Withdrawal of US Troops from Afghanistan

Why in News

America's latest plan to speed up the withdrawal of more troops from Afghanistan may jeopardize the fragile **peace process** underway in Afghanistan.

Key Points

- **India's Stand:**

  - India has been concerned that the Afghan peace process and premature withdrawal of **NATO**/US coalition forces **could leave opportunities for terrorist networks** that could target both Afghanistan and India.
  - As recently as May of this year, the **UN issued a report** providing evidence that despite assurances from the Taliban to the United States, **Al Qaeda is still present and active in Afghanistan,** harboured by the Taliban.

    - In India, Al Qaeda continues to run a propaganda campaign that seeks to capitalise on differences between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority.
  - At a recent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) **meeting**, convened under the **Arria Formula** (informally convened at the request of a UNSC member), India called for an "immediate comprehensive ceasefire" in Afghanistan, while welcoming all opportunities to bring peace to the country.

    - India also described its **reconstruction and development assistance** to Afghanistan over the last nearly two decades.
    - According to India, for durable peace in Afghanistan, there is a need to put an end to terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries **operating across the Durand Line** (in reference to Pakistan).

      - The Durand Line is the **international 2,670 km land border** between Afghanistan and Pakistan in South-Central Asia.
  - India **outlined four requirements** for peace and stability in Afghanistan:

    - First, the process **had to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.**
    - Second, there must be **zero tolerance for terrorism.**
    - Third, the **gains of the last two decades cannot be lost.**

      - In particular, India is convinced that the rights of women need to be strongly protected. Further, the rights of the minorities and the vulnerable need to be safeguarded.
      - India has invested heavily in various Infrastructure projects in the region, for example - Zaranj Delaram Highway, Afghan Parliament etc.
    - Fourth, the **transit rights** of Afghanistan should not be used by countries "to extract political price from Afghanistan".

      - A **reference to Pakistan** obstructing the flow of persons and materials

outside of Afghanistan, impacting, for instance, India-Afghanistan trade.

- India **assured Afghanistan of its support** in its quest for peace during **India's UNSC term.**

    - India's two year term on the non-permanent seat will begin on 1st January 2021.

- **China's Stand:**

    - China has called on foreign troops to leave Afghanistan in an **orderly and responsible manner,** give terrorist forces no breathing space and contribute to Afghanistan peace and reconciliation process.
    - China is concerned that the war-torn country Afghanistan, which shares borders with the volatile Xinjiang province of China, could become a breeding ground for **Uighur Muslim militants.**

        - Uighur is a predominantly **Turkic-speaking ethnic group.** They are primarily confined in China's **northwestern region of Xinjiang** and is one of the largest Muslim group in that region.
        - China insists that **Uighur militants are waging a violent campaign for an independent state** by plotting bombings, sabotage, and civic unrest.
        - China has faced **international criticism** over allegations that it is holding over a million people, **mostly ethnic Uyghurs,** in internment camps in Xinjiang to curb religious extremism.

    - USA's withdrawal also coincides with its move to **lift the ban on the Uighur militant group** - the **East Turkestan Islamic Movement** (ETIM).

        - **China is averse to ETIM,** an al-Qaeda backed militant group regrouping in Afghanistan to carry out attacks in Xinjiang.
        - ETIM was **designated as a terrorist organisation by the** UN's 1267 **counter-terrorism committee** in 2002 for its alleged association with al-Qaida, Osama bin Laden and the Taliban.

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