

Iran's Retaliatory Attacks on US

Why in news?

Iran launched ballistic missile attacks at American troops in two military bases in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Iran's [General Qassem Soleimani](#).

What happened?

- Iran targeted Erbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan in the north.
- Al-Asad in the west, which is some 400 km away from the Iranian border, also faced attacks.
- The attacks were both an act of retaliation and a show of its capability.
- It is the first direct attack on U.S. forces by Iran in the current round of tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

What is Iran's rationale?

- Foreign Minister Javad Zarif invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- It allows member-states to take military actions in self-defence if they come under attack.
- He said Iran has taken and concluded "proportionate measures in self-defence".
- This can thus be interpreted that Iran is now ready for de-escalation.
- The U.S.'s decision to kill Soleimani was practically an act of war, forcing the Islamic regime to respond.
- Iranian military leaders and hard-line politicians issued wide range of rhetoric on retaliation.
- However, despite these, what Tehran actually did was to launch a calculated, limited strike.
- It is as much an act of revenge as an opportunity for de-escalation.

What was U.S.'s response?

- There were no American casualties, and only minimal damage was caused in the attacks.
- Mr. Trump, in his response, has signalled that he was backing away from further conflicts with Iran.
- If the U.S. had responded with air strikes or missile attacks inside Iran, it could have triggered further attacks from Iran.

- This would have set off a cycle of violence and aggression.
- A direct shooting match between the U.S. and Iran would have been disastrous for the whole of West Asia.

What is the significance?

- Iran may be a weaker power compared to America's conventional military might, but it is a formidable rival.
- It not only has ballistic missiles and a wide range of rockets but also a host of militias under its command across the region.
- It could have made an invasion and air strikes on its territories extremely costly for the U.S. and its allies.
- It could also have disrupted global oil supply by attacking the Gulf waterways.
- By any assessment, a direct war would have been catastrophic.
- Fortunately, Mr. Trump did well to step back and not push the Gulf region into a disastrous cycle of violence and destruction.

What is the way forward?

- The international community should now push for a diplomatic settlement of the crisis.
- It must find ways to revive the nuclear deal which could bring long-term peace to the Gulf.
- Also, Iran should seize this opportunity for de-escalation.

Source: The Hindu

