

Developments in Afghan reconciliation process

What is the issue?

Afghan reconciliation process have seen major developments recently and hence India must ensure it's not cut out of the resolution process with the Taliban.

What are the recent developments in Afghan peace process?

- The Taliban reconciliation process is moving at a faster pace than was anticipated.
- The U.S. and Russia have accepted the idea that peace in Afghanistan is not possible without major concessions to the Taliban, including dialogue without insisting on a cessation of violence.
- During the U.S.-Taliban talks in Qatar, the Taliban made it clear that until the issue of withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan is agreed upon, progress in other issues is impossible.
- The Taliban has also been resisting US pressure for the announcement of a ceasefire and direct talks with the Afghan government.
- But the talks in Doha have given birth to cautious optimism for peace in Afghanistan with a number of pro-truce demonstrations in major urban centres across Afghanistan.
- Hence, the U.S., from the discussions, should decide the contours of its ultimate withdrawal from the Afghan war.
- Russia, on its part, has hosted conferences where Taliban leaders sat down with members of the Afghan High Peace Council and senior Afghan politicians recently.
- Both U.S. and Russia seemed to have agreed to sidestep the current government in Kabul, and accepted the Taliban's condition that it will not negotiate with the elected Afghan government at this stage.
- And both the Russian and U.S. processes are dependent on cooperation from Pakistan, which retains its influence over the Taliban leadership.
- On its part, the Taliban has also unequivocally renounced ties with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and committed to preventing Afghan soil from being used by foreign terrorists.

What are the concerns?

- Despite these developments, the current talks with the Taliban are not

Afghan-led, owned or controlled, which was the principle agreed to by all stakeholders in the past.

- Also, the Taliban has not reduced violence, or sworn allegiance to the Afghan constitution before joining talks.
- Despite the talks in Doha, there has been no let-up in the violence in Afghanistan.
- As many as 100 Afghan security forces were killed recently when armed Taliban fighters attacked a military base about 44km southwest of Kabul.
- The Afghan President said that 45,000 members of the country's security forces had been killed since he took office in 2014.

What should be the role of India?

- India's principled position in Afghanistan is that it will not directly or publicly talk to the Taliban until it engages the Afghan government.
- However, considering the recent developments, it is necessary that India stays along with these negotiations and is not cut out of the resolution process.
- A robust channel has to be open between Indian intelligence agencies and all important groups in Afghanistan, including the Taliban.
- This is in order to ensure that Indian interests, development projects and its citizens in Afghanistan are kept secure.
- Thus, India must intensify its dialogue with regional and global stakeholders to ensure that engagement with the Taliban must not come at the cost of establishing constitutional democracy, the rule of law, and securing the rights of women and minorities.

Source: The Hindu