

Joe Biden's peace plan for Afghanistan

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The Joe Biden administration has proposed a new peace plan to the Afghan government and the Taliban, seeking to bring violence to a halt and form an interim government. The Biden administration is currently reviewing its Afghan strategy. While the review is not completed, there is a consensus within the administration that “accelerating the peace process” is the best way to advance the shared interests of the U.S. and the Afghan government.

In news: Joe Biden offers the Taliban a chance to share power in Afghanistan

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign Affairs

Dimensions:

- Highlights of the Peace Plan
- Implications for the region
- Implications for India

Content:

Highlights of the Peace Plan:

In a deal signed with the Taliban in February 2020, the United States agreed to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan by May 2021.

The Taliban and the Afghan government started peace talks in Doha in September last year but reached no breakthrough.

The administration of the U.S. President Joe Biden is trying to stick to this peace deal, but it is faced with some difficult challenges as violence remains high and little progress has been made on intra-Afghan talks.

In order to make an American withdrawal more feasible and not entirely abandon the U.S.-Taliban agreement, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has put forward a revised peace plan with an interim power sharing formula and a proposal to involve key countries in the region.

The new Peace Plan includes the following:

- **Multilateral Unified Approach:** US has proposed a UN-led conference of representatives of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the U.S. “to discuss a unified approach to support peace in Afghanistan”.
- **Written Proposal to enhance Trust:** US will share written proposals with the Afghan leadership and the Taliban to accelerate talks.
- **Inclusive government and Comprehensive Ceasefire:** US has urged both sides to reach a consensus on Afghanistan’s future constitutional and governing arrangements; find a road map to a new “inclusive government”; and agree on the terms of a “permanent and comprehensive ceasefire”.
- **Negotiations in Turkey:** US has also proposed a senior level meeting of the Afghan government and the Taliban in Turkey to discuss power sharing, reduction of violence and other specific goals.

Implications for the region:

- It is clear, however, after 20 years that no government in Afghanistan can succeed without Taliban participation and that no peace process in Afghanistan can succeed without Pakistan’s full support.
- The U.S. assessment is that if American troops are pulled out of Afghanistan, the Taliban would make quick gains and the security situation will worsen.
- It hopes that the best way to prevent a complete Taliban takeover is a regional peace process and an interim unity government. The Taliban are yet to respond to America’s proposal.

Implications for India:

- Since the Afghan peace process began two years ago, India's role in it has been peripheral at best.
- India had no role in the previous process, but was keen not to appear a spoiler, and had declared its support for an Afghan-led process and the talks at Doha.
- For New Delhi, which has protested being left out of regional formulations in the past both in the original **Moscow process**, and in the **United Nation's April 2020 "6+2+1"** that included Afghanistan's "immediate neighbours" only, the U.S.'s suggestion is a relief.
- India has reiterated its long-held support for an **"Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled" peace process.**
- Also, India has long held the position of dealing only with the elected government in Kabul, and has always considered the Taliban a terrorist organisation backed by Pakistan.
- Finding common ground at the high table could prove to be challenging, as each country's priority would be to safeguard its own interests.
- India's refusal to engage with Taliban will give Pakistan a free hand to use it as a proxy in India's internal matters.
- Given India's regional and global positions, it is appropriate for India to engage with all the key players in Afghanistan, not only in terms of the government but also in terms of political forces, society and the Afghan body politics.
- India's position on non-engagement with Taliban has reduced its role in international diplomatic efforts.

Opportunity for India:

- India should draw comfort from the fact that it has been offered a seat on the decision-making table along with China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and the US.

- This is a big opportunity, given the fact that India has been losing leverage in Afghanistan ever since the Taliban came back to battle in 2004, getting stronger and stronger.
- So, the issue for India is whether it should stick to its stance of loyalty to the Afghan government or be flexible in its approach.
- As a new push for peace in Afghanistan gets underway, India must prepare for the challenge of sitting at the high table.
- India has to rethink its stand on Taliban and come out with its own strategy for a multilateral peace process.
- While upgrading its channels of communication with Taliban, India's engagement should be conditional on Taliban joining the mainstream politics.

What is the Afghan government's stand?

- The Ghani administration has consistently been critical of the US's direct outreach to the Taliban.
- The Trump administration held direct talks with the Taliban, excluding the government.
- Later, Washington put pressure on Kabul to release Taliban prisoners as part of an agreement it reached with the insurgents.
- Even when the Doha talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government were underway, Mr Ghani made it clear that he, as elected President, is the only legitimate representative of the Afghan people.
- He resisted making concessions to the Taliban.

Evaluating Future Outcomes:

- While the Afghan government's opposition to sharing power with the Taliban is well known, it is not clear whether Mr Ghani could continue to resist American pressure.
- And if the Biden administration decides to stick to the

Taliban deal and withdraw troops by May, Mr Ghani would be in a tougher spot.

- The people of Afghanistan do not have any good options. If Ghani rejects the American offer, the war will continue forever.
- The Taliban have already taken over much of the country's hinterlands and are breathing down the neck of its cities.
- Either way, the Taliban are set to make gains.

Mould your thought: Critically evaluate Joe Biden's proposed peace plan for Afghanistan. What are its implications for India?

Approach to the answer:

- Background for the new plan
- Discuss the plan details
- Discuss the complications involved and implications for the regional security & Stability
- Discuss the implications on India
- Conclusion