

US's Concerns with China and Russia - CTBT

Why in news?

- Suspicions were recently raised in the U.S. on Chinese violating the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- These led to demands requesting President Trump to “unsign” the CTBT and resume nuclear testing.

Click [here](#) to know more on CTBT (evolution, provisions, effectiveness, etc)

What were the concerns reported?

- In mid-April 2020, a Compliance Report was issued by the US State Department.
- This was on Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Non-proliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments.
- **China** - The report raised concerns that China might be conducting nuclear tests with low yields at its Lop Nur test site throughout 2019.
- This is allegedly in violation of China's Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) undertakings.
- Together with its lack of transparency, China provokes concerns about its intent to observe the zero-yield moratorium on testing.
- **Russia** - The U.S. report also claims that Russia has conducted nuclear weapons experiments that produced a nuclear yield.
- These were inconsistent with ‘zero yield’ understanding underlying the CTBT.
- However, it was uncertain on how many such experiments had been conducted in 2019.
- It suggests that Russia could be testing in a manner that releases nuclear energy from an explosive canister, generating suspicions about its compliance.

What was Russia and China's response?

- Both Russia and China have dismissed the U.S.’s allegations and rejected the claims.
- They also pointed out Trump administration’s backtracking from other negotiated agreements - Iran nuclear deal, U.S.-Russia [Intermediate-Range](#)

[Nuclear Forces \(INF\) Treaty.](#)

- The CTBTO has refrained from backing the U.S.'s present allegations.
- However, with growing rivalry among major powers, the report is a likely harbinger of a new nuclear arms race.

What does this signify?

- The whole turn of events signify a coming back of competition.
- **U.S.** - The key change from the 1990s is that the U.S.'s unipolar moment is over and strategic competition among major powers is back.
- The U.S. now identifies Russia and China as 'rivals', and it is starting to face new nuclear threats.
- The U.S., therefore, has to expand the role of its nuclear weapons and have a more usable and diversified nuclear arsenal.
- The Trump administration has embarked on a 30-year modernisation plan with a price tag of \$1.2 trillion, which could go up over the years.
- Readiness levels at the Nevada test site that has been silent since 1992 are being enhanced to permit resumption of testing at six months notice.
- **Russia and China** - Russia and China have been concerned about the U.S.'s growing technological lead.
- This is particularly the case in missile defence and conventional global precision-strike capabilities.
- Russia has responded by exploring hypersonic delivery systems and theatre systems.
- On the other hand, China has embarked on a modernisation programme to enhance the survivability of its arsenal that is considerably smaller.
- In addition, both countries are also investing heavily in offensive cyber capabilities.

What are the challenges ahead?

- The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) limits U.S. and Russian arsenals, but this will expire in 2021.
- U.S. President Donald Trump has already indicated that he does not plan to extend it.
- Instead, the Trump administration would like to bring China into some kind of nuclear arms control talks.
- But this is something that China has avoided by pointing to the fact that the U.S. and Russia still account for over 90% of global nuclear arsenals.
- U.S.'s tensions with China are already high with -
 - i. trade and technology disputes
 - ii. militarisation in the South China Sea
 - iii. recently, with the novel coronavirus pandemic

- The U.S. is also seen to be preparing the ground for resuming testing at its Nevada site.
- In all, resumption of nuclear testing may signal the demise of the ill-fated CTBT, marking the beginnings of a new nuclear arms race.

Source: The Hindu

