Ending U.S.-Taliban Peace Talks - II

Click here for Part I

What is the issue?

The suspension of U.S.-Taliban peace talks has opened the space for the global community and India to reset the peace process.

What is the recent happening?

- While calling-off the talks, Trump also revealed that he had secretly invited the Taliban and the Afghan President separately to clinch a deal personally.
- The Khalilzad-brokered deal had been in the making over nine rounds of talks, largely in Doha, Qatar.
- [The Afghan government was not a part of this due to a Taliban veto that the U.S. implicitly accepted.]
- The salient details of the agreement were revealed on a private television channel.
- They centered on an initial timetable for the withdrawal of around 5,400 out of nearly 14,000 U.S. troops from 5 Afghan bases in 135 days.
- A tight timeline of two weeks to kick-start intra-Afghan talks before the Afghan presidential elections (scheduled on September 28) was also included.

Was the deal fair?

- The deal as negotiated was one-sided, partial and highly flawed.
- It was loaded heavily towards Mr. Trump's goal of a withdrawal of all U.S. troops by November 2020.
- It was weak in guarantees against terrorism aimed at the U.S., and lacking safeguards for the security and stability for Afghanistan.
- The comprehensive ceasefire was diluted to a limited 'reduction' in violence.
- Unresolved differences over many other issues were among the reasons for Mr. Trump's decision to call-off the talks.
- Notably, the agreement was also widely criticised in the U.S. and elsewhere.
- It was seen as a "negotiated withdrawal", "abdication", and even"surrender" rather than a peace agreement.

- It has sacrificed the political, military and economic investments and civic gains of the last 18 years including democracy and the advancement of women.
- This would create the conditions for civil war, promoting radical extremism.
- In Afghanistan too, the agreement was widely perceived as a sell-out and a betrayal of Afghanistan to the Taliban and Pakistan.

What opportunities does suspension of talks offer?

- The suspension of U.S.-Taliban talks has opened the space for the holding of Afghan presidential elections.
- The Afghan election authorities and security forces should now be supported to conduct free and fair elections as an exercise of sovereignty.
- Concerns about misuse of government apparatus should be addressed as the Taliban will try to disrupt the elections.
- The election outcome could provide a stronger foundation for talks with the Taliban that are Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.
- It may not be dictated from Washington, Islamabad, Doha or Moscow.
- India should be able to support such talks.
- Also, free from elections, the Afghan government could take the lead in forging a national consensus behind talks with the Taliban
- Besides these, the international community should support this peace process.
- It should focus its efforts on the Taliban to demonstrate their 'nationalism' by -
    i. distancing themselves from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence
    ii. halting attacks against fellow Afghans
    iii. agreeing to a ceasefire
    iv. negotiating directly with a representative Afghan delegation

How does the future look?

- Afghansitan and the world may breathe a sigh of relief that the deal has been aborted for now.
- But, this is short-lived as the mindset of a unilateral pullout without being aware of its consequences for Afghanistan and the region and the danger of Trump's uncertain decisions remain.
- For now, Mr. Trump has proclaimed the talks to be "dead" and ordered offensive operations.
- But he still needs a counter-terrorism strategy for which he would have to look for options.
- On the other hand, crucial to Afghanistan's future is its ability to stand on its own feet economically.

- This could be through investment in Afghanistan’s mineral sector to generate revenues, and militarily, through a progressive ‘Afghanisation’ of security forces at a lower budget.
- India should be able to help in this.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering