

Current Affairs

Subjective Part

- Part - II B -

Answer no. 2

Introduction

HTS lightning offensive on 8 Dec, 2024 in Syria has toppled Bashar-Al Assad 50 year rule, leaving many of international spectators in complete shock. This unprecedented change in Syria caused by numerous reasons can have severe implications for the Middle East.

Historical Contextualization

To understand it is necessary to have historical overview.

a. Assad's 50 years of rule in Syria

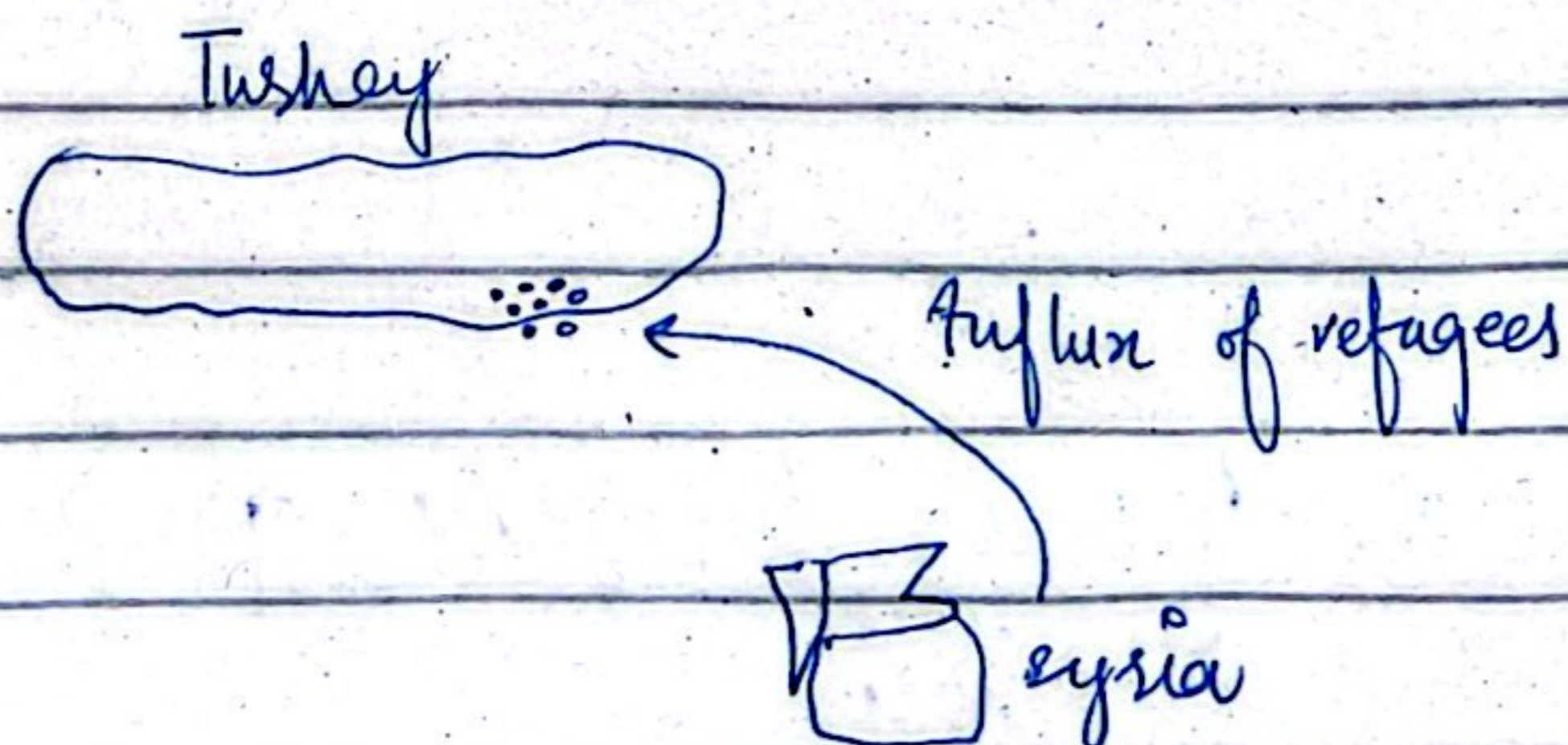
Bashar-al-Assad's ^{family} ruled Syria on his whim for 50 years. During this period, many human rights abuses were reported.

b. Turkey - Syria Relationship

Back then, Turkey and Bashar-al-Assad had very good relationship. At one instance, President Erdogan even invited Bashar-Al-Assad's family to share a meal with him.

c. Influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey

These warm relationships quickly deteriorated when during civil war thousands of refugees came to Turkey. Upon several request from Turkey, Bashar refused to take them back.



Reasons for the Unprecedented Change in Syria

While there are numerous reasons for the unprecedented change in Syria, the most important of them are as follows:

a. Weakening of Hezbollah

Due to Hezbollah-Israel war, Hezbollah was weakened due to which they could not mobilize the support for Bashar-al-Assad. Therefore, when HTS started their operation Hezbollah group was not in the scene.

b. Diverted attention of Russia due to war in Ukraine

Similarly, Russia was the key backer of Bashar-al-Assad rule in Syria. But when it really matter, Russian forces were unable to defend Bashar-Al-Assad rule, as their focus was largely on the war in Ukraine.

c. Declining influence of Iran due to Middle East Crisis

Iran with its non-state allies were holding significant influence in Middle eastern affairs, but the wars in Middle

east, laid bare the vulnerabilities of Iran and its allies.

d. Turkish Backing of HTS and SNA

HTS - Hayat Tahir - al - Shams - led by M. Al Jolani might not be able to take over Syria in few days if they don't have Turkish support. Turkey due to their grievances over refugees supported HTS and its adventure.

e. Sound Blitzkrieg strategy adopted by HTS

HTS was able to perfectly strategize the offensive operation, where it did not let Assad's forces to settle. By employing blitzkrieg strategy, they quickly took over Syria.

f. Human Rights abuses during Assad's regime

Bashar - Al - Assad rule was notorious for doing human rights abuses. There were human slaughter houses, where people were killed for calling for freedom or exercising their right of expression. This cruelty also led Syrian people to back the offensive launched by HTS to topple Assad's rule.

Implications of unprecedented change in Syria

This unprecedented change with the fall of Assad's regime can have many implications for Syria and the Middle East.

a. Final Nail in the Coffin for Hezbollah

The toppling of Assad regime has proved to be final nail in the coffin for Hezbollah as their supply for weapons came through Syria, with HTS now as leader of Syria, they cannot rely on this route anymore.

b. A severe blow to Russian Influence

Russia which exercised great influence in Syria and had one of the biggest military presence before the unprecedented change, has to do much more to regain the influence after failure.

