News: The United States has told that it no longer thinks Israeli settlements in the West Bank violate international law. The new US view is different from that of most countries’ on this issue.

Prelims focus: Locations of Gaza strip, West Bank, Sinai peninsula and others neighbouring regions

Mains focus: about the Israel-Palestine dispute, role of USA policies in the region and their repercussions for the world

- Previously, in 1978 and 1981, the US had taken opposite stands.

Location of West Bank

- It is a landlocked territory near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, bordered by Jordan to the east and by the Green Line separating it and Israel on the south, west and north. The West Bank also contains a significant section of the western Dead Sea shore.

About the disputed settlements in West Bank

- The West Bank was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
- Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since.
- It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.
- Over 4 lakh Israeli settlers — many of them religious Zionists who claim a Biblical birthright over this land — now live here, along with some 26 lakh Palestinians.

Are these settlements illegal?

- The United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the International Court of Justice have said that the West Bank settlements are violative of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- Under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), an occupying power “shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”.
- Under the Rome Statute that set up the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes, as does the “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”.
About Jerusalem

- Under the **Oslo Accords of the 1990s**, both Israel and the Palestinians agreed that the status of settlements would be decided by negotiations. But the negotiations process has been all but dead for several years now.
- Israel walked into East Jerusalem in 1967, and subsequently annexed it. **For Israel, Jerusalem is non-negotiable.** The Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. Most of the world’s nations look at it as occupied territory.