



American Exit From Afghanistan

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This article is based on **“The Middle East reset”** which was published in The Indian Express on 11/05/2021. It talks about the implications of the American troops withdrawal from Afghanistan over the whole region and beyond.

Since it replaced Britain as the major external power, the US has been the pivot around which global and regional politics has played out. Many regional actors sought alliances with America to secure themselves against ambitious or troublesome neighbours.

In the Middle eastern region, Israel’s security, ensuring oil supplies, competing with other powers, making regional peace, promoting democracy, and stamping out terrorism were the factors that demanded American military, political and diplomatic investments in the region.

Now, the US turns away from its priorities from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific, it has sought to exit from Afghanistan. As the last **American troops begin to leave Afghanistan** it could have implications for the whole region and beyond.

Reasons for US Exit

- **Ending Endless Wars:** After the costly and prolonged military interventions in the Middle East, the US has begun to see that it can’t fix centuries-old conflicts in the region.
 - The promise to end America’s “endless wars” in the greater Middle East region was **one of the central themes of former US President Donald Trump’s foreign policy.**
 - The new US President is just maintaining the policy stance on this front.
- **Changing Priorities From Middle East to Indo-Pacific:** US now sees China as revisionist power, challenging the US’ hegemony around the globe.

Thus, the US now has other urgent priorities such as the challenge from an assertive China and subsequently wants to shift its military, political and diplomatic resources from the Middle east to Indo-pacific.

Implication For the Middle Eastern Region

As America steps back from the Middle East, most regional actors either need alternate patrons or reduced tensions with their neighbours. Thus, learning to live with neighbours might then become an urgent priority. In this pursuit:

- **Normalization of Turkey:** Turkey might realize that its troubled economy can't sustain the ambitious regional policies. After years of challenging Saudi leadership of the Islamic world, Turkey may normalise its relations with Saudi Arabia & Egypt.
- **Normalization of Saudi-Iran Conflict:** After years of intense mutual hostility, Saudi Arabia and Iran may now explore means to reduce bilateral tensions and moderate their proxy wars in the region.
Saudi Arabia is also trying to heal the rift within the Gulf by ending the earlier effort to isolate Qatar.
- **Abraham Accords:** These changes come in the wake of the big moves last year by some Arab states — the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan — to normalise ties with Israel.

Implications for India

- **Return of Taliban:** India and other neighbouring countries will have to live with the consequences that include the triumphal return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan and a boost to violent religious extremism across the region.
 - The prospect of trans-border links between the Taliban and other extremist forces in the region is also a challenge.
 - Withdrawal of US troops could result in the breeding of fertile ground for various anti-India terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Mohammed.
- **Undermining India's Role in Afghanistan:** The US withdrawal from Afghanistan poses major challenges to the Indian Subcontinent.
 - For India, American military presence would have kept a check on extremist forces and created conducive conditions for an Indian role in Afghanistan.
 - As Afghanistan is the gateway to Central Asia, the American exit might dampen India's interest in Central Asia.
- **Normalising India-Turkey Relations:** India has managed to expand its ties with most regional actors in the middle east. However, Turkey has turned hostile to India under Erdogan.
Hopefully, the new regional churn will encourage Turkey to take a fresh look at its relations with India.

Conclusion

America's exit from Afghanistan will trigger a geopolitical flux in the region. As these factors will increasingly push India into a geopolitical tough spot in the region, smart statecraft, therefore, is required to deal with changing dynamics in Afghanistan.

Drishhti Mains Question

As the last American troops begin to leave Afghanistan it could have implications for the whole region and beyond. Discuss.
