviation hub and transit corridor for many western tourists to Sri Lanka. Now country experience large scale cancellation due to non-availability of flights. Commercial airlines will not take the risk of flying through the dangerous gulf air space. Hence Sri Lankan economy will have a shock-effect if the conflict continues for a longer period.

About Author



Admiral (Prof.) Jayanath Colombage is an Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS), Hong Kong. He has served the Sri Lanka Navy for a period of 36 years and retired as the Commander of the Navy on 01 July 2014. He is the 18th Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy and was decorated for gallantry and commended for exceptional service to the Navy. He held the portfolio of Additional Secretary to the President for Foreign Relations, and the Secretary to the Foreign Ministry from August 2020 to May 2022. He is a visiting lecturer at the University of Colombo, Defence Services Command and Staff College (Sri Lanka), Kotelawala Defence University and Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute. He is also a Fellow of Nautical Institute, London UK, and Guest Professor at Sichuan University and Leshan Normal University in China and an adjunct professor at National Institute of South China Sea Studies, Haikou, China. He has also been an editor and reviewer of a number of internationally renowned academic journals. In addition, he has served as the Director General of the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka as well. He is currently a PhD examiner for University of Colombo. Email: jayanathskc@yahoo.com.