



# IAS PARLIAMENT

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## GIST OF IDSA

NOVEMBER 2019



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## **IDSA NOVEMBER 2019**

### **1. INDO-SAUDI RELATIONS**

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

Indian Prime minister visited Saudi Arabia for building bilateral ties.

#### **What is the status of Indo-Saudi Arabia relations?**

- India, the world's third-largest oil consumer, imports 83 per cent of its oil needs.
- Saudi Arabia is its second-biggest supplier after Iraq.
- It sold 40.33 million tonnes of crude oil to India in 2018-19 fiscal, when the country had imported 207.3 million tonnes of oil.
- India buys some 200,000 tonnes of LPG every month from Saudi Arabia.
- India is the source of the largest expatriate community in Saudi Arabia with a 2.6 million strong diaspora.

#### **What are outcomes of the recent meeting?**

- India and Saudi Arabia signed a raft of key pacts to significantly ramp up ties in several key sectors including oil and gas, renewable energy and civil aviation.
- The two sides signed an agreement to establish the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council to

coordinate decisions regarding strategically important issues.

- Indian PM will head the council and the crown prince and it will meet at an interval of two years.
- The two leaders condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and agreed to step up bilateral security cooperation.
- They also discussed cooperation in agriculture, oil and gas, maritime security, innovative technology, renewable energy, trade and investment between the two countries during their talks.
- An agreement was signed on bringing coordination between e-migration systems of the two countries.
- A MoU was also signed to roll out RuPay card in the Kingdom making Saudi Arabia the third country in the Persian Gulf after the UAE and Bahrain to introduce India's digital payment system.

#### **What are the prospects of Indo-Saudi Ties?**

- India and Saudi Arabia ranked 63rd and 62nd respectively in the world bank's Ease of Doing Business report.
- A joint collaborative effort of both economies will transform the Southwest Asia sub-region.



- The two sides also vowed to further enhance defence industries collaboration and security cooperation.
- The first naval exercise between the two nations will take place by end of this year or early next year.
- The two countries also decided to move ahead on the ambitious west coast refinery project in Raigarh in Maharashtra which will involve investments from Saudi oil giant Aramco, UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and Indian public sector oil firms.

#### ***What are the reasons behind Saudi's interest on India?***

- Enhanced ties with India is important for Saudi Arabia as well.
- The kingdom is facing economic strain in the wake of persistently weak oil prices.
- The U.S. is no longer as dependent on the region for energy as it used to be, thanks to the shale boom.
- Demand from China is also receding in the wake of a slowdown.
- Besides, competition in the oil market is expected to tighten with a sanctions-free Iran entering the global economic mainstream without any bars.
- In this context, India is a vital market for Saudi Arabia, There is believed to

be friction between Islamabad and Riyadh over the former warming up to Tehran and their growing energy cooperation.

- Pakistan also refused to join Saudi Arabia's war coalition that has been bombing Yemen for the past one year in the name of fighting the Iran-backed Shia rebels.

## **2. VICTORY OF RAJAPAKSA AND INDIA'S CONCERNS**

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

Gotabaya Rajapaksa is elected as the new president of Sri Lanka.

### ***Who is Gotabaya Rajapaksa?***

- As the defense secretary from November 2005 to January 2015, Gotabaya Rajapaksa was seen as a strong leader who put an end to the nearly 30-year-old civil war in the country.
- Once in office, Rajapaksa promptly chose his elder brother Mahinda Rajapaksa, former two-term president himself, as his prime minister.
- The return of the two Rajapaksas in the recent polls is not surprising against the backdrop of the bombings in Sri Lanka in April, which killed more than 250 people and injured more than 500.

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

- India, the neighboring regional great



power, is likely to be worried because the Rajapaksas are seen as being sympathetic to China.

- However, the new president has made repeated statements that his government would like Sri Lanka to be a “neutral country” and that “Sri Lanka won’t do anything that will harm India’s interests.”
- Gotabaya was also critical of the previous government giving Hambantota Port on a 99-year lease to China and said, “We have to renegotiate.”
- He went on to add that giving land as investment for developing a hotel or a commercial property was not a problem but “the strategically important, economically important harbor, giving that is not acceptable.”
- While this rhetoric may be read as reassuring to some, it is too early to say with certainty how Gotabaya will balance India and China.
- The anxieties about the Rajapaksas come from how their past behavior toward China is perceived in New Delhi, and they will not be easily quelled.
- Despite his current criticism of the Hambantota deal, Mahinda was the one who initiated the deal for developing Hambantota port in 2017 when he was president.
- The port also happens to be in his parliamentary constituency. While it should be noted that the port development offer was initially made to India and then handed to China, that has not affected the extent of Indian concern.
- Chinese nuclear submarines also made port visits to Colombo port in 2014, which caused great consternation in India.
- More broadly, China’s deep pockets are evident in the number of economic and infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, including investments in the Colombo International Financial Center, Colombo-Kandy highway, oil refineries, and a \$1.4 billion port city next to the Colombo port.
- India has its own list of pending Sri Lankan development projects that it wants to be part of, including an LNG terminal in Kerawalapitiya near Colombo, a 50-100 MW solar power plant and development of an oil tank farm in the eastern district Trincomalee and the East Container Terminal at the Colombo port.
- These concerns notwithstanding, there clearly has been an effort by both India and Sri Lanka to patch up their ties.
- **What is the way forward?**
  - The China question is only part of the



recalibration that will be needed to get India-Sri Lanka relations on the right track.

- Indian interests in Sri Lanka are also driven by other important factors, including post-war reconciliation and respect for the dignity of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka and its cultivation of ties in its immediate neighborhood and the wider Indian Ocean.
- As a result, New Delhi will be watching carefully how the new Rajapaksa government's tenure plays out both at home and abroad in Sri Lanka.
- But beyond what Sri Lanka does, India will also need to do its part as well.
- Rather than focusing on building the case against China, New Delhi must step up its efforts to show what it is for.
- India can never match Beijing's economic wherewithal to make a difference to Colombo's developmental requirements.
- But it can carve out a niche role in some areas and also partner smartly with likeminded strategic partners like Japan to make an economic and strategic difference in Sri Lanka.

### **3. XI'S VISIT TO NEPAL**

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

Recently Chinese President Xi visited Nepal as a gesture of improving bilateral ties.

#### ***What are the Chinese projects being established in Nepal?***

- **Trade and economic contacts** - China remains the second largest import partner to Nepal with bilateral trade worth \$1.523 billion in 2017-18, a shift from mere \$445 million in 2009.
- Further, their commitment to promote exchange and cooperation in the fields of culture, education, tourism, traditional medicine, media, think tanks and youth at different levels re-emphasise a comprehensive outlook to their relations.
- **Connectivity projects** - Kathmandu-Pokhara-Lumbini Railway project, Implementation of various highway projects in the Himalayan valley Promoting transit-transport connectivity and plans to promote three north-south corridors in Nepal.
- Nepal, a signatory to the BRI, signed the Transit Transport Agreement (TTA) with China in 2018, which in a way assured Nepal of access to seven transit points in China – four seaports (Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang and Zhanjiang) and three land ports (Lanzhou, Lhasa and Xigatse).



- **Energy** - Based on the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2018, both countries agreed to cooperate in the field of energy, hydropower, wind power, solar power, biomass energy and other kinds of new energy.

