

Current Affairs

—(Subjective Part — Part - II B)—

(Answer no. 2)

Introduction

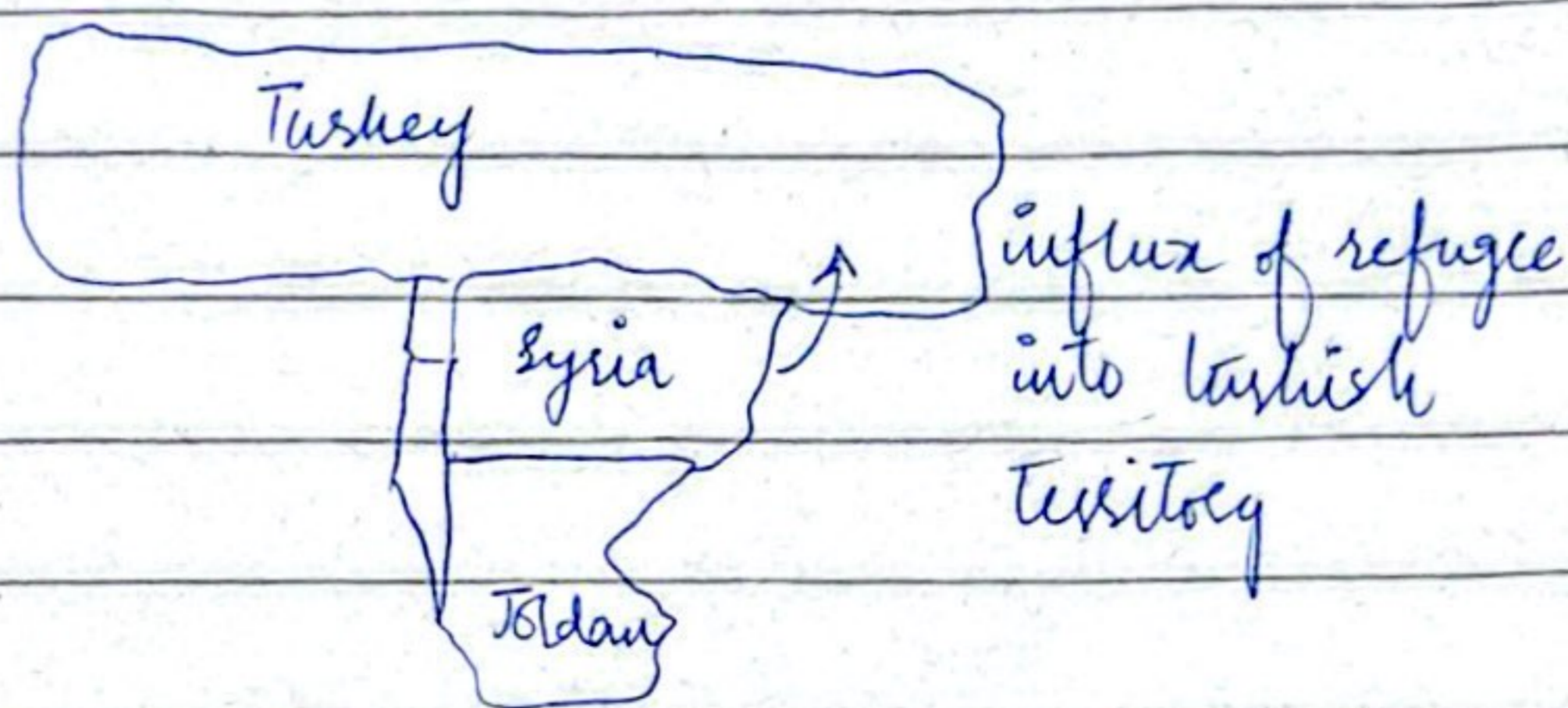
In a middle of conflicts in the Middle East, an unprecedented event toppled 50 year long rule of Bashar Al-Assad family. Bashar-al-Assad - An autocratic ruler - had been a source of serious concerns for Israel and other regional actors. Numerous attempt in the past were made by HTS and SNA largely failed, due to Russian and Iranian intervention in Syria.

Reasons for the unprecedented change in Syria

(a). Turkey - Bashar-al-Assad historical relations

Turkey's President and Syria's ruler

have shared amicable friendship over the past years. Erdogan and Bashar-Al Assad were so close that even had a family dinner together. But, this friendship turned into a serious national security threat when during Syrian civil war, thousands of refugees entered into Turkey.



Upon several request, Bashar Al Assad refused to take back refugees from Turkey, which turned their relation into animosity.

