The Prospects of US-Iran Direct Talks

Why in news?

European-brokered efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal are likely to resume following US President Joe Biden's visit to the region.

What is the history behind the Iran Nuclear Deal?

- Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA or Iran nuclear deal) is the result of prolonged negotiations between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, UK, USA and EU) nations.
- It was quietly brokered by Oman in an attempt to repair its mistrust with Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution.
- The deal obliged Iran to limit its uranium enrichment programme which will be verified by an intrusive inspection regime.
- In return, US agreed to partially lift its economic sanctions on Iran.
- However this was not ratified in US Senate and was implemented through periodic executive orders to keep sanction waivers going.
- Later, Trump administration pulled out from the deal in May 2018 and exerted maximum pressure on Iran to renegotiate through its sanctions.

What happened aftermath the withdrawal of the U.S. from JCPOA?

- **Irans' response**- It began to move away from JCPOA's constraints incrementally- exceeding the ceilings of enriching uranium, stepping up R&D on advanced centrifuges etc.
- After the US strike on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander, Iran said that it would not commit to JCPOA's restraints but it will maintain cooperation with IAEA.
- **USA's side-** U.S. pushed ahead with its unilateral sanctions by widening the scope.
- By end-2020, U.S. had imposed nearly 80 rounds of sanctions targeting close to 1,500 individuals and entities in Iran.
- **Vienna talks**- The aim of the talks is to produce a road map for the revival of the JCPOA by addressing two critical issues — Iran's nuclear enhanced programme and American sanctions.
- The U.S. wants Iran to end its uranium enrichment and centrifuge development programmes and return to the 2015 agreement.
- Iran has rejected the offer now seeking more concrete measures from the U.S.
- The talks collapsed earlier this year as the Biden administration refused to remove the terrorist designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a critical arm of Iran's armed forces.
- **Doha talks**- The recent indirect talks between US and Iranian officials in Doha, Qatar, aimed at salvaging the Iran nuclear deal ended without any progress.

What is the way forward?

- Mr. Biden is facing pressure from America’s allies in West Asia, especially Israel, to include Iran’s weapons programme in the ambit of a fresh agreement.
- Iran is strongly resisting any attempt to expand the scope of the agreement.
- As negotiations go on, Israel has stepped up its shadow war with the Islamic Republic, targeting its military and nuclear personnel and weapons facilities.
- A key meeting of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty members convenes next month in New York.
- Iran has threatened to leave that bedrock bargain which limits the spread of nuclear weapons, in return for access to atomic technologies.
- The U.S. and Iran should start direct negotiations to overcome differences and find common ground on the deal.

References

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