US War in Afghanistan - Withdrawal and Thereafter

What is the issue?

- The last US combat troops prepare to leave Afghanistan.
- But naturally, the question of whether the war is really over or not arises. Here is a look at the various aspects of the troops withdrawal and ending of the war.

How will the future support be?

- Soon, all the U.S. combat troops, and 20 years of accumulated war materiel will be gone.
- However, the head of US Central Command, Gen. Frank McKenzie, will have authority until September 2021 to defend Afghan forces against the Taliban.
- He can do so by ordering strikes with US warplanes based outside of Afghanistan.
- After the withdrawal, strike aircraft, along with any logistical support for Afghan forces, will be done from outside the country.
- Inside Afghanistan, US troops will no longer be there to train or advise Afghan forces.
- An unusually large US security contingent of 650 troops is based at the US Embassy compound.
- This will protect American diplomats and potentially help secure the Kabul international airport.
- Turkey is also expected to continue its current mission of providing airport security.
- McKenzie will have authority to keep as many as 300 more troops to assist that mission until September 2021 (3 months from now).
- Possibly, the US military may also be asked to assist any large-scale evacuation of Afghans seeking Special Immigrant Visas.
- The U.S. administration is concerned of the Afghans who helped the US war effort.
- They are thereby vulnerable to Taliban retribution, and will not be left behind by the U.S.
- In effect, as many as 950 US troops will be present until September 2021 and there is potential for continued airstrikes.
- So, the war is probably not over yet.

How then wars end?

- Unlike Afghanistan, some wars end with a flourish.
- World War I was over with the armistice signed with Germany on November 11, 1918 and the later signing of the Treaty of Versailles.
- World War II saw dual celebrations in 1945, one with Germany's surrender and other with Japan's surrender.
- In contrast, other endings have been less clear-cut.
- The US pulled troops out of Vietnam in 1973, in what many consider a failed war that ended with the fall of Saigon two years later.
- When convoys of US troops drove out of Iraq in 2011, a ceremony marked their final departure.
- But just 3 years later, American troops were back to rebuild Iraqi forces that collapsed under attacks by Islamic State militants.

What is the case with U.S. war in Afghanistan?

- As the war draws to a close, there will be no surrender and no peace treaty, no final victory and no decisive defeat.
- For the U.S., it was enough that US forces dismantled al-Qaida and killed Osama bin Laden.
- The NATO Resolute Support mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces began in 2015.
- At the peak of the war, there were more than 130,000 troops in Afghanistan from 50 NATO nations and partner countries.
- That dwindled to about 10,000 troops from 36 nations for the Resolute Support mission, and most had withdrawn their troops now.
- Some may see the war ending when NATO's mission is declared over.
- But that may not happen for months.

What are the impending threats?

- Lately, violence in Afghanistan has escalated. Taliban attacks on Afghan forces and civilians have intensified.
- An emboldened Taliban insurgency is making battlefield gains. Meanwhile, the prospective peace talks are stalled.
- Some fear that once foreign forces are gone, Afghanistan will dive deeper into civil war.
- Though degraded, an Afghan affiliate of the Islamic State extremist network also exists.
- Given this, the US leaders insist the only path to peace in Afghanistan is through a negotiated settlement.

- Also, the US troop withdrawal does n0t mean the end of the war on terrorism.
- The US has made it clear that it retains the authority to conduct strikes against al-Qaida or other terrorist groups in Afghanistan if they threaten the US homeland.

Source: The Indian Express

