



Mains Practice Question

Q. For any meaningful dialogue to take place, India has to be a partner in Afghanistan reconciliation process. Discuss the evolving paradigm of Indian foreign policy with respect to Afghanistan. (250 words)

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Approach

- Discuss the new shift in India's engagement with Afghanistan
- Discuss India's efforts in engaging with Pakistan
- Discuss the need to recalibrate its previous stand on Afghanistan

Introduction: -

- In a significant departure from India's stand on engaging the Taliban, the government for the first time participated at a "non-official" level, sending two former senior diplomats to attend talks on the Afghanistan peace process which was held and hosted by Russia.
- The principal purpose of the process is to ensure an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, inclusive peace process where the people are fully in the driver's seat to address the multiple dimensions of ongoing war and violence in Afghanistan

Body:

- India an important player in the peace process – it has been acknowledged by all including the US and very recently by Pakistan that India is a key player in the peace process.
- Evolving paradigm of Indian foreign policy: -
 - **Strategic paradigm:**
 - India's influence in Afghanistan waned in the 1990s after Pakistan-backed Taliban rose to power. After the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, New Delhi reached out to renew ties with Kabul. As it is a gateway to energy-rich Central Asian states such as Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.
 - By helping rebuild a new Afghanistan, India strives for greater regional stability, but also hopes to counter Pakistan's influence in Kabul.
 - India hopes its investment in the Iranian port at Chabahar will allow it to gain trading access to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan.
 - **Government aid:**
 - Having committed a \$2.3 billion aid program, India is one of the largest donors to Afghanistan, investing in the economy, humanitarian aid, education, development, construction and electrical projects.
 - **Development cooperation:**
 - India completed construction of the Zaranj-Delaram highway near the Iranian border, New parliament building and the Salma Dam power project.
 - TAPI gas pipeline project is under construction natural gas pipeline from Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan.
 - **Economic paradigm:**
 - The bilateral trade between India and Afghanistan is USD 900 million and with opening of

air corridor our target to take it to USD 2 billion by 2020.

- India-Afghanistan has opened up two direct air cargo routes linking New Delhi and Mumbai to Kabul. The Kabul-Mumbai route was opened up in the year 2017.

- **Cultural paradigm:**

- Indian television soaps and Indian films are very popular in Afghanistan and their particular strength is that they have nothing to do with government propaganda but government can utilize it as soft power.

- **Challenges :**

- India's efforts to provide assistance to Afghanistan are hampered considerably by the lack of geographical contiguity and limited access.
- Growing Chinese influence in Afghanistan has created a diplomatic challenge for India.

Conclusion:

- India's policy change seems to be recalibrated in accordance with the changing regional and global power dynamic. India should reassess its strategic objectives in the region and assess its policies which otherwise till date more or less have been Pakistan centric.
- Government can utilize its "Soft Power" in Afghanistan.

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