

US-Taliban Peace Talks

Why in news?

The eighth round of talks between the U.S. and the Taliban takes place in Qatar's capital Doha. Click [here](#) to know more on the earlier talks.

What are the conflicting demands?

- The U.S. maintained that the Doha talks would cover four issues -
 1. a cessation of hostilities
 2. an intra-Afghan peace dialogue
 3. assurance from the Taliban that Afghan territory would not be used for attacking U.S. interests
 4. U.S. troop withdrawal
- However, the Taliban made it clear that its priority was the last issue i.e. the US troop withdrawal.
- The Taliban rejected a ceasefire, instead of launching its spring offensive, Operation Fath.
- It also rejected talks with the Afghan government, describing it as a “puppet regime”.
- The Taliban provided some assurances on the third issue, but it kept demanding a firm date for U.S. troop withdrawal.
- It changed its mind and agreed on the second issue, an intra-Afghan peace dialogue when pushed by Pakistan.
- Now, the US wants Taliban guarantees that Afghanistan will not become a safe haven for "terrorists".
- On the other hand, the Taliban is focused on ensuring the withdrawal of all US-led foreign forces from the country.

What are the challenges?

- The Afghan government has lost its credibility and there is little support for its term being extended.
- A deteriorating security environment makes it difficult for a credible election to be held.
- Afghan security forces are losing 25 to 30 men daily, a toll that is depleting ranks and affecting morale.
- There is a rise in ethnic polarisation in Afghanistan. With the emergence of

the Islamic State, there is growing evidence of sectarian polarization.

- Any dilution of the stature of the Afghan security forces would dramatically increase the risks of fragmentation of Afghanistan.
- The Taliban is not going to take part in the election, and once a deal is concluded, its demand will be for an interim government.
- Even if elections take place, an elected government would soon find itself at cross purposes with the interim government.
- Further, a number of promised electoral reforms are yet to be implemented.
- The U.S.'s exit will end its long war in Afghanistan but growing political uncertainties will only exacerbate Afghanistan's ongoing conflict.

What lies ahead?

- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has already indicated September 1, 2019, as a deadline for concluding the Doha process.
- So, instead of a contentious election, an interim government would provide a better environment for the U.S. to manage its exit.
- The reality is that there can be no peace unless the Taliban and Afghan security forces de-escalate.
- However, this will require talks between the Taliban and the government.

Source: The Hindu

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