US Blocks Global Drought Framework

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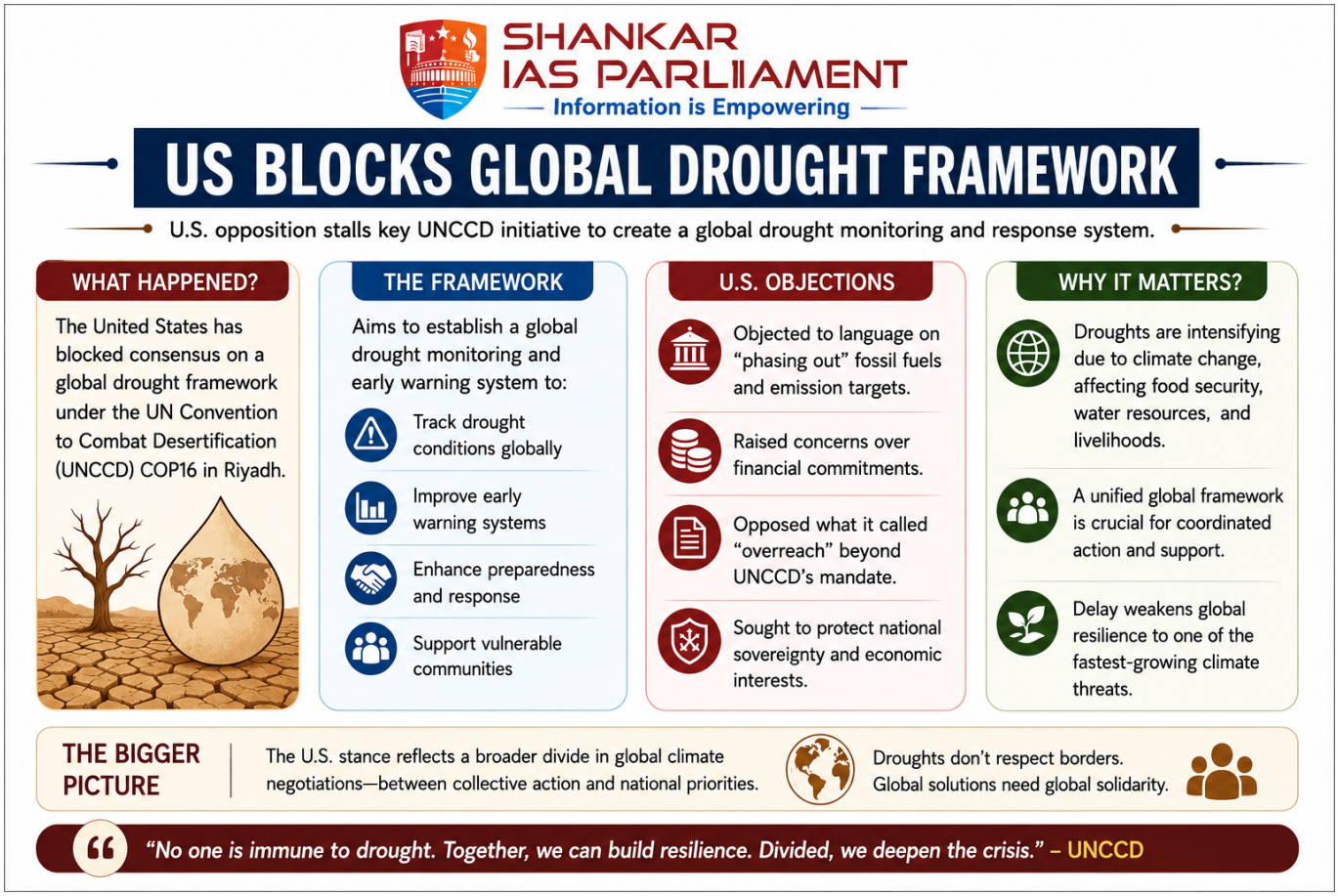
Why in News?

During the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17), the United States drew a "red line" against establishing any international drought instrument (whether legally binding or voluntary).

Key Highlights

- **US Opposition -** The US declared it would not accept any formal international drought framework or protocol, arguing that drought management falls under domestic and bilateral sovereignty.
- **Africa Group stand -** Developing countries, led by the Africa Group, strongly opposed the US position.
- They contending that fragmented national initiatives cannot address the cascading, transboundary nature of droughts or unlock predictable international funding.
- **COP16 -** The standoff is a continuation of unresolved talks at UNCCD COP16 (Riyadh, 2024), where parties failed to agree on a binding drought protocol vs. a non-binding framework and deferred the decision to COP17.
- **Existing Tools -** The US argued that existing initiatives, such as the UNCCD's **Drought Toolbox** and the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) international early warning systems, are underutilized.
- It should be implemented before creating new international bodies or instruments.
- **Chile's Proposal -** Chile introduced a voluntary, case-study-based **"Pilot Implementation Mechanism"** to assess implementation gaps without imposing new financial or legal obligations.
- However, the Africa Group expressed skepticism, noting that previous intersessional assessments had already documented these gaps.



About UNCCD & COP17

- **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**
  - **Adopted in –** 1994.
  - It is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and land management to sustainable development.
  - **Rio Convention -** Formally recognized as one of the three **Rio Conventions** (alongside UNFCCC for climate and CBD for biodiversity).
- **COP17 Context (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia)**
  - **Host -** Convened in **Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia** (August 2026) under the theme "*Restoring Land, Restoring Hope*".
  - **Focus-** Coincides with the UN *International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (2026)*, targeting
    - Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN),
    - Drought resilience, and
    - Global land restoration.

Reference

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