

US Cuts Troops in Iraq

Why in news?

The U.S.'s decision to drawdown their troop in Iraq is both a relief and a challenge to the Iraqi government.

Why is it a relief?

- It is a relief because **public opinion in Iraq** is increasingly against the continuing presence of U.S. troops in the country.
- It is increasing, particularly after the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in January 2020.
- Iraqi lawmakers passed a non-binding resolution after the assassination, asking the government to oust the Americans.
- The new government of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has stated that it does not want U.S. troops in combat operations.
- But he has asked for training services and other assistance.
- Now that the U.S. is cutting troops, Mr. Kadhimi could argue that his government is committed to seeing the full withdrawal of the troops.

Why is it a challenge?

- It is a challenge because the U.S. troops had played a key role in the **war against the Islamic State (IS)**.
- With the drawdown, the Iraqi forces would have to share a greater burden in the fight against jihadists.
- The US political leadership has long wanted to pull troops out of Iraq.
- The US President Barack Obama had set a timetable for the pull back and withdrew most troops by 2011.
- But he had to send soldiers back to Iraq after the rise of the IS.

Why was the drawdown decision taken?

- The US's decision is part of the Trump administration's larger policy of bringing back American troops home.
- However, the local factors cannot be overlooked.
- The U.S. found it increasingly difficult to station troops in Iraq.
- At the height of the war, the U.S. had over 1,50,000 troops in Iraq.
- But in recent years, it found stationing even 10,000 troops risky.

- This is partly because of the **hostile political environment** and partly due to the **growing influence of Iran** and **Shia militias** in Iraq.

What was the recent trigger?

- The US killed Soleimani after Shia militias attacked its troops.
- Iran retaliated by launching ballistic missile attacks on a US air base in Iraq, injuring some 100 American soldiers.
- The Shia militias continued attacking U.S. troops.
- In March 2020, three of the coalition troops, two of them Americans, were killed in such an attack.
- Since then, the U.S. has repositioned troops.
- The drawdown will reduce risks of such confrontations in the future.

What could be done?

- The IS has been driven out of the major population centres of Iraq.
- Though the IS has been driven underground, according to UN assessments, at least 10,000 IS fighters are still active in Iraq.
- While the Americans leave, the Iraqi government should be careful of not letting any security vacuum being filled by jihadist groups.

Source: The Hindu

