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## GIST OF IDSA

MAY 2019



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## IDSA MAY 2019

### 1. INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC VICTORY ON COUNTER TERRORISM

#### What is the issue?

- Listing of Masood Azhar as a global terrorist is a diplomatic victory and a political triumph for India.

#### Who is Masood Azhar?

- Masood Azhar is the founder and leader of the Pakistan-based terrorist organization Jaish-e-Mohammed, active mainly in the Pakistani-administered portion of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Jaish-e-Mohammed claimed responsibility for the following attacks in India
- **2001 Indian Parliament attack** - Jaish-e-Mohammed carried out attack on the Indian parliament in 2001 that brought India and Pakistan to the brink of a full-scale war, resulting in the 2001–02 India–Pakistan standoff.
- **2008 Mumbai attacks** - Group of Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists carried out a series of 12 coordinated shooting and bombing attacks lasting four days across Mumbai.
- Azhar is believed to be one of the mastermind behind the attacks.
- **2016 Pathankot attack** - Pathankot attack was carried out on Indian air base by Masood Azhar's terror outfit.
- **2019 Pulwama attack** - A convoy of vehicles carrying security personnel

on the Jammu Srinagar National Highway was attacked by a vehicle-bound suicide bomber.

- The attack resulted in the death of 44 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel and the attacker.
- The responsibility for the attack was claimed by the Pakistan-based Islamist militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed.

#### What was china's earlier stand on listing Masood Azhar?

- India made proposals in UNSC to list Masood Azhar as a global terrorist in 2009, 2016 and 2017, all those proposals failed due to Chinese opposition.
- The first effort was made after the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks when India moved the proposal in the UN Sanctions Committee.
- In 2016, in the context of an attack on the Pathankot airbase, India, along with the P3 of France, the UK and the US, initiated the proposal.
- In 2017, once again the P3 nations moved a similar motion in the Sanctions Committee.
- However, on all these occasions, citing insufficient proof against Azhar and absence of consensus among members of the committee, China had blocked the proposal from being adopted.



- The latest instance of a Chinese technical 'hold' came on March 13, 2019 when France, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) initiated a proposal for naming Azhar in the UN Sanctions List after JeM took responsibility for the terror attack that killed more than 40 security personnel in Pulwama, South Kashmir.

### ***What prompted China's change of mind?***

- **Wuhan informal summit** - It is an informal meeting between Indian PM and Chinese President happened in 2018.
- Where both parties discussed on strengthening of the China-India relationship.
- China deliberately need India's Co-operation for its BRI initiative, which made strenuous funding for CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) which passes through the Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) region in India.
- Both nations believes that Wuhan Spirit will deepen the bilateral ties and address the issues faced by both nations in developmental projects.
- Thus to keep up the Wuhan spirit and gain co-operation in its developmental projects china is in a position to act in favor of India
- **Diplomatic Pressure** - After the latest hold by China in March 2019, there was an outcry from Indian commentators to stop such

'meaningless' diplomatic efforts at the UN.

- India shared all evidences of terrorist activities of Jaish-e-Mohammad and its chief with China.
- India has also pushed its friends to exert pressure on Beijing at various levels to put a hold on the proposal, the US had circulated a draft resolution in the UN Security Council to ban Azhar.
- The draft, which was backed by France and UK, discussed China's double standards on terrorism by mentioning the Xinjiang issue.
- As a nation that seeks great power status and image, it would have been a huge setback for China to defend a known terrorist like Masood Azhar, that too in a platform like the UN Security Council.
- In addition, the increased international support that India received after the Pulwama attack for its actions against terrorism, including France's move to freeze the assets of Azhar and its call for a European ban on Azhar, may also have influenced the Chinese decision.

### ***What lies ahead for India?***

- Chief of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) Masood Azhar has designated as a 'global terrorist' at the United Nations (UN) in May 2019.
- With China lifting its objection, Azhar has been listed as a global terrorist in the 1267 Sanctions List.



- Consequently, he will face freezing of assets, a travel ban, and an arms embargo by all UN member states.
- In general perception the listing as such may not help India in its fight against state-sponsored terrorism unless Pakistan changes its policy of providing safe-haven and financial support to terrorists.
- For India it is a success in terms of power politics and projection and shows how consistent and pragmatic has been India's multilateral policy.
- Therefore, expecting favorable outcomes immediately and desisting from persistent efforts due to an initial unfavorable result is a suboptimal approach in multilateral engagements.
- The listing of Azhar conveys India about the underlying assumption that in international politics there are no permanent friends or enemies.
- It also reinforces the necessity of persevering in the efforts to gain membership in the UN Security Council and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) despite all the setbacks hitherto.

## **2. RATIONALE BEHIND CHINA'S MOVE ON LISTING MASOOD AZHAR**

### **Why in news?**

- In order to safe guard its geo-political interests, China has designated Masood Azhar as a UN proscribed terrorist.

### **What was china's earlier stand on Islamic Terrorism?**

- **Uighur Separatism** - Chinese administration is very sensitive to the Islamic rationalism on its on land, which is critically linked to Uighur separatism in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.
- Internally, China has adopted the 'Strike Hard' campaign since the 2000s to repress and eliminate the Uighur separatists.
- Since 2017, this policy has acquired a strikingly virulent form with the Chinese government detaining thousands of Uighurs in internment camps and indoctrinating them to wean them away from the Islamic faith.
- Coupled with this, China has launched a massive surveillance-based database, the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP), to monitor Muslims in Xinjiang.
- Externally, China has enlisted the support of Pakistan to rein in not only the Uighurs but Pakistan's own radical forces.
- **In Favor of Pakistan** - China not have said much about its position on terror strikes on India thereby demonstrating its loyalty to Pakistan.
- Post-Pulwama, China had been the only country that did not condemn the terror attack.
- Rather, for the fourth time, it had blocked the proposal put forward by



the US, the UK and France for banning Azhar on the pretext of insufficient information, thus, clearly standing in support of Pakistan.

### ***What are the counter terror initiatives taken by China?***

- China has formulated as many as ten legal documents that outline the principles of anti-terrorism cooperation among member states.
- Plus, an anti-terror center was established in Bishkek to fight what China calls the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- Moreover, in the post-9/11 era, taking advantage of the global war on terror, China has projected Uighur separatism as terrorism.
- In 2002, China got the US treasury department to list the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) as a terrorist organization.

### ***What are the factors that pushed China to list Masood Azhar?***

- Even after taking strong preventive measures Uighur threat has remained unabated, In fact, China can no longer claim immunity to terror attacks.
- Earlier the Al-Qaeda had prohibited attacks targeting China and Chinese interests since it viewed US-China rivalry as a strategic opportunity.
- But now the Islamic State has called on its affiliates to 'take revenge'

against China for carrying out atrocities in Xinjiang.

- Thus, China no longer enjoys the restraint exercised by Al-Qaeda and its associates.
- There are even reports of some 200 Uighurs joining the ranks of the Islamic State and other Jihadi organizations in Syria and Iraq.
- In this context, the terror attack in Sri Lanka, which the IS has claimed responsibility for, is an alarming sign.
- China had so long controlled the menace of terrorism within its borders by joining hands with Pakistan and ignoring India's sovereignty and security concerns.
- The spread of Islamic terrorism to Sri Lanka not only narrows the room for China to ignore terrorism in the region but also threatens to affect its BRI projects in that country.

### ***Why the move is significant for China?***

- It is important to note that the success of BRI is critical to China's own economic growth and fulfilment of its two centenary goals: establishing a prosperous and well-off society by 2022 and joining the ranks of developed nations by 2050.
- In this regard, the recently concluded second BRI summit in Beijing saw reduced enthusiasm among countries across the world.
- China is increasingly confronting criticism about its debt-trap



diplomacy.

- It failed to woo India's participation for the second consecutive time.
- Of the eight SAARC countries, only Nepal and Pakistan sent their heads of state to Beijing.
- Sri Lanka, which had participated in the 2017 summit, skipped it this year.
- The same was the case with Turkey, which chose not to attend on the grounds of China's policy towards the Uighurs.
- At this juncture, China could ill-afford to confront international isolation on the Azhar ban issue.
- Given the critical link between terrorism and the BRI, China realized the futility of its opposition to Azhar being designated as a global terrorist.
- This pragmatism on the part of the Chinese leadership has not only ended the specter of China's international isolation but also raised the prospects of restoring the Wuhan spirit.
- Thus China's decision was guided by a realistic assessment of its national interest.

### **3. INDIA'S STAND ON BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE**

#### **Why in news?**

- China recently organized the second Belt-Road Forum (BRF) in Beijing.

#### **How big is BRI?**

- It was in 2013 that President Xi Jinping launched the 'One Belt-One

Road' (OBOR) project, later rechristened as BRI.

- Spanning across Asia, Africa, Oceania and South America, the total value of the BRI was estimated at \$ 3.67 trillion.
- According to the World Bank, the plan is expected to lift global GDP growth by three per cent.
- BRI is in no way a traditional aid programme, but a money-making investment, it blends political, economic and strategic dimensions.
- Alongside the physical infrastructure, another ambitious project on the anvil is the 'digital silk road' aimed at enhancing digital connectivity.
- The exact number of projects under BRI is hard to calculate, though these run into thousands because many have been informally negotiated.
- Most striking of the Belt-Road ventures is the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) which will connect Malaysia's East Coast to Southern Thailand and Kuala Lumpur.
- CPEC, connecting Xinjiang with Gwadar and the 'Gulf of Oman' is a signature project.
- Total trade between China and BRI nations has exceeded \$ 6 trillion. Chinese investment in these countries stands at over \$ 80 billion.
- BRI provides China an overarching framework for enhancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation.



### **What are global objections for BRI?**

- BRI has come under fire due to lack of transparency, weak institutional mechanism, skepticism about Chinese loans leading to debt trap, and poor environmental record.
- China's initiative evinced interest from a large number of countries since it was filling the void left by International Financial Institutions (IFI) which had stopped financing infrastructure development.
- A few BRI countries had expressed dissatisfaction with the on-going ventures including Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Several projects under CPEC also came under the scanner.
- A hydro-power project in Nepal was scrapped, The Trump administration holds the view that China's 'predatory financing' pushes smaller countries into debt, endangering their sovereignty.
- Beijing's acquisition of Hambantota port on 99-year lease in a debt swap agreement in 2017 is a case in point.
- Recently, US slammed China while addressing the opening session of the 'Arctic Council' in Finland for using its power through BRI to achieve security objectives.
- China has been criticized for allowing its companies to take away 90 per cent of the business and dictating own financing terms to borrowers.

- India stayed out BRI meetings on grounds of sovereignty given that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) traverses through Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK).

### **What is China's response on global fears?**

- In the image building exercise, Belt-Road has now been termed as a 'community of common destiny'.
- A kind of G150, it seeks to promote multilateralism, globalization and development, alongside human rights, providing an umbrella for plurilaterals cooperation.
- BRI manifests China's confidence as a global player, gradually stepping into the strategic space yielded by the USA.
- Chinese administration reaffirmed that BRI would adopt market-driven practices, making financial terms negotiable between lenders and borrowers.
- It also indicated that new rules will be formulated within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

### **What is India's opinion on BRI?**

- BRI is primarily South Asia and IOR centric, as is evident from the number of projects in these regions – CPEC, CMEC (China-Myanmar Economic Corridor), 'Nepal-China Trans Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network' including Nepal-China cross border railway,





besides significant projects in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

- The Maritime Silk Route encompasses major ports such as Kyakhphu in the Bay of Bengal and Gwadar in the Arabian Sea.
- On completion of the above ventures, China will enjoy a competitive edge in the region.
- India has rightly chosen not to participate in the Belt- Road Forum as there is no viable opportunity for it.

#### ***What are India's plan in countering china's BRI?***

- India abstains from participating in china's BRI initiative, as it feels that connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, and rule of law, openness, transparency and equality.
- It further stressed that projects should not create a debt burden and instead empower local communities.
- New Delhi's first regional initiative, its 'Connect Central Asia Policy' (CCAP), is a step in the right direction as it reflects the nation's will to play a larger role in the region.
- The 'Trilateral Agreement' between Afghanistan, India and Iran offers an excellent opportunity to implement a 'Look North Strategy'. There is vast scope for connectivity with ASEAN as well.
- India must pursue alternate connectivity initiatives like the Asia-

Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) in collaboration with partners such as Japan to ensure geostrategic balance in the region.

#### **4. US-CHINA TRADE WARS**

##### ***Why in news?***

- US administration has passed an order to end speculation over the future of Chinese electronic company's operations in the United States.

##### ***What is USA's order about?***

- In 2012, based on the recommendations of The House Intelligence Committee, the Obama administration had blacklisted Huawei and ZTE Corporation from supplying equipment for sensitive systems way back in 2012.
- The 2018 National Defense Authorization Act forbade government agencies from procuring telecommunications equipment or services produced or provided by Huawei and ZTE Corporation.
- Recently US administration issued an Executive Order (EO) entitled "Securing the Information and Communications Technology and Services Supply Chain".
- Pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and the National Emergencies Act, the EO declares "a national emergency with respect to the threats against information and communications



technology and services in the United States.”

- It does not name any country or company per se, but describes the threat as “information and communications technology or services designed, developed, manufactured, or supplied by persons owned by, controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of foreign adversaries.”

#### ***What is the need for such order?***

- The EO comes in the wake of serious allegations against Chinese telecommunications equipment suppliers, Huawei in particular, on account of malicious cyber-enabled actions, including spying, economic and industrial espionage and close ties to the Chinese government.
- The recent executive order is the latest in a series of actions that the US has taken during the last few years to reduce the security risks from Chinese-made equipment.
- For some time now, the US intelligence community, some private sector companies and think tanks have openly voiced concerns about espionage being carried out with equipment supplied by Chinese companies.
- The latest EO comes in the midst of an escalating trade war between the US and China, as part of which both sides have imposed tariffs on the

import of goods from the other country.

- The EO authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to prohibit transactions involving information and communications technology or services from “adversaries”.
- Through the order US probably seeks to address the issue of its rising trade imbalance with respect to China as well as curtail Huawei’s aggressive expansion in the global telecommunications trade, especially when 5G deployment is also around the corner.

#### ***Why US is worried about China?***

- US-China trade, at around USD 660 billion in 2018, has increased by 80 per cent since 2009.
- China has gained substantially from this bilateral trade, with a balance of USD 419 billion in its favor.
- China to penetrate markets in both developing and developed countries.
- The US appears to be caving in to the competition from China, as it is unable to arrest its falling share of exports in ICT and telecommunication equipment trade.
- Global US exports of telecommunication equipment, for instance, has grown by 30 per cent over the last one decade, but its imports have almost doubled.
- The gap between exports and imports is widening and transforming the US



into a market for such products rather than an exporter.

is seen as a major threat to global peace and security.

### ***What will be the consequences of the order?***

- It will not only adversely impact upon US companies and citizens but also have global ramifications.
- Chinese-made ICT products are much cheaper than their Western counterparts.
- Consumers of ICT products are generally individuals and businesses. If companies of Chinese origin are forbidden or restricted from carrying out their business in the US or with their American counterparts, the costs of ICT products will certainly rise.
- There are no replacement products either, as no other country can match China in this regard.
- Its presence in the US entity list will send ripples through these supply chains, disrupting not just American but global markets as well.
- In this era of complex interdependence, such sudden disruptions in supply chains will not only hurt Chinese businesses in the US and elsewhere, but also damage the US economy as well as its reputation as a business destination.

