

# CATMOCK DAILY

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## **KHAMENEI KILLING: FIVE GEOPOLITICAL FACTORS BEHIND INDIA'S SILENCE**

- *The Hindu*



The Union government has come under attack from Opposition parties for its silence on the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei and five of his family members, including his infant granddaughter, as well as his top advisors, at the start of the conflict on February 28. Although External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar did speak with his Iranian counterpart Syed Abbas Araghchi on that day, there was no mention in any of the readouts of a condolence message or the condemnation of the U.S.-Israeli strikes in the heart of Tehran.

Joint U.S.-Israeli missile attacks bombed a girls' primary school in Minab, southern Iran, killing around 150 and injuring about 100, according to UN estimates. On Sunday (March 1, 2026), the strikes damaged hospitals, including the Gandhi Hospital in northern Tehran, housed on Gandhi Street. In a media tour, officials showed blown out glass windows of the hospital, just across from a State TV tower, in a series of such attacks that the World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called "deeply concerning". Yet, New Delhi made no comment on the issue, leading to questions from even former Indian diplomats.

"The trend towards killing or abducting leaders of sovereign countries needs to be countered if we are to live in a civilised world, and not in the jungle. If countries do not come together to oppose this trend, they themselves may be 'on the menu' next," one former Ambassador well-versed in international law, who asked not to be named, said.

Opposition parties have criticised the Narendra Modi government for the lack of comment, comparing the silence to India's historical positions against the violation of territorial sovereignty and unilateral actions. However, New Delhi's position is in contrast even to far more recent events in Iran. In January 2020, when the U.S. carried out a targeted assassination strike on Iran's top General Qasem Soleimani, India called the tensions "alarming".

"We have noted that a senior Iranian leader has been killed by the U.S.," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had said in a statement. "The increase in tension has alarmed the world. Peace,

stability and security in this region are of utmost importance to India. It is vital that the situation does not escalate further,” the statement added. Days later, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif travelled to Delhi to attend the Raisina Dialogue, and openly slammed U.S. President Donald Trump for ordering the killing.

In May 2024, India ordered a day of mourning over the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian in a helicopter crash, and sent then Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar to the funeral. “They will always be remembered as friends of India who contributed immensely to the growth of the India-Iran relationship. Government of India stands in solidarity with the people of Iran at this very difficult time,” EAM Jaishankar wrote in a condolence book at the Iranian Embassy.

Within hours of the U.S.’s strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities on June 22, 2025, Prime Minister Modi called Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and expressed “deep concern” over the escalation. After initially hesitating, India even signed on to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS statements later in the year that condemned the U.S. and Israel’s unilateral strikes.

During the crisis, Iran made a special exception for India, opening its airspace only to allow planes carrying hundreds of Indian students safely back home.

What then explains the absence of any comment from India over the assassination of Iran’s leader, or the deadly strikes on schools and hospitals? The MEA did not respond to requests for a reasoning on its statements. Officials pointed to the MEA statement of February 28 that said India was “deeply concerned at the recent developments in Iran and the Gulf region”, urging all sides to avoid escalation, and a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security headed by Mr. Modi discussed options for Indians caught in the conflict in the region. On Tuesday (March 3, 2026), the MEA issued a fresh statement expressing “grave anxiety” on the continued escalation in India’s proximity.

When asked, experts said there were several factors behind India’s decision to not comment directly on the killings in Iran.

“First, the challenge of navigating today’s complex geopolitics. Second, a circumscribed relationship overall with Iran in recent decades, despite the Chabahar port. And third, Khamenei’s criticism of India on the issues of Kashmir and the treatment of minorities,” former Ambassador Rakesh Sood told The Hindu.

### **These are the five major considerations for New Delhi:**

**1. Israel:** India has had a close security relationship with Israel for decades, but this has exponentially improved in the last few years, since Mr. Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel (in 2017), and then hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (in 2018). With Mr. Modi’s visit to Jerusalem last week, and his address to the Knesset, where he proclaimed India stands “with Israel, firmly, with full conviction, in this moment, and beyond”, New Delhi appears to be abandoning its traditional regional balance in favour of Israel. It is significant that after the initial strikes by Israel and Iran’s retaliatory strikes across the region, Mr. Modi spoke to Mr. Netanyahu and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders, but not to his Iranian counterpart. Mr. Netanyahu, who hailed the killing of Mr. Khamenei, whom he called a “tyrant”, thanked Mr. Modi for his support “for Israel and for the Jewish people” during the conflict.

**2. Iran-India ties:** India’s ties with Iran have weakened concurrently, not as much due to ties with Israel, but over the tightening of U.S. sanctions on Iran. As a result, after zeroing out oil imports from Iran in 2018, India-Iran trade has wound down from about \$17 billion in 2018 to about \$1.68 billion in 2025, and investments in Iranian oil and gas fields have been frozen. In

April, the U.S. will end its sanctions waiver for Chabahar port, and by every indication, India will wind up operating the Shahid Beheshti terminal it has developed at that time, unless the waiver is extended. The Modi government “front-loaded” its commitment of \$120 million for the port, paying it in one go in November 2025, and most personnel have pulled out, according to reports. In the latest escalation, Israeli missiles targeted the Konark airport at Chabahar and have possibly destroyed other infrastructure there as well.

**3. Concerns over Khamenei’s statements:** India-Iran relations had weathered many political storms in earlier decades, when Khamenei was President of Iran from 1981-1989, and then Supreme Leader after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. In 1994, after an outreach from India, Iran chose not to join Pakistan and many Arab countries on a resolution on Kashmir at the UN Human Rights Council. However, more recently, New Delhi had taken umbrage to his comments about internal developments in India, including criticism of the Centre’s Kashmir policy in 2017, and then after the Article 370 amendments in 2019, as well as his statement in March 2020, referring to the Delhi riots as proof of a “massacre of Muslims” in India.

**4. India-Gulf ties:** India’s silence may also be explained by its desire to not upset ties in the Gulf region, especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia, where Iran has targeted U.S. bases, oil facilities, and infrastructure. In particular, India’s ties with the UAE have been strengthened by a defence partnership announced during UAE President Mohammad Bin Zayed’s two-hour visit to Delhi in January this year. Government officials told The Hindu that it is not possible to take any step that could jeopardise the safety of 10 million Indians who live and work in Gulf countries. In comparison, there are about 4,000-5,000 Indians in Iran, and about 20,000 in Israel. With India’s reduction in the import of Russian oil, imports from the Gulf have increased in the past few months, and much of India’s trade with GCC countries is at stake as well.

**5. India-U.S. ties:** The Modi government has only just begun to restore ties with the Trump administration after the U.S.’s reduction of tariffs, and agreement on trade that was announced in February 2026. In addition, the U.S. has included India in its Pax Silica critical technology supply chain, and a string of U.S. officials are now headed to India, including this week, for the Raisina Dialogue. Given the Trump administration’s mercurial nature, and threats of sanctions on any engagement with Iran, New Delhi may prefer playing safe.

New Delhi has some more tough choices ahead, however, as Mr. Trump has indicated that U.S. operations against Iran could continue for several weeks, and that he is open to “boots on the ground”, or sending U.S. forces into Iran. Apart from the travel, trade, connectivity, and energy disruptions, India must also consider its standing in the Global South if it chooses to side with the U.S.-led coalition against Iran. In addition, New Delhi is due to host the BRICS summit this year, and the war and its outcome will have a lasting impact on the grouping that now includes Iran and the UAE, now rivals in the conflict.

## **THE RACE TO REGULATE AI IN WARFARE**

**-Finshot**



Last week, Anthropic stepped back from a \$200 million deal with the United States Department of Defense over a long-standing dilemma — how far AI should be allowed to go in warfare. The company insisted on strict limits preventing its AI, Claude, from being used for mass surveillance or fully autonomous lethal weapons.

Their argument? Such systems should never make kill decisions without meaningful human oversight.

When the Pentagon pushed for broader access that would allow the technology to be used for any lawful military purpose, Anthropic refused and exited the negotiations. Rival lab OpenAI later moved ahead with a separate deal with the Pentagon. This highlighted a growing divide in Silicon Valley over whether AI companies should impose hard ethical red lines on military use of their technology.

At first, this might look like just another corporate disagreement between tech companies and the military. But it touches on a much bigger question: who decides the rules when a powerful new technology enters the battlefield? You see, for most of modern history, whenever humanity created a particularly dangerous weapon, the world eventually responded by writing rules around it. The suffering of wounded soldiers on European battlefields in the 19th century eventually led to the first Geneva Convention protecting both injured soldiers and medical personnel. The horrors of trench warfare and chemical attacks during World War I pushed countries to adopt agreements restricting chemical weapons. And after the widespread civilian suffering and prisoner abuse during World War II, nations came together to create the modern Geneva Conventions. They are a set of international rules that define how wars should be fought, including protections for civilians, prisoners of war and the wounded.

It was a pattern as clear as day: whenever warfare evolved, so did the rules around it. These rules didn't stop wars. They simply established guardrails for how they could be fought — preventing countries from using any and all means against one another.

But today, a new military tech is emerging that doesn't neatly fit into any existing rulebook: artificial intelligence. Imagine a battlefield command centre flooded with information — satellite images streaming in, drone footage updating every second, radio intercepts piling up faster than analysts can process them. Now imagine an AI system sitting in the middle of it all. Within seconds, it scans the imagery, flags suspicious movements, highlights possible targets and suggests the next course of action. Tasks that would normally take human analysts hours or even days, can suddenly happen almost instantly. Militaries around the world are already

experimenting with systems like these. And that's where the real debate begins. Because some of the technologies being developed today go a step further. Instead of merely assisting commanders, they could eventually identify and attack targets independently. Researchers refer to these systems as Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, or LAWS — weapons that could potentially select and strike targets without direct human control.

Over a year ago, the United Nations addressed the dangers of LAWS in modern warfare. Their concern is how AI systems could eventually be used to identify and attack targets without direct human intervention. In other words, the system itself would decide who is a threat and who isn't. In policy circles, these technologies are sometimes referred to as "killer robots". The term sounds dramatic, but it simply refers to weapons that could use artificial intelligence to select and strike targets on their own. That's where things start getting complicated. Because the laws of war were written with the basic assumption that humans make battlefield decisions.

We'll explain this with a scenario. If a soldier violates the rules of war, responsibility is usually clear. The individual who carried out the attack can be investigated. Commanders who gave unlawful orders can be held accountable. But autonomous weapons complicate that idea of responsibility. If an AI system misidentifies a target or causes civilian casualties, who exactly is to blame? The military commander who deployed the system? The engineers who wrote the algorithm? Or the machine itself?

It's a question the current rulebook doesn't clearly answer.

That's why they've been debating whether the world needs new rules for autonomous weapons. From now to September, over 120 countries will discuss new rules and regulations of LAWS. Even the chair of the negotiations has warned that time is running out. If governments wait too long, he said, technological developments could overtake the rules meant to control them. Unlike nuclear or chemical weapons, AI doesn't rely on rare materials or specialised factories. Much of it is software. And software tends to spread quickly.

But agreeing on it is easier said than done. Here's why.

Right now, there are three broad ideas on the table. The first is a complete ban on autonomous weapons altogether. This would mean that machines on their own wouldn't be allowed to operate independently. Especially for life-or-death decisions in war. It would follow the same logic the world eventually applied to chemical and biological weapons.

And then there's the second possibility: do nothing new at all. Some governments argue that existing laws of war already cover this technology. The same rules that apply to any weapon today, including the protections laid out in the Geneva Conventions, should apply to AI systems as well.

The third option is a middle ground. Instead of banning these systems outright, countries could require what experts call "meaningful human control". In practice, that would mean AI systems could analyse battlefield data, suggest targets or recommend actions. But the final decision to launch an attack would always rest with a human commander.

Which brings us back to Anthropic.

The company was founded by former OpenAI researchers who believed powerful AI systems needed clear guardrails. That philosophy also shaped its decision to step away from the Pentagon deal. Anthropic wasn't opposed to working with the military. But it was unwilling to remove restrictions that could allow its AI to be used for mass surveillance or fully autonomous weapons. In many ways, that's the same question the rest of the world is now grappling with: where exactly should the guardrails for AI in warfare be drawn?

For centuries, the pattern has been clear. New weapons emerge, wars reveal their dangers, and only then does the world write the rules. Artificial intelligence may be the first time humanity is trying to write those rules before disaster forces its hand. Unlike traditional weapons, which are controlled by whoever wields them, AI systems still carry safeguards designed by their creators. At least for now, those guardrails remain in the hands of the companies building the technology.

