The Iran challenge - Iran Nuclear Deal under Joe Biden

What is the issue?

- When Mr. Biden assumes U.S. presidency on January 20, 2021, one of his most pressing early diplomatic challenges would be Iran.
- In this context, here is a look at the Iran nuclear deal, and the challenges and priorities in this regard.

What is the Iran nuclear deal?

- It is officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- It was signed between Iran and the P5, plus Germany and the EU in 2015.
    - P5 is the five permanent members of the UNSC - US, China, France, Russia, and UK.
- The deal aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear programme.
- Under the deal:

i. most of Iran’s enriched uranium was shipped out of the country
ii. a heavy water facility was rendered inoperable
iii. operational nuclear facilities were brought under international inspection

- In return, the deal involved lifting of international sanctions on Iran.

What are the challenges before Biden?

- When Joe Biden left the government in 2017 after having served as Vice-President, the U.S.-Iran relationship was totally different.
- But U.S. President Trump was critical of the deal and pulled the U.S. out of the JCPOA, and reimposed sanctions on Iran. Click here to know more.
- During the recent election campaign, Biden's promise was to take the U.S. back to the deal.
- But any such move would meet with strong opposition from its allies in West Asia, especially Israel.
- The assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh has escalated tensions in the region.
    - Iran has blamed Israel for the attack and vowed revenge.
    - Israel has neither confirmed nor denied reports of its involvement in the hit.
    - Any retaliatory actions by Iran could cause a further flare-up, even

leading to an open war.
- In turn, this could make diplomatic options for a Biden administration complex.

What is expected under Biden's presidency?

- After the election, Mr. Biden has reaffirmed his commitment to the nuclear deal.
- But he has said that he would seek to extend the restrictions on Iran (15 years, according to the JCPOA).
- He would also discuss Iran's "malign" activities in West Asia.
- This suggests that Mr. Biden would want amendments to the original accord.

How has Iran's response been?

- Mr. Trump had expected Iran to come to the table to renegotiate the deal. But Iran did not give in to the pressure.
- When the Trump administration exerted 'maximum pressure', Iran came up with 'maximum resistance'.
- The tensions took both countries to the brink of war twice:
  1. when Iran shot down an American drone over the Gulf in June 2019
  2. when the U.S. killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020

How does the future look?

- The question now is whether Mr. Biden, with an emphasis on diplomacy, would manage to restore the lost trust and be able to revive the deal.
- It is in everybody's interest that the nuclear deal is revived.
  - This would not only deny Iran a path to the bomb but also restore some order in the region.
- Mr. Biden will have to reassert himself and rein in America's allies from launching more provocative attacks on Iranian regime figures.
- He must press Iran to return to the terms of the agreement and further talks on the country's regional activities in return for economic and security assurances.
- Iran, on its part, should observe strategic patience and give diplomacy another chance.

Source: The Hindu



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