Ending U.S.-Taliban Peace Talks

Why in news?

US President Donald Trump announced the cessation of peace negotiations with the Taliban, which was aimed at ending the 18-year war in Afghanistan.

What happened?

- The negotiations were over U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- The objective was to get assurances from the Taliban of not letting the country to be used as a safe haven for terrorists targeting the U.S.
- Mr Trump was about to host the Taliban as well as Afghan president Ashraf Ghani at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland for secret talks.
- In this backdrop, Trump's tweets seem to have indicated the end, at least for now, to the negotiations conducted by the chief U.S. negotiator, Zalmay Khalilzad, with the Taliban.
- Mr. Khalilzad had disclosed that he had reached an "in principle" agreement with the Taliban, but the details have not been revealed.
- The Taliban said the US would "lose the most" for cancelling talks.

What is the reason?

- The Taliban has been continually engaging in a series of attacks against civilians throughout the course of the talks.
- One estimate suggests that it has engaged in 173 terror attacks resulting in close to 1300 fatalities in 2019 alone.
- The Taliban has perversely used the attacks as a bargaining chip of sorts, to undermine the Afghanistan government.
- Mr. Trump said that a recent suicide car bomb attack in Kabul was the trigger for his sudden decision to end the talks.
- But little has changed in the Taliban's behaviour to immediately call-off the talks.
- So, this is seen as yet another instance when the U.S. President puts in personal diplomacy in the conduct of America's foreign affairs.

What lies ahead?

- Afghanistan continually witnesses violence, with the Taliban increasing its control over several provinces.

- The government’s writ prevails only in the north-central parts of the country.
- Given this, a durable peace, with the U.S. seeking early troop withdrawal, is only possible if there are talks between all Afghan groups and other regional stakeholders.
- For this, a guarantee by the Taliban that it will give up terror is essential.
- Going forward, Mr. Trump must reveal the contents of the so-called “in principle” agreement.
- He should also set more meaningful terms of engagement involving the Afghan regime in any further talks with the Taliban.

Source: The Hindu

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