

## International Relations This Week: Episode 59

International relations is a very important segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#). In this series, we present an analysis of the most important international issues and developments that occurred over the past week relevant for the IAS exam. In this article, you can learn more about the developments in West Asia, North Korea, Pakistan's new National Security Policy and the latest developments in Afghanistan.

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### 1. Developments in West Asia: Drone Attack by Houthis on UAE

#### Context:

- The Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed responsibility for the suspected drone attack in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

#### Who are the Houthis?

- The Houthi rebels are an insurgent group controlling most of the northern part of Yemen.
- They largely follow the Zaydi Shia sect. Zaidis make up around 35 per cent of Yemen's population.

#### What is the Houthi movement?

- The 'Houthi movement' is formally known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God).
- The Houthi movement was founded in the 1990s by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a member of Yemen's Shia majority.

#### What is the significance of the location of Yemen?

- Yemen is located at the junction of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, its coastline commanding the strategic strait of Bab al-Mandab.



Image Source: Al Jazeera

### **Yemen-Saudi crisis: Why is there a war?**

- Yemen's war began in September 2014, when the Houthis seized Sanaa and began a march south to try to seize the entire country.
- Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates and other countries, entered the war alongside Yemen's internationally recognized government in March 2015.
- Meanwhile, the coronavirus pandemic rages unchecked as Yemen's health care system has been decimated by the war and the Houthis suppressed information about the crisis.

### **When did the crisis in Yemen begin?**

- Yemen's civil war began in 2015 as a result of clashes between Yemeni government forces and the Houthis.
- Over the past six years, conflict and economic decline have taken a heavy toll on civilians, forcing millions to flee their homes and leaving 66 percent of the population in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

### **What are some of the biggest challenges people face in Yemen?**

- Six years of intense fighting have pushed the country to the brink of economic collapse, leaving only half of the country's health facilities functional.
- The risk of a large-scale famine, violence, collapsing services and protracted displacement are the biggest challenges in Yemen.
- More than half of the country's population is without enough water and resources to meet their basic needs.
- Reports show that more than 16 million people could go hungry this year and half a million are already living in famine-like conditions.
- Women and children are bearing the brunt of the crisis. They constitute 79 percent of the displaced population and are finding themselves in increasingly difficult circumstances.

### **Abraham Accords:**

- The [Abraham Accords](#) is an agreement between the State of Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States that aim to normalize diplomatic relations.
- The leaders of the three countries agreed to “the full normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates”, calling the agreement a “historic diplomatic breakthrough” that would “advance peace in the Middle East region”.

## **2. Developments in North Korea: North Korea tested Hypersonic missile**

### **Context:**

- North Korea has successfully launched a hypersonic missile as part of efforts to modernize its strategic weapons systems.

### **What are hypersonic weapons and who has them?**

- A hypersonic missile is a vehicle that achieves a speed five times faster than the speed of sound, crossing Mach 5.
- These missiles travel at a speed of around 6,115 km per hour, with a combination of technology and manoeuvrability of ballistic missiles and cruise missiles.
- Hypersonic weapons can take missile warfare, particularly nuclear warfare to a new level.
- **France, Australia, India, Germany, Japan, South Korea and North Korea** also have hypersonic weapon research programs.

### **Why are hypersonic weapons so dangerous?**

- The speed and the manoeuvrability of hypersonic weapons give them the potential to evade defensive systems.

- They are difficult to detect and their ability to make radical course changes as they get close to a target is meant to evade interception.
- Hypersonic weapons can traverse laterally, close to the earth's surface and hit a target in a much shorter flight time.
- Hypersonic weapons can also achieve more than five times the speed of sound.
- All these features make them harder to track and intercept.

### What are the Concerns with North Korea?

- North Korea has one of the largest standing armies in the world - with more than one million army personnel.
- Its conventional forces could still inflict massive damage on South Korea in the event of war.
- North Korea also has around tens of thousands of special forces troops which could be expected to infiltrate the South in the event of any conflict.
- A further threat comes from thousands of North Korean artillery pieces and rocket launchers deployed along the border.
- There've also been concerns that North Korea could have a biological weapons programme.



Image source: BBC

### India's full Diplomatic Relations with North Korea

- India's ties with North Korea are a key aspect of India's [Act East Policy](#) and the country's post-Cold War outlook.
- India is one of only 25 countries in the world with an embassy in North Korea.
- The two countries have concluded multiple bilateral agreements and understandings in science, technology, cultural exchanges and information technology.
- India has often come to North Korea's assistance in difficult times by providing food items, blankets, polythene sheets and medical supplies.
- Increased aid to North Korea could emerge as a critical aspect of this humanitarian outreach.
- India has made active efforts to engage in "dialogue diplomacy" to establish peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula while hoping to act as a bridge between North Korea and the West.

### Challenges Ahead for Expanding India-DPR Korea (DPRK) Engagement

- **Nuclear Ambitions:** One of the biggest hindrances towards deeper engagement lies in North Korea's increasing commitment to its nuclear program. India is increasingly treating North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program as a threat to Indian national security.
- **The Pakistan Connection:** There is a longstanding "illegitimate nuclear technological nexus" between North Korea and Pakistan that has always concerned India.
- **India's Ties with the US and South Korea:** At a time when US-DPRK ties are deeply strained, India's special strategic partnerships with the US, Japan and South Korea can make engagement with North Korea a challenging diplomatic manoeuvre.

### Conclusion:

- The recent tests are the moves in a dangerous arms race in which smaller Asian nations are striving to develop advanced long-range missiles, alongside major military powers.
- Hypersonic weapons could be a concern as they can potentially evade missile shields and early warning systems.

### 3. Developments in Pakistan - National Security Policy (NSP)

#### Context:

- Pakistan launched its first-ever National Security Policy (NSP) which aims to "deter war" through all elements of national power.

#### What is the National Security Policy (NSP)?

- The National Security Policy (NSP) is a document that serves as a roadmap for the country's defense and a comprehensive national security policy that is centred on citizens.

## Concerns with National Security Policy and implications on India

- The strategic establishment in India would need to look at the policy in the context of security challenges.
- The policy will impact Pakistan's approach to India as an open-ended subject by changing the military engagements and infrastructure built up along the border areas.
- Know more in detail: [CNA 03 Jan 2022](#).

## Policy's Position on Various Stakeholders: US, UK, India, China

- Prepared after seven years of consultations, it is being endorsed as the first policy document with guidelines for achieving national security goals.
- The Policy is divided into eight sections and places the economic security of the country at the core.

Know more in detail: [Sansad TV Perspective: Pakistan's National Security Policy](#).

## 4. Developments in Afghanistan

### Context:

- In 2021, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), commonly known as the [Taliban](#), took control of Afghanistan.
- The Taliban's control of the country led international donors to immediately suspend most non-humanitarian funding and freeze billions of dollars worth of assets.
- Without this funding, most health clinics have closed and the economy has spiralled downward as the country confronts an ongoing drought and hunger crisis and possible fourth wave of COVID-19.

### Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan:

- **Hunger Crisis:** There is a hunger crisis since prices for food staples have skyrocketed, severe drought in much of the country has destroyed crops, and several challenges have halted cross-border aid.
- **Rising Poverty:** Nearly every Afghan citizen could be living in poverty by mid-2022, according to the [UN Development Program](#). Due to a lack of funds, thousands of people who work in public-sector jobs, such as teachers and court employees, haven't been paid in months.
- **Collapsing Healthcare System:** Lack of foreign aid has caused a shortage of medicine and supplies, primary-care facilities have been forced to close, and medical staff have not received regular wages, raising concerns that they could soon stop showing up to work.

- **Displacement:** In 2021, some seven hundred thousand people were forced to leave their homes and move to other parts of Afghanistan. Internal displacement is also a major factor here, with many people arriving in Kabul and other large cities in search of safety from conflict and other threats, including flooding and drought.
- **Climate Change:** The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated due to a series of droughts. Between security concerns and this climate shock, farmers face challenges of below-average harvest, poor pastures, etc.
- **Concern for Women and Children:** There are concerns about the continued risk of child recruitment for radical activities. Meanwhile, women and girls face great uncertainty when it comes to respecting their rights to education, livelihoods and participation.

### Economic Crisis in Afghanistan:

- **Dependency on Foreign Aid:** The Afghanistan economy was heavily dependent on foreign aid. In Afghanistan, about 40% of its GDP was international aid, according to the [World Bank](#).
- **Foreign Aid Suspension:** When it became clear that the Taliban would gain control of Kabul, western powers, including the US and Germany, suspended foreign aid to the country. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund ([IMF](#)) have also since halted payments.
- **Dependence on Remittances:** On top of foreign aid, another 4% of Afghanistan's GDP was made up of remittances, according to the World Bank. In response to the Taliban's take-over and western countries halting foreign aid shipments, international transfer companies suspended their services in Afghanistan - effectively cutting off the supply of family money from abroad, too.

### Challenges:

- Afghanistan is largely dependent on foreign assistance and its illicit opium trade.
- The lack of a robust institutional infrastructure combined with poor property rights is a major challenge to gaining financial access in Afghanistan.
- This has led to a lack of competition, which drives the trade deficit.
- It should be noted that the illegal drug trade accounts for the majority of production, exports and employment in Afghanistan. Besides, there is also a thriving illegal mining sector.
- Concerns about food insecurity are mounting, and a looming drought is expected to make matters worse.

### India's Interests in Afghanistan

- **Combating Terrorism:** The rise of fundamentalist terrorism in the region, egged on by Pakistan, was targeted at India in the initial few years. The nexus between the Taliban and other radical groups underscores Pakistan's increasing influence within the country.

- **Energy Needs:** Afghanistan can prove beneficial in terms of the energy needs of India. A strong physical presence in Afghanistan is the best bet to ensure uninterrupted energy supply if and when the pipeline from that region becomes a reality.
- **Countering China:** The Chinese interests in Afghanistan pose challenges to India on different fronts such as energy security, infrastructure development, radical movements and border infiltration, etc.

#### Way Forward:

- **Broader Diplomatic Engagement:** Countries should consider appointing a special envoy dedicated to Afghan reconciliation. They should broaden engagement with the Afghan government and other political actors, and reach out to certain Taliban representatives.
  - **Continued Training and Investments:** Nations should provide more military training to Afghan security forces and invest in longer-term capacity-building programs. It should actively support and invest in the National Directorate of Security and expand its development assistance.
  - **Working With and Through Others:** India and the US should look to broaden their engagements with Iran and Russia, explore opportunities for cooperation with China, and find common ground with the United States on Afghanistan's future.
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