Iran's Retaliatory Attacks on US

Why in news?

Iran launched ballistic missile attacks at American troops in two military bases in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Iran's General Qassem Soleimani.

What happened?

- Iran targeted Erbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan in the north.
- Al-Asad in the west, which is some 400 km away from the Iranian border, also faced attacks.
- The attacks were both an act of retaliation and a show of its capability.
- It is the first direct attack on U.S. forces by Iran in the current round of tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

What is Iran's rationale?

- Foreign Minister Javad Zarif invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- It allows member-states to take military actions in self-defence if they come under attack.
- He said Iran has taken and concluded "proportionate measures in self-defence".
- This can thus be interpreted that Iran is now ready for de-escalation.
- The U.S.'s decision to kill Soleimani was practically an act of war, forcing the Islamic regime to respond.
- Iranian military leaders and hard-line politicians issued wide range of rhetoric on retaliation.
- However, despite these, what Tehran actually did was to launch a calculated, limited strike.
- It is as much an act of revenge as an opportunity for de-escalation.

What was U.S.'s response?

- There were no American casualties, and only minimal damage was caused in the attacks.
- Mr. Trump, in his response, has signalled that he was backing away from further conflicts with Iran.
- If the U.S. had responded with air strikes or missile attacks inside Iran, it could have triggered further attacks from Iran.

- This would have set off a cycle of violence and aggression.
- A direct shooting match between the U.S. and Iran would have been disastrous for the whole of West Asia.

What is the significance?

- Iran may be a weaker power compared to America's conventional military might, but it is a formidable rival.
- It not only has ballistic missiles and a wide range of rockets but also a host of militias under its command across the region.
- It could have made an invasion and air strikes on its territories extremely costly for the U.S. and its allies.
- It could also have disrupted global oil supply by attacking the Gulf waterways.
- By any assessment, a direct war would have been catastrophic.
- Fortunately, Mr. Trump did well to step back and not push the Gulf region into a disastrous cycle of violence and destruction.

What is the way forward?

- The international community should now push for a diplomatic settlement of the crisis.
- It must find ways to revive the nuclear deal which could bring long-term peace to the Gulf.
- Also, Iran should seize this opportunity for de-escalation.

Source: The Hindu

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