

SUBJECTIVE
PART- II
ANSWER-2
REGIME CHANGE IN SYRIA

Introduction:

First week of December 2024 has witnessed sudden regime change in Syria. The HTS Rebels have successfully toppled 54 year long Assad Family rule in the country. There are diverse reasons of the fall - mainly lack of extended support to Assad government by long-term allies Russia and Iran. Also, Turkish support to non-state HTS and allegedly western backing provided it with unopposed power. The event will undoubtedly be marked by repercussions for Iran, Russia and spill-over effects can cause troubles for Arab States. United States remains a major beneficiary, so far.

GCC are celebrating victory and so is Israel on the regime change. The upcoming government in March 2025 shall decide future of the region.

Reasons of Regime Change:

Multiple reasons can be regarded as contributing factors to the regime change in Syria.

(1) Prolonged War ~ Declining Army:

Syria has a stark past with two-leading alliances. One the **Al-Nusra Army** or better known as **FSA - Free Syrian Army** which is backed by United States and KSA, Qatar - GCC. They repeatedly attacked **SDP - Syrian Democratic Party**. This group backed by Iran, Russia, Hezbollah and Iran. The peak war years (2011-2021) have exhausted Syrian Army both morally and strategically.

Weapons required major overhaul which could not be funded.

(2)

Strategic Ally in a Whirlpool ~ Russia:

Russia has backed Bashar-ul-Assad's regime. It has provided weapons and funds for Syrian government to sustain.

Ever since its invasion on Ukraine

in 2022, Russia has been unable to match-up the aid and supply to Syria. It is countering the world's most strong force (NATO forces) in Eastern Europe. It is unable to fund a two-front war. This lack of strategic support has caused issues for sustaining Bashar's rule.

(3) Sectarian Ally ~ Iran:

Iran has provided absolute support to Syrian government. Hezbollah forces have been engaged against Al-Nusra in Syria. Also, Bashar-ul-Assad's 'Allawite government' provided Iran with a sectarian ally in Middle East.

Gaza War had diverted the Iranian support on multiple fronts. Fighting US-backed Israel is no easy task. Iran, also, could not sustain a two-front war.

(4) USA's Dual War :

USA, on contrary, has the ability to engage Iran and Russia: both

major allies of Syria in a two-fronts war. US hegemony and its hold over Middle East, its extensive backing of the Free Syrian Army; Al-Nusra has been a major player of Syrian regime change.

(5) Turkish Backing to HTS:

Demographic Implications lie at the heart of Syrian crisis. 10% of Syria Kurd population controls 30% of Syrian land. Turkey, also home to the Kurds PKK is deeply troubled by use of Syrian soil against Turkish lands. In order to crush the PKK, it handed over major regions to HTS and its sister groups.

It has never negated its support to HTS which has been a popular propaganda. In the past, NSA Leaks of Professor Snowden have showed US support to ISKP. Allegedly, Turkey is the facilitator to HTS today while, US remain mainly.

Implications of Regime Change:

Syrian regime change has posed greater implications for states in the region and globally as well.

(1) Hezbollah's Supply Link Broken:

Syria had been serving as a major transporter of aid to Hezbollah via Iran under the Assad government.

Iran → Iraq → Syria → Lebanon

This link has now been broken due to toppling down of government. Lebanon will face major set-backs in Gaza war and so will Iran in countering Israel.

(2) Loss of Shiite ally for Iran:

Iran has always felt left out in Middle East due to divergent sectarian choices. The Arab world and Iran do not share much in common. Syrian Assad government was Iran's only ray of hope for the past 54 years. Now, Iran's presence

relevance and influence on Middle East's decision-making will greatly decline.

(3) Strategic Implications for Russia:

Russia had stationed its naval fleet and a military base in Syria. The day Aleppo was attacked, Russia knew it lost a strategic graveyard in Syria.

Russia has removed its bases along with its nuclear materials from Syria.

(4) Victorious USA and Israel:

As a result of Fall of Damascus, US and Israel have turned out to be the major beneficiaries. The supply line breakage means a weaker Hezbollah and Iran for Israel to face in Gaza.

Russian setback benefits the US for now, it can have uninterrupted focus on west

Asian affairs:

(5) Regional Implications:

Hayat Tahrir Shaam (HTS) has taken over Syria, without much resistance. It is notable how both parties (HTS leader Tolani and Syrian PM) have agreed on a peaceful power transition. However, the country is under supervised rule of a non-State Actor. Even the coming government in March 2025, would be kept in check. It is unfortunate that rebel groups are now landing in parliaments. The region could witness spill-over / domino effects that will be unfavourable.

Conclusion:

The unprecedented fall of Bashar-ul-Assad leaves analysts questioning the agreed upon rules and human rights imposed by the west. It has left many in a dilemma.

ANSWER: 4

RUSSIA-CHINA ALLIANCE

Introduction:

Since the end of cold war and collapse of USSR, United States has enjoyed hegemony over the world. By beginning of 21st century, an emerging trend is witnessed. It refers to economic rise of China and revisionist state agendas of Putin's Russia. This emerging multi-polarity is characterised by strong alliance between China and Russia on economic, political and strategic fronts. Critics are spell-bound that these agreements are nothing but an attempt to challenge US-led world order.

The scenario complies with a famous IR maxim:

"The enemy of my enemy
is my friend."

Russia-China Collaboration:

Russia and China have extended collaboration in various domains:

(1) Strategic Partnerships:

Russia is engaged in Ukraine war while China is stuck with security threats in South and East China Sea.

The US is undoubtedly challenged by China's economic rise. The Trump Administration imposed a Trade Ban in 2017. China sought Russian help for weapons. Russia has provided China with **SU-400** and **S-35** fighter-jets. It is remarkable because no other country has been traded with S-35 jets, fifth-gen aircrafts.

(2) Economic Partnerships:

Russia and China engaged economically because they have similar grievances. Post Ukraine invasion, US imposed economic sanctions on Russia. This was a major blow to Russian

economy because Europe remained its target market. Russia was devastated.

2.1: Energy Trade Agreements:

Russia did not sit back to cry but decide to slash its oil price by 35%. It is significant to know that Russia is the world's largest gas exporter and second largest oil exporter.

China, seeking opportunity decided to purchase Russia oil at cheaper rates. This agreement mutually favours both countries.

25.3 Despite sanctions, Russian exports increased by \$66 Billion in 2022. This indicates the strength of Sino-Soviet partnership.

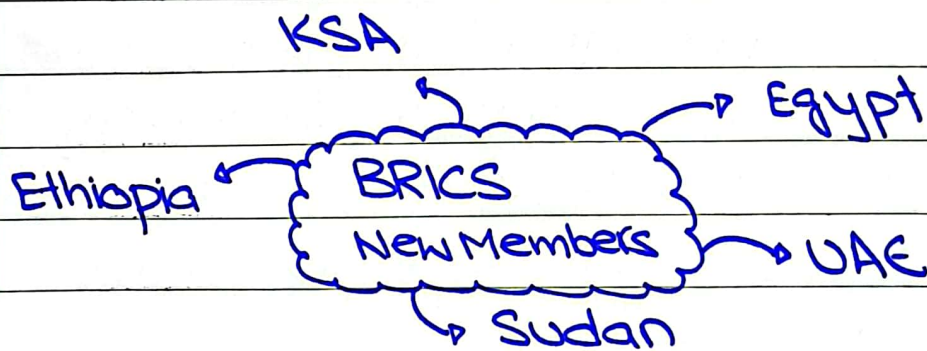
(3) Political Convergence:

Russia and China are two major followers of the communist ideology. Both Xi Jinping and Putin are seen to oppose the over determined capitalist world order.

President Xi has visited Russia in 2024. More arenas of mutual benefit have been discussed.

(4) BRICS ~ an emblem of partnership.

BRICS+ is currently pacing towards global hegemony. The organisation has been home to 43% of global GDP. It has extended membership to five new countries in 2024.



This is not merely about population or GDP, but BRICS claims to be the face of Global South. They have embodied the agenda of South-South cooperation as their voice and it is directly a challenge to the North-South Divide.

With the notion achieved, BRICS can counter USA's

influence.

4.1: New Development Bank:

BRICS has laid foundation of the New Development Bank (NDB) to challenge US-led economic order. It is a rival to IMF, WB and WTO. It follows the same footsteps and provides loans, with much soft conditionalities and carries developmental projects in deprived countries.

The magnitude is certainly small, but with current rate of progress, it can lead the Global South soon.

4.2: Common Currency Idea:

Under the banner of BRICS, Russia and China are leaving no stone unturned to collaborate and counter USA.

Recently, in 2024, President Xi has declared the need to create a common BRICS currency on the idea of Euro (EU).

Talks are underway to generate a paper currency or follow the buzz of cryptocurrency.

(5) CPEC : Proposed avenue for collaboration

China has challenged US-led order ever since President Xi materialized the Chinese Dragon Agenda of Mao, and launched the BRI.

Out of the six announced corridors, two corridors include Russia at the prime centre of trade route :

- China-Central-Russia EC
- China-Armenia-Georgia-Turkey - Russia - Europe EC

This signifies the deeply intricate collaboration between China and Russia.

The US is concerned regarding their increasing collaboration on various domains.

