Evaluation of a US-Iran War Event

What is the issue?

- Tensions are escalating between the U.S. and Iran over the nuclear deal and oil import sanctions. Click here to know more
- With U.S. on the brink of another major war in West Asia, with Iran, it is essential to assess the rationale and implications of such an event.

What are the recent happenings?

- It is Israel that provided the intelligence inputs that set off the latest clash.
- With this input, the U.S. claims that Iran could target its interests or the interests of its allies in the region.
- So it has already sent an aircraft carrier group and a bomber squadron to the Gulf.
- U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton is currently driving the Iran policy, and he has repeatedly called for regime change in Tehran.
- Alongside, in West Asia, there was a mysterious attack on four oil tankers off the UAE coast.
- Also, a drone attack on a Saudi pipeline allegedly by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels of Yemen worsened the crisis in Yemen.
- The situation in the Gulf is so dangerous now that a mere spark could trigger a full-blown conflict.

Why is a war with Iran irrelevant now?

- **West Asia** is still struggling to recover from its past US interventions.
- If the U.S. goes to another war in the region, it will be morally calamitous and strategically baseless.
- **Iran does not deserve** this treatment as it has largely complied with the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal.
- It was US (Mr. Trump) that violated the deal first by pulling out of it and reimposing sanctions on Iran.
- In a better world, Iran's adherence to the agreement would have been appreciated and the country allowed to reap the promised benefits.
- **A unilateral military action** by the U.S. will not get the approval of the UN Security Council as Russia and China remain firmly opposed to it.
- Even the U.S.'s European allies, including the U.K. which supported the Iraq

war, remain committed to the nuclear deal.
- The U.S. might get the support of Saudi Arabia and Israel, but it is not certain whether even these would like to get dragged into a full-blown war.
- A unilateral military action would also weaken international institutions and create more fissures in the Atlantic alliance.

What are the dangers of it?

- **Iran is not Iraq; nor is it Libya** is something which U.S. has to take note of.
- The U.S. went to war with Iraq after a decade of crippling sanctions that it imposed affected Iraq's economy and military.
- Moreover, Iraq was totally isolated.
- Arab countries had turned against Iraq after the first Gulf war, Iran was its enemy, and Russia was still in retreat mode.
- So the U.S., the U.K. and their allies marched to Iraq and easily toppled the Saddam Hussein regime in just a few weeks.
- Iran, on the other hand, is a country that lives in a state of permanent insecurity, and it has always been battle-ready.
- While Iran is not a strong conventional military force and is crippled by sanctions as well, Iranian policymakers were aware of these challenges.
- That is why they adopted a 'forward defence' doctrine of expanding Iranian influence across West Asia through non-state militia groups.
- Iran has Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, and the Islamic Jihad in Gaza.
- So in the event of a war, Iran could activate these groups, triggering multiple conflicts, drawing in several other countries.
- This possibility makes even "a limited strike" on Iran dangerous.
- Besides, Iran could block the Strait of Hormuz, which lies between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.
- Almost one-third of the world's LNG and 20% of total oil productions flow through this route, blocking which could have wider economic ramifications.

How has U.S.'s war record been?

- The U.S.'s war record is not as great as is often presented to be.
- It is the world's pre-eminent military power not because of the results of the wars it has fought but because of its military might.
- It is ironic that the U.S. is escalating tensions in the Gulf at a time when it is negotiating with the Taliban to find an exit from Afghanistan.
- When the War on Terror began, the U.S. promised to go after every terrorist in the world.

- But 17 years later, al-Qaeda is still alive, the Islamic State and other terror organisations are operating across the world, and the Taliban controls almost half the territory in Afghanistan.
- In Iraq too, the U.S. failed to suppress the post-Saddam unrest and the country slipped into a sectarian civil war.
- In Libya, the promise was liberation from Muammar Gaddafi's dictatorship when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization intervened in 2011.
- Gaddafi was killed, but eventually the country sank into chaos and is still to recover from it.
- In Syria, the U.S. made an indirect intervention and demanded President Bashar al-Assad's ouster until it was outwitted by the Russians.
- Evidently, the U.S. had failed to get the desired outcome in all these countries.

What could the U.S. do?

- As U.S. President, Barack Obama seemed to have realised the challenges in Iran.
- This is primarily why he attempted to curtail Iran's nuclear programme through diplomatic means, and it was a notable success.
- President Trump says he wants talks with the Iranians; but there is no realistic programme for the same from him.
- If talks were his primary objective, the U.S. should not have withdrawn from the nuclear deal.
- Mr. Trump should have used the bonhomie created by the deal to expand ties and address concerns such as Iran's regional activism.
- If he truly wants to change the course, he should start with de-escalation of current tensions.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering