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**Editorials &**  
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**17 March 2026**



## UPSC 360°

**The Hindu Unwrapped** - Daily Current Affairs Mastery for UPSC CSE (Clear that it's based on The Hindu editorials / news analyses - very aspirant-friendly)

### Significance

The West Asia war highlights how armed conflicts severely damage the environment through pollution, ecosystem destruction, and resource depletion. These impacts worsen climate change, threaten public health, and disrupt livelihoods. Ignoring environmental costs delays recovery and sustainable peace. Recognizing ecological damage as a core issue is essential for long-term regional stability and global environmental security.

### Environment: Yet Another Casualty of the West Asia War

#### Why in News?

1. The ongoing US-Israel-Iran war (escalated since February 2026 with Khamenei's killing and intensified by US strikes on Kharg Island in March 2026) has triggered a severe, under-reported environmental crisis in the Persian Gulf and broader West Asia. Recent incidents include:
  - Fires and potential oil spills from US strikes on Kharg Island (Iran's primary oil export terminal).
  - Missile/drone attacks damaging industrial facilities, oil infrastructure, and ports in Iran, Gulf states, and Lebanon.
  - Explosions releasing toxic gases, particulate matter, and heavy metals into air, water, and soil. UNEP and environmental NGOs (e.g., Greenpeace, Conflict and Environment

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Observatory) have warned of long-term ecological damage comparable to the 1991 Gulf War. Oil prices and maritime risks have surged, while India (heavily dependent on Gulf energy) faces indirect threats to marine ecosystems and fisheries. The crisis highlights how modern conflicts accelerate climate vulnerability and biodiversity loss in already fragile arid and marine ecosystems.

## Key Details of Environmental Damage

### • Air Pollution

- Explosions and oil fires at Kharg Island and other sites release black carbon, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and heavy metals.
- Particulate matter (PM2.5) levels spiked in Gulf cities (Dubai, Doha, Tehran) in March 2026.

### • Water & Marine Contamination

- Risk of large-scale oil spills from damaged Kharg terminal and tanker incidents (e.g., MT Skylight strike).
- Sewage systems and industrial plants destroyed → untreated waste entering Persian Gulf and rivers (Tigris-Euphrates basin).
- Coral reefs, mangroves, and fisheries threatened (Gulf is a biodiversity hotspot).

### • Soil Degradation & Land Contamination

- Heavy metals, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and fuel leaks render agricultural land infertile.
- Lebanon and Syrian border areas worst affected by cluster munitions and chemical residues.

### • Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- Military operations and oil fires contribute significantly to CO<sub>2</sub> and methane release (estimated additional millions of tonnes in first month alone).

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- **Infrastructure Collapse**

- Damage to waste management, desalination plants, and power grids → uncontrolled dumping and burning of waste.

## Background: Historical Lessons from Regional Conflicts

- **1991 Gulf War**

- Iraqi forces set ~600 oil wells on fire → burned for 10 months, released 1.5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> daily, caused massive marine oil spills, and led to “black rain” across the region.
- Long-term effects: Soil infertility, respiratory diseases, and biodiversity loss persisted for decades.

- **2003 Iraq War & Later Conflicts**

- Depleted uranium munitions contaminated soil and water; agricultural lands turned into wastelands.

- **Current 2026 Conflict**

- Echoes past patterns but amplified by precision strikes on energy infrastructure (Kharg Island) and drone/missile attacks on ports and refineries.
- Unlike previous wars, real-time satellite monitoring (e.g., by UNEP) is documenting damage faster, yet accountability remains weak.

## Implications

- **For West Asia**

- Long-term ecological scars: Desertification acceleration, loss of fisheries (livelihoods of millions), and reduced climate resilience in an already water-stressed region.
- Humanitarian multiplier: Contaminated water and air worsen displacement and health crises (respiratory diseases, cancers).

- **Global Climate & Environment**

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- Additional GHG emissions undermine Paris Agreement goals.
- Marine pollution affects migratory species and global fisheries.
- **For India**
  - Energy security risk: Any prolonged Hormuz disruption or Gulf pollution affects 85% of oil imports.
  - Fisheries impact: Potential contamination of Indian Ocean currents.
  - Diaspora & remittances: Health risks for ~9 million Indians in Gulf states.
  - Strategic: Navy monitoring extended for environmental/maritime security.
- **Policy Gaps**
  - International Humanitarian Law (Geneva Conventions Additional Protocol I) prohibits widespread environmental damage, but enforcement is weak.
  - No dedicated global fund for war-related environmental cleanup.

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## UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: Environmental Warfare, Kharg Island, Persian Gulf Pollution, UNEP Conflict and Environment Observatory
- Data: Hormuz transit (20% global oil); 1991 Gulf War oil fires (600 wells)
- Related: UNEP, Geneva Conventions, Paris Agreement

### GS-3 (Environment & Disaster Management)

- War-induced environmental degradation
- Climate change & conflict nexus

### GS-3 (Security)

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- Non-traditional security threats (environmental security)

## GS-2 (IR)

- India's West Asia policy & humanitarian/environmental dimensions

## Essay / Interview

- "The Invisible Victim: How Modern Wars Are Destroying the Environment"
- "Conflict and Climate: The West Asia War as a Case Study of Ecological Devastation"

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## MCQs

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1. With reference to the environmental impact of the 2026 West Asia war, consider the following statements:
2. US strikes on Kharg Island have caused oil fires and raised spill risks.
3. The Persian Gulf is a critical biodiversity hotspot threatened by marine pollution.
4. Historical precedent of massive environmental damage exists from the 1991 Gulf War oil fires.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (d)**

2. Which international body has been actively documenting war-related environmental damage in West Asia?  
(a) IPCC

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- (b) UNEP
- (c) WHO
- (d) IMO

**Answer: (b)**

3. The Strait of Hormuz, at risk of environmental catastrophe in the current conflict, carries approximately what percentage of global oil transit?

- (a) 10%
- (b) 20%
- (c) 30%
- (d) 40%

**Answer: (b)**

4. The 1991 Gulf War is infamous for:

- (a) Setting fire to over 600 oil wells
- (b) Nuclear contamination
- (c) Chemical weapon use only
- (d) None of the above

**Answer: (a)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "Modern conflicts are turning the environment into a silent casualty." Discuss the ecological impacts of the 2026 West Asia war and their long-term implications for regional and global security. (15 marks / 250 words)

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2. Analyse how military actions in the Persian Gulf threaten marine ecosystems and India's energy security. Suggest measures for environmental protection during armed conflicts. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Post-conflict environmental restoration must be integrated into peacebuilding." Examine this statement in light of historical lessons from Gulf wars and the current crisis. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "War and the Environment: The West Asia Conflict as a Case Study of Ecological Devastation and the Need for Global Accountability."

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