The Taliban's Surge

What is the issue?

- Since the start of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban has made rapid territorial gains.
- This calls for a proactive role by both the Afghan government and the regional powers who are invested in the country's long-term stability.

How is Taliban's control evolving?

- 90% of U.S. withdrawal is complete.
- With this, the Taliban have taken control of 195 of Afghanistan's 407 districts, and are contesting 129 others.
- Most of their recent victories are in the northern provinces of Badakhshan and Takhar.
- These had notably resisted Taliban rule in the 1990s.
- In several northern districts, Afghan troops have either surrendered or retreated.

What is the impending threat?

- The north is home to Afghanistan's elite power brokers and leaders.
- If this is lost, the risk of a total collapse of the government in Kabul would increase.
- The government still controls most of the provincial capitals and cities.
- But they are practically surrounded by the Taliban.
- The pace of the Taliban's advancement in the countryside is on the rise.
- It is thus possible that they could launch an offensive to take the population centres once the foreign troops are out.
- On the other hand, the Taliban's strategy is still not clear.
- Their political office in Doha started peace talks with Afghan government representatives in September 2020.
- It continues to say that they were committed to the dialogue.
- But on the battlefield in Afghanistan, they continue a relentless campaign aimed at capturing more territories.

Why is the situation so?

- Part of the problem was the total abdication of leadership and responsibility

by the U.S., which invaded Afghanistan 20 years ago.

- When direct talks between the U.S. and the Taliban began, the U.S.'s focus was on exiting the war.
- It was not into finding a peaceful settlement to the crisis that it partly created.
- Therefore, the U.S. failed to put pressure on the Taliban to extract concessions.
- Instead, it struck a deal with them, completely ignoring the concerns of the Kabul government.
- Now, the Taliban are much more powerful on the ground.
- Even if the peace process with the Afghan government is revived after American pull-out, they would negotiate from a position of strength.

What is the way forward?

- A violent takeover of the country by the Taliban, like in 1996, would not serve anybody's interests.
- The Taliban would also not find international legitimacy if they capture Kabul through bloodshed.
- Afghan's past reveals that one-party regimes [the communist regime, Mujahideen or the Taliban] failed to stabilise the country or sustain themselves in the long term.
- Given this, the warring parties' focus should shift towards settlement and building lasting structures of power.
- The given conditions should not stop Kabul and regional powers China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and India from seeking a political settlement.

Source: The Hindu

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