Rising Tension in West Asia

Prelims – Current events of national and international importance.

Mains – GS II: International Relations

Why in News?

Recently, the tension in West Asia is rising with Israel growing more aggressive, the Trump administration turning more hostile and Iran retaliating with its diminishing strategic space.

What are the recent issues in West Asia region?

- **U.S. armed force in West Asia** – U.S. has deployed more fighter jets and its *second aircraft carrier* to West Asia.
- It had launched waves of *"pre-emptive" air strikes against Ansar Allah* (commonly known as the Houthis) in Yemen.
- Bombing the Houthis (pro-Iranian group) signals that the U.S. is fully on board in Israel's mini-regional war.
- **Israel's military campaigns** – It resumed its *bombing of Gaza,* killing over 400 Palestinians in overnight attacks and effectively ending the ceasefire that had been in place since January 2025.
- It carried out heaviest *air strikes in Lebanon* since the November 2024 ceasefire, targeting Hezbollah, a key Iranian non-state ally.
- **Iran's Nuclear Programme** – The President of U.S. had sent a letter to Iran to negotiate a deal on Tehran's nuclear programme.
- U.S. *wants Iran to give up its nuclear programme*, restrict its conventional military capabilities and sever ties with the axis.

How regional dynamics in West Asia is changing?

- **Israel's rise** – The *election of Mr. Trump*, who supports Israel's war policies, has given Tel Aviv the confidence to continue its mini-regional war without bothering about external pressure.
- The 2023 attack by Hamas in Israel made it to indulge in continuous *attacks in 2 fronts*
  - One focused on Gaza, and the other targeting Iran.
- It killed an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) general in Syria, and then bombed the Iranian embassy in Damascus.
- **Changes in Syrian government** – The *fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria* has disrupted Iran's regional axis.

Mr. Bashar al-Assad's Syria, Iran's only state ally in West Asia, had served as a crucial land bridge between Iran (through Iraq) and Hezbollah (in Lebanon).

- The new regime of Sunni Islamists that is *hostile to the Shia theocratic Iran* taking over Damascus, the supply route has been severed.
- **Iran's growing ambition** – It *stepped up its nuclear programme*, enhanced support for the network, particularly the Houthis, and *expanded its weapons capabilities.*

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran now possesses enough stockpile of 60% enriched uranium to make 6 nuclear bombs if further enriched to weapons-grade purity (90%).

- **Weakening of Hezbollah & Iran** – In Lebanon, *Israel has degraded Hezbollah's militant infrastructure* and decapitated its leadership.
- Its ability to rebuild itself depends on supplies from Iran has been disrupted and so it will remain weak militarily, which would in turn weaken Iran's overall deterrence.
- The Israelis are tightening the *ring of fire around Iran*.

Why destabilising Iran is a challenge?

- **Geographical advantages** – It is ring-fenced by mountains.
- **Safe military infrastructure** – Most of Iran's nuclear facilities are buried underground, some of them beneath mountains.
- Even a joint U.S.-Israeli operation may fail to eliminate them completely.
- **Technical knowledge** – Even if the facilities are damaged, Iran will still possess the *technical know-how to rebuild its military programme*.
- **Relatively stable government** – Iran, despite the occasional mass protests, has *no organised, militarised insurgency*.
- **Strategic advantage** – Its navy ***has the Strait of Hormuz***, a vital oil transit choke point of the world.

