



Reviving the JCPOA

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(Mains GS 2 : Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.)

Context:

The Vienna talks aimed at reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal, have hit a wall after Russia sought sanctions exemptions for its future trade and defence ties with Iran.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA):

- The Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is a landmark accord reached between Iran and several world powers, including the United States, in July 2015.
- JCPOA seeks to prevent Iran from producing a nuclear weapon by putting curbs on its atomic programme in exchange for economic incentives.
- Under the JCPOA, Iran agreed to eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98%, and reduce by about two-thirds the number of its gas centrifuges for 13 years.
- To monitor and verify Iran's compliance with the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will have regular access to all Iranian nuclear facilities.
- The agreement provides that in return for verifiably abiding by its commitments, Iran will receive relief from the U.S., European Union, and United Nations Security Council nuclear-related sanctions.

Unilaterally pulled:

- According to European negotiators “a good deal” with Iran is on the table but Russia, which has been slapped with a barrage of sanctions by the United States and its allies over the Ukraine invasion, seeks written guarantees that those curbs would not “in any way harm” its ties with Iran.
- The nuclear deal, reached in 2015, started unravelling in 2018 as the Trump administration unilaterally pulled the U.S. out of the agreement despite international certification that Iran was fully compliant with its terms.
- After the U.S.’s withdrawal, Iran started enriching uranium to a higher purity and installing advanced centrifuges at its nuclear plants and now nuclear experts believe Iran is just months away from having enough high purity uranium to make a nuclear bomb.

Demands urgent steps:

- According to western countries officials, the growing nuclear capability of Iran demands urgent steps to conclude the deal and curb its nuclear programme.
- Removing sanctions on Iran and letting Iran’s oil enter the global market could also ease oil and gas prices, which shot up after the Russian attack on Ukraine.
- The West’s push to conclude the deal gives Russia added leverage in the negotiations, at a time when relations between Moscow and western capitals are at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War.

Reviving the deal:

- The U.S. and Europe are reportedly looking for alternatives to revive the deal without Russia but it would not be easy because Russia, an original signatory of the JCPOA, is a member of the joint commission that supervises Iran’s compliance.
- Under the agreement, Russia is also required to take control of Iran’s excess enriched uranium and work with Tehran to turn its Fordow nuclear plant into a research facility.
- In theory, the deal can be revived if other signatories take up Russia’s responsibilities but it is not clear whether Iran and China would be ready to go ahead without Russia.

Security crisis:

- Iranians have publicly said they would not allow any “external factors” to impact their national interests but Tehran is unlikely to ignore the sensitivity of Russia to reach an agreement with the U.S. which leaves the future of the nuclear deal in Russian hands.

- Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the West's response to it have already sent commodity prices soaring and shaken the global economy, which is yet to come out of the **COVID-19 shock**.
- A further delay or a total collapse of the Iran deal would not only deepen the security crisis in West Asia but also add pressure on global oil and gas prices.

Conclusion:

The signatories of the JCPOA should not hold the Iran deal to ransom rather they should continue to push for a collective agreement that could curb Iran's nuclear programme and take the country into the global economic mainstream.