

Engaging the Taliban: The Moscow Format

What is the issue?

Indian delegation and Taliban officials will come face-to-face for the first time at the Moscow Format meeting in Russia.

What is the Moscow Format?

- The Moscow format was introduced in 2017 on the basis of the six-party mechanism for consultations between special representatives from Russia, Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, Iran and India.
- The present meeting includes a group of 10 nations including India, China, Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian republics with Taliban officials.

*Russia had previously convened a new meeting of the '**Extended Troika**' on Afghanistan which included Russia, the United States, China and Pakistan. The U.S. pulled out of the last meeting.*

Why is the meeting significant for India?

- The meeting is significant because of the recognition of new reality in Afghanistan.
- India had previously established contacts with the Taliban's political office in Doha, Qatar.
- But this is the first time India met a top Taliban delegation, which included Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi.
- Over the 20 years, India has been one of the largest regional donors to the country investing billions of dollars which it wants to be protected.
- Taliban has acknowledged that they will not allow Afghan soil to be used by any terrorist organisation and this is crucial for India regarding anti-India terrorist groups such as LeT and the JeM.
- Taliban, if isolated, may serve the interests of Pakistan and hence India's engagement is a necessary.

To know more about Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, click [here](#)



Taliban means "students" in the Pashto language.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TALIBAN TAKEOVER OF AFGHANISTAN

1979

Soviet invaded Afghanistan. Mujahideen fighters with U.S.'s support, repelled Soviet in 1980s.



Subsequently, civil war erupted for control of the country

1994

Taliban was founded by Mullah Mohammad Omar, a local imam in Kandahar, as a faction for gaining control.

1996

Proclaimed an Emirate with a harsh interpretation of Islamic law.



SEPTEMBER 9, 2001

9/11 attacks in the U.S. by Al-Qaeda, killing nearly 3,000 people.



OCTOBER 7, 2001

US President George W Bush launches "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan, after the Taliban refuses to hand over al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.



2002

Transitional govt government led by Hamid Karzai is established in Kabul.

2003-2008

Taliban regroup, Bush sends more troops



MAY 2, 2011

Bin Laden killed in Pakistan by US Special Forces



JUNE, 2011

Obama announces troop withdrawal



2014

NATO ended their mission leaving responsibility to the Afghan army. Taliban seized more territory.



APRIL, 2021

Biden declared US troops would leave Afghanistan. Taliban continued to target Afghan forces and were in full control of a number of districts

AUGUST, 2021

Kabul finally fell to the Taliban



SINCE 2004

What was the agenda of the meeting?

- Terrorism
- Humanitarian assistance to Afghans
- Inclusive government
- However, the matter of recognising the outfit as the legitimate government in Afghanistan is not on the current agenda.

What is the need of the hour?

- **In this current situation of a near collapse economy in Afghanistan, India must pursue more through regional diplomacy than bilateral engagement.**
- The Taliban should be urged to open up their government and share power with other political and ethnic communities.
- The Taliban needs to respect the fundamental rights of Afghans.
- Countries must stress the Taliban to form an inclusive government and ensure that their territory is not being used by terrorist groups.
- While India and other regional countries should help Afghans during this period of economic miseries, they should also use their collective economic and political clout to mount pressure on the Taliban to make political concessions.

References:

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