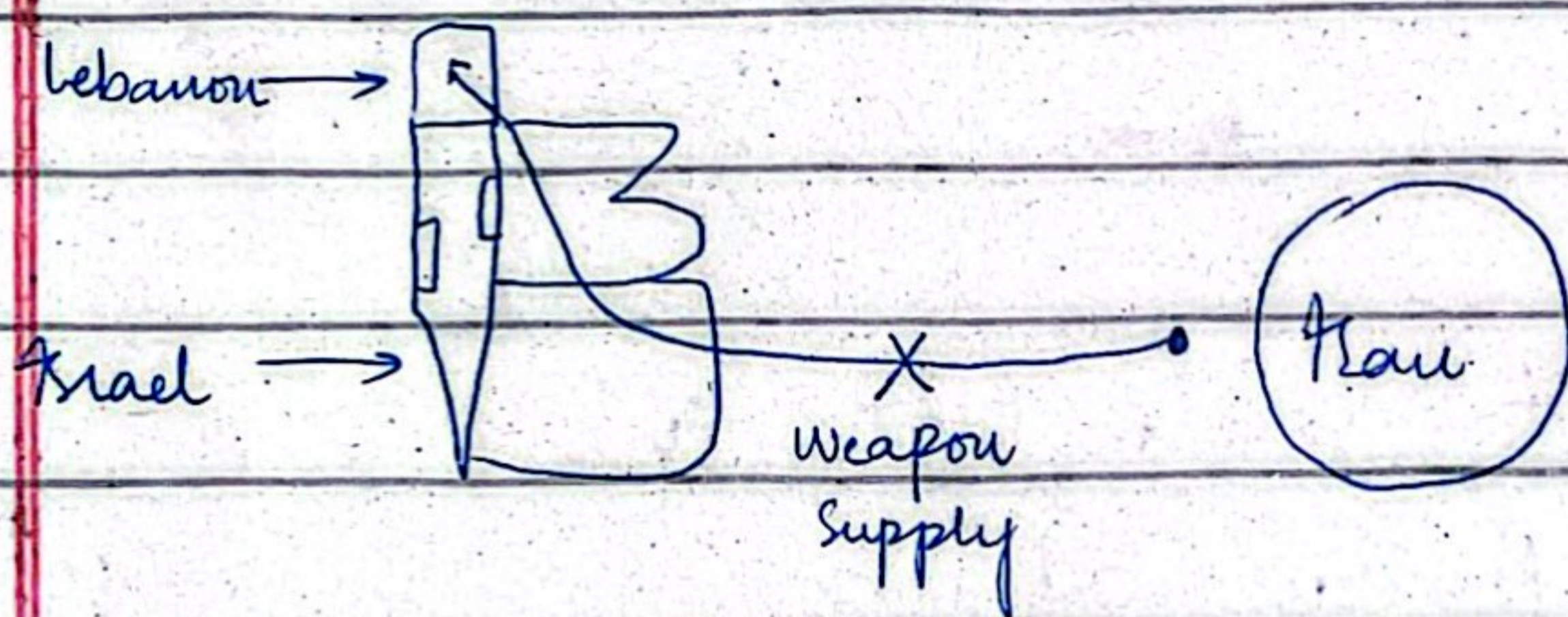
c. Emboldened Israel and its allies

Israel and its allies such as US always wanted the Bashar Al-Assad to fall, therefore

this change in Syria has not only emboldened ~~it~~ but also made its border more secure.

d. limited Iran influence

Almost all the non-state allies of Iran such as Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthis in Yemen are being defeated ^{one} ~~where~~ way or the other. The so called 'Axis of Resistance' led by Iran now have to lick its wounds first before it poses any serious risk to Israel.



e. Emergence of Turkey as a key player in Middle Eastern Affairs

This unprecedented change have also witnessed the emergence of Turkey as a key player in Middle Eastern Affairs. It has shown that it can now hold significant leverage over HTS and thus over the future of Syria.

f. Emergence of HTS as a political organization

Moreover, the emergence of HTS as a political organization promising to uphold elections and democratic values, and to take back Syrian refugees from Turkey is undoubtedly a welcoming development.

Critical Analysis

While the unprecedented change in Syria is welcomed by Syrians, its future still looks troublesome. As the country's economy stands at only 9B\$ and its FER are declining at less than \$200 million. Moreover, since civil war, its currency has declined to 99%, which means that 13000 pounds (Syrian) are equal to 1\$.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the change that came with the fall of Assad's regime has been welcomed by those who were oppressed but its plight is far from over.

Answer no. 4 B

Introduction

Russia and China are making collaborations with each other in different sectors potentially to challenge US led world order. US led world order is falling quickly and there are growing calls for an alternative world order which is more just and equitable than liberal internationalist order.

Russia-China Collaborations in geo-strategic, political and Economic terms to challenge US led world order

While there is no denying the fact, US GDP (26\$ trillion) is much more than Russia and China's (18\$ trillion) GDPs combine, but it is also true that current world order has caused unprecedented inequality. For instance, top 1% holds 50% of global wealth. Moreover, if we compare US defense spending (900\$ billion) against China (300\$ billion), then US still leads but recent Russia-China collaboration is posing

a serious risk to US led world order.

A. Providing alternative to the developing world in the form of BRICS

BRICS, which covers 40% of the population have emerged as challenged to US as, Putin in 16th summit of BRICS said, "BRICS not west will drive the Global Economy"

B. Russia-China Collaborations in Europe

Russia and China have been collaborating more in European region after the 2021 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

i. China Absorbed much of European sanctions on Russia.

Russia was sanctioned heavily after invasion of Ukraine. But, since 2021, China and India have both absorbed 80% of Russian Natural Gas.

ii. China's Economic

Support to Russia in
the wake of Ukraine-
Russia War.

In spite of freezing of Russian assets in Europe, China continued to bolster its economy by providing economic support to Vladimir Putin.

iii. China's Political/Diplomatic Support to Russian Cause

Similarly, China also subscribes to Russian vision to contain NATO's rising influence in the Europe. Therefore, it diplomatically supports Putin's cause.

C. Russia-China Collaboration in the Asia-Pacific

Russia and China have also collaborated in Indo-Pacific region to unprecedented level;

i. Russia supporting China's One China Stance and

~~Russia support's One China policy and~~

claims over South-China sea

Russia supports "one China policy" and its demarcation of EEZ and moreover it also implicitly supports China's claim over Paracels and Spratley Islands in South China Sea.

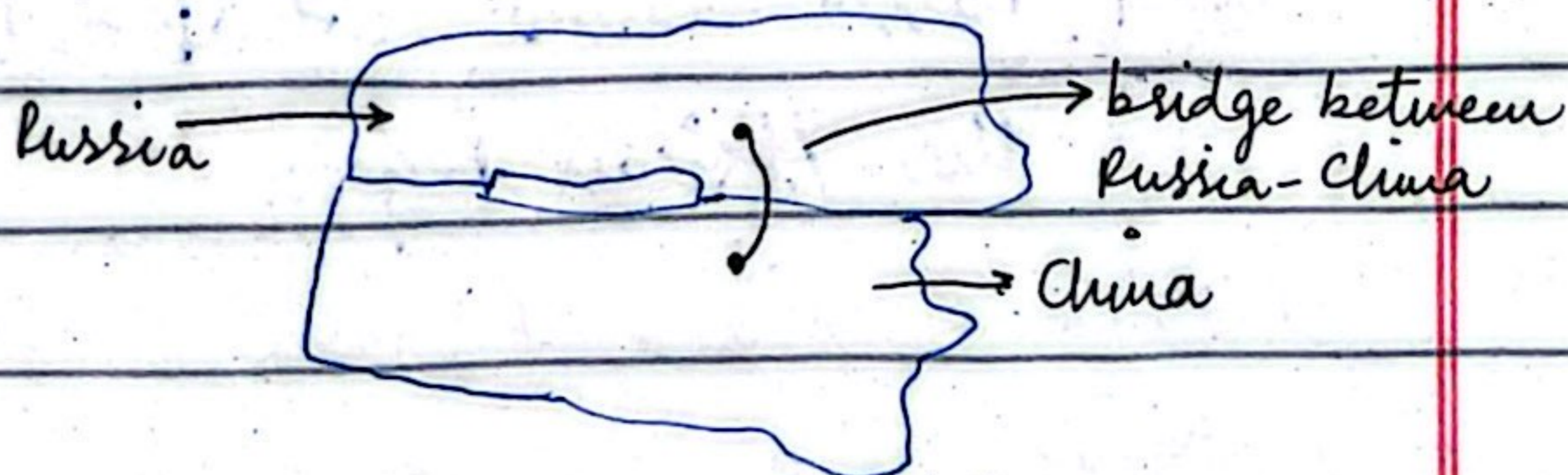
ii. No-limit friendship against western aggression

Russia and China have also declared "No limit friendship" which means both can go to any extent to support each other in need.

D. Russia-China Collaboration in Asia

Similarly, both the countries have also shown collaboration in Asia to challenge western hegemony.

i. Russia is a part of China's larger BRI project.



Russia is also a part of China's 1.3 trillion dollar project, opening more trade opportunities for each other.

E. Russia - China Collaboration in the Middle East.

To add more, Russia and China have also collaborated in Middle East to counter western hegemony in geo-politics.

i. Similar Stance on Israel war on Gaza

Both the countries presented many resolutions for a ceasefire in Gaza, which were vetoed by the US in the Security Council.

ii. Economic Investment in Middle East

Russia - China have also invested in critical infrastructure in the Middle East. Both the countries have poured billions to maintain balance of power.

F. Russia - China Collaboration in the African region

Additionally, Russia and China have also contributed and collaborated in African region for the extraction of rare minerals.

i. Economic Partnerships

for Rare Earth Elements

Elements like Germanium, Cadmium, Cobalt, are strategically important in modern economy. Russia and China have strategically maintained controlled over many states for Rare Earth Elements.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, whether Russia or China could potentially change the US led world order is another story. One thing is certain that whenever their geo-political collaboration or rivalry takes place, ordinary citizens suffer most. It is high time that states realize this and work together to construct a more equitable world order.

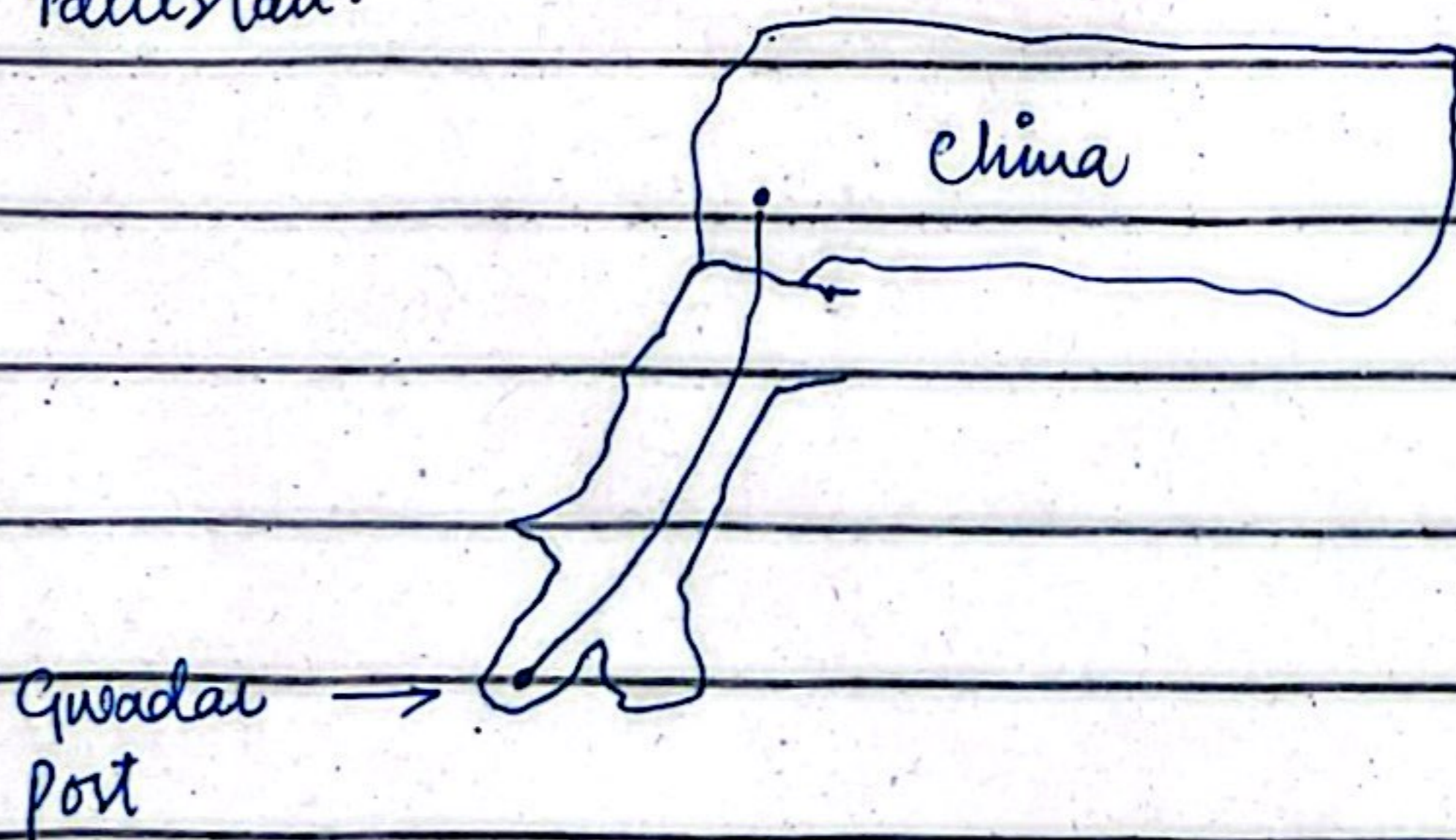
Answer no. 8 B

Introduction

CPEC- China Pakistan Economic Corridor is a project jointly launched by China and Pakistan in 2015. While it has a promising start initially, it is largely now in backslide due to internal and external problems faced by Pakistan.

An Overview of CPEC

CPEC is a \$62 billion project and it is part of China's larger BRI project. It was designed to transform the economy and modernize critical energy and transportation infrastructure of Pakistan.



While CPEC first phase is still not complete, its phase 2 offers great opportunities for Pakistan. An overview of CPEC Phase 2 is as follows:

(i). ML-I Project: ML Phase I will start from 'Karachi to Multan' and then Phase 2, from 'Multan to Peshawar'.

(ii). Gwadar International Airport: Under CPEC Phase 2, Gwadar International Airport is also to be constructed.

(iii). N-50: N-50 is a highway also known as Zhob - Quetta highway will also be constructed in CPEC Phase 2.

Reasons for the slowing down of CPEC

Reasons for slowing down of CPEC especially from 2019 - till now are as follows:

a. Political Deadlock in Pakistani Politics.

Pakistan's political landscape is in continuous state of turmoil which hinders any possibility of the continuation of policies. Thereby, diminishing chances for the revival

of CPEC.

b. Pakistan's continued Economic Dependency

Pakistan's largest foreign creditor is China (approx 24\$ billion), this dependency and constant rescheduling of debt make Chinese authorities less interested.

c. Rise of Terrorism

Similarly,

The rise of terrorism in Pakistan by the banned TTP has triggered anxiety among Chinese authorities. Moreover, terrorists have also deliberately targeted CPEC projects.

d. Rise of Insurgency by Baloch Separatists

Baloch separatists triggered by the state's unequal attention to the province have also faced their attack on CPEC projects to register their protest as they grow more violent than ever.

e. Role of External Elements

One such rival - India, is definitely a big reason for slowing down of CPEC, as evidence suggests that India is involved in state-sponsored terrorism to disrupt CPEC completion.

f. Security concerns of Chinese Nationals.

Security of Chinese national is a serious security concern. For instance, in Bishau Attack 5 Chinese nationals lost their lives, which has alarmed the Chinese Authorities.

g. Bureaucratic delays and Inefficiency

Moreover, CPEC slowing down can also be attributed to Bureaucratic inefficiencies and delays as most of the state machinery is busy in dealing other problems of the state.

Current Status of CPEC

i. EEZ- Exclusive Economic Zones

Out of 9 EEZ, none is being completed.

ii. Power Projects

Out of 21 Power projects, only 7 are being completed.

iii. Transportation Projects

Similarly, out of 24 Transportation Projects only 6 are being completed.

iv. Untapped Potential of Gwadar Port.

Moreover, the Gwadar Port is still not being able to fully commercialize for international Trade.

Recommendation to Islamabad to re-invigorate

It is high-time that Islamabad needs give CPEC its due share of attention and for this recommendations are as follows;

a. Establishing State's writ against terrorist

States need to curb the terrorist attack. For instance, 685 personnel in 444 Terror attacks have lost their lives. Therefore, state needs to immediately establish its writ.

b. Getting own house in order

Without political stability at home, the chances of CPEC revival are very bleak. Therefore, authorities needs to get own own house in order first.

c. Showing Political will to Chinese Authorities.

Similarly, Islamabad needs to show its political will to Chinese authorities for timely completion of CPEC by speeding up the process of construction.

d. Economic reforms to lessen dependency on China

Pakistan needs to implement structural economic reforms such as tax reforms and

Privitization of SOEs.

Recommendations to Beijing: to

Re-invigorate CPEC

Recommendations for Beijing are as follows:

a. Putting Trust on Pakistan's Armed Forces for Security

Chinese Authorities need to fully trust the capabilities of Pakistan's prestigious armed forces for the security of its technical experts and engineers.

b. Speedy transfer of credits to complete projects

Moreover, China also need to speedily transfer credits for timely completion without any delay, which is necessary for the CPEC projects to be operational.

c. Assistance in counter-terrorism

China can also offer Assistance in counter terrorism to Pakistan under the SCO framework of RAT, so that Islamabad can effectively deal with the menace.

Conclusion

In conclusion, CPEC is a "jewel in the crown" for China's larger BRI project, its timely completion rests on Islamabad and Beijing authorities to make the project up and running, notwithstanding, the external and internal problems.

