

‘The price of a US-Iran conflict will be paid in many currencies’: Indian MP Akbar

Keynote Speech by Indian Member of Parliament MJ Akbar

By Lim Wei Chean

War is not a solution to the tensions between the United States and Iran, said Indian Member of Parliament MJ Akbar. Speaking as the third keynote speaker at a conference organised by the National University of Singapore’s Middle East Institute, Mr Akbar, who was formerly India’s minister of state for External Affairs, stressed the importance of diplomacy.

“There are many itchy fingers on weapons, but none of this is in anyone’s geo-strategic or geo-economic interests,” he said at the conference, held at the Orchard Hotel on 13 August 2019. In fact, he added: “The price of a US-Iran conflict will be paid in many currencies.”

Tensions between Washington and Tehran pre-date the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, he said, adding that one of the lasting results of the Iranian Revolution was the creation of a Shia strategic space on the map of the Muslim world, which it has extended beyond its territorial borders. He stressed that is a space Iran would not be likely to leave in a hurry.

Part of problem with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), he suggested, was that it was not joint, not comprehensive and not planned.

The good news, however, is that the handling of the US-Iran tensions remains in the hands of state, rather than non-state, actors, he said. “Will they talk before inflicting serious, if not incalculable, harm on the region?”

Diplomacy is key, he said, adding: “Diplomacy is continuous engagement, knowing that one mistake could become a crisis.”

He said India believes states must find a direct route to dialogue. However, he also said: “Security is not a negotiable instrument ... peace does not come without security.”

Responding to a question on what nuclear capability has done for India’s world outlook, he said: “Security is something that every nation determines for itself, and takes whatever decisions it requires, based on its own judgement.”

