The US's F-16 Package to Pakistan

Why in news?

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar blasted the United States for its move to provide Pakistan with the F-16 case for sustainment and related equipment.

What is the F-16 package about?

- **F-16 package**- It is a $450 million package of technical and logistical service for follow-on support of Pakistan's F-16 fleet.
- This means a life-time upgrade for Pakistan's existing fleet of F-16s.
- There is participation in several technical coordination groups, aircraft and engine hardware and software modifications and support, equipment support, manuals, precision measurement, and a range of related elements of aircraft maintenance.
- The proposed sale does not include any new capabilities, weapons, or munitions.
- This is the first American military assistance package to Pakistan after the Trump Administration ended defence and security co-operation with the country in 2018.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Report, the five largest spenders in military in 2021 were the US, China, India, the UK and Russia, together accounting for 62% of expenditure.

What are the speculated reasons for this action?

- **Killing of Zawahiri**- One of the reasons for the Biden Administration's reversal of Trump's policy on Pakistan, revolves around the killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul.
- **Breaking China's hold in Pakistan**- Amidst the Russia-Ukraine war, the US is trying to break China's hold on Pakistan.
- **Disapproval with New Delhi**- The Biden Administration has been conveying its own concerns to India on Delhi's attitude to the sanctions against Russia, and its neutrality in the war.
- The gesture to Pakistan could have been intended to convey that disapproval in concrete terms.

Why has India criticized the F-16 package?

- **India's objections**- India registered a strong protest with the US against the deal, over both the substance and timing of the US decision.
- India was upset that the US did not forewarn India about a policy design that could have serious implications for India's security.
- India's objections were communicated to the US officials during the 2+2 Inter-

sessional and Maritime Security Dialogue.

- **US's response**- The US said that it looks at both India and Pakistan as partners, who have shared values and shared interests.
- It also added that the US's relationship with both countries stands independent to each other.
- The US has said that the proposed sale will not alter the basic military balance in the region.
- The proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the US by allowing Pakistan to retain interoperability with the US and partner forces in ongoing counter-terrorism efforts.

The Pressler Amendment *passed in t 1985 required the U.S. President to certify that Pakistan did not possess any nuclear weapons and to refuse foreign aid to it in the absence of such certification.*

What are the possible impacts on Indo-Pak Relations?

- During India and Pakistan's aerial skirmish in 2019, Pakistan brought down a MiG-21 flown by the Indian Air Force's Abhinandan Varthaman.
- The move acted as a show of strength for the F-16, cementing Pakistan's intentions to use the aircraft in all future operations.
- India will have to effectively enhance conventional combat capability of the Indian Air Force (IAF) to continue to meet the challenge of a resurgent Pakistan Air Force.

References

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Quick facts

F-16 Fighting Falcon

- It is a 4th generation multi-role fighter aircraft.
- It has proven itself in air-to-air combat and air-to-surface attack.
- Speed- Mach 2 at altitude
- It can locate targets in all weather conditions.
- In an air-to-surface role, the F-16 can fly more than 500 miles (860 km) and deliver its

weapons with superior accuracy.
- It utilises "fly-by-wire" system where electrical wires relay commands, replacing the usual cables and linkage controls.
- It provides a relatively low-cost, high-performance weapon system.