(6) De-Dollarization : A Threat to Dollar Hegemony:

Chinese Yuan is actively involved to challenge Dollar Supremacy in International Trade.::

China has signed 45+ currency swap agreements > most of which are with Russia.

Yuan-Ruble Trade is inclined to diminish the supremacy of US dollar in world trade.

Conclusion:

China and Russia are leaving no stone unturned to contain US-led world. It is their pertinent aim to emerge as revisionist states and challenge status quo. As far as stats are concerned, US is still the leading world economy stationed at \$26 Trillion and more than 52% of global trade is dollarized. It is not as simple as it looks, challenging US would pose implications.

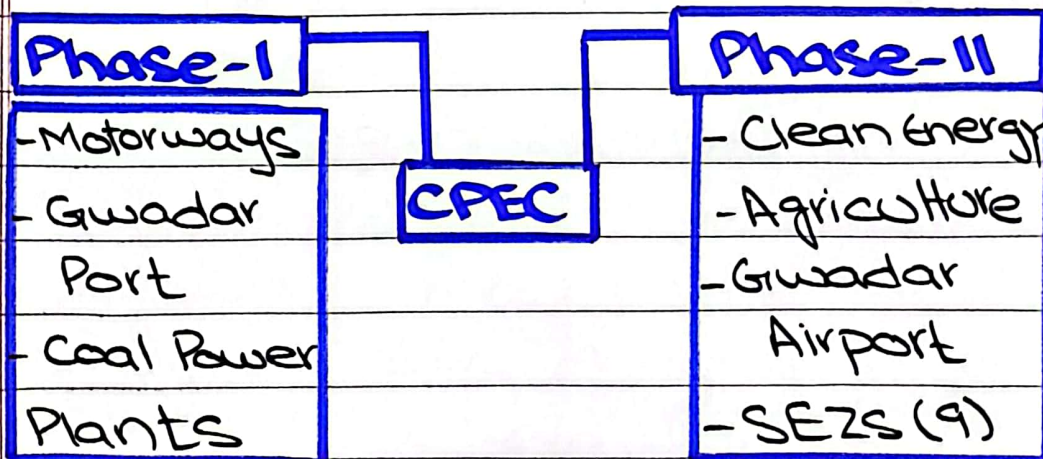
ANSWER: 8

HALTED PROJECTS OF CPEC

Introduction:

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is \$62 Billion flagship project under BRI. The project began in 2015 in Pakistan. It is planned to execute in three distinct phases. Currently, there is evident lag in the progress of projects under both phase-I and phase-II. The issues of political instability and security dilemma for Chinese workers remain at the core of reasons of delay.

Both countries need to jointly address their reservations and find a prosperous way-out.



Reasons for slow down of CPEC:

Various internal and external dynamics contribute to the decline in pace of CPEC agendas:

(1) Political Instability in Pakistan:

Eversince CPEC has been announced in 2013, Pakistan has changed over **5 Prime Ministers** and three-four **governments**. The lack of policy continuity forms the grounds for decline in CPEC.

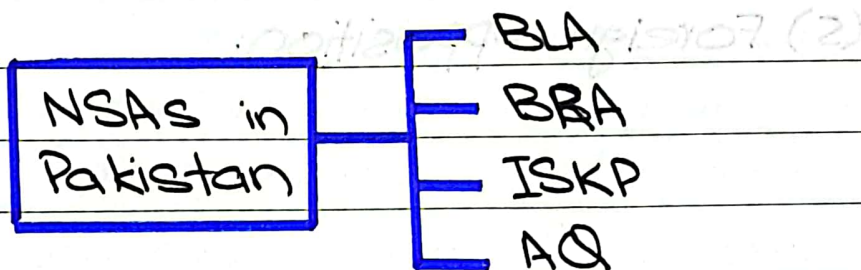
Moreover, every government has its own agendas and priorities which do not necessarily go in-line with the demands of CPEC.

(2) COVID-19:

Global pandemic of COVID-19 has caused certain set-backs for Pakistan. The Phase-II, which was to be announced in 2020, according to initial plans, came to the table very late.

(3) Threat to Security of Chinese Nationals:

Pakistan has always been linked to security turmoils. Currently, the country is home to multiple Non-State actors (NSAs) whose prime target are Chinese Nationals



These agents of chaos target anything that benefits the state and CPEC remains the core of their aims.

(4) Attacks on Chinese:

Bisham Attack

Three Chinese engineers died in an attack in Besham.

Karachi Attack

Confucius Institution attack at KU killed two professors (Chinese).

Airport Road Karachi	Majeed Brigade took responsibility for bombing Chinese in a car at Karachi.
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Chinese government officials are very displeased. They have openly declared dissatisfaction.

(5) Foreign Opposition:

China and India share similar terms as China and Pakistan. Both countries are fostering while India is pulling all strings to bring down the project. There are confirmed Reports (Dossier) and confessional statements (Kulbhushan Yadhu) to prove that RAW is funding attacks on Pakistani soils.

Policy Options for Future:

Joint Projects require collective efforts. Both China and Pakistan need to put in extra efforts to work for completion of CPEC.

Recommendations for Pakistan:

(1) House in order:

The state needs to address the grievances of local population of Gwadar, unhappy about trawlers fishing at their ports.

(2) Policy Continuity Assurance:

All stakeholders in Pakistan, particularly the establishment need to finalise a unified stance on completion of CPEC. No matter how many governments come and leave, the projects must go on.

(3) Deployment of Forces:

Chinese primary concern, security must be catered immediately. The country must specially train its Police and law enforcement agencies to protect Chinese citizens. A specialized division must be placed for this role.

(4) Single Investment Window:

In order to ensure smooth flow of money, Pakistan is already working on a single investment window - SIFC (Special Investment Facilitation Council) that would address the concerns of Chinese investor and facilitate them.

Recommendations for Beijing:

China must retain trust in long-term ally and friendly neighbour Pakistan.

China holds a powerful global recognition, it must declare that attacks on CPEC projects by foreign soils would be left unattended.

China has always proved to be an all-weather friend and stood glued to the narrative:

"China-Pakistan Friendship:

Higher than Himalayas, deeper than sea, sweeter than honey, and stronger than

steel. "A"

Contemporary Analysis:

Currently, multiple projects have begun under CPEC Phase-II.

Major ones are:

- ML-1 Railway Line
- Hydel Power Projects
- Allama Iqbal Industrial Complex Faisalabad (400+ Industries)
- Gwadar Airport.

On 10th January 2025, the 5th Meeting of **JWG-ICC** (Joint Working Group) ended on a positive note.

Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan has called CPEC a win-win situation for both countries.

Conclusion:

Regardless of lingering crisis, there is hope for a probable prosperous future and sustainable alliance on CPEC between both countries.

ANSWER: 7

BANGLADESH

Introduction:

Summer 2024 has witnessed a student-led revolt in Pakistan's neighbourhood that successfully carried out a regime change. The autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina Wajid ended as she flew to India. Post crisis, there are various internal opportunities and external chances regarding the situation.

Internal Dynamics of Bangladesh:

The country feels liberated after opposition parties were led free, previously incarcerated. Also, the military regained its position after years of being on the sidelines.

The rebels have themselves appointed an interim government led by Nobel Laureate Mr Yousif.

The scenario provides all sorts of possibilities in the future.

(1) Opportunities for students:

They can form a political party, build a manifesto and contest elections. This shall give them a rightful say in power and decision-making.

They have already gathered enough support during the uprising, at the cost of blood.

(2) Military's Future Options:

The army of Bangladesh, though always kept at bay from core political ideas now has the opportunity to reform internally and hold a central position in power.

(3) Jamaat-e-Islami:

The Jamaat also has a fair chance to win public narrative and form central government. This Muslim

role provides Pakistan a chance to fill the alliance vacuum and extend cooperation.

(4) Space for BNP:

The Bangladesh National Party also has ample space to step out of prison cells and travel the road to parliament with rallies, manifestoes and incentives.

Challenges for Bangladesh:

This revolt supported a popular narrative and gained massive public support in Bangladesh. It is probable that if the military or central government remains weak, a power/governance vacuum shall be created.

It can be filled by many unfavorable actors like NSAs and TNCs or other interest groups.

Opportunities for Pakistan:

Pakistan has still not overcome its sorrow of losing its West wing back in 1971. The government, with adequate measures can extend diplomatic affinity towards the incumbent regime in the neighbourhood. This shall equip the state with support and influence around the vicinity of arch-rival India.

Threat Perception ~ a misunderstood Narrative:

Many in Pakistan are fearful of domino effect of this regime change. It is very unlikely that Pakistan witnesses such a scenario, mainly due to presence of a hybrid system - **strong military and establishment backed central government.**

It is undeniable that educated youth of Pakistan faces some issues of

unemployment and lack of growth arenas, but the state and its writ do not provide any margins for such revolts.

Balanced Approach towards Dhaka:

1 Pakistan must adopt a friendly but balanced approach towards Dhaka.

It can start trade with Bangladesh, capture markets that have been abandoned by India and initiate transport projects for enhanced connectivity and people to people interaction.

Plans of revival of a single-unit must be overthrown because we can not tolerate more burden of population and administration. Also, Pakistan can not upset the Regional hegemon India - already an antagonistic neighbour - to avoid future conflicts.