Enhancing Iran's role in Afghanistan

What is the issue?

Iran could help India enhance its role in stabilising Afghanistan as a responsible regional power.

What is the present situation?

- US has promised to withdraw half of its troops from Afghanistan by the end of April 2019.
- The U.S. will want to leave behind a stable country.
- Any peace settlement will stand a better chance of implementation only if it is supported by regional powers.

Who are the major regional powers?

- U.S. and Russia arranged talks on the Afghan peace process from 2014 to 2016.
- The meetings, known as the **6+1 group**, included representatives from Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and the U.S.
- The process assumed that each of these countries was essential to the achievement of a political settlement in Afghanistan.
- Moreover, in November 2018, the U.S. and the Taliban joined for the first time, in the Russia-hosted conference, in the hope of promoting a negotiated solution to achieve peace and national reconciliation in Afghanistan.

What are the conflicts of interest between U.S. and Iran?

- The American and Iranian interests on Afghanistan were coincided in the past.
- Together with the U.S. and India, Iran supported the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001.
- Iran also supported the installation of Hamid Karzai as President and favoured the exclusion of the Taliban from his government.
- The situation has changed after the U.S. imposed sanctions on Iran post-2005 on account of its non-compliance with nuclear safeguards.
- Following that, Iran started supporting the Taliban by providing them arms.
- Iran fears that American troops in Afghanistan could be used against it.
- U.S., on its part, have accused Iran of trying to extend its influence in

western Afghanistan by providing the Taliban with money, weapons and explosives.

Why should Iran and U.S. act together?

- Advantages could range from stability in Afghanistan to increased trade prospects, especially in South and West Asia.
- At a time when Iran's economy is weighed down by American sanctions, it would want to build up trade ties with neighbouring states.
- Iran could gain by strengthening trading ties with a secure Afghanistan.
- It has already supplanted Pakistan as Afghanistan's largest trading partner in 2017.
- On its part, the U.S. would also gain since Iran is the geopolitical hub connecting South, Central and West Asia.
- Moreover, an improvement in U.S.-Iran relations would be welcomed by America's European allies, who are opposed to Washington's unilateral sanctions on Iran.

What should be the role of India?

- India will also be adversely affected if negotiations break down, which would then increase extremist exports from Pakistan to Afghanistan or India.
- Thus, India should explore the Iranian diplomatic options to secure Afghanistan.
- Looking beyond Chabahar, India, Iran and Russia were the founding countries of the International North-South Transport Corridor project since 2002.
- The corridor is intended to increase connectivity between India, Iran, Russia, landlocked Afghanistan, Central Asia and also Europe.
- It would also advance the trading interests of these countries.
- Playing a larger role in regional security would enhance both the status of India and Iran as regional powers as well as the stability of South, Central, and West Asia.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering