

Tehran Movie



Spy thrillers in Bollywood have always walked a thin line — they need to be gripping enough to hold the audience, intelligent enough to feel believable, and patriotic without slipping into jingoism. With *Tehran*, directed by Arun Gopalan and starring John Abraham in the lead role, the attempt is ambitious: to create a film that mirrors real-world geopolitics while also serving as a high-octane entertainer. Inspired by true events, *Tehran* takes its audience into the volatile landscape of Middle Eastern politics and India's role within it.

So, does *Tehran* succeed in striking the right balance? Let's dive into a detailed review.

Storyline: A Political Hotspot Meets Human Drama

Tehran is set against the backdrop of rising tensions between Iran, Israel, and global powers. The story begins with escalating chaos in Tehran — protests, political assassinations, and intelligence agencies playing a deadly chess game. India finds itself caught in the middle, with stakes higher than ever.

John Abraham plays **Ravindra Kaul**, an Indian RAW officer tasked with a dangerous mission that could tilt the balance of power in the region. The film explores how far India can go to safeguard its interests, and how an individual spy must balance national duty with moral dilemmas.

Unlike typical Bollywood spy films that rely heavily on fictionalized villains, *Tehran* weaves real-life events — the killing of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, the US-Iran conflict, and Israel's shadow involvement — into its screenplay. This gives the narrative a sense of urgency and authenticity. The geopolitical backdrop is as much a character as the human players, keeping audiences on edge throughout.

Performances: John Abraham Shines in an Intense Role

John Abraham has, over the years, carved a niche for himself in action-oriented, patriotic thrillers (*Madras Café*, *Parmanu*, *Batla House*). In *Tehran*, he brings back the same intensity but with a slightly more nuanced performance.

- **John Abraham as Ravindra Kaul** – His physicality makes the action sequences convincing, but it is his restraint that stands out. Unlike the larger-than-life heroes of mainstream Bollywood, Kaul is grounded, flawed, and human. John plays him with brooding seriousness, which works well given the complex political landscape.
 - **Manushi Chhillar** – Making her spy-thriller debut, Manushi impresses in a strong role as an undercover operative. She balances charm with toughness, and her chemistry with John provides emotional depth without derailing the political narrative.
 - **Supporting Cast** – The ensemble of Iranian and Israeli actors adds credibility to the global setting. While some roles are underwritten, their presence enhances the authenticity of the international milieu.
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Direction and Screenplay: Intelligent, But Sometimes Overstretched

Director **Arun Gopalan** deserves credit for daring to bring a complex story to mainstream cinema. The film doesn't shy away from naming real-world players, which is unusual for Bollywood, often criticized for playing it safe in geopolitics.

The first half of *Tehran* is gripping — it sets up the political backdrop, introduces characters, and throws the audience into a web of espionage. The second half, however, slows down slightly, weighed down by exposition-heavy dialogues and a few predictable tropes.

Still, the screenplay ensures the stakes remain high, and the climax redeems any lag with a nail-biting finale that blends action, politics, and personal sacrifice.

Action and Cinematography: Raw, Real, and Refreshing

One of the biggest strengths of *Tehran* is its **realistic action sequences**. Unlike over-the-top Bollywood stunts, the film opts for grounded fight scenes, chases through crowded bazaars, and tense shootouts. The action feels organic to the story rather than an afterthought.

Cinematographer **Ishaan Bhatt** captures Tehran's dusty streets, dimly lit safe houses, and bustling markets with flair. The contrast between the grim Middle Eastern locales and India's intelligence offices adds layers to the narrative. Drone shots, chase sequences, and close-quarters combat scenes are handled with precision, giving the film an international look.

Music and Background Score: Subtle Yet Powerful

The soundtrack of *Tehran* doesn't rely on typical Bollywood song-and-dance. Instead, the music is kept minimal, with just a couple of situational tracks. The **background score**, however, is powerful. It uses Middle Eastern instruments blended with electronic beats to heighten tension. The score swells at just the right moments, amplifying the drama without overwhelming it.

Themes: Beyond Patriotism

While *Tehran* is undoubtedly a patriotic film, it goes beyond the black-and-white narrative of "good spy vs bad spy."

1. **Moral Ambiguity:** Ravindra Kaul is shown making difficult choices that may not always align with traditional notions of heroism. The film asks — how much should one compromise for the nation's larger interest?
2. **Real-world Politics:** By referencing actual events, the film bridges fiction with reality, making viewers reflect on how India navigates volatile global politics.
3. **Human Cost of Espionage:** Beyond the thrill, the film highlights the toll that spying takes on individuals — the lies, isolation, and risks involved.

This layered treatment makes *Tehran* more than just another action movie.

Strengths of Tehran

- **Authenticity:** The film feels well-researched, with details about international relations, spycraft, and geopolitics adding credibility.

- **Performances:** John Abraham's intensity and Manushi Chhillar's surprising depth elevate the film.
 - **Action:** Realistic and gripping, far removed from the exaggerated heroics of Bollywood masala films.
 - **Global Appeal:** With international locations and a politically charged storyline, *Tehran* feels like an Indian attempt at films like *Argo* or series like *Fauda*.
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Weaknesses of Tehran

- **Pacing Issues:** The second half drags at points with heavy political dialogues that may confuse casual viewers.
 - **Underwritten Side Characters:** While the lead pair shines, many secondary characters are not fully fleshed out.
 - **Predictable Tropes:** Despite its unique setting, the film occasionally falls back on familiar spy-thriller clichés.
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Audience Reception

Initial reactions to *Tehran* have been largely positive. Viewers praised John Abraham's restrained performance and the film's grounded approach to action. Many also appreciated the fact that Bollywood attempted a geopolitically nuanced thriller without resorting to over-dramatization.

However, some felt the film required more clarity in explaining the complex politics, making it a slightly heavy watch for those unfamiliar with Middle Eastern affairs.

Final Verdict

Tehran is not your typical Bollywood masala entertainer. It's a gritty, well-intentioned spy thriller that attempts to merge real-world politics with cinematic drama. While it has its flaws —

especially in pacing and side character development — it stands out for its authenticity, John Abraham's performance, and its willingness to address difficult geopolitical realities.

For fans of intelligent thrillers, *Tehran* offers a refreshing change from formulaic action films. It may not be perfect, but it is bold, ambitious, and relevant in today's volatile global context.