News: United States initiated the process of leaving the Paris Agreement, notifying the United Nations of its withdrawal from the landmark climate deal. The withdrawal will take effect one year from delivery of the notification.

Prelims focus: Overview of the Paris agreement.

Mains focus: Concerns and issues over US exit, its implications.

Main Concern: After it leaves, the US will be the only country left out of the global protocol. Syria and Nicaragua, the last remaining countries who were earlier holding out, also became signatories in 2017.

About Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement of 2016 is a historic international accord that brings almost 200 countries together in setting a common target to reduce global greenhouse emissions in an effort to fight climate change.

- The pact seeks to keep global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels, and to try and limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- To this end, each country has pledged to implement targeted action plans that will limit their greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Agreement asks rich and developed countries to provide financial and technological support to the developing world in its quest to fight and adapt to climate change.

Procedure to leave the Agreement

Article 28 of the Paris Agreement allows countries to leave the Paris Agreement and lays down the process for leaving.

- A country can only give a notice for leaving at least three years after the Paris Agreement came into force.
- This happened on November 4, 2016. Therefore, the US was eligible to move a notice for leaving on November 4 this year, which it did.
- The withdrawal is not immediate, however. It takes effect one year after the submission of the notice. It means the United States will be out of Paris Agreement only on November 4 next year.

Reason for US withdrawal
During his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump had said the Paris Agreement was “unfair” to US interests. He had promised to pull out of the Agreement if he was elected.

The United States is the world’s second largest emitter of greenhouse gases. If it does not reduce its emissions befitting its status as the second largest emitter, it could seriously jeopardise the world’s objective of keeping the global temperature rise to within 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial times.

As part of its commitment to the Paris Agreement, the United States had promised to reduce its emissions by 26 per cent to 28 per cent by the year 2025 from 2005 levels.

- The United States plays a preeminent role in mobilising financial resources globally, and its absence from the scene could seriously hamper that effort.
- Under the Paris Agreement, developed countries are under obligation to mobilise at least $100 billion every year from the year 2020 in climate finance meant for the developing world. This amount has to be revised upwards after five years. As it is, countries are struggling to reach this amount by next year.
- The US was opposed to this move.

Implications:

1. While exiting the Paris Agreement does not automatically mean the abandonment of this target or of any future action by the United States on climate change, it would no longer be committed to these actions.
2. But the biggest impact of the exit of the United States from the Agreement might be on the financial flows to enable climate actions.

Can US returns to the Paris Agreement at a later date?

1. It can indeed, return. There is no bar on a country rejoining the Paris Agreement.
2. It is also possible that the United States does a rethink and actually never leaves the Paris Agreement. It has one full year to reconsider its decision.

Does this mean the end to the war on climate change?

- No, the US will not be entirely missing from the climate negotiations.
- While it is pulling out of the Paris Agreement, it remains part of the UNFCCC, the mother agreement that was finalised in 1994.
- The Framework Convention was the first international agreement to identify and acknowledge the problem of climate change.
- It had laid down the principles and guidelines to achieve the objective of stabilising the greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to levels that would cause least damage to climate system.
- The Paris Agreement is an instrument of the Framework Convention to achieve that objective.
The United States will be out of the Paris Agreement, but by virtue of being a signatory to the UNFCCC would continue to be a part of the other processes and meetings under the Framework Convention.