## **5. ISIS & INDIA**

### ***Why in news?***

- ISIS regaining its international notoriety soon after its defeat in Syria

### ***Where did ISIS emerge?***

- Islamic State of Iraq and Syria was earlier known to be the al-Qaeda in Iraq.
- US troops and allied Sunni militias defeated al-Qaeda in Iraq during the 2007 war, but didn't destroy it.
- In 2011, the group began rebuilding, and in 2012 and 2013 it freed a number of prisoners held by the Iraqi government, who then joined its ranks.
- Meanwhile, the group saw an opportunity in Syria, where peaceful protests descended into violence in mid-2011 and 2012.
- It began establishing a presence in Syria in mid-2011 in order to participate in the fight against Bashar al-Assad's regime, a move that helped it gain fighters and valuable battlefield experience.
- In 2013, the group once known as al-Qaeda in Iraq now based in both Syria and Iraq rebranded as ISIS.
- ISIS aims to create an Islamic state called a caliphate across Iraq, Syria and beyond.
- The group is implementing Sharia Law, rooted in eighth-century Islam, to establish a society that mirrors the region's ancient past.
- ISIS's revenue comes from oil production and smuggling, taxes,



ransoms from kidnappings, selling stolen artifacts, extortion and controlling crops.

### ***What is the present status of ISIS?***

- In 2018 US President Donald Trump announced rapid withdrawal of American troops from Syria with a tweet falsely claiming that ISIS has been defeated.
- Although coalition forces have been successful taking back territory that was once part of the ISIS caliphate, militants continue to control a small swath of land near the Euphrates River.
- According to estimates the number of ISIS members in Iraq and Syria as high as 30,000.
- In March 2019, the Syrian Democratic Forces announced that ISIS has lost its final stronghold in Syria, bringing an end to the so-called caliphate declared in 2014.
- What is the role of US in containing ISIS?
- In 2014, the United States announced a comprehensive strategy for destroying ISIS in both Iraq and Syria.
- The campaign centers on an air war against ISIS in both countries and the provision of arms and training to local allies on the ground the Iraqi army, the Kurdish Peshmerga, and “moderate” Syrian rebels.
- Iraq has generally been the priority, but that’s been shifting as Kurdish

forces made advances against ISIS in Syria.

- And US-Kurdish-Iraqi cooperation has pushed ISIS back significantly from its early high point.

### ***What are the instances of reemergence of ISIS?***

- ISIS seems to be fast regaining its international notoriety as a major threat to global peace and security.
- US has also warned that ISIS could likely resurge in Syria within six to twelve months and regain limited territory.
- In recent weeks, there has been an upsurge in ISIS-linked activities in Syria, Iraq and other parts of the world.
- ISIS claimed responsibility for Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka stating that attack is an act of revenge for ISIS’s defeat in Syria.
- A day after the attacks in Sri Lanka, ISIS tried to carry out an attack on a state security building in Riyadh but Saudi forces foiled the attack and arrested all 13 suspects.
- ISIS is also said to have gained a foothold in Congo and the terror group’s news agency has claimed to have assaulted a military barracks in the area.

### ***What are the factors behind the reemergence of ISIS?***

- ISIS leadership has adopted new strategic directive in which it does not



seem keen on reinstating the territorial Caliphate but called for the adoption of a more shadowy, unconventional campaign, on the lines of Al-Qaeda.

- This approach leads to attack on ISIS's enemies and exhaust them in all of their capabilities human, military, economic and logistical and in all matters.
- The absence of a political solution in Syria and the unpopularity of the Iraqi government among the Sunni community are the reasons for the continuing support for ISIS in the region.
- There is also a growing threat of dispersed ISIS fighters returning to re-instate the ISIS proto-state.
- American military and intelligence assessments report that thousands rather than hundreds of ISIS fighters and planners seem to have slipped out of the caliphate and are still at large in the region.
- ISIS fighters have slipped through Iran into the Pakistani province of Baluchistan and into Afghanistan.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS OF ISIS'S REVIVAL FOR INDIA**

### **Why in news?**

- Recently official news agency of ISIS claimed that the group has established a IS province in Kashmir.

### **What is ISIS's plan on India?**

- Far from over, the ISIS threat may have become deadlier internationally and seems more intent on exploring new pastures, particularly India.
- ISIS is at present increasingly focusing on India, the organization sees India as promising territory and is intent on aggravating Muslim-Hindu tensions there.
- ISIS plans series of highly sophisticated and coordinated attacks by establishing much wider network of unknown ISIS affiliates and local religious organizations extending deeper into India and Bangladesh.
- ISIS named a certain Abu Muhammed al-Bengali as its new emir in 'Bengal' and issued a direct threat to carry out strikes in India and Bangladesh.
- ISIS's masterminded behind Colombo attacks had already radicalized several Indian youths in different parts of South India.

### **What are the speculations on IS province in Kashmir?**

- After its fall in Syria the ISIS is in stress forging ties with local surrogate groups in Asia and Africa.
- The proclamation by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that it has established a 'province' in India appears to be a case of hollow propaganda and far removed from reality.
- It is true that the police in Kashmir



have described it as 'pure propaganda'.

- Though apparently seen as information hype, Indian intelligence agencies have been put on high alert.
- ISIS claims did not elaborate on the geographical limits of the so-called province.
- Various reports on the movement of ISIS leadership after the fall of the caliphate in Syria finds that the organizational leadership is moving eastward closer to India.

#### **What is India's opinion on this issue?**

- Kashmir issue is primarily a territorial and political dispute as opposed to a purely religious/Islamist conflict.
- Consequently, ISIS has failed to establish its footprints in the Kashmir Valley.
- Furthermore, cross-border terrorist groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad are in opposition to the concept of a pan-global Islamic Caliphate.
- Kashmir police officials are of the considered view that militants have no organizational link to the ISIS as such and are only motivated by their ideology.
- Threat ISIS poses to India, and South Asia in general, is as real as it is for any other major region or state.
- What are the possible threats of ISIS to India?
- For the time being, it could be inferred that the ISIS top brass is under

tremendous pressure as it is fighting for its very survival.

