Division between the EU and the U.S. - Iran's Crisis

What is the issue?

With the US, under Trump, abandoning the nuclear deal with Iran, the division between the EU and the U.S. over Iran is becoming a pressing security challenge.

What is the situation now?

- Following the U.S.'s move, Iran has deliberately violated its terms by producing more low-enriched uranium than the agreement permits.
- The European nations seem worried about a growing list of violations of the deal by Iran.
- Iran recently seized a U.K.-flagged tanker in the Strait of Hormuz.
- But despite all these, they want to preserve the deal (JCPOA - the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action).
- The Iran crisis reflects the strains between the U.S. and Europe over the U.S. President's maximalist political approaches.

What are the key differences?

- The major reason is that Europe needs to keep the Persian Gulf open to guarantee the flow of oil and ensure its economic security.
- However, on this issue, France and Germany have refused to join the American plan called "Project Sentinel."
- [This aims to protect ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz.]
- Moreover, Europeans are fearful of getting involved in another war in West Asia.
- In fact, they do not trust that Mr Trump would keep his word and that he would not attack Iran.
- Also, the Europeans have been trying to find ways for their businesses to avoid the effects of American sanctions on Iran.
- France, Germany and the U.K. have developed a mechanism to trade with Iran legally using a trading system known as INSTEX (Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges).
- It has been designed to permit countries to trade with Iran without the use of American dollars, so as to avoid the U.S. financial system.
- For many European companies, the risk of facing sanctions because of trade with Iran is more.

- It outweighs any gain from trading with the Islamic Republic and more specifically the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) which is targeted by the U.S. as a terrorist organisation.
- America's allies are wary of Trump's administration's intentions to provoke a war with Iran no matter what the consequences are for the rest of the world.
- Evidently, no European country wants to trigger a military confrontation with Iran.
- This is because it would draw in other regional states and non-state actors.

How does the future look?

- European powers could play a major role in ending U.S.-led economic warfare against Iran.
- They could contribute to building a more effective diplomatic process in West Asia.
- However, the reality is that at this time the situation is at a deadlock.
- It is high time that the Trump administration will need to make decisions given the costly setbacks that some of its recent policies have seen.
- For the Iranian government, the most immediate priority is to ask for help from France and Germany in finding a way out of the current economic crash dive.
- This is crucial for containing public unrest and preventing social instability inside the country.
- But ultimately, Iran will need to show some signs of flexibility.
- By this, possibly, the arrangements arrived at in the nuclear deal could be enlarged and applied to other key issues.

Source: The Hindu

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