### **What are the highlights of the recent visit?**

- Chinese administrator Xi's recent visit to Nepal could be viewed within the spectrum of China's 'neighbourhood' policy that Beijing has been reinforcing for some time through greater strategic presence and multi-modal connectivity plans, and importantly, offering attractive financial aids.
- Bilaterally, Xi's visit to Nepal was the first-ever by a Chinese President since 1996.
- Stressing on a 'renewed friendship', Xi's joint statement outlined a resolute Chinese goals to promote "trans-Himalayan multi-dimensional connectivity network" in the region.
- A similar approach could be noticed in China's interactions with other immediate neighbours such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar in particular.
- With more than 20 agreements, his visit outlined an ambitious Chinese approach not only to promote the

flagship BRI-funded projects but also to link it strategically with its various trans-Himalayan connectivity projects that are being discussed between the two sides.

- While the ports would be enabling Nepal to end its transit dependence on India slowly, the same also operated as an assurance of continued economic as well as strategic relations between China and Nepal.

### **What are the benefits for Nepal?**

- The Chinese attempt is to gradually change Nepal "from a landlocked to a land-linked country".
- For Nepal, inclusion in BRI means a much-wider strategic platform to connect with China as much as with the entire Himalayan region.
- Nepal's enthusiastic stance towards the BRI comes as an advancement of China's greater connectivity ambitions with a focus on the Himalayan region.
- An upgrade in the China-Nepal relationship comes amidst Beijing's effort to increase its influence in South Asia.
- Further, the locus of geo-politics has been increasingly shifting towards the Indo-Pacific which is also encouraging China to accord more importance to Nepal and other immediate neighbours in the region.
- **What does this means for India?**



- Importantly, any advancement in the China-Nepal relations should also be perceived from the perspective of Beijing's rising footprint in the Indo-Pacific.
- In fact, under Xi, China's South Asia policy has been heavily influenced by connectivity and infrastructural initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), deep seaports at Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Gwadar in Pakistan and Chittagong Port in Bangladesh.
- These projects give China strategic access into the Indian Ocean and expand its presence in the region to protect its sea lanes of communication (SLOC).
- Beijing also acknowledges Nepal's fervent yet cautious approach towards China and its connectivity initiatives, in the context of India's staunch condemnation of the CPEC as well as the BRI.
- Nepal acknowledges the need to tread carefully between India and China so as to preserve its growth and territorial integrity.
- Aware of Nepal's dependence and historically close relations with India, China too would be cautious not to hurt its developing partnership with

India at the cost of its new strategic partnership with Nepal.

- Beijing takes serious note of India's rising profile as a power, mainly as a strategic pivot in the Indo-Pacific construct.
- The same is encouraging China to view its relationship with India through a new spectrum, specifically after Xi's visit to India for the Mamallapuram 'informal summit', just ahead of his trip to Nepal.
- Hence, China would aim to forge a partnership with Nepal without disrupting its growing engagement with India.

#### **4. ISIS CRISIS**

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

After the execution of ISIS head new caliph of Islamic state as been assigned.

##### ***How potential was ISIS chief?***

- Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the brutal founder of 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria' (ISIS), was executed by US forces recently.
- Baghdadi carried a bounty of US\$ 25 million announced by the American Government, making him the world's most wanted terrorist.
- In 2014, after declaring himself Caliph, Baghdadi ran a global terrorist network in over a dozen countries.
- His motive behind establishing a caliphate differed in concept from al





Qaeda, under whom Baghdadi and his men had earlier operated.

- He succeeded in establishing a 'caliphate' which lasted three years (2014-17) and included half of Syria and one-third of Iraq.
- At its peak, ISIS was the size of Britain with a population of around 12 million; a new normal for a 'non state actor' to challenge the very concept of 'nation state'.
- Baghdadi managed to evade capture for almost a decade by adopting stringent security measures, as he did not trust even his closest associates.

#### ***What are recent happenings in ISIS?***

- The taking out Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, by the American Special Forces in Syria, was followed by the elimination of the supposed 'replacement' Abdullah Qardash and spokesman Abu Hassan al-Muhajir.
- These are significant blows that may be deemed as decisive in the global campaign against ISIS, from which the terror conglomerate may arguably never recover.
- In fact, these major setbacks come on the heels of the decimation of the ISIS proto-state straddling Syria and Iraq earlier this year and could be more devastating for the terror group.

