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Loya Jirga: Grand Assembly of Afghanistan

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Why in News

Recently, a three-day **Loya Jirga-grand assembly** has been called in Afghanistan to decide on freeing about 400 Taliban fighters convicted for serious crimes including murder and abductions.

Loya Jirga

- It is a **mass national gathering** that brings together representatives from the various ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan.
- It is a highly respected **centuries-old consultative body** that has been **convened at times of national crisis or to settle national issues**.
- According to the Afghan Constitution, a Loya Jirga is considered the **highest expression** of the Afghan people. It is **not an official decision-making body** and its **decisions are not legally binding**.
- However, the Loya Jirga's decision is seen as final, with the president and parliament expected to respect the ruling.

Key Points

- **Need for Convening Loya Jirga:**
 - The Loya Jirga has been convened after the Afghanistan President refused to release the Taliban prisoners. This threatened the **derailment of intra-Afghan talks**, tentatively scheduled for 10th August 2020 in Doha.
The Taliban has also threatened of more bloodshed if the prisoners are not released.
 - The USA believes that the talks between the Afghanistan government and Taliban will lead to reduction of violence and direct talks, resulting in a peace agreement and an end to the war in Afghanistan.

- **Background:**

- The prisoner exchanges are part of the agreements signed by the **USA and Taliban** and the USA and Afghanistan government in February 2020.
- However, these were delayed for several months, and the intra-Afghan talks that were scheduled on 10th March had to be put off. Few argue that the **current Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani is deliberately delaying peace talks** with the Taliban to retain power because it is speculated that **negotiations could seek a neutral interim government that** may cost Mr.Ghani his post.
- The USA announced to withdraw its forces and reduced its strength to about 8000, after pushing for the Afghanistan government to release the Taliban prisoners, and for the Taliban to release Afghan soldiers and civilians in its custody.
- Over the past few weeks, the USA government has been keen to speed up the Taliban-Afghan reconciliation process, with an eye on the November 2020 Presidential elections.

- **India's Interests in Afghanistan:**

- India has a **major stake** in the stability of Afghanistan. India has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan's development. **E.g. the Afghan Parliament, the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam)** among others.
- India favours the continuation of the current Afghanistan government in power, which it considers a strategic asset vis-à-vis Pakistan.

An increased political and military role for the Taliban and the expansion of its territorial control should be of great concern to India since the Taliban is widely believed to be a protégé of Pakistan.
- Afghanistan is the gateway to Central Asia.
- Withdrawal of US troops could result in the breeding of the fertile ground for various anti-India terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Mohammed.



Way Forward

- India should support any genuine peace process in Afghanistan. However, the peace process in Afghanistan is **one-sided and pushed by the U.S.A. and Pakistan.**
- India should not recognise or publicly engage the Taliban until it recognises the Afghanistan government.

Source: TH