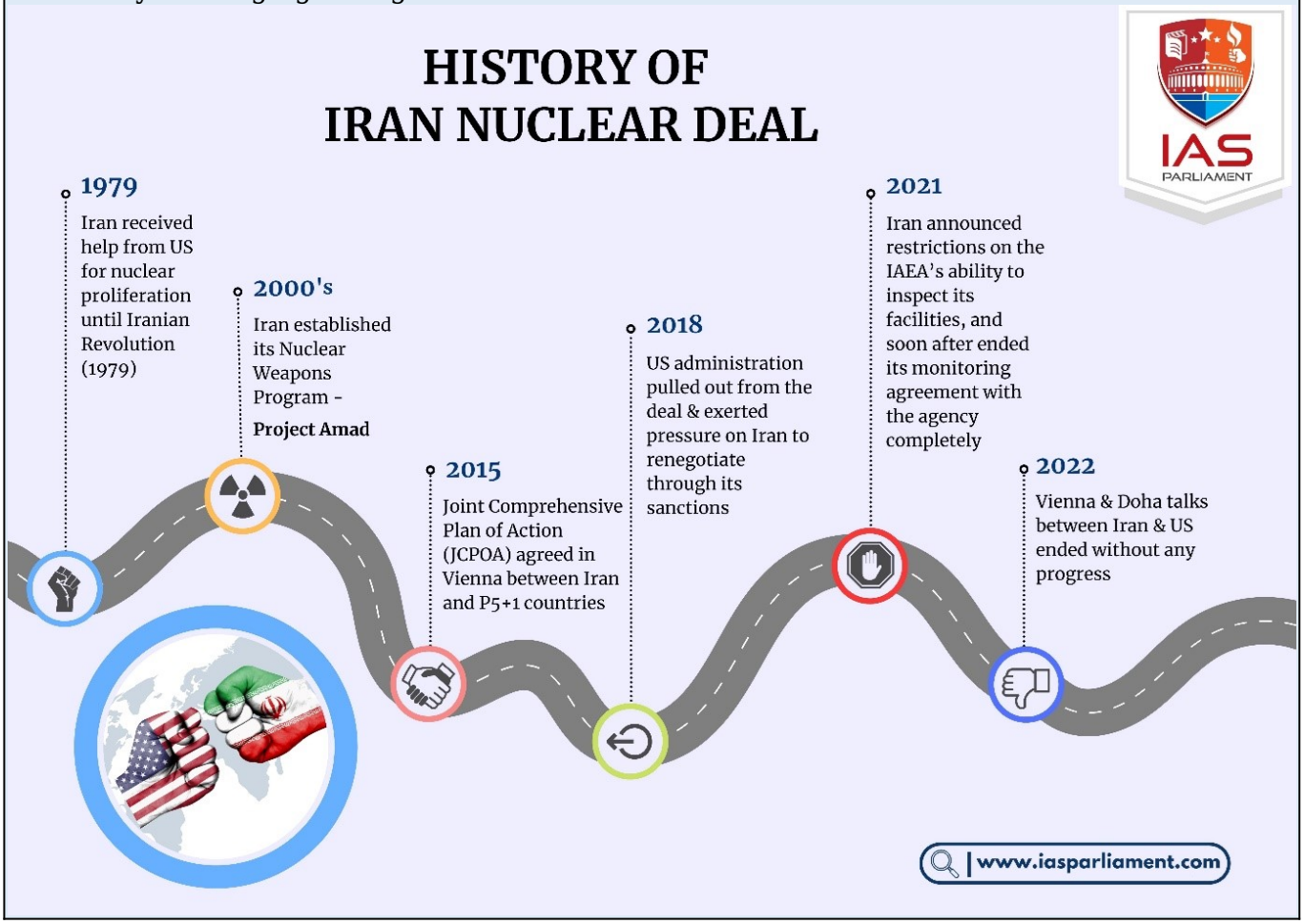
What lies ahead?

- **Diplomatic engagement** – Iran has expressed willingness to engage in "indirect talks", focusing on the nuclear programme, essentially a return to the 2015 framework.
- **Addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict** – Reviving meaningful peace negotiations based on international law and relevant UN resolutions.
- Supporting a two-state solution, if all parties involved are willing to engage in that process.
- **De-escalation of regional conflicts** - Efforts to reduce proxy wars and limit external interference.
- A coordinated international effort is needed to address the complex challenges facing the region.
- **Economic development** – Investing in economic development and creating opportunities for young people.
- This can help reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies.

Quick Facts

Iran's Nuclear Deal

• It is an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program reached in Vienna and is also called as *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA).
• **Signed in** – 2015.
• **Signatories** – It is signed between *Iran and P5+1* (China, France, Germany, Russia, UK, USA).
• **Failure of Iran nuclear deal** – While the deal restricted Iran's nuclear programme, it left its nuclear processing capabilities, extensive *ballistic missile programme untouched*.
• In 2018, *U.S. unilaterally withdrew* from the agreement and reimposed sanctions on Iran, effectively sabotaging the agreement.



Reference

The Hindu| Tightening Ring of Fire Around Iran

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