- At the same time ISIS would continue to float its brand image of the global caliphate and be in constant search of 'feudal support' at local bases.
- If the ISIS leadership were to shift eastwards, the entire terror network can take up a different paradigm altogether.
- A vanishing ISIS could turn out to be lethal, with splinters of violence emanating randomly in every possible direction.
- They may not be powerful enough to take on a conventional army, but a deadly combination of suicide bombers and lone-wolf attacks could be bothersome.
- In addition, ISIS may clash with other terrorist outfits and more bloodshed could be on offer.

## **7. IRAN-USA CONFLICT**

#### **Why in news?**

- US has issued orders for the deployment of troops in the Persian Gulf.

#### **What is the historic account of US-Iran relationship?**

- The US and Iran are at loggerheads since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which witnessed the overthrow of the Shah, an American ally in the Middle East, and brought Iran under a clerical regime antagonistic to the US and its involvement in regional



politics.

- US sanctions in the 1980s and 1990s were intended to check Iran's regional activities and compel it to cease support for terrorism.
- After the discovery of Iran's clandestine nuclear programme, the US focus shifted to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.
- Thus, the Iran Non-proliferation Act (later renamed Iran-North Korea-Syria Non-proliferation Act) was enacted to prevent transfer of material and technology that can help Iran acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).
- But despite US sanctions, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports detailing Iran's violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which it had signed in 1970, and UNSC resolutions imposing sanctions, Iran continued to pursue and expand its nuclear programme.
- The statement of Iranian leaders on various occasions that their nuclear programme is only meant for civilian purposes and that the country is not developing nuclear weapons did not convince the US and the international community of Iranian intentions, especially as Tehran continued to drag its feet on opening all its nuclear facilities for inspection by the IAEA.
- Nonetheless, an antagonistic relationship between the US and Iran did not prevent them from coordinating foreign policy moves in

case of need such as in post-war Iraq and Afghanistan.

- Such occasional coordination, however, did not lead to negotiations on Iran's controversial nuclear programme until the advent of Barack Obama.

### ***What is the role of JCPOA in US-Iran Ties?***

- Guided by prevailing foreign policy debates in the US on the need to "pivot to Asia" and cater for the larger strategic challenge posed by a rising China and get out of the quagmires in Afghanistan and Iraq, Obama decided to recalibrate US policy towards the Middle East including Iran.
- As a result, the US joined the P5+1 (representing five members of the UNSC plus Germany) efforts to curb Iranian nuclear activities through negotiations.
- After a series of UN resolutions, international economic sanctions, IAEA investigation of Iranian nuclear facilities and several rounds of negotiations, hope arose of a deal between P5+1 and Iran.
- In 2015, the P5+1 and Iran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to restrict Iran's nuclear enrichment activities and prevent Tehran acquiring nuclear weapons capability in the immediate future.
- Subsequently, UNSC resolution 2231 was adopted, endorsing the JCPOA and affirming that full implementation



will lead to the lifting of economic sanctions.

- While the international community responded positively to the developments and termed the JCPOA as a step in the right direction to resolve the standoff on Iran's nuclear programme, two important regional countries in the Middle East, Israel and Saudi Arabia, disagreed.
- While Israel openly criticized the move, Saudi Arabia conveyed its displeasure by starting its own civilian nuclear programme.
- Nonetheless, both sides continued to implement the provisions of the deal, though some Iranian actions, especially its testing of medium-range ballistic missiles in 2015 and 2016, raised concerns in the US and EU over Iranian commitments.
- But the Obama administration did not take any drastic measures and continued to ease sanctions on Iran as part of its commitment to the JCPOA.

### **What is the reason behind USA's withdrawal from JCPOA?**

- In 2018, President Trump announced the decision to withdraw from the deal, accusing the Iranian regime of pursuing a regional agenda of harming core US interests in the Middle East.
- Announcing the decision, President Trump termed the Iranian regime as "the leading state sponsor of terror"

and argued that Tehran "exports dangerous missiles, fuels conflicts across the Middle East, and supports terrorist proxies and militias such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Taliban, and al Qaeda."

- He also termed the JCPOA as "defective at its core" since it would have allowed Iran to eventually acquire nuclear weapon capability even if Tehran were to fully comply with its provisions.

### **What are the factors responsible for US-Iran tensions?**

- **Iranian nuclear issue** - While Iran has always maintained that its nuclear programme is for civilian and peaceful purposes, the US and its allies in the region refuse to believe that Iran's programme is only meant for producing electricity or for medical purposes ever, no independent international agency including IAEA has corroborated the US-Saudi-Israeli fears in this regard.
- For instance, the February 2019 IAEA report on verification and monitoring of the Iranian nuclear programme states that Iran continues to abide by the provisions of the JCPOA and that there is no reason for any doubts on secret or unverified nuclear facilities that might violate Iran's non-proliferation commitments.
- Yet, the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia refuse to fully believe both the guarantees given by the Iranian





regime and reports produced by the IAEA, and claim that Iran has secret facilities in violation of the NPT and UNSC Resolution 2231.

