

Afghanistan Peace Process

The Afghanistan Peace Process is a series of compromises and negotiations bid to end the ongoing war in Afghanistan that first began in 2001.

The main parties to the peace talks are:

1. The Afghan Government
2. The Taliban insurgents fighting against the Afghan Government
3. The United States Military

Other regional players like India, China, Russia are also playing a role in the ongoing Afghanistan Peace Process.

This article will give further details about the Afghanistan Peace Process within the context of the IAS Exam.

Latest Developments Regarding the Afghanistan Peace Process

- On March 6, 2021, Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani expressed that his government would be taking forward peace talks with the Taliban, discussing with the insurgent group about holding fresh elections and forming a government in a democratic manner.
- On April 13, 2021, the Biden administration announced that it would withdraw its remaining 2,500 troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, on the twentieth anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

Overview of the Afghan Peace Process

Even though sporadic efforts have taken place since 2001 to bring about peace in Afghanistan, it was only in 2018 were these efforts intensified. As part of the peace process, two treaties were signed on September 22, 2016 between the Afghan government and the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin militant group.

The second peace treaty was signed between the U.S. and the Taliban on February 29, 2020, which called for the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan within 14 months if the Taliban upheld the terms of the agreement.

Following the agreement between the USA and the Taliban, there was a surge in attacks against Afghan security forces. As the peace talks between officials from the Afghan government and the Taliban were underway in September 2020, there had been a rise in civilian casualties in Afghanistan since then.

Issues Regarding the Afghanistan Peace Process

Just like the war in Afghanistan, the peace process to end it is plagued with many complex and multi-layered issues. Some of them are as follows:

- Ideological differences have stalled the peace process. While the 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan guarantees freedom of expression, education and women's rights, all of them were suppressed during the Taliban rule of the country before 2001.
- There is genuine fear that if the Taliban gains power following the US withdrawals then all the freedom gained in the subsequent years would be reversed
- Continued violence on both sides remains an obstacle to a final peace agreement. While preliminary talks were going on, the Taliban continued to fight on the battlefield and launch terror attacks in the capital city

Indian and the Afghanistan Peace Process

India has its own stake in the Afghanistan Peace Process similar to its rival, Pakistan. Some terror attacks like the May 2020 attack at a Kabul hospital have been blamed by the Afghan state on Taliban, while the US blamed the regional ISIS branch. Pakistan meanwhile accused India of trying to derail the process, which India denied and dismissed such claims as being “absolutely ridiculous”.

The US-Taliban deal signed in February 2020 was seen in India as a "victory for Taliban and Pakistan".

Regardless, India is a major player in the peace process, a fact that has also been acknowledged by the USA.

- India supports all efforts in the reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan so long such efforts are inclusively Afghan led
- India has invested much in Afghanistan's development and infrastructure, training security forces and supplying them with necessary equipment.
- Also India's assistance of more than USD 3 billion in projects, hundreds of small development projects (of schools, hospitals and water projects) have cemented its position in Afghanistan.
- India hopes to have a role in setting the terms especially concerning terrorism, violence, women's rights and democratic values.

India has economic interest as Afghanistan is the gateway to the oil and mineral rich republics of Central Asia. Economic interest aside, India has security concerns as state-sponsored terrorism may find its way to Kashmir.

Most of these terrorist groups have their networks in the hinterlands of Afghanistan. Therefore a friendly government in the country will be beneficial to India in combating terrorism.

Conclusion

The Afghanistan War has been one of the longest wars fought by the United States, similar to the Vietnam War from 1955-1975. The scale of casualties for both Afghan and American combatants have been immense, to say nothing of the number of civilians killed in the process.

The ongoing conflict and ensuing instability will not only affect Afghanistan but even South Asia as a whole as any fallout of the conflict will spill over in the neighbouring regions.

As such a peace agreement that is accepted by all the parties involved is essential to bring peace to the region.