

Current affairs Mock

Q.2

=> Introduction .

In a world filled with turmoil, tensions reached the Iran - Pakistan border on the 16th of January, 2024, when the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) decided to launch strikes inside Pakistan's Balochistan province. Tensions further escalated when Pakistan launched retaliatory strikes on the 18th of January in Operation Marg Bar Sarmachar. Both countries have now deescalated the situation, and have decided to work towards joint interests.

=> Reasons Behind Military Strikes

-> Iran's Internal Domestic Pressure

Since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7, 2023, there has been an increased involvement by Iran backed proxies in this war, namely the Hezbollah from Lebanon, and the Houthis from Yemen. Both parties quickly joined the fight after which Israeli attacks started on them as retaliatory measures. This led to an increase in domestic pressure in Iran, calling to take action against Israel and its backers. Subsequently, Iran took a stronger stance and further strengthened the rhetoric against Israel and the US. The strikes conducted by Iran in Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan were partly because of the mounting internal pressure in Iran.

-> Internal Terrorism in Iran

Furthermore, after the attacks in the city of Kerman, where almost 100 people died, Iran was pushed to a point where it decided to act against elements it claims are backed by Israel and the

US. The Kerman attacks were conducted by ISIS-KP, a regional terrorist organization which has been responsible for attacks inside Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Hence, the attacks Iran conducted were due to 'hostile proxies' as it claims that were hiding in Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan. Iran claimed to have targeted the 'Jaish al-Muhajirin' group, which is a group responsible for attacks within Iran.

→ Iran's Message to The West

With the attacks, Iran wanted to send a message to Israel and the US along with the rest of the region showing their power and position as a strong military power in the region. In addition, these strikes also served to establish 'deterrence' against the US and Israel, showing Iran's willingness to retaliate if provoked.

→ Pakistan's Retaliatory Strikes

In the early hours of 18th January 2024, Pakistan launched airstrikes in Iran. These were conducted because of the violation of the sovereignty of the Pakistani state. The attacks on Pakistani soil were also a violation of international law, and was an unnecessary provocation in such a tense geopolitical scenario. Pakistan claimed that 3 civilians were killed in a house that was struck by Iran, and this resulted in a counter strike.

→ Pakistan's Deterrence Posture

Another reason why Pakistan struck back was to maintain credible minimum deterrence. This was a message directed towards India, who has a hostile posture against Pakistan, and has also indulged in misadventures such as the Balakot

strikes of 2019. Hence, it was imperative that Pakistan maintains its deterrence in the region to maintain its deterrence posture to deter any adversaries from taking hostile actions against it.

=> Beneficiaries of The Escalation

The primary beneficiary of this Escalation would be Israel who considers Iran its arch nemesis, and would want Iran to be involved in a multi-front conflict in an effort to weaken it as a state. Israel considers Iran to be the source of its problems and sees a non-nuclear and weak Iran as a solution to its problems. On the other hand, India was the beneficiary of this escalation as it would want Pakistan to remain occupied in regional disputes, while it pursued its hegemonic ambitions. A weak and destabilized Pakistan is in India's interest also because that would hinder the growth of CPEC that is now a major challenge for India.

=> Way Forward

-> High Level Talks

Similar to the visit of the ~~Kazbi~~ Iranian foreign minister to Islamabad, further high level talks should also be held between the leaders of both countries to encourage open dialogue between the two and for both countries to rebuild trust. This would help both countries in further deescalating the situation and building a path towards attaining mutual trust.

-> Joint Counterterrorism Cooperation

Iran and Pakistan should form a joint commission or body where actionable intelligence would be shared, and a way forward would be devised.

This joint body would be responsible for joint action against terrorist outfits in the region without the violation of each other's sovereignty, or with mutual consent.

→ Confidence Building Measures

Moreover, Iran and Pakistan can take confidence building measures (CBMs) to pave the way for normalcy. CBMs would include further increasing economic cooperation without violating existing US sanctions, energy cooperation, trade and a further increase in people to people contact. Pakistan and Iran can further strengthen the barter trade mechanism and trade and make transactions in local currencies. This would further help deescalate the tensions between Pakistan and Iran.

Q.3

⇒ Introduction

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), founded in 1969 is an intergovernmental organization. It was founded as a reaction of the arson attack against the Al-Aqsa mosque in 1969, and aims to promote unity among Muslims and to tackle issues faced by the Muslim community across the globe. However, the history of this organization is tainted with failures, which pertain to a plethora of reasons such as external influence, internal politics, geopolitical tensions, and economic agendas.

⇒ OIC in The Backdrop of Israel-Hamas War

The OIC summit on the 12th of October, days after the start of the war, ended in the strong condemnation of Israel's actions, and

labeled them as a war crime. However such summits end up with joint statements rather than collective action because internal members are deeply influenced by the US. For example, a key member, Saudi Arabia has expressed the desire to ~~not~~ recognize Israel in the past in exchange of a military pact with the US and a civilian nuclear program. Given this angle, the Saudis are not keen on taking a very strong position against Israel, like some states have. Furthermore, the UAE, which has ~~also~~ recognized Israel, enjoys warmer relations and economic ties with Israel, which also prevents it from taking a strong stance against Israel. This results in a lack of unity and coherence.

=> Iran - KSA Rapprochement

The Iran-Saudi rapprochement was mediated by China, and was achieved on the 10th of March 2023. This resulted in a $\frac{1}{2}$ major thaw between the two hostile states. This rapprochement resulted in the end of hostilities in Yemen, and Iran openly vowing to not use proxies against the Saudis. Despite all this, tensions between the two states still exist and are at risk of increasing rather than decreasing. Given the Saudis' inclination towards the West, Iran considers this as a threat to the region and to its interests. Although a constructive step towards peace, this rapprochement has still yet to contribute towards unity and collective action.

=> OIC Role in Kashmir Issue

Q. Evaluating the current performance of the OIC amidst the Israel-Hamas war requires evaluation of the OIC's performance throughout the years regarding the Kashmir issue. Mere condemnations and suggested steps are ineffective and fail to steer the Muslim community towards a united

and constructive future. The OIC has been unable to unite against the human rights violations of India against the Kashmiri people, despite Pakistan ~~has~~ constantly raising the alarm on the issue. This further proves that the OIC will remain an impotent force in solving either the Kashmir issue, or the Palestine issue.

=> Way Forward

-> Uphold Unity

All OIC member states should observe unity to define their collective stance against the violent nature of both India and Israel. The OIC should collectively influence the UNSC and UNGA to implement necessary resolutions to stop Israel and India from violent means. Furthermore, OIC member states should solve mutual trust issues by regularly holding summits to discuss mutual issues and reach a united position.

-> Foil Islamophobia in The World

OIC member states should further strengthen their efforts towards the eradication of Islamophobia from this world. This would serve as a 'soft power' tool, to portray the actual teachings of Islam, and to woo western countries. This, in turn, would help gather support of western states which would then be able to be used as leverage against India and Israel.

-> Collective Action

To influence the Kashmir or Palestine issues, the OIC should take measures collectively to coerce both aggressors to stop their

violence. Applying the American tool of economic coercion — sanctions, the major oil producing countries in the OIC namely, KSA, UAE and Qatar should put energy related economic sanctions on both India and Israel to coerce them. This method is considered a harsh one and can be seen by both India and Israel as a provocation. This is exactly why a united OIC is necessary when taking a strong stance against Israel and India.

=> Conclusion

The reluctance of the OIC has caused an irreversible loss ~~threat~~ to the muslim Ummah. The current situation of Muslims in Indian occupied Kashmir and Palestine are a reflection of reality. Therefore, OIC member states should employ the suggested remedies to help pave the way for a united Muslim Ummah, and to protect oppressed Muslims all around the globe.

Q. 4

=> Introduction

The G20 summit, held in Delhi on the 9th of September 2023 resulted in the 'New Delhi Leaders Declaration of 2023'. This also included the pledge to start a new chapter of economic regional connectivity known as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). This project is seen both as a competitor and a complementor of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), however it will serve as a competitor to the BRI.

=> Potential of Regional Connectivity

-> Potential of IMEC

The IMEC is currently in its MoU stage and has not yet reached a signed agreement between the G20 states. The IMEC is a proposed network consisting of railways and sea ports and will have 2 corridors: East Corridor, connecting India to the Middle East, and Northern Corridor, connecting Europe to the Arabian Gulf. The IMEC has potential to serve as a key regional connectivity project, and ~~should~~ would cost around \$3 to \$8 billion. Delhi has said that it will not be involved in financing the railroads or ports. The main hurdle faced by the IMEC is lack of framework and operationalization.

→ CPEC: A Formidable Force

Part of the BRI is CPEC, which is the China Pakistan economic corridor. Compared to the IMEC which would be valued around \$8 billion in its initial phases, the CPEC is currently worth over \$60 billion, and is continuing to develop. When it comes to the potential of this corridor, apart from connecting China with warm waters, it also has the opportunity to spread to Iran and Afghanistan. Since IMEC will only be a rail based connectivity network in the Middle East apart from a few ports, it will not be able to compete with the CPEC project if it manages to spread to Afghanistan and Iran.

→ Can IMEC Complement the BRI?

In the future, the IMEC would also have a chance to complement the BRI despite being a competitor. This would be possible through railroad connectivity. The IMEC is also bringing forth a new range of 'cross border ship to rail transit networks' which could be used as a unique selling point to collaborate with the BRI. Furthermore, it can

also supplement China's cross regional port and railway infrastructure. In addition, BRI presence in Africa and ASEAN reinforces its leverage over the IMEC proving greater value of BRI for IMEC. The cluster of ports under BRI also appeal to the IMEC because they would be able to reduce loading and shipment time for the IMEC.

→ Significance of B3W Amidst Competition

In the backdrop of the IMEC-BRI competition, the B3W or 'Build Back Better World' is worth mentioning. Announced by the G7 nations in 2021, this regional connectivity project ~~se~~ aims to build strong strategic partnerships, mobilize private capital, and enhance multilateral public financing. In the future, if the IMEC partnered with the B3W, it would be able to serve as a significant counterweight to China's BRI. However, both the B3W and IMEC are in their early developmental stages which the BRI is currently worth around \$8 trillion. With such a headstart catching up with the BRI would certainly prove to be a tedious task for both the IMEC and B3W.

→ Implications on Pakistan

Due to its strategic ~~geostat~~ geographical location and membership of the BRI, there will be significant implications of the aforementioned developments. Considering the sharp disagreements between the West and Russia, the region is still witnessing sustained disruptions in economic, energy and food supply chains. The IMEC and 2023 Delhi Leaders Declaration is aligned with the position of Pakistan pertaining to regional economic connectivity. Therefore, Pakistan's position has more room to maintain neutrality on the IMEC. Moreover, the IMEC leaves Pakistan out of the trade and connectivity loop, and is likely to step up competition against

the BRI, which will push Pakistan to further push for stronger geoeconomic connectivity.

=> Conclusion

The IMEC and BRI are two regional connectivity projects, with the former still in its infant stages. With rising geopolitical tensions the future prospects of both projects will be filled with challenges that both would need to tackle in order to fully connect Asia with the rest of the world.

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=> Introduction

As the world approaches multipolarity, great power politics has taken the main stage with the US and China as two main players. During negotiations in the 1980s, China formulated a 'One China Two Systems' policy. This policy entailed that there would be one China, reunified with Hong Kong and Macau, but these two regions would have their own administrative and economic systems. Recently this policy has been spoken of with respect to Taiwan as well, when Taiwan openly rejected this policy, as recently as in December 2023. Despite this, the US policy towards Taiwan is considered a threat towards China's policy and is exacerbating global tensions.

=> Implications of US Taiwan Policy

-> US Strategic Ambiguity

Throughout history the US has maintained a policy of 'strategic ambiguity' towards Taiwan. This policy gave birth to several ambiguous policies regarding Taiwan with the aim to

prevent China from invading Taiwan. However, in 2021, President Joe Biden abandoned this policy and claimed that the US would defend Taiwan if it was attacked. This has stepped up efforts against China's 'One China' policy and is a significant challenge towards Taiwan's reunification with China. Furthermore, in 2022, Joe Biden again stated that the US would militarily intervene if China invaded Taiwan. Hence, such rhetoric is a challenge to China's policy.

-> Chip Wars

Apart from the military threats, the Biden administration has also started to coerce China with the help of restricting its access to advanced microchips. China and Taiwan are both export and import markets of such chips, but the US has sanctioned China in order to boost the Taiwanese chip market. This has allowed Taiwan to make efforts in its desire to bypass Chinese economic sanctions. Hence, China's policy also faces a threat from the chip development perspective.

-> Military Aid to Taiwan

Taiwan's elections in January 2024 elected Lai Ching as the new President, who is also considered to be a pro-American leader. In light of the increasing military aid to Taiwan over the last 2 years, under the new President, there will potentially be more cooperation in the military sector. US military aid aims to enhance the capabilities of the Taiwanese military to increase its deterrence against China. This is another significant ~~key~~ challenge faced by China's policy.

Recommendations

-> Increase Bilateral Dialogue

Due to the prevalent mistrust between the two global superpowers, there is a need to enhance bilateral dialogue and multi-track diplomacy to constantly communicate concerns and way forwards. In addition, summits focussed on geopolitical issues should be held for both powers to take supportive steps rather than aggressive ones.

-> Decrease in US Militarism

The past few years has seen a significant rise of buildup of US military vessels and capabilities in Taiwan, in the South China Sea, as well as in South Korea and Japan. The AUKUS, Quad, and Five Eyes are multilateral pacts all with aim of China's containment. This is seen as unnecessary provocation by China and should be toned down. Bilateral relations would not improve in an environment of hostility, double standards and threats by the US.

-> Rules Based Approach to Settle Disputes

China and the US should engage in a rules based approach to deal with maritime issues emerging in the South China sea. This would allow both parties to address their concerns and work towards a mutually beneficial solution. In addition, this approach should also be applied to the nuclear threat emanating from North Korea, which the US, South Korea and Japan consider a significant threat. This would enhance bilateral relations and mutual trust between the two.

=> Conclusion

Multipolarity is shaping the current world order, and has brought with it significant threats. Despite this, global powers such as China and the US both have opportunities to navigate through a tense environment surrounded by conflict and the presence of potential flashpoints. The US is doing everything it can to contain China, which China is determined to succeed with its one China policy. However, with the help of the suggested recommendations, both China and the US can form a stable and peaceful world order.