- **Iran's missile programme** - Iran has a robust military establishment that has developed medium- and long-range ballistic missile capabilities.
- Even after signing the JCPOA, Iran continued to develop and test ballistic missiles.
- Iran defends its ballistic missile programme as meant for national security and not in violation of UNSC Resolution 2231 since the missiles are not capable of carrying nuclear warheads.
- **Regional Military Expansionism** - Iran proceeds with regional military expansionism and supports non-state actors including Hezbollah, Hamas, Ansar Allah, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU) and Shia militias in Syria.
- The US and its regional allies see this as threatening their national security and regional interests.
- In US administration's view Iranian military expansionism and support for Islamist militias undermine US national interests and threaten Israeli and Saudi security (which are the close allies of the US).
- **Iran action post US withdrawal** - Post US withdrawal from the JCPOA Iran warned the other signatories, namely UK, France, Germany, Russia

and China to take concrete measures to reduce the impact of US sanctions on the Iranian economy in the next 60 days, failing which it might be forced to retract from the agreement.

- The statement attracted criticism from European countries that wish the remaining parties to continue abiding by the agreement.
- However, developments since the US withdrawal from JCPOA have created serious doubts about its sustainability and have raised tensions between the US and Iran.

#### ***What are the recent acts of USA in this regard?***

- After withdrawing from the JCPOA, the Trump administration re-imposed economic sanctions on Iran including on its export of crude oil which came into full effect on November 05, 2018.
- However, a waiver was offered to eight countries (China, India, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Greece, Italy and Taiwan) on importing Iranian oil for 180 days, which came to an end on May 02, 2019.
- In April 2019, the US decided not to renew the waivers (Significant Reductions Exceptions (SREs)) on Iranian oil exports and designated the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) including its elite Qods Force as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).
- US Department of Defense has



approved the movement USS Arlington an amphibious warship in the Persian Gulf region.

- Its movement bolsters the existing US naval presence in the region and underlines the fact that the US might be preparing for use of force against Iran.

#### ***What is the plan of Iran in this regard?***

- After the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and re-imposition of sanctions, Iran stepped up diplomatic efforts to convince the European Union (EU), Russia, India and other countries to continue doing business with Iran. In general, it received a positive response.
- In 2019, Germany, France and Britain announced the establishment of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), called the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), to “facilitate legitimate” trade between the EU countries and Iran.
- However, the US threat to impose secondary sanctions under the might prevent European companies from defying US sanctions.
- This can multiply economic troubles for Iran which is already facing a serious recession on account of the renewed US sanctions.
- Iran has the ability to deal with economic troubles given past experience of surviving under harsh international sanctions.

- Iran is likely to employ the coping mechanisms used in the past to mitigate the impact of sanctions.
- This means that the intended effect of the sanctions can be reduced through informal business activities as well as special arrangements for financial transactions with interested Russian, Chinese, European, Turkish and Indian companies.

### **8. INDIA-IRAN RELATIONS**

#### ***What is the issue?***

- US sanctions on Iranian oil export seriously affects India in economic and political aspects.

#### ***What is the toll of US sanctions on Iran?***

- Apart from sanctions on Iranian oil export, US further tightened Iran’s sources of revenue, Trump signed an executive order to “impose sanctions with respect to Iran’s iron, steel, aluminum, and copper sectors,” considered to be its “largest non-petroleum-related sources of export revenue”.
- As mentioned earlier, the US has also threatened to impose secondary sanctions on entities that engage in business activities with Iranian businesses, sectors or individuals listed under US sanctions.
- These are comprehensive sanctions intended to apply “maximum pressure” on Iran, help curb its nuclear, missile and regional military activities, and compel it to seek



renewed negotiations with the Trump administration.

- Resultantly, Iran has been facing extreme economic troubles as many international companies that had started doing business in Iran in the aftermath of the signing of the JCPOA in 2015 have left or are contemplating leaving the country to avoid being penalized by the US.
- Iran's exports have been curbed, causing a decline in state revenues and the Iranian Riyal has devalued leading to a sharp rise in inflation, estimated at 40 to 50 per cent in March 2019.
- Curbs on the iron & steel and manufacturing sectors have led to a significant drop in economic growth and loss of jobs.
- Economic troubles and inability to provide relief to the Iranian people suffering from hardships had caused unrest even before the repositioning of US sanctions.

#### ***What are the areas of Indo-Iranian economic ties?***

- Energy is the most important component of bilateral trade and Iran contributes significantly to India's energy security.
- Iran has been one of the top three suppliers of crude oil to India for over a decade, except during the period 2011-15 when it was under international sanctions.

- India also buys natural gas from Iran and hence the total value of energy imports from Iran is even higher, accounting for 80-85 per cent of its overall imports from Iran.
- The important aspect in bilateral relations is India's involvement in the development and operationalization of the Chabahar Port.
- India deems the port as a gateway for its trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- India, Iran and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement during the to develop the port as a transit and transport corridor.

#### ***What are the implications of Iranian Sanctions for India?***

- Economic implications - Recent US-Iran conflicts have placed India in a difficult situation given its growing strategic partnership with the US, on the one hand, and strong bilateral ties with Iran, on the other.
- It faces a pre-JCPOA-like situation having to deal with the US pressure while simultaneously working to secure its interests vis-à-vis Iran.
- Most importantly, the US insistence on not renewing the waiver or SRE on Iranian oil imports poses a challenge for New Delhi as Iran is India's third largest oil supplier.
- This means that Indian companies will either have to stop buying oil from Iran or resort to a Rupee payment mechanism as was done in the past.