- However, Recently ISIS announced it as selected a new leader new leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi.
- Nobody outside a likely very small circle within ISIS have any idea who their new leader 'Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi' is".
- Thus, struggling for its own survival, the ISIS seems to have appointed an incognito Caliph both for itself and the global Muslim community, who even if he exists appears too risky for it to identify for now.

#### ***Why this concerns the globe?***

- As many of the ISIS' high to mid-level leadership has been gradually eliminated in recent years, the big question is whether the group has any senior members left in their midst with any pretensions of being a theologian to assume the title of 'Caliph', or is the banditry of the group now fully in view.
- Perhaps, the invention of a fictitious Caliph, as the presently released name of the ISIS Caliph might suggest, may not be a bad idea for the group to gain mythic longevity.
- In spite of the severe crisis facing ISIS in Syria and Iraq at present, the threat of terrorism that the group and its affiliates pose at least in the short-to-medium term cannot be discounted.



- The ongoing civil unrest sweeping Iraq, Syria and Lebanon following acute political and economic mismanagement has worsened prospects for aspiring youth of the region, providing fertile ground for terrorism to flourish.
- With the escape of several ISIS inmates from Kurdish prisons in the wake of Turkish incursion of Syria, the likelihood of the group replenishing its ranks has increased.
- Then there is also the threat of ISIS carrying out reprisal attacks in the near future.
- The possibility of total decimation of ISIS gives the world an opportunity to take the fight against global terror to several localised jihadist groups operating across the world before they forge new cross-continental alliances and give rise to a larger terror conglomerate to fill in the prospective void left by the ISIS.
- The focus should be on the terror groups operating in failed or failing states, particularly in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Central and East Africa as well as in Southeast Asia.
- It is possible that the ISIS may not survive the decisive blows it has sustained in recent times.
- However, countries around the world, particularly the Indian security agencies, should remain vigilant against terror attacks in the near to medium term and the possibility of ISIS morphing into a more lethal variant of the erstwhile group.
- The ISIS has tried to make inroads even into India by claiming to establish 'Wilayah of Hind' (India Province).
- It has called for jihad by raising sentiments around Kashmir.
- Around 100 Indians are believed to have joined ISIS in Syria.
- The ISIS will continue to make concerted efforts to recruit cadres from India and its neighborhood.
- It can also collude with other terrorist organizations to carry out violent actions in India and pose a threat to overseas assets as well.

## **5. OPINIONS ON THE ROLE OF CHIEF OF DEFENSE STAFF**

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

The Chief of Defence Staff should not become another interposed level between the Defense minister and the service chiefs.

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

- For several years, al Qaeda has been steadily increasing its influence in Asia and Africa as the global focus has been fixed on ISIS.



### **What is the post of Chief of Defense Staff?**

- Indian Prime minister announced post of Chief of Defense Staff in his Independence Day speech 2019.
- The CDS is a high military office that oversees and coordinates the working of the three Services.
- It offers seamless tri-service views and single-point advice to the Prime Minister on long-term defence planning and management, including work force, equipment and strategy, and coordination in operations.
- The role of the CDS becomes critical in times of conflict.
- As of now India has Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC), The senior-most Chief of Staff is appointed to serve as a Chairman until he retires.
- The current Chairman is the Chief of the Army Staff.
- The CoSC is a toothless office in the manner of its structure.
- The post did not further tri-service integration, resulting in inefficiency and an expensive duplication of assets.

### **What should be the role of CDS?**

- **Charge of new organizations** - Retention of existing warfighting structures, while the CDS takes control of newer organizations being

set up for tackling future threats, has some merit.

- Development of future technologies and means to face emerging threats in the cyber, space, missiles domain, nurturing of AI-based platforms, usage of drones for various roles and such modern conflict realities is indeed important.
- **Cost-effective development** - These advancements are extremely costly, and the CDS can facilitate optimal, cost-effective integrated development and deployment of such structures.
- Modern war and warfighting has tremendous economic costs.
- Defence budgets are invariably inadequate to meet the “wish lists”, and intense prioritization of capabilities is inevitable.
- The CDS can be the vital point to undertake such prioritization and rationalization, and, therefore, can play a stellar role in the perspective planning and development function.
- Considering the high cost of future technology, the CDS can also contribute towards optimization of existing structures.
- Such review of existing establishments and manpower should also be an assigned task for him.
- **Integrating Workforce** - Future conflict situations would possibly



need integrated application of fighting formations and resources, with unitary operational control of deployed elements.

- The CDS would be better placed for integrated employment of war fighting potential, and therefore logically needs to be part of the operational control chain.
- His tri-service position makes him the most suited driver for the integrated application of warfighting resources and facilitates unitary control in integrated operations.

#### **What lies ahead?**

- In the debates on CDS, one often heard the designated profile as “providing single-point military advice”.
- National security decisions are always taken after a multitude of advisory inputs from a number of agencies, duly analyzing ramifications and end state probabilities.
- The CDS is better termed as the primary military advisor, with the service chiefs also remaining important military advisors.
- The CDS should not become another interposed level between the Raksha Mantri and the service chiefs, whose access to the minister should remain as prevalent.

- The CDS also has a primary advisory role, and therefore should not be boxed into administrative efficiency roles, but must be in the operational control chain.
- In the interim, the CDS may not override the operational responsibility of the service chiefs, and in due course, his operational responsibility can expand and become more “hands-on”.
- Thus, it is clear that the CDS would play a far more critical role in the national security apparatus, than the three service chiefs.

## **6. SIGNIFICANCE OF CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF**

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

The complexities involved in appointing the first Chief of Defense Staff need to be addressed in order to resolve the issues in defence sector.

#### **What are the issues in Indian Defence sector?**

- **Defence Planning** - India has so far prepared 13 defence five-year plans (FYPs), beginning with the first plan post the war with China in 1962.
- These FYPs are in addition to numerous other procurement plans articulated in the aftermath of the Kargil conflict in 1999.
- These plans and in particular the processes involved in formulating



them have, however, hardly been satisfactory.

- The major deficiency of the planning process has been the lack of inter- and intra-service prioritization, leading to duplication of efforts, haphazard capability development and sub-optimal utilization of resources.
- The reason for such a lackluster planning process has been the glaring absence of an overarching institution with the requisite authority to translate India's overall defence requirements into a holistic capability development plan while keeping in view the scarcity of resources, technological advancements, self-reliance goals and politico-diplomatic engagements with other countries.
- The Department of Defence Production (DDP) is often accused of conflict of interest because of its dual responsibility of being the administrative department for both production and quality assurance, the latter function being provided largely through the Directorate General Quality Assurance (DGQA).
- **Absence of an overarching agency** - This has led to individual service headquarters (SHQ) to plan and project requirements that are not necessarily in harmony with those of other services.

- This is not how major countries in the world undertake defence planning.
- **Delays in procurement** - Two critical stages of procurement formulation of qualitative requirements (QRs) or technical specifications and conduct of trials – that have the maximum bearing on subsequent decision making and speed of procurement are undertaken at the SHQ level.
- These two stages of procurement are, however, most susceptible to delays and controversies because of a variety of reasons, prominent of them being lack of expertise and professionalism.
- **Lack of Integrated Command** - Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) is an integrated theatre command, it lacks teeth due to differing perceptions and priorities of the contributing services.
- The Commander-in-Chief of the ANC (CINCAN) is constrained in requisitioning critical assets from the services to perform its assigned task.

#### ***How Chief of Defense staff can address the issues?***

- With the creation of the post of CDS, India has an opportunity to rectify this historical deficiency in its defence planning process.
- The CDS could be entrusted with the task of defence planning, subject to overall guidance and directions from



the DPC.

- It could be mandated to prepare and own a holistic 15-year plan from which would follow the five-year capital acquisition plan and the two-year procurement plan.
- The CDS could be the overall in-charge of defense procurement.
- It would be ideal if the CDS is made responsible for all aspects of defence diplomacy, subject to clear policy guidelines from the government.
- All initial vetting of bilateral/multilateral exercises and visits of higher military authorities - to name just a few aspects of defence diplomacy - need to be centrally processed at the CDS level before it is finally approved at higher levels.
- The CDS, given its tri-service nature, would be ideally suited to take up the responsibility of quality assurance.

## **7. DEBATES ON AIRCRAFT CARRIERS**

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

The expensive nature of aircraft carriers stirs the quintessential debate within policy circles.

### ***What is the significance of Aircraft carriers?***

- The aircraft carrier is the largest and most complex of all warships.
- The carrier has retained its prestige, making it an essential component of

navies and indispensable to their strategic interests.

- Mature and strong navies have continued to build, operate and exploit Aircraft carrier for a multitude of roles including
  1. Power projection,
  2. Land attack from sea,
  3. Securing sea lines of communication (SLOCs),
  4. Security of island territories,
  5. Diplomacy,
  6. Numerous non-combat missions.
- All major maritime powers have aircraft carriers in their naval inventories.
- The United States (US) operates 11 nuclear powered carriers, with the intent to maintain a twelve-carrier force into the future.
- The United Kingdom (UK) recently commissioned HMS Queen Elizabeth, with a second carrier, HMS Prince of Wales, in the final stages of construction.
- Russia, Italy and France all operate one aircraft carrier each, while Japan is in the process of converting its helicopter carrier into an aircraft carrier.
- The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy today is operating two operational aircraft carriers and the third is under construction.



- It is likely that the PLA Navy will have four operational aircraft carriers by 2028, with the eventual aim of having a 10 aircraft carrier navy by 2049.

### **What is India's position on aircraft carriers?**

- India's Experience - In 1961, India joined a select band of nations that had mastered the arduous task of carrier operations with the commissioning of Vikrant.
- 25 years later, India became one of the few nations to operate two aircraft carriers with the acquisition of Viraat in 1986.
- India currently operates only one carrier, INS Vikramaditya (erstwhile Admiral Gorshkov of Russia), which was commissioned in 2013.
- Even as India's first indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC-I), to be named Vikrant, is being manufactured by the Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) and is supposed to be completed in 2021, it has already embarked on its follow-on induction, likely to be named Vishal (IAC-II), which is expected to be much larger and more potent.
- A three-carrier force would allow the Indian Navy to operate one carrier task force (CTF) comfortably on each seaboard.

### **What are the advantages solutions proposed?**

- **Not an easy Target** - The aircraft carrier along with its escorts is an intimidating force in both offence and defence and therefore targeting a carrier battle group is never going to be an easy task for the adversary.
- Successful targeting of such a massive force would require the adversary to coordinate simultaneous strikes by multiple weapon systems from different platforms.
- **Affordability** - The aircraft carriers are expensive assets, but only when one considers its initial cost of acquisition.
- When this cost is divided over the average life of an aircraft carrier, which could be anywhere from 40 to 45 years, it works out similar to two destroyers with an average life span of 25 years.
- This includes the fact that an aircraft carrier over its lifespan might service squadrons from two different technological generations.
- Islands Better than Carriers
- **Only option** - Mobile military assets are crucial for strategic defence at sea because of the necessary flexibility and depth for maritime operations.
- Therefore, a mobile and flexible capability that concentrates on



surveillance effectiveness and firepower will not only remain relevant but perhaps the only prudent option.

- The possible scenarios wherein carrier capability would be indispensable are many. Some of the more compelling ones are as follows:
- **Power Projection** - The increasing utility of aircraft carriers as a 'maritime mobile runway' can be better explained by the 70/80/90 rule.
- Water covers about 70 per cent of the earth's surface – approximately 80 per cent of the world's population lives in the littorals – and about 90 per cent of all trade travels by sea.
- Therefore, the aircraft carrier will dominate the battlespace in the area of operations for its uniqueness especially the speed at which it can arrive along with its escort group.

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

- Nations strive to build maritime assets that can exert influence over a wide spectrum of operations.
- These include operational assets like ships, submarines and aircraft that are used to influence the outcome of a maritime conflict.
- There are also assets like survey vessels, hospital ships and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) platforms that project

'soft-power' and therefore influence the nation's ability to be a net-security provider for the region.

- However, the ability to project a nation's maritime power across the seas, at the very shores of a potential adversary, as a measure of national influence is reflective of the nation's maritime strength.
- Justifiably, the only asset that can claim to exert such influence over large nautical distances is the aircraft carrier.
- Therefore, considering the wide expanse to be covered on both sides of the Indian Peninsula, and the possibility of concurrent operations on either side, it is imperative that India maintains an operational carrier battle group on both sides, and at all times.

#### **8. THREAT TO PRIVACY - PEGASUS**

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

- Indian journalists were spied using malicious code Pegasus through WhatsApp.

##### **What is Pegasus?**

- Pegasus is a surveillance technology developed by Israel-based NSO Group is inadequate and, more unfortunately, far from reassuring.
- According to NSO group Pegasus is exclusively licensed for government intelligence and law enforcement





agencies and not just to anyone who wants it.

- WhatsApp's revealed that Indian journalists and human rights activists from India were among some 1400 people globally spied upon using Pegasus
- Pegasus is malicious code, which exploited a bug in the call function of WhatsApp to make its way into the phones of those select users, where it would potentially have had access to every bit of information.
- The Spyware exploited a vulnerability in WhatsApp's video call feature that allowed attackers to inject the spyware on to the phones simply by ringing the number of a target's device.

#### ***How potential is Pegasus?***

- Pegasus is believed to be one of the most sophisticated spyware in the world.
- The spyware can hack both iOS and Android devices by targeting vulnerabilities in the operating systems.
- It is capable of running in the background without the targeted user ever knowing about the hack.
- Pegasus works by sending an exploit link, and if the target user clicks on the link, the malware or the code that

allows the surveillance is installed on the user's phone.

- Once Pegasus is installed, the attacker has complete access to the target user's phone.
- Pegasus can be used for mass surveillance; it would seem likely that only selected individuals would be targeted.

#### ***What is the status on Indians who were hacked?***

- WhatsApp has claimed that it sent a special message to approximately 1,400 users who it believed were impacted by the attack, to directly inform them about what had happened.
- WhatsApp has not said how many people it contacted in India.
- By reports, at least two dozen academics, lawyers, Dalit activists, and journalists were alerted by the company in India.
- It is not known who carried out the surveillance on the Indian targets.
- There cannot be any national security without individual privacy
- The targeted users included activists, journalists, and senior government officials, among others.

#### ***What does this mean for Indian data security?***

- The Government says, it is concerned over the breach of privacy of the



citizens of India and asked WhatsApp to explain the kind of breach and what is it doing to safeguard the privacy of millions of Indian citizens.

- In a country where data protection and privacy laws are still in a nascent stage, incidents such as this highlight the big dangers to privacy and freedom in an increasingly digital society.
- It is thus imperative that the Government sends a strong message on privacy, something that the Supreme Court in 2017 declared to be intrinsic to life and liberty and therefore an inherent part of the fundamental rights.

### ***What is the way forward?***

- India must recognize that national security starts with securing the smartphones of every single Indian by embracing technologies such as encryption rather than deploying spyware.
- The first thing it could do is to answer categorically if any of the governmental agencies used NSO's services.
- It is, therefore, extremely important for the Government to clear the air on this issue in no uncertain terms especially when WhatsApp had given information to CERT-IN, a government agency, even if without any mention of Pegasus or the extent of breach.