Peace Process in Syria

Why in news?

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The 7 year-old Syrian conflict is moving toward a possible end with the defeat of IS and weak ceasefire agreements with the many rebel groups.

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How has peace negotiations progressed?

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- Astana Peace Process, (sponsored by Russia, Iran & Turkey) and the U.N.-sponsored Geneva Talks have been inconclusive thus far.
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- Russia has pressed the military advantage gained to find a lasting political solution by hosting Syrian President Assad recently.
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- Notably, the Russian side had also had multiple consultations with other stakeholders - U.S., Saudi, Egyptian and Israel.
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- Also, in tandem with the Russian initiatives, Saudi sponsored a two-day meeting of around 140 rival groups in Riyadh.
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- In this, an agreement was reached to field a unified rebel delegation at the Geneva talks in future meetings.
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- They also reportedly dropped their long-standing demand for the removal of President Assad, which could ease tensions.
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What are the challenges?

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- The intense foreign involvements that pursue divergent objectives have created a big mess in Syria – which needs to be overcome.
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- **Divergence -** Notably, there is no unanimous opionion in support of the Assad regime and the legitimacy of major rebel groups.
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- The Kurdish quest for self determination is also highly controversial as this spreads across borders.
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- Similarly, apprehension about Iranian gains in the Syria have also been a major concern for countries like Saudi & Israel.
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- Also, the future polity envisioned for Syria range from the continuation of "Shiaite Ba'at Allawite domination" under Assad to the establishment of a "Sunni Rebublic".
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- **Enacting Peace –** A sustainable and speedy agreement on peace is crutial as prolonged negotiations will lead to further crisis.
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- Any peace process involves funds for reconstruction and stakeholders should ensure sufficient funds for development.
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- The best one can realistically hope for is a congruence of major players and progressive withdrawal of foreign military presence.
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What are the stakes for India?

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- By keeping a low profile during the conflict, India has earned wider acceptability across the Syrian social spectrum.
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- Before the war, bilateral trade between the two countries was over half a billion dollars annually, with India enjoying a trade surplus.
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- In a post-conflict situation, India has a potential role in institution building and reconstruction.
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- India could also capitalise on its rapo with Iran to further its economic prospects Syria.
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Source: The Hindu

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