



Iran and Stability in the Middle East QSD on 30 January 2020

On 30 January 2020, Lord Turnberg (Non-affiliated) is due to ask HMG “what assessment they have made of the influence of Iran on stability in the Middle East”. The debate is time limited to 1 hour.

Summary

- Tensions remain high in the Middle East as various actors including Iran vie for control and influence in the region. Iran’s ongoing antagonism with Saudi Arabia, exacerbated by religious and geopolitical differences, has seen both countries and others allegedly active in several so-called ‘proxy wars’ in Lebanon, Yemen and Syria, backing rival factions with funds, weapons and in some cases direct military assistance.
- A number of incidents in 2018 led to further conflict. These included disputes over Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme, with the United States withdrawing from the nuclear agreement agreed with Iran and other European nations—with which Iran has also subsequently stated it will no longer comply—drone attacks on Saudi Arabian oil fields, and the targeting of tankers in the strategically important Gulf of Hormuz.
- In addition, Iraq continues to exist in a state of turmoil, with Prime Minister, Adel Abd al-Mahdi, resigning in December 2019 amid anti-Iranian protests alleging corruption and a failure of governance at a time when many state institutions are perceived to be subject to Iranian influence. Conflict between Iran and the United States has also continued to impact stability in the country. A rocket attack on US personnel at an Iraqi military facility near Kirkuk in December 2019 led to reprisal US air strikes against Iranian-backed Shia militias. This in turn prompted violent scenes at the US Embassy in Baghdad on New Year’s Eve.
- Tensions were heightened still further on 3 January 2020, when the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ overseas forces, General Qasem Solemani, was killed in a drone strike conducted by the US military at the Baghdad International Airport. Mr Solemani was an influential figure in the region, who the US President, Donald Trump, has suggested was involved in the preparation of “imminent and sinister” attacks on US personnel, charges that Iran denies.
- In response to the attack, Iran launched two missile strikes against the al-Asad and Erbil airbases in Iraq on 8 January, which house US and coalition forces. No fatalities were reported.
- On the same day, a Ukrainian passenger aircraft bound for Kyiv crashed shortly after take-off from Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport with 176 people on board. Despite initial denials, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ Aerospace Division has since admitted firing two missiles at the plane, apparently mistaking it for a US cruise missile.
- That admission has triggered protests in Tehran and other cities across the country and resignations from journalists at state-run news outlets, as well as criticism from other notable Iranian media and sports personalities.
- The UK Government has continued to call for a de-escalation of tensions in the region.

James Tobin | 23 January 2020

A full list of Lords Library briefings is available on the research briefings page on the internet. The Library publishes briefings for all major items of business debated in the House of Lords. The Library also publishes briefings on the House of Lords itself and other subjects that may be of interest to Members. Library briefings are compiled for the benefit of Members of the House of Lords and their personal staff, to provide impartial, authoritative, politically balanced briefing on subjects likely to be of interest to Members of the Lords. Authors are available to discuss the contents of the briefings with the Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

Any comments on Library briefings should be sent to the Head of Research Services, House of Lords Library, London SW1A 0PW or emailed to purvism@parliament.uk.

Further Information

- House of Commons Library, [Iraq, Iranian Influence and the Death of Soleimani](#), 6 January 2020

A briefing paper exploring the death of Qasem Soleimani in the context of rising tensions in the region and examining what might happen next.
- House of Commons Library, [What Now for the Iran Nuclear Deal?](#), 15 January 2020

Briefing examining the future of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iranian nuclear capabilities and implications of Iran's stated intention to no longer abide by the terms of the agreement.
- [Statement by the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, on the 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action'](#), HC Hansard, 14 January 2020, cols 896–7

Statement by the Foreign Secretary stating that the E3 nations (United Kingdom, France and Germany) have decided to take action to hold Iran to account for its non-compliance with the JCPOA.
- [Statement by the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, on 'Iran'](#), HC Hansard, 13 January 2020, cols 751–2

Statement by the Foreign Secretary on the situation in Iran, calling for a full investigation of the crash of Ukrainian International Airlines flight PS752 and criticising the arrest of UK Ambassador, Rob Macaire, after attending a public vigil for those who lost their lives.
- [Statement by the Secretary of State for Defence, Ben Wallace, on 'Middle East: Security'](#), HC Hansard, 7 January 2020, cols 253–4

Statement by the Defence Secretary on the UK's response to rising tensions in the Middle East, following the death of Qasem Solemani.
- Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), [Iran's Objectives and Capabilities: Deterrence and Subversion](#), February 2019

An occasional paper examining Iran's tactics and methodology in seeking to extend its influence in the Middle East.
- Council on Foreign Relations, '[Global Conflict Tracker: Iran](#)', updated 17 January 2020

Briefing examining recent developments including the US designation of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organisation and the potential implications of a growing conflict with Iran.
- Brookings, '[Iran's Leaders Have a Problem They Can't Fix](#)', 21 January 2020

Article examining the internal politics of Iran and the impact of the downing of flight PS752 and death of Qasem Soleimani on the dynamics and struggle for control and influence in the country.

Press Articles and Comment

- Michael Safi, '[Iran Admits it Fired Two Missiles at Ukrainian Passenger Jet](#)', *Guardian*, 21 January 2020
- Najmeh Bozorgmehr, '[Iran: The Unspoken Battle to Succeed Ayatollah Khamenei](#)', *Financial Times* (£), 23 January 2020
- Frank Gardner, '[Iran's Network of Influence in the Mid-East is 'Growing'](#)', BBC News, 7 November 2019

Further Information

- House of Commons Library, '[Operation Kipion: Royal Navy Assets in the Persian Gulf](#)', 6 January 2020
- House of Common Library, '[The Iran Deal and Rising Tensions in the Gulf](#)', 1 October 2019
- House of Commons, '[Written Question: Iran: Diplomatic Relations](#)', 20 January 2020, 3307