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Title 1. Iraqi MPs vote to expel U.S. troops (The Hindu Page 01)

Syllabus Mains: GS Paper II – International Relations

Theme West Asia

Highlights Context: In an extraordinary parliamentary session on Sunday in Iraq, its parliament has passed a resolution whereby it has called its government to end all foreign troop presence in Iraq.

- It has also urged to cancel its request for assistance from the US-led coalition which had been working with Baghdad to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).
- This backlash is due to escalation of tension between US and Iran after the killing of top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a U.S. strike in Baghdad.
- As per the resolution, the Iraqi government must work to end the presence of any foreign troops on Iraqi soil and prohibit them from using its land, airspace or water for any reason.
- This resolution was passed following retaliation by Iran in Iraq as several rockets fell inside Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, which houses the United States embassy and the **Balad Air Force Base**, an Iraqi air base housing US troops, in Baghdad on Saturday.
- In Iraq, Parliamentary resolutions, unlike laws, are non-binding. But this one is likely to be heeded as the Prime Minister of Iraq Adel Abdul Mahdi had earlier called on Parliament to end foreign troop presence as soon as possible.
- The U.S.-led coalition battling the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria said it had halted most of its operations against the militants for now to focus on protecting coalition forces and bases, amid soaring tensions with Iran.

Dated: 06. Dec. 2019

Title 2. Scoring a Foreign Policy Self Goal (The Hindu Page 10)

Syllabus Mains: GS Paper II – International Relations **Theme** Foreign Policy

Highlights Context: The article takes its cue from article published on 2nd January titled “New Worry of Depleting Diplomatic Capital”. The author says that recent domestic move of Indian government on Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) and Jammu and Kashmir might have international fallout and India may start losing political support at various international quarters. Thus, the government seems more interested in domestic political gains at the cost of international political fallout. **International Fallouts**

- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called the CAA “fundamentally discriminatory”
- The United States, arguably India’s best friend today, urged the country to “protect the rights of its religious minorities in keeping with India’s Constitution and democratic values”.
- The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) referred to CAA as not only “highly discriminatory and arbitrary” but also contrary to New Delhi’s “obligations under international human rights laws”.
- India’s External Affairs Minister pulled out of a meeting with senior members of the U.S. Congress after U.S. lawmakers refused New Delhi’s demands to exclude Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal — she has been critical of the Indian government’s policies in Kashmir — the message that went out was that India is unable to justify its own policies. Or that it does not bother with what others think of it. **Global**

Expectations

- If Indian government continues the path of risking diplomatic capital at the cost of domestic policies, then its stature in the world and its ability as a soft power to mould responses from responsible and powerful states might take a serious hit.
 - The article says that a great power, among other things, is a state that is willing to live up to certain global expectations and has the ability and willingness to help with system maintenance. India must not fall far behind in this regard.
 - Great powers have traditionally been supportive of India’s rise in the global order and have more or less stood by India in its pursuit of power and reputation. However, this might change sooner if concerns highlighted by international community are not heeded and if the government continues on its path of domestic preoccupations.
 - If there is change of power at Washington next election with Democrats winning the Presidential polls, then it might become more difficult for India to maintain steady relations with the US.
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- Both Moscow and Beijing will not support India either in order to consolidate their position in the new global order. **Way Ahead**
 - The MEA is busy firefighting not for international causes but for domestic ones pursuing corners of the world that CAA and Jammu and Kashmir lockdown is for the betterment of Indians which the international community is not buying.
 - The article ends by stating that instead of fighting internationally for domestic issues, India must re-focus on negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, initiating Afghan peace process and put together its activities for new initiatives in the Indian Ocean Region.

Dated: 06. Dec. 2019

Title 3. Spotting an Opportunity in changing fundamentals (The Hindu Page 10)

Syllabus Mains: GS Paper II – International Relations

Theme Trade War

Highlights Context: This article highlights the axis of USA-China-India amid increasing chasm between

China and US on one hand and developing ties between US & India on the other hand to balance the growth of China. The author ends up arguing that an upward trajectory in India- U.S. relations coincides with US China rivalry. In this article, the author has highlighted myriad fronts of co-operation and rivalry between US-China-India amid changing international situations. **Phase One Trade Deal between China & US**

- The “Phase One” trade deal between the United States and China gives both sides a reprieve, especially since the U.S. stayed its hand in not imposing additional tariffs worth \$160-billion in mid-December. (However, beyond trade, the chasm between US & China is growing)
- On Dec. 13, 2019, President Trump announced that the U.S. and China had agreed to a “Phase One” trade deal. Under the agreement, the U.S. will roll back tariffs on Chinese goods in exchange for more U.S. goods purchases and structural reforms from the Chinese side.
- According to Trump, he will sign the deal on Jan. 15, 2020 with Chinese representatives at the White House. If the signing goes as planned, it will represent the first agreement between the U.S. and China to reduce import duties since the two countries began implementing bilateral tariffs in July 2018.
- Further, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) has confirmed that the U.S. will reduce tariffs on \$120 billion of China’s exports from 15 % to 7.5 %.

Going beyond Trade

- Beyond trade, a technology war has erupted in the areas of artificial intelligence, digital space and 5G. Tensions have risen following the U.S.’s passing of the **Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019** and the proposed **Uighur Act**. (as a measure against growing human right violations in China)
- The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019, (presently awaits passing by Senate) addresses Hong Kong's status under U.S. law and imposes sanctions on those responsible for human rights violations in Hong Kong. (Hong Kong is part of China but has a largely separate legal and economic system.)
- The Act is US Federal law that requires the U.S. government to impose sanctions against Chinese and Hong Kong officials responsible for human rights abuses in Hong Kong, and requires the United States Department of State and other agencies to conduct an annual review to determine whether changes in Hong Kong's political status (its relationship with mainland China) justify changing the unique, favorable trade relations between the U.S. and Hong Kong. **Energy Concerns – China – Iran – US - India**

- Slack demand for energy and surplus production mainly by the U.S. had lowered oil prices, which was good news for India, given its huge imports.
- However, this scenario has changed after US attack in Baghdad killing Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, Commander of the Quds Force.
- China continues to buy Iranian crude oil and is its largest buyer. Reports suggest that China will invest \$280-billion in developing Iran’s oil, gas and petrochemicals sectors and even station Chinese security personnel to guard Chinese projects.

- Dependence on China prevents Iran from criticizing China on its policies in Xinjiang. In tensions with the U.S., Iran sees in China a sympathiser.
- China's interest in weakening the dollar in the global energy market has grown and China is forging closer ties with Iran and other countries which do not share good equation with US. This facilitates China's naval presence in the western Indian Ocean, including the Strait of Hormuz. **On Technology**
- China's ambitious thrust on artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous vehicles and space technologies has made Donald Trump administration competitive. With tensions rising after the blacklisting of Huawei Technologies by the U.S., the fear of a high-tech war looms large.
- The big three Chinese high-tech companies, Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, together poured in \$5-billion in Indian startups in 2018. India could use this opportunity to try and force China to pry open its market to India's IT and other tech exports.

• The U.S.-China high-tech war threatens India's strategic autonomy. Yet India has decided to allow all network equipment makers, including Huawei, to participate in 5G spectrum trials. The outcome is not certain as India risks its data going into Chinese hands without adequate legal data protection in India. **On Regional Connectivity**

- India is neither part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) nor the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. It is absent from the Indo-Pacific Business Forum created by the U.S., Japan and Australia as also from the Blue Dot network.
- The US, Australia, and Japan have joined together to establish a trilateral "Blue Dot Network" to help develop infrastructure "in the Indo-Pacific and around the world". The plan was announced on the sidelines of the 35th ASEAN summit in Thailand.
- Blue Dot Network is seen as a counterbalance to China's extensive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Blue Dot Network aims to promote sustainable infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. But with no ASEAN leaders picking up the cause so far, it does not look like the network will gain much traction in the region.

• Thus, challenge for India will be to choose its own regional connectivity initiatives along with the regional partners. **Warfare – US-China-India**

- With the creation of a **U.S. Space Force** as a separate arm under the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. will seek to increase its superiority in network-centric warfare.
- As China's anxieties in the Asia-Pacific theatre grow, India may yet have to contend with a greater Chinese military presence on its periphery.
- **The Western Theater Command** created in 2016 is responsible for the border with India. It is the largest of China's military regions. The Tibet Military Command under it has been accorded a higher status than other provincial commands to widen its scope for combat preparedness.
- The Western Theater Command is one of the five military regions of China since 2016. Its jurisdiction includes Sichuan, Tibet, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Xinjiang and Chongqing.

• U.S.-China rivalry coincides with an upward trajectory in India-U.S. relations. This is important for equilibrium and multi-polarity in Asia, even as India and China try and build much-needed trust and cooperation. Personal Notes

Title 4. Challakere to ISRO's astronaut training hub. (The Hindu Page 01)

Syllabus Prelims: Science & technology

Theme Space technology

Highlights Context:

- As India is planning to Indian into the space through Ggaganyaan project, it has also planned to set up a world class facility for training astronauts.
- The centre will be established at Challakere in Karnataka.
- Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has proposed a Rs 2700 crore master plan to create infrastructure that will house its Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC).
- ISRO has decided to shift everything connected with events and planning of the HSP (Human Spaceflight Programme) to its campus at Challakere.
- It will be a self-contained facility there so that in future, whatever training and activities is taking place in Russia for the Gaganyaan crew can all be done at Challakere.

Need for such facility

- The country pays a hefty, unnamed sum to use such facilities abroad. The first set of four astronaut candidates for the first Gaganyaan mission of 2022 are to train in Russia.
- India has an ambitious program for space and this type of training facility is in the strategic interest of the country.
- There is a need to integrate facility which are related for Human Space Flight Program. Currently, HSP work is split Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram and the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru. The Institute of Aerospace Medicine of the Air Force has been roped in for their selection, basic and final training in Bengaluru.

Title 5. Iran dumps nuclear pact, says it won't respect limits (The Hindu Page 14)

Syllabus Mains: GS Paper II – International Relations

Theme West Asia

Highlights Iran dumps nuclear pact

- Iran's state television reported that the country will no longer abide by any of the limits set under the nuclear deal signed with six major powers in 2015.
- However, Iran said that its cooperation with the IAEA "will continue as before."
- The statement said Iran's steps could be reversed if Washington lifted its sanctions on Tehran.

- The decision came in the background of killing of top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike by USA.

Iran Nuclear deal / Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

- In 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany.
- It came after years of tension over Iran's alleged efforts to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran insisted that its nuclear programme was entirely peaceful, but the international community did not believe that.
- Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.