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China to Join UN Arms Trade Treaty

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Why in News

Recently, **China** has decided to join the **United Nations Arms Trade Treaty** (UN-ATT) to regulate its arms sales.

Key Points

- China held that it has always strictly controlled the export of military products and joining the treaty is an important step towards its **efforts to enhance peace and stability** in the world and **support multilateralism**.
 - China said that it only exports military products to sovereign countries and not to non-state actors.
- **Background:**
 - China's move comes after the **USA announced to pull out of the ATT in 2019**.
 - The reason given was that the **treaty amounts to international gun control**, and is a **threat to USA's second amendment right to bear arms**.
 - The USA also held that the **treaty fails to truly address the problem of irresponsible arms transfers** because other **top arms exporters like Russia and China were not signatories** to it that time (till now, Russia has neither signed it nor made any announcement to sign it).
 - In **May 2020**, USA announced to exit the **Open Skies Treaty** (OST).
 - In **August 2019**, the USA along with Russia withdrew from the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, 1987**.
 - The **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute** (SIPRI) in its annual report '**Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019**' highlighted that **China is the second-largest arms producer** in the world after the USA.

United Nations Arms Trade Treaty

- The UN-ATT **regulates the international trade in conventional arms**, from small arms to battle tanks, combat aircraft and warships, and **controls the flow of weapons into conflict zones**.
- It entered into force on **24th December 2014**.
- The treaty **requires member countries to keep records of international transfers of weapons** and to **prohibit cross-border shipments** that could be used in human rights violations or attacks on civilians.
- **State parties to the treaty may seek assistance** in its implementation and the **UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR)** was launched to help in that.
 - UNSCAR is a **voluntary, flexible multi-donor trust fund** to kick-start advocacy, universalisation and implementation of the ATT.
 - **It aims to:**
 - Mobilize resources to support the ratification/accession and implementation of relevant international instruments on arms regulations.
 - Improve the effectiveness of assistance through coordination, monitoring and matching of resources.
 - Promote increased sustainability through more predictable sources of funding.

India's Stand on ATT

- **From the beginning** of the ATT process, India has maintained that such a treaty would make a real **impact on illicit trafficking in conventional arms and their illicit use** especially by terrorists and other unauthorised and unlawful non-state actors.
- India has been an **active participant in the ATT negotiations** and **stressed** consistently that the **ATT should ensure a balance of obligations between exporting and importing states**.

For India, the underlying principle is that member states have a legitimate right to self-defence and its own belief that there is no conflict between the pursuit of national security objectives and the aspiration of the ATT.
- **However, India has not signed the Treaty** on the grounds that it is **weak on terrorism and non-state actors** and these **concerns find no mention in the specific prohibitions** of the Treaty.
- Further, India **cannot accept that the Treaty is used as an instrument in the hands of exporting states** to take unilateral **force majeure** measures against importing states parties without consequences.

Way Forward

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- Civilian populations often in conditions of poverty, deprivation and extreme inequality suffer the most because they are on the receiving end of the misuse of arms by state armed and security forces, non-state armed groups and organized criminal groups.
 - Inadequate controls on arms transfers lead to the widespread availability and misuse of weapons disrupting the humanitarian and development operations of the UN.
 - In many areas of work, the UN faces serious setbacks that ultimately can be traced to the consequences of the poorly regulated arms trade so the adoption of the ATT is very important for the UN system as a whole.