Israel-Hezbollah Tensions

Why in news?

Israel attacks Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon.

What is the story behind?

- Hezbollah is a Shia militia-cum-political party in Lebanon.
- Hezbollah and Israel have fought two wars before.
- They have been observing a tenuous ceasefire for 14 years.
- The recent attacks mark a significant escalation in the crisis that has been building up along the border in recent years.
- Recent tensions began after Israel targeted Iranian weapons and supplies within Syria.

Why Israel specifically targets supplies in Syria?

- In Syria, the Shia militias fought alongside regime fighters against rebels and Sunni jihadists.
- So, Israel fears that Iranian supplies to Hezbollah via Syria would leave them stronger.
- This would enhance Israel's security challenges in the northern border.

What was Israel's target in the recent attacks?

- In the recent attacks, Israel targeted an observation post.
- The Israeli Defense Forces claimed that this post was attacked as they were used by Hezbollah for intelligence collection.
- The raid shows the growing appetite of the newly formed unity government of Netanyahu.
- This government is under fire at home over its COVID-19 crisis handling, for war as a means to address the simmering border problems.

For Israel, how tough target Hezbollah is?

- In 2000, after 18 years of occupation of southern Lebanon, Israel was forced to withdraw mainly due to the fighting of Hezbollah.
- In 2006, Israel invaded Lebanon, aimed at destroying Hezbollah's military capabilities.

- But after a month of Israeli aerial and land attacks, Hezbollah fired hundreds of short-range rockets into northern Israel.
- Ever since, both sides have been wary of another open conflict.
- Israel, which bombed Gaza several times since its 2005 withdrawal from the strip, had been careful when it came to Hezbollah.
- The militants turned their focus to capacity building after the 2006 war, and, since 2011, to the civil war in Syria.

What is the axis formed?

- Syria has been a vital link between Hezbollah and Iran ever since the group was founded in the early 1980s.
- Iran has substantially increased its footprint in Syria, bolstering the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis.
- Israel sees this axis as a growing security challenge.
- Hence, it started the bombing operations in Syria, risking another conflict with Hezbollah.

What is next?

- The past two wars suggest that it would not be easy for Israel to defeat the battle-hardened Hezbollah fighters at their base.
- Hezbollah, on the other side, might resist an Israeli attack, but risks pulling Lebanon into a wider war.
- Lebanon is already battling an economic crisis, political instability and the after-effects of the Beirut blast.
- Both sides should avert such an outcome and stick to the ceasefire.

Source: The Hindu

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