US-Taliban Peace Talks

Why in news?

The eighth round of talks between the U.S. and the Taliban takes place in Qatar's capital Doha. Click here to know more on the earlier talks.

What are the conflicting demands?

- The U.S. maintained that the Doha talks would cover four issues -
    1. a cessation of hostilities
    2. an intra-Afghan peace dialogue
    3. assurance from the Taliban that Afghan territory would not be used for attacking U.S. interests
    4. U.S. troop withdrawal
- However, the Taliban made it clear that its priority was the last issue i.e. the US troop withdrawal.
- The Taliban rejected a ceasefire, instead of launching its spring offensive, Operation Fath.
- It also rejected talks with the Afghan government, describing it as a “puppet regime”.
- The Taliban provided some assurances on the third issue, but it kept demanding a firm date for U.S. troop withdrawal.
- It changed its mind and agreed on the second issue, an intra-Afghan peace dialogue when pushed by Pakistan.
- Now, the US wants Taliban guarantees that Afghanistan will not become a safe haven for "terrorists".
- On the other hand, the Taliban is focused on ensuring the withdrawal of all US-led foreign forces from the country.

What are the challenges?

- The Afghan government has lost its credibility and there is little support for its term being extended.
- A deteriorating security environment makes it difficult for a credible election to be held.
- Afghan security forces are losing 25 to 30 men daily, a toll that is depleting ranks and affecting morale.
- There is a rise in ethnic polarisation in Afghanistan. With the emergence of

the Islamic State, there is growing evidence of sectarian polarization.
- Any dilution of the stature of the Afghan security forces would dramatically increase the risks of fragmentation of Afghanistan.
- The Taliban is not going to take part in the election, and once a deal is concluded, its demand will be for an interim government.
- Even if elections take place, an elected government would soon find itself at cross purposes with the interim government.
- Further, a number of promised electoral reforms are yet to be implemented.
- The U.S.'s exit will end its long war in Afghanistan but growing political uncertainties will only exacerbate Afghanistan's ongoing conflict.

What lies ahead?

- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has already indicated September 1, 2019, as a deadline for concluding the Doha process.
- So, instead of a contentious election, an interim government would provide a better environment for the U.S. to manage its exit.
- The reality is that there can be no peace unless the Taliban and Afghan security forces de-escalate.
- However, this will require talks between the Taliban and the government.

Source: The Hindu

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