Making Peace with Taliban

What is the issue?

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- Afghan government has proposed peace with Taliban and offered for talks to work out a settlement.
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- This is the most comprehensible outreach since the ouster of Taliban from power in 2001 by the U.S. led coalition.
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What is the exact proposal?

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- **The Offer -** Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has recently invited the Taliban for talks and promised to recognise them as a political party.
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- He also called for other confidence-building measures and asked them to recognise the Kabul regime and the constitution.
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- The Taliban was asked to open an office in Kabul and passports and freedom of travel were offered to those involved in negotiations.
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- The Afghan government has presently come up with a seven-point plan for engagement and no apparent preconditions have been set.
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- Also, no time limit has been set for the Taliban to respond and negotiations are being premised on an openness to be accommodative.
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- **Previously –** An attempt for peace with Taliban was made in July 2015, and talks between the warring parties were held in Pakistan.
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- But those efforts collapsed when it emerged that Taliban leader Mullah Omar had died two years earlier in an attack.
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- Ever since, the Taliban has stepped up its violent campaign, killing

thousands and the current offer is partly in desperation.
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What drove the offer?

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- Clearly, 16 years of unending war seems to be driving the government and its allies to a fatigue, as the Taliban still looks resilient and persistent.
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- Notably, Taliban's is currently on the offensive and is expanding its influence across rural areas, and has a strong presence in 70% of the country's territory.
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- While Taliban has shown a capacity to strike even fortified positions in Kabul, it cannot capture the city as long as the U.S. has boots on the ground.
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- Considering this stalemate like situation, both sides have incentives for initiating talks and try direct negotiations for a way out.
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- Significantly, Mr. Ghani's offer comes a month after U.S. President Trump ruled out talks with the Taliban and committed more troops for Afghanistan.
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- But given the indispensability of U.S. support for the regime, the present offer is likely to have got the tacit approval of the Trump administration.
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How does the future look?

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- Previously, U.S. had tried various tactics like – "increasing troops, pressuring Pakistan to restrain Taliban, and promoting secret talks".
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- But as these have resulted in little success and hence it is important to experiment with a direct Afghan driven initiative like the present one.
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- Settling the Taliban menace is also vital as another threat is looming large in eastern Afghanistan, where "Islamic State affiliates" are gaining clout.
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- If the Taliban accepts the peace proposal, it could set the stage for a constructive engagement and provide the much needed relief for the

Afghanis.
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Source: The Hindu

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