U.S' Afghan Strategy - Issue of Continuity

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Why in news?

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U.S President recently announced his new Afghan strategy.

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How did U.S Strategy evolve?

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- Launched with the full support of the international community in 2001 after 9/11 by President George Bush.
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- The end objective of a stable and peaceful Afghanistan began to recede as the Taliban launched their insurgency in 2005 after they had recovered and regrouped themselves in Pakistan.
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- After 16 years, Afghanistan remains America's longest war, having spent more than $800 billion and losing nearly 2400 troops, with no victory in sight.
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How did the Obama years look?

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- After taking over in 2009, Obama described the Afghan war as "a war of necessity" & authorised a surge in U.S. troop presence from 55,000 in early 2009 reaching 100,000 in 2010.
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- The objective was to gain a decisive victory over the insurgency with a

time bound drawdown that would commence in 2011.
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- By the fall of 2014, only 8,400 U.S. soldiers and another 5,000 from other allies stayed behind to “advise, train and assist” the Afghans.
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- It was expected that from 2014, the Afghan security forces would robustly take charge of all combat operations, which however has been proving to be lacklusture.
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- So, the completion war which was supposed to happen by 2016, was put on hold and passed on to the next president.
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How is the Trump era taking shape?

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- Trump has been a vocal supporter of complete withdrawal for long but the American establishment’s view prevailed against his instincts as with Obama.
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- A hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum that would facilitate the resurrection of Taliban & 20 other U.S.-designated terrorist groups.
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- So, modest increase of 4000 troops was ordered without any time frame for withdrawal.
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- Mr. Trump has made it clear that the purpose of the U.S. military presence “is not nation-building”, but “killing terrorists”.
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Does it make a dramatically different plan?

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- US recognises that the elimination of external sanctuary and support to the insurgents is essential for success.
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- Afghan-oriented militant groups, including the Taliban and Haqqani Network, retain freedom inside Pakistani territory and benefit from support from elements in the Pakistani Government.

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- Although these discoveries aren’t new, an open acknowledgement of this by a U.S. President is new.
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- Trump has described that the U.S. can no longer be silent about Pakistan’s safe havens for terrorist organisations.
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- He has also indicated determination to further develop a strategic partnership with India and appreciated India’s important contributions to stability in Afghanistan.
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Will Pakistan continue to hold primacy?

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- As long as the U.S. maintains a military presence in Afghanistan, geography determines its dependence on Pakistan for supply routes.
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- The other possible access routes are through Iran or though Russia and Kyrgyzstan neither of which is currently feasible.
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- Consequently, Mr. Trump’s policy reflects more continuity than he is willing to acknowledge.
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Source: The Hindu

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