

Final Mock: Current Affairs

QUESTION-2

UNPRECEDENTED CHANGE IN SYRIA

The 54-year long rule of Assad's regime in Syria ended with a final blow from HTS-Islamist rebels in a mere 11 days. There were various reasons behind this abrupt regime change and has multiple implications on the region and other states involved in the conflict.

REASONS BEHIND THE REGIME CHANGE:

Bashar al Assad was fighting with the Syrian rebels for many years with the support of its allies including Russia and Iran. But the recent changes in both countries led to the change of focus of these countries from Syria towards their

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own issues that led to weakened rule of Bashar al Assad in Syria and his government finally toppled over.

1. RUSSIA UKRAINE WAR

Russia was an ally of Assad's regime in Syria and provided necessary military and economic aid to Syria to fight off the civilian rebels. But the recent developments in Russia Ukraine War and economic strain on the country shifted the focus of Russia towards its own dilemma.

1.1 Refusal of Ukraine to renew transit deal

→ Russia was the major exporter of natural gas to the Europe but with the turning year, Ukraine refused to renew the pipeline deal which provided natural gas to the Europe.

→ As a result, Russian monopoly of energy ended as its export share dwindled.

Russia's share of 35% natural gas exporter in Europe dwindled to 10%.

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→ This inflicted serious economic strain on Russia.

→ Moreover, economic sanctions on Russia and its aggressiveness in Ukraine shifted the much needed focus from Syria and it could not provide further help to Syria that made situation difficult for Assad's regime.

2. IRAN'S ECONOMIC SITUATION

Iran is desiring to get its economic sanctions lifted and struggling with the global pressure to forsake its nuclear ambitions.

2.1 Supporters of Hezbollah & Hamas

Iran is a major supporter of Hezbollah and Hamas in Lebanon and Palestine.

Iran needed Syria to maintain its communications with both groups, which is why it was supporting Syria but the recent developments in Iran's situation diverted its focus to its own region that left Syrian government alone in the woods.

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2.2 Israel's attack on Iran

In the year 2024, Israel attacked Iran multiple times through missiles. Iran's defence situation was at stake for which it required all hands on deck. Iran focused on its own defence and could not provide the necessary support to Syria.

2.3 Martyrdom of Iran's Leadership

In the plane crash in the year 2024, Iran's President died in a shocking turn of events. This further weakened Iran's position to support Syria.

3. Israel's Unrelenting Support to HTS

Israel, on the other hand, unrelentingly supported the civilian rebels in the conflict. This situation provided favourable ground to the rebels to overthrow Assad's regime and take control of Damascus.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE REGIME CHANGE

With the unprecedented regime change in Syria and taking over of government by Hayat Tahrir al Sham group, the situation

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is unfolding with diverse implications on both sides.

1. BREAKING OF AXIS

Iran's presence in the region was to maintain the "axis of resistance" for which Syrian government was the most important ally. This has broke the supply of weapons to the region and finally broke the axis of resistance.

2. TEHRAN-THE BIGGEST LOSER

The biggest loser in this case is Tehran as the regime change has ended Iran's dominance and presence in the region which was critical for Iran to support Hezbollah and Hamas.

3. HUGE BLOW TO RUSSIA

Russia was using Syria to maintain its influence in the region and gain economic advantages. Russia's preoccupation with Ukraine gave rebels a golden chance to attack the regime as they expected that Russia will not be coming to the aid.

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4. ISRAEL - BIGGEST BENEFICIARY

This has ended Iran's influence in the region and as a result weakened support to Hezbollah and Hamas. This has strengthened Israel's position in the region and the rebels who are now holding the government will prove to be a key ally to Israel in the region.

5. BENEFIT FOR TURKEY

This has benefitted Turkey as its border is secured and provided way to house Syrian refugees.

BOTTOM LINE:

Despite Assad's regime brutal rule, the situation has shifted and it will result in changing scenario in the region. Israel's strengthened position is a matter of concern for Gaza and Lebanon as it will worsen their situation in the war.

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QUESTION-6

ISLAMABAD KABUL TENSION

The fall of Kabul and Taliban regaining control of Afghanistan has resulted in unfavourable situation in terms of resurgence of terrorism in Pakistan.

REASONS FOR TENSIONS

The situation of Pakistan Afghan border is creating tensions on both sides, with Pakistan facing the implications of the regime change.

1. Resurgence of Terrorism in Pakistan

Taliban has taken back control of Afghanistan after hurried withdrawal of US troops from the area. This resulted in a new wave of terrorism in Pakistan due to revival of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan across the border.

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According to a report,

TTP attacks have increased

27% as compared to 2023.

This has resulted in a serious law and order situation in Pakistan and increased tensions across the border.

2. Revival of TTP

Due to withdrawal of US Forces in Afghanistan and failing of appeasement policy, TTP has revived itself, with other groups joining it. TTP is now using Kabul as a launching pad to commit terrorism in Pakistan.

According to a report,

TTP has established 12 new administrative units in Pakistan.

3. Taliban's Ambiguous Policy

Taliban's ambiguous policy regarding TTP and not ensuring co-operation to root out TTP's presence from its areas has further complicated the situation and created issues along the border.

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4. Lack of fulfillment of commitments:

Moreover, despite Islamabad's constant stress to fulfil the commitments set in the withdrawal agreement, Taliban govt has not shown support. The response from Kabul is that agreement was between Afghanistan and US not Pakistan.

5. Failed Appeasement Policy:

Despite Pakistan's efforts for the appeasement policy, it failed miserably which provide TTP and other insurgent groups enough time to regroup themselves and complicate the law and order situation.

6. Situation in Balochistan:

Due to terrorist activities by TTP, situation in Balochistan is worsening. The Kurram region is facing the worst situation of sectarian conflicts which is fueled by TTP's presence in the region.

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POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

1) Zero Tolerance Policy:

It is the need of the hour that Islamabad clears its position and strictly follow a zero tolerance policy on terrorism.

2) Political Stability:

Political instability fuels the situation of terrorism for which it is necessary to improve political stability in both regions to suppress terrorism.

3) Clear talks with Kabul govt:

It is important to develop a clear stance regarding no appeasement by compromising state's sovereignty with the Kabul government.

4) Shift the Fighting Mode:

It is important for Islamabad to shift its fighting mode from defensive to offensive to fight TTP.

5) Comprehensive Plan of Action:

It is important for Pakistan to develop a comprehensive plan of action by bring-

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ing all stakeholders on deck to solve the issue.

BOTTOMLINE:

Pakistan has suffered a lot in the past to gain stability from terrorist attacks. If prompt and effective action will not be taken it will bring grave consequences for Pakistan.

QUESTION-8

SLOWING DOWN OF CPEC

CPEC faces increasing security challenges from terrorist groups like BLA and TTP with over **700 militant attacks in 2024**. Pakistan and China initiated Phase II of the CPEC Project but recent developments have resulted in slowing down of the investments and increasing security concerns regarding the project.

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REASONS

1) Security Concerns

with resurgence of terrorism in Pakistan and high profile incidents like **Gwadar Port** and **Karachi University** targeting Chinese nationals has raised security concerns regarding Chinese nationals and hampered the progress.

2) Resurgence of TTP

TTP regaining its control over administrative units in Pakistan and increasing militant activity specifically targeting Balochistan and Gwadar area has aggravated the security concerns and resulting in slowing down of projects.

3) Delay in investments

With over 65 Billion dollars on the line, it is important to relieve the security concerns as it has resulted in China feeling cautious regarding future investments and as a result slowed down the project.

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4) Pak China strained relations

With China adopting zero tolerance policy regarding terrorism and security of its nationals, it has increased the pressure on Pakistan to cope with the situation and has somewhat strained the relations among neighbours.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation of CPEC is critical for both sides and it is highly essential to reinvigorate the process by alleviating concerns and tackling the situation.

1. Options for Pakistan

1.1 Comprehensive Plan of Action

It is highly necessary for Pakistan to develop a comprehensive plan of action against the resurgence of terrorism in the country and make sure CPEC is protected from the aims of the insurgent groups.

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1.2 Rekindle the Relationship with China

It is important for Islamabad to alleviate the concerns of Beijing and address the issue of Chinese nationals' security as effectively as possible. Strong ties with Beijing is essential for Pakistan to fight against Indian activities and strengthen its standing in the region.

1.3 Economic Security

With Islamabad's latest focus on strengthening economy for a better standing in the region, CPEC is the key to the goal. Inflation reached its new low in 2024 which is a positive sign for the government to keep its focus on strengthening economy.

2. Options for China

2.1 Ensuring Regional Connectivity

China's goal to develop an economic corridor to ensure regional connectivity and uninterrupted flow of its exports

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to Europe and other regions can only be fulfilled if CPEC is complete. The recent halt in the progress of CPEC is not a good sign for the ambitions of China under Belt and Road Initiative so it is important for Beijing to reinvigorate the process.

2.2 To maintain Status quo in South Asia

China's desire to fight off India's impact on the region and maintain status quo in South Asia can be fulfilled with Pakistan's help. Islamabad has always supported China because of its mutual rivalry of India, so it is advantageous for Beijing to maintain good relations with Islamabad.

BOTTOM LINE:-

CPEC fulfilment is in favour of both sides so it is essential for both countries to address their concerns through negotiation and reinvigorate the process.

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QUESTION-5

BRICS+ AND DOLLAR

With the addition of Indonesia in BRICS+, the group now represents 45% of the world's population and 35% of total world's GDP. This presents a fruitful opportunity to the BRICS+ countries to fight dollar's dominance and decrease its leverage in the global trade particularly in the Global South.

Dominance of Dollar in the Global Trade

Presently, US Dollar is the world's primary reserve currency for global trade.

With Trump's recent reiteration to assert dollar's position in the global market further clarifies the aims of America to maintain its leverage in the global

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trade and assert significant control over global financial flows.

Swift as a Tool for Sanctions

SWIFT facilitates global financial transactions across more than 200 countries.

While it is based in Belgium, it has faced pressure from US to comply with its sanctions regimes. Countries like Russia, Iran & Venezuela have been excluded from SWIFT as a part of US led sanctions.

Impact on Global South

1) Economic Vulnerability:

Many countries rely on US dollar for trade and sanctions or restrictions disrupt essential imports.

2) Debt and Dependency:

Dollar denominated debts leave these nations vulnerable to US interest rate hikes.

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3) Erosion of sovereignty:

The ability of US to enforce compliance outside its jurisdiction is a breach of national sovereignty.

ROLE OF BRICS+

The BRICS+ bloc comprising Russia, China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia is one of the world's fastest growing economies group and has the potential to defeat dollar and monopoly of US in the international system.

1. Dedollarization

1.1 Trade in Local Currencies:

One proposal is to trade in local currencies instead of dollar because of economic differences in the bloc.

1.2 Joint currency:

Proposals have been submitted to develop a common currency like Euro for EU and it has been discussed in the recent

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summit but up until now no consensus is reached. This is the most effective way to reduce dominance of dollar in global trade.

2. SWIFT Alternative

→ Russia's SPFS and China's CIPS are alternatives to SWIFT and can reduce the hold of us over global market.

BRICS bank: The New Development Bank by BRICS to provide loans to member countries and avoid IMF & World Bank that are primarily under US's control is a great initiative.

3. Economic Co-operation

→ Strengthening economic co-operation by including new members in the bloc like Indonesia is vital for the success of this block.

→ Increasing trade and investment in between BRICS nations to reduce dependency over US dollar.

Permanent Solutions

1) Challenging us led sanctions:

Countries like Russia and China have

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been vocal in this regard by challenging the unipolarity of US.

2) Economic alternatives:

Finding permanent economic alternatives for trade and financing among BRICS+ nation will strengthen their position.

3) Reducing disparities:

Due to diversity in the group, different countries have different economic styles in their regions, but reaching a common economic way will help BRICS+ and global south to break the shackles of US's hegemony.

BOTTOM LINE:

BRICS+ can be a promising solution to defeat dollar and SWIFT in the global trade if this group continues through the road effectively.