

Evolving Security Situation in Afghanistan: RSTV- Big Picture

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What's in the news?

- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani discussed the evolving security situation in the region and other areas of mutual and bilateral interests.
- The Afghan President thanked India for the timely supply of food and medical assistance to meet Afghan requirements during the [COVID-19](#) pandemic.
- India reiterated its commitment to the people of Afghanistan in their quest for a peaceful, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan.
- Recently, Afghan forces retook a prison in the country's east, after a gun battle with the ISIL fighters who had attacked the facility, killing nearly 29 people.

The contemporary situation in Afghanistan

- The main issue in Afghanistan is the confrontation between Afghan authorities and the [Taliban](#). The Taliban is insisting on the imposition of strict Sharia law.
- Violence is being perpetrated by ISIS and the Taliban.
- The beginning of peace talks is stuck on the issue of prisoner release. Unless talks or intra-Afghanistan dialogue begins, the security situation will continue to remain challenging.
- Americans have decided to withdraw and this bipartisan position of the US will not change even if there is a change in the presidency in the US.
- Without support from the US Government, the security forces of Afghanistan are not equipped to counter the aggression of the Taliban.
- While the high profile attacks have gone up, the actual levels of violence as per the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) have reduced considerably in 2020.
- UNAMA report says that casualties amongst children are primarily caused by Afghan security forces.

The focus of the Islamic State is shifting to Afghanistan

- The Islamic State has shifted its focus from West Asia to Afghanistan, which they call the 'Khorasan affiliate'. Their main objective is to expand operations in eastern Afghanistan.
- The various terror groups such as Haqqani network, LeT, Taliban, and Tehrik-i-Taliban of Pakistan are interlinked with one another. They have coordinated training activities and logistics.

Why is the US keen on withdrawing from Afghanistan?

- The US wants to focus on countering global [terrorism](#) and not insurgency in Afghanistan in particular. Therefore countering the terror operations of Al Qaeda is a bigger priority for the US rather than countering the Taliban's radical activities.

Dynamics after the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan

- The main objectives of the Taliban have been:
 - Withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan
 - The imposition of a conservative “Islamic system” under the sharia law
- Currently, as these aims are being achieved, Taliban leaders have promised negotiations with Afghan authorities for:
 - Mutual power-sharing
 - A stable future political structure
 - Governance and rules for public life
- The 2020 peace deal signed between the Taliban and the U.S by which the US ensured a fourteen-month phased withdrawal of military forces, pressures the Taliban to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a platform for terrorists or continued attacks on civilians.

Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan

- The primary motive of Pakistan is to limit Indian presence or influence in Afghanistan. However, this is a condition which no Afghan Government has been willing to accept so far.
- Pakistan has said that it will talk to all Afghan political groups, as it sees the Afghan Government to be just a puppet of the US.
- Pakistan will continue to have a stronghold in Afghanistan since it has played a crucial role in the rise of the Taliban. The Taliban is closely linked to Pakistan and is dependent on it.
- Pakistan wants to fix the Durand Line but Afghanistan does not agree with it because it divides the Pashtuns. Pakistani forces killed many innocent civilians at the Chaman-Spin Boldak border between the two nations.

China’s rising influence in Afghanistan

- China convened a quadrilateral dialogue with the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, Nepal, and Pakistan. China wants Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to follow the China-centric development model by:
 - Endorsing the [Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#) infrastructure projects.
 - China also proposed extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan.
 - China wants to exploit the rich natural resources in Afghanistan.
 - Trilateral cooperation between Pakistan, China, and Iran.

The role of Iran in Afghanistan

- Iran has been trying to push itself tactically in Afghanistan in the last few years.
- When the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan, it was regarded as anti-Shia by Iran.
- However, during the US-Taliban war, Iran extended its military and tactical support to the Taliban for exacting revenge against the US.
- Presently, Iran is in a poor financial state.
- Iran has had the compulsion to depend on China due to the impact of American sanctions, its deteriorating oil production output and its rising COVID death toll.
- Iran has invited massive Chinese investment not only in the oil and gas sector but in other sectors as well including railways and banking.
- India has to gain the support of the US as it is the only major power that can help India against Chinese aggression.
- Cheap oil imports from Iran have been a priority for India, as other oil and gas sources are not as cheap. Despite that India has been dropped from the Chabahar rail project by Iran.

- The growing US-Iran confrontation has contributed to India's distancing from Iran. India needs smart diplomacy to have access to Afghanistan via Iran.

The best way forward for India

- India must involve the Taliban during its negotiations with the Government of Afghanistan and this does not amount to India endorsing its agenda.
- India should convince the US for obtaining concessions on Iran so that India can maintain links with Iran, which would enable its presence in Afghanistan.

