

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

