US-Taliban Peace Talks in Doha

Why in news?

Talks between the US and Taliban in Doha has led to a “framework” for a peace agreement, aimed at ending the 17-year-old conflict in Afghanistan.

How has the conflict been?

- The Taliban emerged in the early 1990s following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, shortly before the demise of the Soviet Union.
- The militants ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.
- They were imposing a brutal version of Sharia law that included public executions and amputations, and the banning of women from public life.
- They are in conflict with the US-led troops following the 9/11 attacks of 2001, which U.S. blamed on al-Qaeda militants sheltered by the Taliban.
- The US has about 14,000 troops in Afghanistan, most of which are present as part of a larger NATO-led mission to train, advice and assist Afghan forces.
- The conflict, known as America's longest war, has cost more than 2,400 American lives, and billions of US dollars.
- The number of civilians, mostly women and children, killed or injured by airstrikes in Afghanistan has risen 39% year on year.
- In the past 3 years, the Taliban have strengthened their grip.
- In November 2015, the Afghan government controlled 72% of districts in the country, but now controls just 56% of them.
- Approximately a third of Afghanistan is a "contested" area.



What does the framework contain?

- Taliban has made a commitment to not allow terrorists to use Afghan territory to mount attacks on the US and its allies.
- The US has made an agreement to pull out troops.
- But this is only if the Taliban agrees to talk with the Afghan government, and to a permanent ceasefire.
- With the announcement of a near agreement, the US has outrun Moscow, which had begun its own process.
- Russia's strategy included regional players such as Iran, China and several Central Asian states.

- India too sent a “non-official” delegation to Russia-led talks, to find a resolution in Afghanistan.

What is the Afghan government's stance?

- The Afghan government has so far been kept out of the US-Taliban talks.
- Afghan President Ashraf Ghani cautioned against rushing into a deal.
- The government prefers an agreement that comes with rationality, without repetition of past mistakes.
- The President asked the Taliban to engage with the Afghan government directly.
- But Taliban maintains that without the withdrawal of international troops, there could be no progress on other issues.

What next?

- Reportedly, a US-based security think tank, had drawn up a peace agreement (a possible final agreement) whose main elements are:

i. an 18-month transitional government that will oversee power sharing between the Taliban and other sections of the Afghan polity
ii. extension of US assistance to Afghanistan
iii. the creation of a high Ulema council which, along with the interim government, will discuss changes to the Constitution
iv. amnesty
v. Taliban’s renunciation of links with terrorist organisations
vi. release of prisoners
vii. formation of an impartial team to implement the draft deal

- However, the US State Department has denied any plans for an interim government in Kabul.
- The presidential elections are due in July, 2019, and it is unclear how the talks might impact this process.

Source: Indian Express

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