U.S.-Turkey relations

What is the issue?

- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has threatened to shut down two U.S. bases in Turkey recently.
- Rising tensions in U.S.-Turkey relations are threatening to upset North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) unity.

Why did Turkey retaliate?

- The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved a Bill seeking sanctions on Turkey over the S-400 purchase and the Syria offensive.
- So, in retaliation for these proposed sanctions, Turkey has threatened to shut down U.S. bases in Turkey.
- The U.S. and Turkey are the largest and second largest standing armies of NATO, respectively.
- There are U.S. nuclear warheads in the Incirlik airbase, a critical facility for American operations in West Asia.
- Mr. Erdoğan has warned that Incirlik and the Kurecik radar base would be shut if there are sanctions.
- With threats to shut down Incirlik and Kurecik bases, it is now clear that the cracks are wide open.

Why did ties started to slump?

- U.S.-Turkey ties began to slump in recent years after US's refusal to extradite a US-based Turkish Islamic preacher who is accused by Ankara of orchestrating the failed 2016 coup against Mr. Erdoğan.
- The U.S. decision to arm and assist Kurdish rebels in Syria against the Islamic State was another blow.
- Turkey sees the People's Protection Units (Syrian Kurdish militia) that became an American ally in the anti-IS war, as an affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers Party (Turkish Kurdish militia).

How did Turkey respond to this slump?

- Turkey moved closer towards Russia.
- It is trying to raise its regional profile.
- It invaded Kurdish-held towns in northern Syria earlier in 2019.

- Turkey's decision to purchase the Russian S-400 missile system despite US-NATO opposition was the tipping point.

Does NATO have relevance now?

- After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, NATO remained as a vehicle of western military might and continued to expand to Russia's borders, creating tensions between Russia and the West in the recent past.
- But with the revival of populist, nationalist leaders in several western countries question the relevance of the NATO several times.
- U.S. President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron called it obsolete and brain death, respectively.
- Fast-deteriorating ties between the U.S. and Turkey is adding to the crisis.
- The Trump administration has already suspended Turkey from the F-35 programme, citing concerns over Russia spying on the fighter jet's capabilities using the S-400 system's radar.

What is next?

- Turkey seems determined to go ahead with the S-400 deal and even buy advanced Russian aircraft if the U.S. does not deliver the F-35s.
- The question the NATO faces in this hour of crisis is whether the U.S. and Turkey would manage to resolve their differences.
- There is another question too, whether NATO could stay relevant in a post-Cold War era where bilateral ties are fast-changing.

Source: The Hindu

Quick Facts

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation)

- NATO is an intergovernmental political and military alliance founded in 1949 among 29 independent member countries.
- It was meant to ensure collective protection for its members against the threat of possible post-War communist expansion and aggression by the Soviet Union.
- Head Quarters - Brussels, Belgium.
- Key member States - The United States, Canada, and American allies in Europe.



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