



Mains Marathon

Day 12: Since the withdrawal of US Forces from Afghanistan there is a situation of political turmoil in Afghanistan, like the imposition of Muslim sharia law, deny of the basic rights to the people, mass-killing etc. