

## **Peace Process in Afghanistan**

### **What is the issue?**

- Afghan social media and political circles have learnt of a policy review in the U.S. which intends to fully withdraw all U.S. military forces from Afghanistan as early as May 1, 2021.
- The peace process in Afghanistan has reached a critical turning point with this, and here is a look at its various aspects.

### **What are the recent developments in this regard?**

- The former U.S. President Barack Obama announced the exit of U.S. forces from Afghanistan.
- More recently, the [Doha Agreement](#) was concluded between the U.S. Government and the Taliban.
- Despite the Doha Agreement, the Taliban has not ended its ties with the al-Qaeda and other similar terrorist groups.
- Nor have intra-Afghan negotiations progressed.
- The policy review now ordered by the U.S. President Joe Biden is a critical point but it is kept confidential.

### **What is Biden's stance?**

- Mr. Biden has long held, even as Vice-President, that Pakistan is strategically more important to the U.S. than Afghanistan.
- He has held that the U.S. troops should be pulled out of the Afghan battlefield as soon as possible.
- Donald Trump was doing nothing different from his predecessor.
- The ongoing review had raised hopes in Kabul of a turnaround in U.S. policy. That is not happening in substance.

### **What is the U.S.'s plan?**

- The U.S. Government is advocating 'a new, inclusive government' in Afghanistan.
- This implies an immediate 50% share for the Taliban in an interim government.
- This is in return for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.
- This will be without reference to a mandate from the people.

- That is because elections will be held only in the future, after the principles guiding Afghanistan's future constitutional and governing arrangements are worked out.
- As a prelude to the ceasefire, the U.S. has proposed to the Taliban to reduce violence for 3 months.

### **What are the challenges?**

- The U.S. maintains that its objective is to bring about a just and durable peace through political negotiations.
- It intends to achieve this in a manner that Afghanistan remains united, sovereign, and democratic, and preserves the gains made over the past two decades.
- However, this is a tall order, as it contradicts the abiding U.S. priority, to cut its losses and be out of Afghanistan at the earliest.
- The challenge for the U.S. is that it cannot disengage from Afghanistan without accepting Pakistan's terms.
- These terms would not be acceptable to Afghan patriots who want freedom for Afghanistan to choose its political direction.
- If training, combat support, and the supply of weapons are stopped from Pakistan, the Taliban could surrender.
- The U.S. Government is wary of Pakistan's negative role.
- Instead of pressuring Pakistan, it is seeking Afghan acquiescence for a power-sharing arrangement with the Taliban, enabling the exit of U.S. soldiers.

### **How is India-Afghan relations?**

- India remains fully committed to Afghanistan and supporting state institutions there.
- Despite the policy changes there, bilateral relations are flourishing.
- There have been frequent and productive high-level exchanges between Indian and Afghan leaders.
- India is to be part of the future consultation process on Afghanistan.
- It has expanded its development partnership, worked with all communities across the country, and asked leaders of all Afghan ethnicities to remain together.
- That policy has been well-received by most of the Afghan people and government, and it has served India well.

### **What next for India?**

- The moment has now come to directly engage with the Afghan leaders on the

ground who will determine the course of the peace process.

- The American plan might result only in a 'reduction in violence' and not its complete cessation.
- In that case, if the U.S. forces are pulled out, India must step up to assist materially those who want to defend the Afghan republic.
- India should explore commonalities with key countries in dealing with the rapidly evolving situation.
- When in the late 1990s no country was willing to help the democratic forces in Afghanistan, India and Iran had scaled up their support. The current scenario reflects the same.

**Source: The Hindu**