(b). Turkey's backing of HTS and SNA

When official channels failed, Turkey was left with no other choice but to support rebel groups like HTS - Hayat Tahrir Al Shams to get rid of Assad's regime. Moreover, Syrian National Army - SNA was also backed by Turkey to topple the regime which forced Bashar Al-Assad to escape or flee to Moscow.

(c). Failure of Russian Backing

Bashar Al Assad's regime remained in power and prevented any serious resistance from rebel groups largely due to the presence of Russian support in the region. When Russia was unable, intentionally or unintentionally, ^{to} safeguard Bashar Al-Assad, HTS quickly toppled the regime in matter of few days.

(d). Long lasting desire of US and Israel to get rid of Bashar Al Assad

For a very long time, US and Israel wanted to get rid of Bashar-Al-Assad regime as it was acting as lifeline and doorway to supply Iranian aid to Hezbollah in Lebanon. To achieve lasting peace in the region, US and Israel strategically ensured the fleeing of Bashar-Al Assad from the scene.

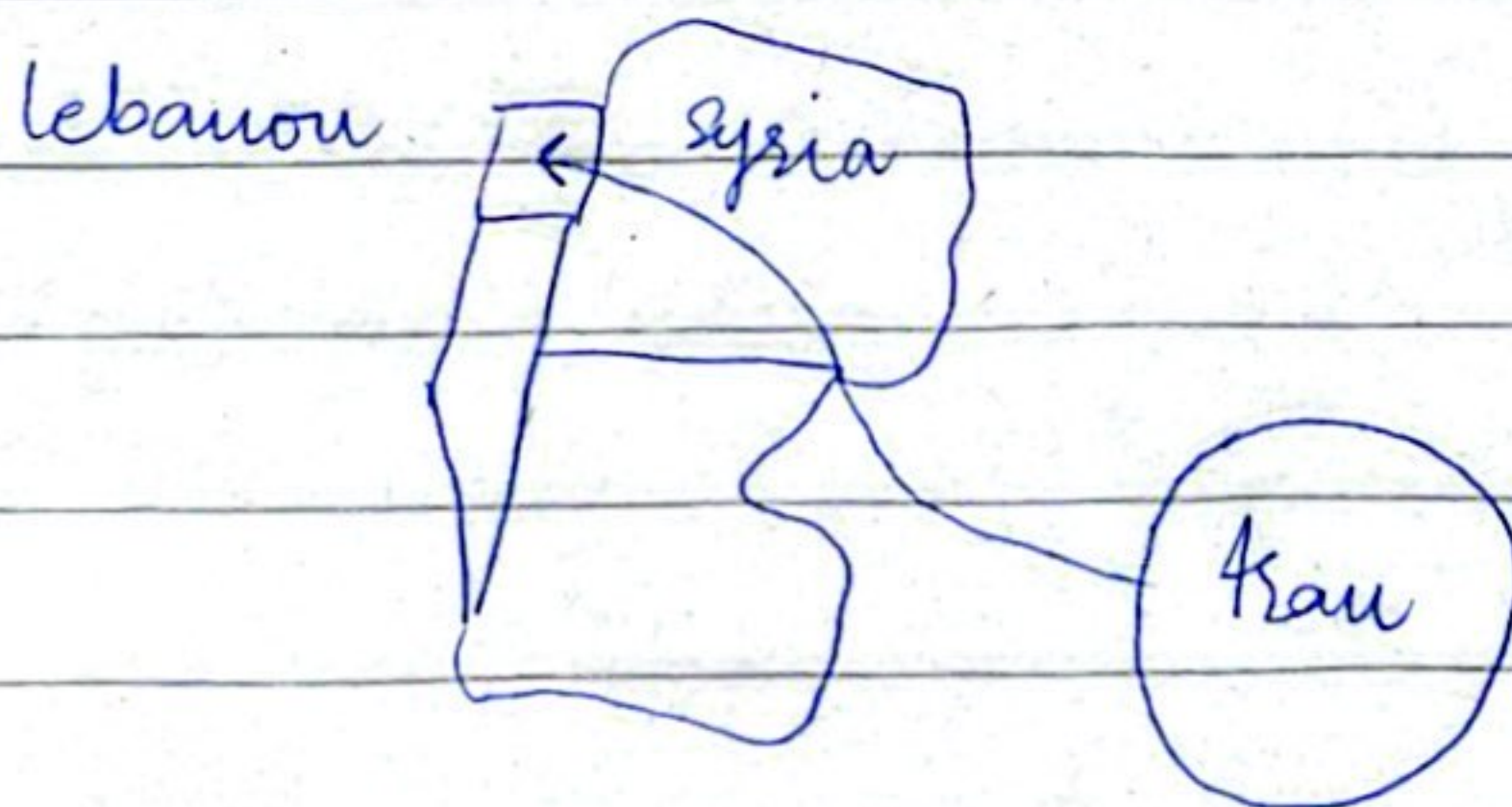
(e). Hezbollah's failure to come for Assad's support

While Hezbollah - a Lebanese armed group - was the biggest beneficiary, it failed to come at the support of Syrian regime. Largely, because of severe damage to its capability due to Assad-Hezbollah conflict.

Implications of this unprecedented change in Syria

(a) - Decline of Iranian Influence and increase in difficulties for Iranian backed non-state actors

Iran used to send military weapons through Syria during Assad's regime, with the fall of Assad, the only way to send aid to Hezbollah has been closed.



Moreover, the failure to prevent the toppling of Assad's regime shows the defeat of Iran and its allies.

②

(b). Turkish Emergence as a main player in the Middle East Peace Process

HTS, a rebel group, takes every action as told by Turkey, which gives Turkey a big leverage over negotiation process. Therefore, any process without the addition of Turkey will not be sustainable.

(c). A Severe Blow to Russian Influence in the region

Russia has miserably failed to prevent the ouster of Bashar Al-Assad which has caused a severe blow to its credibility as a major player in geo-politics. Russia no longer hold similar influence as it used to during Assad's regime.

(d). Fall of Bashar Al-Assad has further emboldened Israel and its allies in the Middle East

By the fall of Assad, Israel has cherished

each moment and declare it as a victory. Moreover, emboldened by Assad's fail Iraq has also declared to build a military base in somaliland-breakaway province of Somalia - to maintain checks on Houthis in the Red Sea.

(e). Final Nail in the Coffin for Hezbollah

Hezbollah already exhausted by the war with Israel has suffered enormously due to the blockage of supply of weapons. With the Hezbollah's influence in decline for the coming years, Israel has to worry less about it.

(f). Emergence of HTS as a responsible actor

HTS, which came to light after showing great military strategy, has also vowed for a democratic and peaceful transition of power. Moreover, it has also promised Turkey to take back all the refugees.

Conclusion

While the HTS were successful in their Blitzkrieg strategy, the plight of Syrians is far from over. Syrian economy which is plummeting everyday needs immediate support for restoration of the damage caused by Bashar Al Assad → 53 year despotic rule in the country.

— Answer no. 4B —

Introduction

US and its allies share similar anxiety of Russia-China economic, strategic and geo-political collaboration. US led world order - liberal internationalism - emerged at the end of cold war, when US emerged as a sole super power. But, with the of revisionism, US led world order has been under decline for numerous reasons. Russia and China, have doubled their efforts in Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa to challenge US hegemony.

Russia-China Collaboration in African Region

(a). Economic Investment in the Africa in exchange of precious resources to compete with US

Russia and China both are known historically to have great influence in the region for various purposes. China has invested billion in infrastructural development to acquire precious metals like Germanium which are crucial for semiconductor chip manufacturing. Whereas, Russia has provided military support in the region to carry out billion dollar projects.

(b). Lack of Alternative for African Countries

African nations have largely been ignored by the US and often exploited by its European allies. This gap has been filled by Russian and Chinese companies to provide substantial funding in terms of loans. Due to lack of US alternative in the Africa, the

③
1

African states have no other choice but to accept the deals of Russian and Chinese companies.

(c). Strategic Importance of Africa

Africa is known for its abundant natural resources which are crucial to shift to renewable energy sources or cleaner energies. For example, cobalt and copper are two extremely precious elements for the making of EV batteries and vehicles or any other electronic equipment. Similarly, Germanium is also available in vast quantity. On top of that, cheap labour makes Africa a very lucrative market.

From the presence of Russia and China, it has been clear that war is on already, as said by Graham Allison in his famous work;

“Can they (US-China) escape Thucydides Trap?”

Russia - China collaboration in European Region

(a). Unified Stance on Ukraine - Russia war

Recently, Russia and China upgraded their mutual ties and declared their relationship as 'no limit friendship' highlights western concern of Russia-China collaboration.

(b). Economic War

While the elected president Donald Trump has declared to increase tariffs on China, similar steps have been taken by the European nations such as Germany. China make cheap yet luxurious EVs for European market, which US based company - Tesla or German origin company - BMW are unable to compete.

(c). Fragmentation in EU over Russian Sanctions

②

While Russia has suffered a lot from the US and EU sanctions, there are many EU countries like Romania, Hungary who are unhappy about its implications on Europe itself. The Russia used to export cheap natural gas to Europe, which after sanctions has been largely catered by China. Therefore, Russia had a very minimal impact of sanctions on its economy.

Similar kinds of collaboration between US and China have been going Asia-Pacific and the Middle, adding more to the worry of US led world order.

As US led world order really affected by the Russia-China collaboration in geo-political, economic and strategic terms.

Argument in Favours

Russia and China unprecedented collaboration have raised serious concerns

in Washington over the future of US led world order. Since the start of Russia-Ukraine war, their mutual trade has been increased and moreover, Russia macro-economic indicators shows that economy has strengthened

Decline in US influence due to dual standard foreign policy choice

While Russia and China have called for immediate ceasefire in Gaza, US has vetoed everytime which has caused irreparable damage to US image and its allies. US led world is complicit in genocide in Gaza, which is highlighted by the civil society.

Arguments against the notion

While the Chinese economy is 2nd largest in the world. Critics still believed that hegemony of US is unchallenged for multiple reasons;

(a) - US economy is stronger than Russia-China combined.

US is currently the world largest economy in the world with an economy of around 26 trillion dollar which is much bigger than China's economy of 18 trillion dollars.

(b) - US military might is unchallenged

US spend around 900 Bn dollars in defense, whereas China only spend 300 bn dollars. Therefore, critics argue that Russia or China has no real competition with the US.

US led world order under Decline?

(a) - Recurring Conflicts

Recurring conflicts in Middle East or Asia Pacific have shown that liberal internationalism was unable to fulfill its objectives and it is not the end of history as championed by Francis Fukuyama in his work;

“The End of history?”

(b). Widening Global Inequality

Despite beautiful promises of capitalism economy for equal opportunity, the global inequality is on the rise calling for an alternative economic model in the form of BRICS as championed by Russia and China.

Conclusion

The world has suffered a lot due to economic and geo-political rivalry between the powerful nations. It is high time to set our differences aside and work together in a multipolar world to find an alternative which ensures sustainable development as highlighted by Amartya Sen.

~~Ans no. 7B~~

Introduction

In the amidst of conflicts in Middle East, US, Israel, Iran and its non-state allies, Russia and China have emerged out as a key players capable of influencing geo-politics in the region. While, it is a cumbersome task to declare any player as a loser or winner when the conflicts are already on-going, a critical evaluation can be done to find out key beneficiaries and potential losers in the conflict.

Potential Beneficiaries in Israel-Hamas War

Israel and Hamas locked themselves into a full blown war after October 7th. Since then, Gaza has been turned into rubble and more than 46000 innocent lives have been lost due to Israel's relentless bombing in the Gaza Strip. Out of the bloody conflict following are the potential beneficiary;

(a). Iran being the biggest beneficiary

Iran with its network of non-state actors in Lebanon, Yemen or Gaza has been successful to highlight the western hypocrisy in the wake of war in Gaza. Prior to war, Iran was unable to get support of International community for its support of Hezbollah, Hamas and Houthis. After the war, Iran has not only got International support and sympathy but its historical rival Saudi Arab has also shown soft corner for Iran.

(b). Russia and China also being the secondary beneficiaries of the war

China has proved its diplomatic capability by setting the table for a historic peace deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which has given a huge momentum to its rising geopolitical influence. Therefore, China has also proposed similar help to negotiate a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which adds further to its

projection of soft power. Moreover, Russia and China, who were historically been accused of Human rights violations have finally got an opportunity to level the score with US by publically condemning US compliance and staunch support to Israel.

Potential losses in the Israel-Hamas war

(a). Israel being the biggest potential loser

Israel has done irreparable damage to its identity by bombing continuously the unarmed civilians. Moreover, the issue of Arrest warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu is a moral stain on Jewish nation. In addition to that, many countries such as Turkey has declared to stop trade with Israel, adding more to the devastation economy of Israel due to war. Additionally, Israel has been completely isolated diplomatically by international community,

which has put successful diplomatic negotiations in the form of Abraham Accords or Camp David accords into jeopardy. Lastly, the prospects of peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia have also been deteriorated.

(b). A huge blow to US hegemony

Despite having significant leverage over the Israel, US has decided to be complicit in war crimes by providing billions of dollars in aid to Israel. Moreover, when US congress cheered and welcomed Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu - a wanted criminal - it marked a low point in American politics. To add more, US has also vetoed many resolutions for a ceasefire in Gaza, put forward by Russia or China, which has further added to America's misery.

o. Potential Beneficiaries in Hezbollah - Israel war

Hezbollah - an armed group in Lebanon - launched attack on Israel almost immediately after the October,

7th, which further increased the tensions in the middle east.

(a). Hezbollah and Iran the potential losers

Hezbollah which vowed to not to stop assault until a ceasefire is reached in Gaza has suffered a huge blow. Israel eliminated its key leader 'Hassan Nasrallah' and also caused severe damage to Hezbollah's public image in domestic politics of Lebanon.

(b). US and Israel the beneficiaries

While both Israel and Hezbollah have successfully negotiated a sketchy ceasefire, Israel has considered it as a victory because it has not only killed Hassan Nasrallah but also forced Hezbollah to get back on its promise to not to stop until a ceasefire is reached.

Conclusion

While the debate between potential beneficiaries and losers can continue, one thing is certain and that is 'Humanity has lost lives'. Human lives are lost at both conflicting sides, which brings us to point to negotiate ceasefire and immediately end hostility towards each other.

— Answer no. 8B —

Introduction

CPEC has been rightly depicted as a Jewel in the crown, but lately, the development of this flagship project is in stalemate due to internal and external elements. CPEC - China Pakistan Economic Corridor - is a part of large Belt and Road Initiative which President Xi - Jinping revealed in Kazakhstan. CPEC ensures development of Pakistan but its completion has been halted due to following reasons;

Reasons for the Slowing Down of CPEC Projects

(a). Revival of militancy in Pakistan

Pakistan have seen a high uptick in terrorist attacks recently in KPK and Balochistan province, which has raised concerns for investors to invest in Pakistan.

(b). Role of External Elements in slowing down CPEC

India and its intelligence agency RAW have been involved in deteriorating the success of this CPEC project, especially Phase-II and Pakistan has substantial evidence of it

(c). Internal Problems of Pakistan

Pakistan is a country, which faces serious internal problem ranging from political instability and unbridled corruption, which demoralise Chinese authorities to continue with the project.

(d). Weak Institutional Capacity

Unlike China, Pakistan does not hold institutional capacity to continue this complex project. Without China's institutional support, this can slow down more.

(e). Economic Crisis in Pakistan

Any country facing economic downturn is not a pleasant place for investor to invest. The moribund economy and dependence on foreign aid raises concerns among Chinese.

(f). Trust Deficit and Security Issue of Chinese Workers

With recent rise in attacks against Chinese nationals, Chinese government is unsatisfied by the security of its national in Pakistan.

Recommendations to Islamabad and China to Reinvigorate the Project and Make Phase II a tangible reality:

Recommendation to Islamabad

(a). Getting our own house in order

To attract Chinese attention back to CPEC, Pakistan immediately needs to set its own house in order. It is high time that confrontational politics ends and stability is established.

(b). Establishing State's writ against Terrorists

Whether through implementation of NAP or revival of NACTA, state needs to ensure that terrorists are not allowed to roam freely and kill security personals and Chinese nationals.

(c). Capacity building of Bureaucracy

Without an effective and efficient Bureaucracy, any project is bound to slow and in some cases fail. Therefore, state must invest in capacity building.

(d). Transparency should be increased

China have shown serious concerns about the state of transparency in Pakistan, there-

fore Islamabad needs to ensure fair transparency.

(e). Ensuring safety of Chinese Nationals

It is the duty of host state to ensure the safety of foreign nationals. Pakistan must ensure the safety of Chinese nationals.

(f). Successful Implementation of SAPs and starting to return debt owed to China

Pakistan needs to structurally adjust its economy according to the IMF to gradually decouple its dependence. Moreover, asking China everytime to rollover debt is not going to help

Recommendations to Beijing

(a). Speedy revival of projects to ensure that Phase-II does not remain on paper.

Phase-II of CPEC includes strategically important Mainline Project connecting Hyderabad

to Quetta. China needs to ensure the funding and technical assistance must be released at earliest for timely completion.

(b). Trusting Pakistan's security forces for the safety of its Nationals

Pakistan security forces are prestigious and highly capable of defending its borders and any national insides its territory. China needs to trust it and send its technical experts.

(c). Intelligence collaboration to take out external conspiracy threat to CPEC.

External elements, especially India's RAW, and terrorist operating outside Pakistan's territory needs to track down through intelligence sharing to eliminate the threat.

Conclusion

By mutual trust and assistance the flagship project of BRI - CPEC can be achieved and turned into reality. Authorities in Islamabad and China

needs to cancel out noise and dedicate all its efforts for timely completion of CPEC - Phase II.