Making peace with Taliban

What is the issue?

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- The Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has been trying to initiate a peace process with sections of the Taliban.
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- This initiative runs the inherent risk of intensifying divisions in the country's ruling coalition.
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Why is the timing for offering peace important?

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- One of the most difficult moments in any war is identifying the perfect timing for making a bid for peace.
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- If bid from a weak position, it would imply a tacit defeat.
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- Also, if bid from a strong position, it would mean settling for a compromise when a comprehensive victory was very much in the offering.
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- It hence needs to be appropriately timed in order to help in accelerating a positive shift in the structure of the conflict.
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- While Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has made a peace offer to the Taliban, there is no clarity on where this might lead to.
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What is the present ground situation?

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- **Rising Taliban -** Taliban's clout has steadily expanded in recent years and it

is now said to be prominent in nearly 50% of the Afghanistan's territory.
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- The Taliban, with its sanctuaries in Pakistan, has been able to mount spectacular terror attacks in Kabul and elsewhere at ease.
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- Mr. Ghani had vowed to exterminate Taliban only a few months ago, in the aftermath of a string of massive attacks within high security zones.
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- Hence, the current offer for unconditional talks was a surprise and many observers are also sceptical as they believe it is a tactical acceptance of defeat.
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- Notably, Taliban persists in its refusal to engage the government in Kabul, which it considers illegitimate and prefers to negotiate directly with the U.S.
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- **U.S. Position -** U.S. is a major player in the war against Taliban and has been steadfast in preventing a military victory of Taliban over the Afghan regime.
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- It has also been mounting pressure on Pakistan to crack down on elements within Pakistan that are contributing to destabilising Afghanistan.
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- Taliban wants a complete U.S. withdrawal, as U.S. presence is its biggest impediment to recapture power, but the U.S. only recently increased its troops.
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- **Afghani government -** Mr. Ghani's own position within Kabul's ruling coalition at the national and provincial governments is steadily waning.
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- Many also worry that any significant concessions to the Taliban will further intensify the divisions within the ruling coalition and usher in instability.
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What are the contours of the peace offer made?

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- Mr. Ghani unveiled a peace in Kabul last week, which without a speck of doubt is the most comprehensive and generous offer made since war began in 2001.
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- **Provisions -** It includes a ceasefire, release of prisoners, recognising the Taliban as a legitimate political force, and a review of the constitution.

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- By offering unconditional talks, Kabul seems to be suggesting that it is willing to negotiate a transition to a new political order to replace the current one.
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- The offer is a clear recognition of Taliban's renewed relevance for the political future of Afghanistan, which wasn't accorded thus far.
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- **Considerations -** The war in Afghanistan, now in its 17th year, doesn't seem winnable by either side despite large military interventions.
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- As the U.S. would have to eventually pull out, it is only prudent for Kabul to start negotiating with the Taliban to end the stalemate and ensure stability.
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- Notably, the Pakistani government too has welcomed Ghani's peace offer and has promised "wholehearted support" to the peace process.
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Source: Indian Express

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