- Political consequences - If India were to stop sourcing oil from Iran, it will affect bilateral relations.
- Moreover, giving in completely to US pressure and cutting off Iranian oil imports does not comport with India's pursuit of an independent foreign policy and its endeavor to maintain strategic autonomy.
- On the other hand, if India were to continue to buy Iranian oil, say by sidestepping US sanctions, it is likely to impact the strategic relationship with the US.

#### ***What are the options before India?***

- India is not directly affected by US sanctions on Iran though Indian companies involved in the Iranian automobile, iron & steel and mining sectors will be affected due to additional US sanctions on these sectors.
- The Chabahar Port also does not come under US sanctions and hence Indian investments and involvement in it will not be affected.
- It might not be difficult for India to meet the shortfall in crude oil imports due to US sanctions on Iran.
- According to forecasts by the International Energy Agency (IEA), global oil supply is expected to outpace demand throughout 2019 because of the surplus available in the international oil market.
- While US shale production is expected to grow rapidly, the higher flows from countries such as Nigeria, Libya and Iraq have already offset losses from the decline in Iranian exports.
- Moreover, countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the US have publicly announced their willingness to help meet the shortfall in crude oil that India might face due to sanctions on Iran.
- Then there are countries such as Iraq, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Angola, Mexico, etc. which are among the top ten sources of oil for India and have the capacity to increase production and exports in case of a rise in demand.
- Therefore managing the economic aspect of continued flow of oil to India might not be difficult.
- India can resort to buying Iranian oil through one or more informal arrangements including: devising a Rupee payment mechanism to overcome the sanctions; joining hands with the EU, Russia and China through the INSTEX mechanism; teaming up with a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) initiative to defy US sanctions.
- The second and more plausible option is to continue negotiating with the US to either secure a formal waiver or to have an informal understanding to buy Iranian oil.
- In the meanwhile, India can offer to Iran to enhance its investments in the Chabahar Port development project as



well as consider initiating other developmental and connectivity projects to strengthen linkages to Afghanistan, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

- This will help India not openly defy the US or subvert its policy towards Iran but also at the same time ensure that its relationship with Iran is not completely derailed and it is also able to pursue an independent foreign policy.

## **9. THREATS OF MOIST INSURGENCY IN INDIA**

### **Why in news?**

- In Maharashtra 15 Commandos of the elite 'C 60 group' were killed in an IED blast.

### **What is an IED?**

- It is a homemade bomb, constructed from military or non-military components.
- IEDs consist of an initiating mechanism, a detonator, an explosive charge, and a collection of projectiles like ball bearings or nails that produces lethal fragments upon detonation.
- IEDs can be made from many different kinds of objects and materials, including fertilizers, TNT, and other explosives.

### **What are the instances of IED explosions in India?**

- Recently Office of a major political in Jharkhand was partially damaged by an Improvised Explosive Device [IED].
- In April 2019, a member of the legislative assembly of a major political party lost his life in the Maoist den of the state of Chhattisgarh, and again due to an IED blast.
- In May 2019, 15 commandos of the elite 'C 60 group' were killed in an IED blast as they were travelling in a private vehicle on a patrol mission in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra.
- 22 out of 28 security officials lost their lives due to IED blasts in 2019, while 41 of 67 officials had died in such explosions in 2018.
- However, only seven security personnel among 74 were killed in IED blasts in 2017, indicating a surge of IED explosions in the last two years.

### **What are the threats posed by Maoists?**

- The IED again was suspected to have been planted by the Maoists as a trap for the security forces.
- This series of events appear a bit weird when, in fact, the five decade old Maoist insurgency has been on the wane since 2012, with the security forces holding the upper hand.
- The point to note here is that, since 2009, there was a steady decline in



Maoist activity in Maharashtra and, in that context, the particular IED blast killing 15 elite commandos is a matter of concern.

- It is reported that the Maoists are presently using various types of IEDs : from command-wire IEDs to victim-operated as well as radio-controlled IEDs.
- Maoists learned the use of IEDs from Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE].
- The Maoists are also prone to using Claymore mines or directional IEDs which could be fitted to a tree.
- In India over 60 per cent of the casualties among the security forces have been caused by explosives or IEDs.

#### ***Why Maoists are choosing the IED's in the first place?***

- The insurgent group has depleted manpower compounded by the lack of fresh recruits and a continuous loss of top leadership, thus Maoists of late have switched to the IED-model to inflict blows to the security forces with minimum loss on their side.
- They meticulously wish to avoid frontal confrontation but at the same time gain an apparent tactical victory in the propaganda space.
- The use of IEDs is not a novel technique that the Maoists are putting into effect now, rather they have been doing it since long.

- It is expected that for some time to come the Maoists would focus more on low-end technology of the IEDs to inflict as much damage on the security forces and dent their morale.
- This tactic might, by and large, continue till regrouping takes place and fresh recruitment is on the rise.
- Thereafter, while the use of IEDs would continue, however the intensity of their use would expectedly go down with greater focus on reaching the third stage of the 'strategic offence' in the guerrilla campaign.
- Presently, the Maoists are in the 'strategic defence' phase and playing on the back foot.
- By the character of IEDs it's so easy to assemble and hide, though the army conducts regular Road Opening Parties (ROPs) for 'sanitizing' roads before any military movement, yet IEDs remain a potent threat.
- Cutting across geography, ideology and/or purpose, IEDs appear to be consistent and standard weapons against the 'state forces' used by insurgents in this asymmetric war.

#### ***What measures are needed in this regard?***

- Prediction of IED events requires a set of information derived from both human as well as technical sources, followed by analytical inference deduced from the data.
- Naturally, persistent surveillance can



improve the capabilities of the security forces.

- Incidentally, till date, intelligence gathering remains the most powerful weapon against the IEDs.
- From the past and recent IED events it does not mean that the security forces would not follow standard operating procedures while dealing with the insurgent in a difficult topography.
- Being huddled together in a single vehicle would obviously make them vulnerable.
- Leakage of information to the other side should be prevented at all costs.
- Research on detecting and containing the IED menace needs to continue, with emphasis on less exotic and cost-effective techniques.
- The CRPF is in the process of upgrading their IED detection equipment and Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) unit to reduce casualties in the ongoing tussle with the insurgents.
- The Maoist insurgent would continue to use the low-end technology to extract as much leverage as possible, while state forces need to exercise caution, exhibit patience and wait for the earliest opportunity against the ultras.

## **10. SINGAPORE'S PROTECTION FROM FAKE NEWS ACT**

### ***Why in news?***

- Singapore passed the Protection from Online Falsehood and Manipulation Act (POFMA) 2019.

### ***Why Singapore enacted POFMA?***

- Singapore has enacted POFMA to prevent the communication of false statements of fact and enable measures to counteract the effects of such communication.
- To suppress the financing, promotion and support of online locations in Singapore that repeatedly communicate false statements of facts.
- To enable measures to be taken to detect, control and safeguard against coordinated inauthentic behavior and other misuse of online accounts and bots.
- To enable measures to be taken to enhance the disclosure of information concerning paid content directed towards a political end.

### ***What are the significance of POFMA?***

- One of the challenges facing the world community is regarding the classification of a piece of information or news being spread on cyberspace as hateful or fake.
- It is not clear as to when such news is to be considered an innocent prank or



a law and order problem or a threat to national security.

- POFMA attempts to resolve this dilemma by stating that a piece of news is deemed to be fake and worthy of action if and only if it meets two criteria.
- Firstly, it should be a false statement of fact, secondly communication of this false news is likely to affect the security of Singapore or be prejudicial to public health, safety, tranquility or finances or be prejudicial to Singapore's relations with other countries or influence the outcome of elections or incite feelings of hatred, enmity/ ill will or diminish public confidence in the state or its institutions.
- The act empowers Minister in the Singapore government competent to classify news as fake and take appropriate action to deal with such news.
- It also empowers the Competent Authority to issue a "Stop Communication" direction, and empowers the Minister to direct the Information Communication Media Development Authority (IMDA) to order the internet access service provider to disable access to an online location for all end users by issuing an "Access Blocking Order".
- An Internet Intermediary has been classified as a person providing internet intermediary services (like

social networking services, search engine, content aggregator, internet based messaging service, video sharing services, etc.).

- Targeted Correction Direction - wherein the internet intermediary that has been used as a medium to propagate the false information is required to send a correction notice within a specified time limit to all the end users in Singapore who had accessed the false information.
- The act also deals with Declaration of online locations, such a Declaration happens "when an online location is responsible for propagating three or more different false statements.
- Once an online location has been "Declared", its owner is thereafter required to inform its declaration status to all end users who access that online location.
- By implementing POFMA, Singapore has demonstrated a resolve to fight the growing spread of false news and misinformation campaigns.

#### ***What are the reactions on POFMA?***

- The major points in favor of the bill is that POFMA provides a measured and calibrated approach with the affected party given the right to appeal at every step.
- It provides greater oversight to the courts and makes a clear distinction between "opinion" and "fact".
- It defines a "statement of fact" as "a reasonable person seeing, hearing





or otherwise perceiving it would consider to be a representation of fact”.

- Publication of the correction notice along with the false statement of fact by the concerned person/ internet intermediary will result in greater authentication of online statements and lead to the eradication of false content.
- Google, in its response to POFMA, said that the new law could hurt innovation, which is a crucial element in the hi-tech sector.
- Some tech firms, media houses and activists are of the opinion that POFMA could be used to curb freedom of speech and be a major impediment to a free internet.

#### ***What are the takeaways for India?***

- For India there is a need to acknowledge the role of social media and other ICT companies as important stakeholders in ensuring national security, and their expertise and skill set need to be optimally utilized for the same.
- India's IT (Amendment) Act 2008 has adequate provisions for monitoring and blocking internet sites and services.
- A proactive approach with the help of ICT companies can help in identifying messages and posts which are going viral and further analytics of these can assist in segregating messages

that are likely to result in the commitment of illegal acts.

- Restricting the number of forwards has been a major step in this direction as it helps in slowing down message propagation.
- Cyber education of our population in detecting and making considered decisions with respect to false statements will reduce the appeal and spread of such messages.
- All messages which are being originated and propagated on the internet needs to be uniquely identified and tracked so that the anonymity of the message originator, recipient and propagator can be removed and this would in turn lead to a more responsible user behavior.
- Prompt and exemplary action needs to be taken against persons and organizations resorting to the spread of false messages both within and outside the country.
- Lastly, collaborative and cooperative partnership needs to be forged with likeminded countries to identify the origin of misinformation campaigns and initiating counter measures against the perpetrators.
- The recent signing of the “Christchurch Call to Action” declaration by India is a step in the right direction.