Taking Forward the Afghan Peace Process

What is the issue?

- The U.S.-Taliban talks were suspended recently with U.S. President Trump's decision.
- However, the Afghan peace process has a long way to go and here is a look at the challenges and priorities in this regard.

What is the security threat Afghanistan faces?

- With suspension of talks, the insurgent group threatened to step up attacks in Afghanistan.
- After the suspension, it used two suicide bombers who killed at least 48 people.
- They targeted a rally being addressed by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani north of Kabul, and also the capital.
- These attacks are yet another warning of the security challenges Afghanistan faces.
- This, especially, becomes a concern when the country is gearing up to the presidential poll (September 28, 2019).
- Both the 2014 presidential election and 2018 parliamentary poll were violently disturbed by the Taliban.
- This time, the group has asked civilians to stay away from political gatherings, making all those who participate in the political process potential targets.

What is the larger concern?

- There are rising attacks against Afghan civilians by the Taliban.
- This makes Taliban's claim that it is 'fighting on behalf of the civilians against the foreign invaders' questionable.
- The Taliban did not suspend its terror campaign even while holding talks with the U.S. in Qatar.
- Now that the talks have collapsed, a revengeful Taliban could be more dangerous to the Afghans.

What is the Afghan government's stance?

- The Afghan government seems determined to go ahead with the election.

- It has deployed some 70,000 troops to protect over 5,000 polling stations.
- But, the threat from the Taliban is so grave that the President is largely addressing campaign rallies through Skype.
- Even if the elections are over without further attacks, the Taliban problem will remain and the Afghan government will have to deal with it.

How does the future look?

- The fundamental problem with the U.S.-Taliban peace process was that it excluded the Kabul government at the insistence of the insurgents.
- This was a major compromise by the U.S.
- On the other side, the Taliban was not even ready to cease hostilities.
- A peace agreement dictated by the Taliban will not sustain and the Taliban cannot be allowed to have a free terror run either.
- A permanently unstable Afghanistan and an insurgent group growing further in strength is unhealthy for any nation, including Afghanistan's neighbours.

What lies ahead?

- The U.S.-Taliban peace talks may have collapsed but it need not put an end to finding a settlement for the Afghan crisis.
- Afghanistan needs a comprehensive peace push in which all stakeholders, including the government, the U.S., the Taliban and regional players should have a say.
- The U.S., for its part, should -
    i. continue to back the Kabul government
    ii. put pressure on Pakistan to crack down on the Afghan Taliban
    iii. double its counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan
    iv. invite regional players such as Pakistan, Iran, Russia, India and China to take part in the diplomatic efforts
- In other words, the Taliban should be forced to return to talks.

Source: The Hindu

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