FINDER
03rd March 2026
FORTUNE IAS NEWS DAILY EXPLAINER
FORTUNE IAS ACADEMY
More than just an academy

Israel, the U.S. and a war to build a unipolar West Asia

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Background and Immediate Trigger

- On **February 27**, Oman's Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi said a **U.S.–Iran nuclear deal** was close.
- Iran reportedly committed to **never building a nuclear bomb** and not stockpiling nuclear material.
- The next day, the **U.S. and Israel launched airstrikes** on Iran.
- Iran's **Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** and several senior officials were killed.
- Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu called it a **"pre-emptive" strike** against existential threats.
- U.S. President Donald Trump openly hinted at **regime change**.
- Despite the initial shock, **Iran reorganised and retaliated**, escalating tensions in **West Asia**.

2. Geopolitical Context: Why Target Iran?

- After the **12-day war (June 2025)**, the U.S. claimed it had **"obliterated" Iran's nuclear programme**, yet war resumed eight months later.
- Israel's concern is not just Iran's **nuclear capability**, but also its **missile programme** and **regional influence**.
- The 2015 nuclear deal under Barack Obama focused only on the **nuclear issue**, not Iran's conventional power.
- Israel views Iran as the **last major revisionist power** challenging its dominance.
- Other regional powers like **Iraq (post-Saddam Hussein), Libya (post-Gaddafi), and Syria (post-Bashar al-Assad)** have weakened.
- A regime change in Iran would create a **unipolar West Asia**, centred around **Israel backed by the U.S.**

3. Strategy: Decapitation and Regime Change

- Direct **ground invasion** (like Iraq 2003) is unlikely due to:
  - Iran's **large size (70× Israel)**
  - Its **mountainous geography**
- No strong **armed opposition group** exists inside Iran (unlike Libya or Syria).
- Therefore, Israel adopted a **"decapitation strategy"**:
  - Kill top leadership.
  - Create chaos.
  - Trigger internal collapse.
- However, after both **June 2025 and February 2026 strikes**, Iran's state structure **survived and responded militarily**.
- The expected **popular uprising** did not materialise.

4. Regional Escalation and Global Risks

- Unlike 2025, Iran is now attacking:
  - **U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf**
  - Targets in **Cyprus and UAE**
  - Israel directly
- Iran announced closure of the **Strait of Hormuz**, a chokepoint carrying **one-third of global energy supply**.
- This risks:
  - **Regional war** involving Gulf monarchies
  - Severe disruption to **global energy markets**

- Missile defence systems being **overstretched**

- Though the **U.S.-Israel alliance has superior conventional strength**, victory depends on **clear, achievable objectives**.
- Iran's doctrine aims to **prolong conflict**, making quick victory difficult.
- As strategist Henry Kissinger implied:
  - In asymmetric warfare, the **guerrilla wins if it does not lose**.

UGC reform debate, faultlines in politics of social justice

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1.Context

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed **the Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions Regulations, 2026 to improve social justice in universities.**
- Some upper-caste groups opposed the rules, calling them unfair.
- The **Supreme Court stayed them, citing vagueness** and possible misuse.
- The **issue raised concerns about fairness and representation** in universities.

2. Purpose of the Proposed Reforms

- The **regulations define caste-based discrimination as unfair treatment** against Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and other vulnerable groups (like the EWS)
- They **extend legal protection to OBCs and other vulnerable groups,** correcting a key gap in the earlier draft.
- The regulations **establish a multi-level grievance redressal system, including Equal Opportunity Centres with Equity Committees** to address discrimination complaints.
- They **also set clear timelines and procedures for resolving complaints** and for appealing panel decisions.
- **Promote more inclusive and socially** responsive universities.

3. Representation and Social Inequality in Academia

- **Marginalized groups still face inequality** in higher education.
- **Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are underrepresented** in universities.
- **Poverty limits their access to quality education** and employment.
- Their **presence in state and urban sectors is low.**

4.The OBC Question

- The Bihar Caste Survey 2023 highlighted **that many people belong to Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs), who are often landless and poorly educated.**
- In central universities:
  - **OBC representation among faculty** is reportedly less than 3%.
  - **Concerns have been raised** about **discriminatory recruitment practices.**
  - Unlike SC/ST groups, **OBC members have relatively limited institutional safeguards against caste-based discrimination.**

5.Conclusion

- The **UGC reform debate highlights ongoing inequalities** in higher education.
- It **underscores the need for institutional safeguards and inclusive policies to address underrepresentation and discrimination** faced by socially vulnerable groups.

Rupture across the Durand Line

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Background

- **Pakistan and Afghanistan** have fought two major military clashes within six months, first in October 2025 and again recently.
- Pakistan conducted **air and missile strikes** inside Afghanistan, including in **Kabul** and **Kandahar.**
- The Taliban retaliated by attacking Pakistani military posts across the **Durand Line.**
- Both clashes caused **high military and civilian casualties**.
- The fighting resumed despite a **ceasefire mediated by Turkiye and Qatar** after the October 2025 conflict.
- Pakistan's Defence Minister described the situation as an **"open war".**

Durand Line

- The Durand Line is an **international land border** of about 1,600 miles (2,600 km) between **Afghanistan and Pakistan.**
- It was established in **1893** between British India and the Emirate of Afghanistan to mark their spheres of influence.
- It is named after **Sir Henry Mortimer Durand,** who negotiated the boundary agreement with Afghan Emir Abdur Rahman Khan.

2. Nature of the Rupture

- **Political rupture:** After the Taliban took power in **2021**, relations were expected to improve, but ties between Islamabad and Kabul have instead worsened.
- **Institutional rupture:** The historic **nexus between Pakistan's Establishment** and the **Taliban** has fractured under new military and ISI leadership.
- **Societal rupture:** Pakistan's push to **deport Afghan refugees** has increased public anger in Afghanistan, deepening mistrust across the Durand Line

3. Drivers of the Conflict

- Pakistan expected the Taliban to act against the **Tehrik-e-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP)** after 2021.
- Instead, militant attacks in **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** increased during 2022-25.
- Pakistan's approach shifted from a **negotiation-based strategy** under Imran Khan to a **stronger military response** under the current Army leadership, worsening tensions.
- The Taliban has been **reluctant to act against the TTP** because TTP fighters had earlier given **refuge to Taliban members before 2021**.
- The presence of **Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K)** complicates the situation, as strong action against the TTP could push fighters towards IS-K.
- Kabul accuses Pakistan of blaming Afghanistan for its own **internal militancy**, while Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of allowing **cross-border militant activity**.

4. Asymmetry and Strategic Outlook

- **Pakistan holds clear military superiority**, with air and missile capabilities; the Taliban lacks comparable force projection.
- Economically, **Afghanistan is highly dependent on Pakistan,** especially access to Karachi port.
- Pakistan's **stronger regional and U.S. ties** provide **diplomatic leverage.**
- Given asymmetry, the Taliban is unlikely to pursue sustained **"open war"** but may resort to limited or indirect retaliation.

KEYWORDS

Hydrological hysteresis

- Hydrological hysteresis **refers to the phenomenon where a river basin or landscape responds to rainfall based on both current and previous rainfall.**
- Water stored in soils, wetlands, aquifers, and floodplains affects infiltration and runoff.
- Thus, **even identical rainfall can produce different flood levels depending on prior saturation.**
- This "landscape memory" explains prolonged or sudden urban flooding.

National Medical Commission (NMC)

- The **National Medical Commission (NMC)** was constituted under the **National Medical Commission Act, 2019**.
- The Act came into force on **25 September 2020** through a **Gazette Notification dated 24 September 2020**.
- **Key Objectives of NMC**
  - Promote **quality and affordable medical education**.
  - Ensure availability of **adequate and competent medical professionals** across the country.
  - Support **equitable and universal healthcare** with a **community health focus**.
  - Make medical services **accessible to all citizens** and advance **national health goals**.
  - Encourage adoption of **latest medical research** and uphold **high ethical standards**.
  - Provide **transparent assessment of institutions**, maintain a **National Medical Register**, and ensure an **effective grievance redressal mechanism**.