

US-IRAN TENSION: INDIA WILL HAVE TO BALANCE ITS TIES WITH ALL PARTIES - EDITORIALS - HINDUSTAN TIMES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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Iran and the United States (US) appear to be locked into an escalatory spiral following the American drone strike that killed Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the al-Quds Force foreign operations arm of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The latest indication of this is US President Donald Trump's belligerent message to hit 52 Iranian sites "very hard" if Tehran attacks Americans or US interests in retaliation to Soleimani's killing. As Mr Trump has been wont to do, he announced his plans via Twitter, hardly the platform for diplomacy, and said he wouldn't hesitate to strike targets that are important to Iranian culture. Any retaliation by Iran, most experts, and West Asia watchers acknowledge, is a given, though what form it will take remains to be seen. There are fears that Iran could use its proxies to retaliate in Syria, Lebanon or Israel, or target the interests of Saudi Arabia, a key ally of the US, or even launch cyber attacks, at least to save face because of Soleimani's status within the power hierarchy in Tehran.

While the killing of Soleimani may have met the parameters of US laws, Washington appears to be skating on thin ice as far as international laws are concerned. Once again, it appears Mr Trump has given little thought to the consequences of his decision to retaliate against the recent attacks on US assets in Iraq or to the interests of partners such as India. Mr Trump's contention that the Iranian general was eliminated because he was plotting "imminent" attacks has been questioned by wide sections of the US media and experienced intelligence hands, who have said little information has emerged to back up this claim.

One immediate consequence of the flaring up of tension in West Asia is that India finds itself in a very difficult position, given its strong relations with all the key players. The US and Israel are pre-eminent strategic partners for India, and Saudi Arabia and Iraq are crucial for the country's energy security, but Iran is central to India's plans to access Afghanistan and Central Asia via Chabahar. At stake too is the fate of some eight million Indian expatriates in West Asia. India's economic and strategic interests will take a hit if there is any further instability or tension in the region.

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