### **IQ SCORES ARE FALLING BUT, NO, WE'RE NOT GROWING MORE STUPID**

- *Psyche.co*



Screens and social media get the blame, but the real problem lies in how we measure intelligence in the first place.

In the past decade, researchers have found data suggesting that, on average, the populations of developed Western countries are becoming more stupid. It's a reversal of the so-called Flynn Effect, named after the New Zealand philosopher and intelligence researcher James Flynn. In the 1980s, Flynn had shown that, between the 1930s and the 1970s, average intelligence rose by three IQ points per decade in the United States and in other Western nations, a trend that seemed to persist until the 1990s. But then in the early years of the 21st century, Flynn noticed something disturbing: IQ scores for even the brightest children in the US and the UK had started to decline. And in Nordic nations, Flynn projected that average national intelligence scores – some of which had been declining since the mid-1990s – could drop by around seven IQ points over the following 30 years.

Plenty of reasons are given for this decline. In November 2025, Lane Brown, a feature writer for New York magazine, cited several possible factors: outsourcing our cognitive labour to AIs, being glued to our screens, the ongoing effects of COVID-19 and, though this is probably a niche factor, too-strong weed. 'The world is dumber, and we all know it,' writes Brown. 'Lately, it feels like that culturewide upgrade to our mental operating systems has been rolled back to an older and buggier version.'

The negative Flynn Effect, however, isn't what it seems. Firstly, falling average intelligence among Western nations is perfectly compatible with rising intelligence rates among certain sections of their populations. But more worryingly, the IQ tests on which Flynn relies are of doubtful value. Our stupidity, it turns out, is not always easy to understand.

A century ago, the superbly named pioneer of intelligence tests, Professor Edwin G Boring, remarked that 'Intelligence is what the tests test.' It's a maxim whose circularity suggests that aptitude at passing IQ tests may be a hopeless proxy for intelligence and doesn't indicate much about real-life cognitive abilities. Instead, IQ scores reward what society regards as valuable mental traits at a particular slice of time: your IQ number is a judgment rather than an objective

fact. And yet, that number may serve as a curse or a badge of honour, depending on which side of the average 100-point score a person falls. As Brown puts it, 'both the original Flynn effect and its reversal might owe more to inconsistent methodology than to real cognitive change.'

IQ tests can also be unhelpfully culturally specific, with disastrous, even racist results. In the BBC documentary *Subnormal* (2021), one of the UK's first Black educational psychologists, Waveney Bushell, told an interviewer that underperforming Black kids who were segregated into special educational needs schools were often considered to be educationally subnormal due to unhelpful culturally specific questions on IQ papers. For instance, one question invited children to identify a 'tap' – more commonly known as a 'faucet' in the US. Easy enough, one would have thought. But some Black kids struggled with the question. It was not because they were stupid, but because in parts of the Caribbean, where their families are from, the word 'pipe' is used rather than 'tap'.

For Arendt, our leading moral task is to overcome that stupidity – that form of moral blindness

Perhaps there's more to intelligence than passing an IQ test. Consider the case of what *Newsweek*, in a 1945 article, called 'the evil geniuses'. Before high-ranking Nazis were tried at Nuremberg, American psychologists measured their IQ scores and, worryingly, found that, by that metric, many of the most evil men in the world were geniuses: the economics minister Hjalmar Schacht scored 143, the Air Force commander Hermann Göring 138, and Hitler's architect Albert Speer 128.

In 1961, when the philosopher Hannah Arendt looked across a Jerusalem courtroom into the eyes of Adolf Eichmann, one of the leading organisers of the Holocaust, she was struck by his absolute inability 'to think from the standpoint of somebody else'. That is precisely what Arendt meant by the 'banality of evil'. Then in an interview in 1964, Arendt said: 'It was his thickheadedness that was so outrageous, as if speaking to a brick wall. And that was what I actually meant by banality ... There's simply resistance ever to imagine what another person is experiencing.' For Arendt, our leading moral task is to overcome that stupidity – that form of moral blindness.

So, even if our intelligence measures really are flawed, what explains the rise and fall of IQ scores? Flynn hypothesised the importance of environmental factors, including changes in education, nutrition, family structure, economic pressures, microplastics, antidepressants and wildfire smoke. But that's not an adequate explanation: from the 1930s, when average national intelligence rose in developed Western nations decade on decade, other deleterious environmental factors were at play. There was a lack of free public education and socialised healthcare, and toxic air pollution – a known factor influencing intelligence scores and cognition – was often unchecked. Complicating things further, what Flynn proposed as negative factors may be positive ones, and vice versa. Antidepressants, for instance, might help with improving one's intelligence precisely by lifting one out of existential hopelessness.

More recently, observers have suggested two knockdown factors accounting for the apparent declines in average national intelligences: screens and social media. For many, these are intuitively seen as accelerants to the 21st century's bonfire of stupidity – we seem to collectively sense that they are dumbing us down.

Intuitively, the argument that digital media is dumbing us down is plausible.

On this point, it's worth noting that the scores used to support the negative Flynn Effect weren't down in every category. In 2023, researchers at Northwestern University and the University of Oregon published a study indicating that average American intelligence declined between 2006 and 2018 across three of four broad domains tested. They found that their fellow citizens

tracked falling scores in logic, vocabulary, visual and mathematical problem-solving, and analogical reasoning. Only scores for spatial ability – the measure of the mind’s ability to analyse three-dimensional objects – rose during that period for the average American. Again, this highlights the culturally specific value judgment of those who contend that IQ tests demonstrate falling average intelligence. Perhaps spatial ability, for instance, is more important to today’s cognitive elites than reading. Certainly, you’ll need the former if you’re going to be any good at fast, visually intensive online games such as Fortnite. It is uncertain right now whether the gaming virtuosos who will play the next iteration of the Grand Theft Auto series will be dumber than someone who can write a plausible essay on the depiction of female autonomy in Samuel Richardson’s literary classic *Clarissa*; or, *The History of a Young Lady* (1748). Perhaps both skills are signs of intelligence; perhaps neither. What’s important here is that it’s hard to determine whether the latter is a more objective measure of intelligence than the former.

Intuitively, the argument that digital media is dumbing us down is plausible. And book after book, based on study after study, appears to confirm our intuitions. Computers and smartphones spare us cognitive labour. As a result, the human mind has less to do. Therefore, the need to be intelligent is less of an evolutionary imperative than it was in the pre-digital era. Computers and smartphones are more complex than ever, but human routines are oddly simpler. Generations ago, dishwashers and clothes dryers eased physical labours in daily life. Today, an iPhone or an Amazon Echo can ease mental labour, enabling us, the creators of these machines, to slide into the warm bath of mental fatuity. But perhaps, in principle at least, using an Echo or talking with ChatGPT allows you to free your mind for more cognitively challenging work.

The Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan saw the invention of the light bulb as an enlightening moment for humanity. ‘A light bulb creates an environment by its mere presence,’ he wrote in *Understanding Media* (1964) – the light extends human powers over what was hitherto dark. It is not utter folly to believe that AI and other digital tools derided for making us more stupid work in similar ways, by extending human cognitive powers rather than destroying them. Or maybe, and this is my favourite thought, they do one or the other depending on your ability to critically reflect on what the technology is offering you. ChatGPT, after all, does come with a cognitive health warning that the data it supplies may be wrong. It is up to the wit and discernment of the human using it to sort the right from the wrong. Human intelligence is not quite obsolete, but it does face new demands.

One intriguing hypothesis for the supposed cognitive decline has been advanced by the psychologist Elizabeth Dworak, lead author of the aforementioned 2023 study seeking to explain the negative Flynn Effect. As she told *The Hill* newspaper: ‘The line can’t go up forever. It’s called the ceiling effect. You eventually hit that threshold.’ Again, this is intuitively plausible. What goes up must come down. Athletes can only run so quickly. Presumably, then, there will come a day when some sprinter holds on to the 100-metre world record, in principle, forever. Similarly, there’s only so far mere human intelligence can go.

But the parallel isn’t a good one. Firstly, world records are measured objectively by clocks. Second, human intelligence is too slippery and culturally relative to yield to objective measurement. What we regard as intelligent or stupid changes over time, just like the skills that we regard as important or irrelevant. Some abilities valorised by IQ tests decades ago may be worthless in 2026.

The grand delusion of IQ scores is that they are objective facts rather than relative measures of intelligence. Despite what hypotheses about the negative Flynn Effect suggest, these numbers do not offer incontrovertible evidence that us poor mugs in the developed West are more stupid on average than our grandparents. That judgment may say more about our witlessness than our intelligence. Or, at least, I hope I’m not stupid in believing so.