Implications of U.S.'s Withdrawal from Afghanistan

What is the issue?

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- America is in the process of quitting Afghanistan as its soldiers are too expensive to send abroad.
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- The SAARC countries, India and Pakistan especially, are required to assess the situation and respond appropriately.
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What does the withdrawal mean for the countries?

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- Pakistan is scared of what will happen if America really quits and Afghanistan returns to its heroin-sustained warlordism.
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- The Afghan Taliban are winning on a daily basis and control half of the country.
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- They even eye the 250,000-strong Afghan army as future Taliban.
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- India has presence in Afghanistan after the construction of the Chabahar Port in Iran and the highway that links it to Kabul.
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- China is the next economic presence in Afghanistan after India.
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- Turkey is also eying an opportunity to play its role to safeguard the interests of Afghanistan’s Turkmen-Turkic community.
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- Three South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) members - Afghanistan, Pakistan, India - could have cooperated.
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- But the countries are only moving to end up in a conflict.
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What is Pakistan's stance?

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- When the Taliban ruled in Afghanistan, Pakistan’s own jihadi underground in the madrasa-dominated regions was vulnerable to their influence.
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- Rebellious Pakistani Taliban, safely located in northwestern Afghanistan, has hurt Pakistan as no one else in Afghanistan.
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- In 2014, six of its gunmen attacked the Army Public School in Peshawar, killing more than 100 children.
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- This changed the thinking of the Pakistan army.
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- Pakistan no longer viewed Afghanistan as its “strategic depth” against India as it posed challenges to it in return.
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How does Afghanistan's future look?

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- The Taliban have warriors in their hordes who have come from the Middle East and Central Asia.
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- Also, there are ISIS-Daesh and Al Qaeda still operational in Afghanistan, threatening all the three SAARC members.
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- It is true that most Afghans will accept the return of the Taliban.
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- They would welcome the destruction of the liberal order now being held up by an America-overseen constitution and American money.
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- But they would like to leave the country, if they could, before a Taliban takeover.
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- This is because Afghanistan is already on the brink of a food and water crisis.
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- The “small landlocked country recovering from decades of war” is among the water-stressed nations and whose people lack sufficient dietary diversity.

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- The Ashraf Ghani government will not survive after the American-funded Afghan army disintegrates and joins up with the Taliban.
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- That’s why the Taliban are refusing to even recognise the Kabul government.
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- For them, the Afghan army is the low-hanging fruit that will enlarge their capacity to challenge both Pakistan and India.
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What lies ahead?

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- It is difficult to diagnose the state of the mind of decision-makers in Pakistan.
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- But their decision to turn to India and offer talks and trade points to the possibility of the kind of normalisation needed for handling the crisis in Afghanistan.
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- A dead SAARC must now be revived to decide what its three members are going to do after the Americans leave Afghanistan.
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Source: Indian Express

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