Attrition Warfare

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | International relations | Defence*

Why in News?

As tensions between the US, Israel, and Iran continue, both Washington and Tehran signal their readiness for a prolonged standoff & experts caution that the situation is evolving into a "war of attrition."

- **Definition** – War of attrition is a *military strategy* where a warring side seeks to exhaust its opponent's resources, personnel, and morale (will to fight) until the capacity to fight collapses.
- The strategy involves a large amount of equipment, soldiers, and supplies to maintain sustained pressure on the enemy.
- **Origin –** The term attrition derived from the *Latin word* "attritionem", meaning "a rubbing against" or "wearing away".
- **Key Features** – In attrition warfare, a warring side with greater resources seeks to wear down its opponent's resources to the point of collapse.
- The victory comes not from quick battles but from endurance and persistence.
- **Historical Context** – This strategy has been used since ancient times, famously associated with World War I trench warfare, where stalemates forced armies to rely on overwhelming numbers and resources.
- **Comparison with Manoeuvre Warfare**
    - **Manoeuvre Warfare** – Focus on strategic positioning to disrupt an opponent's forces without heavy losses.
    - **Attrition Warfare** – Focus on prolonged fighting to drain the enemy.
- Both strategies are often interlinked.
- **Examples**
- **World War I –** Western and Italian fronts became stalemates due to trench warfare - Allied powers, with superior men and resources, eventually prevailed through attrition.
- **West Asia (1969–1970)** – Egypt vs Israel over the Sinai Peninsula.
- **Egypt's strategy** – Artillery bombardment → limited crossings → extensive operations → full-scale crossing, with an aim to drain Israel's military and economy.
- **Current US-Israel-Iran Tensions** – The confrontation is showing signs of becoming a war of attrition.
- The US & Israel have superior military and technological power, but Iran's approach appears to be survival—absorbing punishment longer than adversaries can sustain costs.

- **Risk –** Prolonged conflict could escalate into a regional conflagration, with global economic and security fallout.

Reference

Indian Express | What is war of attrition?

