
4. US - Taliban Peace Pact & India

Prelims Syllabus: India and Pakistan

Mains Syllabus: GS-II India and its Neighbourhood- Relations.

Context:

- The US administration and the Taliban negotiators have agreed to finalise a peace pact on February 29 if a seven-day cooling-off period was passed off peacefully. The reduction in violence is seen as a test of the Taliban's control of their ranks and their commitment to peace.
- This peace deal would be the first step towards US's withdrawal from the Afghan soil.

The Peace deal and Afghan's future:

- The peace deal is expected to kick off two processes — a phased withdrawal of US troops and an 'intra-Afghan' dialogue.
- The first test will be a "significant reduction in violence" across Afghanistan.
- "Intra-Afghan negotiations will start soon thereafter, and will build on this fundamental step to deliver a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire and the future political roadmap for Afghanistan.
- The only way to achieve a sustainable peace in Afghanistan is by bringing together the main political actors - the Afghan government and the Taliban on the same page.
- However, many security analysts have criticised the US-Taliban talks as it would legitimise the Taliban.

The Taliban and Afghanistan's Troubled Peace:

- Taliban is an Islamic fundamentalist terror outfit originating in Afghanistan, waging war in the country in the form of an insurgency.
- Taliban emerged in the aftermath of the Afghan Civil War in 1994 and had established dominance in Afghanistan until they were ousted in 2001 after the American invasion.
- The Taliban has been condemned internationally for brutal treatment of many Afghans especially women.
- The UN has accused Taliban of starving the Afghan population by denying them UN food supplies and burning vast areas of fertile land.
- In areas they controlled the Taliban issued edicts which forbade women from being educated and girls were forced to leave schools and colleges.

- Taliban has also been accused of sheltering terrorists that were involved in the 9/11 terror attacks and have claimed responsibility for multiple terror attacks within the country as well as outside.
- Post 9/11 the group has focused more on pushing forward their political and ideological goals by expanding links to other terror outfits like Al-Qaeda and more recently ISIS.

US withdrawal and impact on India:

- India has an investment of over 3 billion dollars in Afghanistan.
- India's interest is to secure the investments it has made in Afghanistan in the past two decades, and the security of its diplomats, personnel and missions.
- India is helping the Afghan state in the rehabilitation process. This has taken away the large number of Afghan youth from the path of terrorism.
- India wants an Afghan led, controlled, owned process in which all stakeholders have a role to play. India's position has always been that it does not have any direct conversation with the Taliban.
- However, in 2018, India sent two retired diplomats, at the non-official level to join negotiations with Taliban at Moscow.
- India stresses on the legitimate democratically elected government in Afghanistan.
- India is seen as a stabilizing force by Afghanistan which can keep a check on Pakistan.
- In addition, India is concerned about the ungoverned spaces in that country, which could become grounds for terror groups to flourish.
- Of particular concern would be the prospect that Pakistan could use any such spaces to move its anti-India terror infrastructure, groups like LeT and JeM from Pakistan.

The Pakistan Factor:

- Pakistan has been pressured by the US to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table and prima facie, it has delivered.
- Pakistan tends to utilize the space to project its influence over the Afghan political space and in turn use it as a leverage to come out of the FATF's grey list.
- However, once when the Taliban enters a power sharing agreement with the Afghan government as part of the US Peace Process, Pakistan may lose its control over the Taliban. Pakistan has been providing continuous support to the destabilising elements in Afghanistan, despite the US aid withdrawal.
- The status-quo is about to change with the Afghan peace deal progress.

Way Forward:

- Making truce only with the Taliban is however a short-sighted policy, an overall dialogue needs to take place among all the stakeholders in Afghanistan to ensure sustainable peace,
- The other countries need to keep their respective interests aside, to build peace in the region.
- The US needs to make its policy on terror in Afghanistan clear, post the afghan withdrawal.
- India and Central Asian Republics can come forward in the rebuilding process to ensure peace in the region.

