

US – Taliban deal

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Source: *The Hindu*

Manifest pedagogy: In a major policy flip by the USA under the Trump administration a deal was negotiated between the USA and Taliban. The minutes of the deal along with its consequences for the Afghan government and the region is very important from the perspective of Mains.

In news: The United States and the Taliban have signed a peace deal.

Placing it in syllabus: India and its neighborhood relations

Dimensions:

- Provisions of the deal
- Concerns
- Global and regional reactions
- Implications on India and India's response

Provisions of the deal:

The peace agreement addresses **four main issues:**

Cease-fire: Negotiators agreed to a **temporary reduction in violence** and a **lasting cease-fire among U.S., Taliban, and Afghan forces** will be part of intra-Afghan negotiations.

Withdrawal of foreign forces: The **United States has agreed to reduce its number of troops in the country from roughly 12,000 to 8,600 within 135 days**. If the Taliban follows through on its commitments, all U.S. and other foreign troops will leave Afghanistan within fourteen months.

The United States and the Taliban agreed to the **release of up to five thousand Taliban prisoners in exchange for up to one thousand Afghan security forces**.

Intra-Afghan negotiations: Taliban has indicated the possibility of talks with the Afghan government to resolve intra-Afghan disagreements, which it had opposed all these years.

Counterterrorism assurances: The Taliban guaranteed that Afghanistan will not be used by any of its members, other individuals, or terrorist groups to threaten the security of the United States and its allies. U.S. officials have also stressed protecting women's rights which were curbed by Taliban prior to its 2001 overthrow.

Concerns: Though the move is welcomed by many nations, the issues which remain to be worked out during intra-Afghan negotiations include *sharing power, disarming and reintegrating Taliban fighters into society and determining the future of the country's democratic institutions and constitution.*

Disputed election results were announced in mid-February, 2020 and both President Ashraf Ghani and his main rival have declared victory. Ghani's rival has been threatening to set up a parallel government. Hence the **peace process could be complicated by a weak central government, afflicted by ethnic, sectarian, and tribal differences.**

With an estimated sixty thousand fighters, **Taliban is stronger now than before.** It controls many districts throughout the country and **earns millions of dollars from opium poppy cultivation and the illegal drug trade,** which pose further problems for the peace process.

There are still around **twenty terrorist groups aligned with the Taliban or al-Qaeda** that are operating inside the country. The resurgence of the Islamic State is a big concern.

Pakistan, which serves as the home base for the Taliban leadership could mobilize opposition against them as they would feel excluded from the talks.

Taliban prisoners are key leverage for the Afghan government, and Kabul has long said it would not release prisoners until after intra-Afghan talks. But the deal signed states that 5,000 prisoners Taliban are to be released by the date that intra-Afghan talks are required to start. The Afghan government has said it had not committed to such a swap.

Global and regional reactions:

After the U.S. invasion, Pakistan granted the Taliban safe havens. According to experts **Pakistan now desires an Afghan government that includes the Taliban and is friendlier toward Islamabad than it is to New Delhi.**

Shiite-majority Iran has long viewed the Taliban, a Sunni group, as a foe, especially since it has received support from Iranian rivals Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Iran accepted U.S. efforts to overthrow the Taliban in 2001 and supported the Afghan government. The **trafficking of drugs from Afghanistan through Iran and opium addiction in Iran are problems** in the two countries' relationship.

Russia wants to take a lead role in the peace process and grow its influence in Afghanistan to counter the U.S. and NATO presence in the region. It has also hosted several meetings between Taliban delegations and Afghan representatives in the past years.

Beijing is economically interested in Afghanistan as it hopes to integrate it into the **Belt and Road Initiative**. It is Afghanistan's **largest source of foreign investment** and is interested in tapping into Afghanistan's vast natural resources. In late 2019, Afghan and Taliban officials attended a conference in Beijing, and **Chinese leaders supported the U.S-Taliban agreement.**

Around **75 percent of the Afghan government's public expenditures are currently covered by grants from international partners,** according to a World Bank report. As

Afghanistan will continue to require billions of dollars in aid for years to come, experts opined that the aid could be used as leverage to keep the Taliban in negotiations with the Afghan government.

Implications on India and India's response:

India has been a key stakeholder in the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. It is a strong supporter of the Afghan government and has **given \$3 billion to develop infrastructure and cultivate business in Afghanistan** since 2001. Its **main goals are to** minimize Pakistan's influence and prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for anti-India militants.

However, **the Indian government did not back U.S. efforts to reach an agreement with the Taliban** and disagreed with legitimizing the group as a political actor. But its **ambassador to Qatar attended the signing of the landmark peace deal**, making it the first time that New Delhi officially attended an event involving the Taliban.

India in a sense feels that the peace deal could be a victory of sorts for Pakistan, which has been Taliban's principal supporter. India's discomfort with the development, exposes its lack of options in the wake of a regional development that holds **crucial security and strategic implications for India.**

India's consistent policy is to support all opportunities that can bring peace, security and stability in Afghanistan, end violence, cut ties with international terrorism and lead to a lasting political settlement through an Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled process.

In recent times it has been **delineating clearly that it shares a border with Afghanistan.** It is reiterating its sovereign rights over Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir and **formalising its role as a neighbour of Afghanistan, not just a close regional partner.**

Since India is one of the biggest players in the region and an emerging superpower, whatever happens in Afghanistan has a direct strategic bearing and holds security concerns for New Delhi.

Hence **India's endorsement of the peace deal is more of an acceptance of inevitability** and a realist interpretation of the course of history over which India has little control. **India reads the "agreement" not as a treatise of "peace" but the first step towards an exit strategy of the US.**