Answer no. 6

Introduction

Despite sharing a border, Pakistan and Afghanistan are still not being able to develop cordial ties due to historical grievances between Islamabad and Kabul. Moreover, contemporary problem of Terrorism in Pakistan has also been attributed to Afghan Taliban's support to the TTP, which has made relationship much more difficult.

Historical Grievances between Islamabad and Kabul

When Pakistan got independence in 1947, the Afghanistan was the country to place a block against UN membership. Since then, numerous challenges emerged

a. Durand line Issue

Afghanistan claims that Durand line border was decided through a treaty with British, and it needs to redrawn with Pakistan. Pakistan claims that Durand line border is a undisputed fact, which is not open for discussion

b. Pakistan's role in GWOT

Prior to GWOT, Pakistan recognized Taliban in 1996. But, after 9/11 attacks Pakistan was left with no foreign policy choice but to stand with the west against terrorism. This F.P choice sowed seeds of Antagonism.

c. Refugee Crises

After the Russian invasion in Afghanistan, 4 million refugees came to Pakistan in 1979, which overburdened the already depleting resources of Pakistan, which caused Pakistan to rethink its decision.

d. Demographic Changes to Pakistan's Society

Similarly, when the refugees came it change the social fabric of Pakistan as undocumented economy grew, as well as extremism and sectarianism increased. Moreover, the weaponization of Pakistani culture (Kalashnikov culture) is also attributed to the influx of refugees.

Contemporary Tensions between Islamabad and Kabul

Contemporary Tensions are as follows:

a. Afghanistan as a launching pad for terrorism

Pakistani authorities claim that Afghanistan is a launching pad for terrorism in Pakistan and Afghan Taliban are complicit in supporting their ideological brothers (TTP).

b. Repatriation Drive of Afghan Refugees

Moreover, the Afghan Repatriation drive which started in 2024 for the undocumented Afghan refugees is also not welcomed by Afghan Taliban & Co, which has triggered animosity.

c. Cross-border firing

Cross-border firing between two states is a serious concern which can threaten the regional stability in case of any miscalculation.

d. Smuggling through Porous Borders

Drugs and Human Trafficking is also a serious irritant for Pakistan, as Torkham border is being used to carry illegal activities with impunity.

Critical Evaluation of situation

a. Emboldened Afghan Taliban 2.0 regime

The withdrawal of US and Nato forces has emboldened Afghan Taliban 2.0 regime as they feel that they can now challenge any state with confidence of defeating super power.

b. Lack of cooperation between Islamabad and Kabul

Pakistan on numerous occasions have tried to hold talks with Afghan but they have failed every time as Afghan Taliban show unwillingness to cooperate with Islamabad.

c. India's close relation with Afghan Taliban

To exploit the situation, India is drawing itself closer to Afghan Taliban to further destabilize Pakistan by providing them with aid.

Recommendation for both the regimes

Following are the recommendation for both Islamabad and Kabul.

a. Finding space for Political Dialogue

Despite many irritants, Islamabad and Kabul need to find space for political dialogue. By employing Track I and

Track-II diplomacy, chances of thaw in relations are possible.

b. Intelligence collaboration

Both the countries are affected by the terrorism, therefore Afghanistan should share intelligence and leave the support of TTP which is wreaking havoc in Pakistan.

c. Avoiding Unilateral breaching of Territorial integrity of each other.

Similarly, Pakistan has recently conducted a unilateral operation against TTP on Afghan soil, which can trigger bigger conflagration. So, authorities in Islamabad need to avoid it.

d. Diplomatic Pressure on Afghan Taliban from International community

China can play a mediator role between Pakistan and Afghanistan by providing good offices, as it has played role in Iran-Saudia deal. Moreover, China hold some leverage over Afghanistan as it is

the first country to give Taliban implied recognition.

e. Employing the Incremental Approach

Finally, if Islamabad and Kabul starts to cooperate at issue of low politics such as climate change then they will be able to achieve cooperation at issues of high politics such as terrorism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Afghan Taliban needs to look at the bigger picture and stop providing safe havens for terrorists. Otherwise, their prospects of global recognition and integration into global economy will start to diminish over time.