India’s role in Afghanistan

What is the issue?

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India must be prepared for the potential consequences of withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

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What is the shift in U.S. policy?

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- The U.S. had announced South Asia Strategy for Afghanistan in 2017.
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- According to it, U.S. troops would remain involved in the country until conditions mandated the return of the troops.
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- Also, U.S. would put Pakistan on notice for its support to the Taliban and a political settlement with the Taliban would only follow after an effective military effort.
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- Finally, the strategy would focus on further developing the strategic partnership with India.
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- Despite the strategy, casualties of Afghan National and Defence Security Forces (ANDSF) in May-September 2018 were higher compared to corresponding periods since 2001.
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- The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan also documented more civilian deaths in the first nine months of 2018 than during the same period in 2014.
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- US has also appointed a special envoy to have direct talks with the Taliban.
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- This show that it has reversed its earlier position of not engaging the Taliban, until Taliban engages the Afghan government.
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- However, the efforts of the special envoy too fail to deliver much on the

peace process.
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- Hence, the US seem to pull-out its troops and reduce its presence in Afghanistan.
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- As a result, the U.S. war in Afghanistan evolved into a mission for ensuring democracy and prosperity in Afghanistan.
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- Accordingly, the U.S president has suggested that regional players like Russia, India and Pakistan should be more involved in stabilising the situation.
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What should be the role of India?

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- The U.S. administration has welcomed Indian investment in Afghanistan, which is shown by its temporary waiveron Chabahar port development in Iran.
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- The port development could pave the way for an alternate passage of facilitating easy movement of goods into the country through Iran.
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- However, India cannot replace Pakistan’s position geographically.
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- The decision to abandon the SAARC in favour of groupings like BIMSTEC, BBIN and IORA may have provided some short-term returns for India in isolating Pakistan.
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- However, it has had the effect of cutting Afghanistan loose from Indian leadership of South Asia as well.
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- Thus, India’s best course with Afghanistan remains its own regional strategy, not becoming a part of any other country’s strategy.
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- As the U.S.’s eventual pullout as Afghanistan’s peacekeeper is inevitable, close bilateral consultations should be made to help Afghanistan according to its own needs.
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Source: The Hindu

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