

Moscow's response to Israeli attacks on Iran

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In response to Israel's strikes on military and nuclear facilities in Iran on 13 June, Vladimir Putin held phone conversations with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The following day, he spoke with US President Donald Trump, and on 16 June with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was in contact with his counterparts from Iran and Turkey. In its official statements, Moscow condemned the Israeli attacks and offered to mediate between the parties in order to resolve the conflict.

The Israeli-Iranian confrontation presents both challenges and opportunities for Russia. The challenges include the exposure of the Kremlin's lack of influence over the situation and the risks associated with the potential marginalisation of Tehran – a de facto ally of Moscow in its confrontation with Ukraine and the West. The opportunities include rising oil prices, which help to stabilise the Russian economy, and the possibility of using Russia's offer to assist in overseeing Iran's nuclear programme as a means of enhancing its relations with the United States.

Commentary

- **The Israeli strikes on Iran pose a political and reputational problem for the Kremlin.** Moscow, which had offered to mediate with the United States regarding oversight of Iran's nuclear programme and signed a new treaty on comprehensive strategic partnership with Tehran in January this year (see '[A new Russian-Iranian treaty: closing ranks ahead of Trump's presidency](#)'), exerted no influence over the course of events, particularly in terms of restraining Israel's actions. Although the Russia-Iran agreement places special emphasis on cooperation in defence and security, it contains no provisions for mutual assistance in the event of aggression. Accordingly, Russia limited its response to condemning the attacks and describing Iran's retaliatory strikes as acts of self-defence, while refraining from declaring any form of support for Tehran.
- **Russia's recent surge in diplomatic activity should be interpreted as an attempt to mask its weakness**, evidenced by its lack of effective leverage over either side in the conflict. It seems unlikely that the Kremlin could play the role of mediator between Jerusalem and Tehran. Israel's ambassador in Moscow offered only a vague response on the matter, while Iran requested contact with Washington through Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman.
- **Any escalation of the conflict and destabilisation of Iran would negatively affect Russia's strategic position.** Cooperation with Tehran is a key factor for Moscow in the

context of the war in Ukraine (including the supply and production of Iranian drones used extensively on the front line), its rivalry with the West – particularly the United States (through initiatives targeting the interests of Washington and its allies in the Middle East) – and as a stabilising influence in the South Caucasus. The neutralisation of such an important partner (in effect, an ally) would pose a serious strategic challenge to Russia.

- **Moscow derives short-term benefits from the Israeli-Iranian conflict.** The most significant of these is the rise in oil prices and the potential for them to remain elevated over the longer term. This could substantially ease the recent severe financial pressure on the Russian budget by boosting oil export revenues – a key factor stabilising the Russian economy. Other advantages for the Kremlin stemming from the escalation include the temporary diversion of Western attention from the war in Ukraine; owing to developments in the Middle East, Trump departed the G7 summit in Canada.
- **Moscow will continue to assert its indispensability to the United States in the process of negotiating an agreement with Iran on nuclear programme oversight** – a priority of the Trump administration's foreign policy – and will seek to use any potential rapprochement with Washington to ease the sanctions regime and develop bilateral cooperation. However, this would first require a de-escalation of the Israeli-Iranian conflict.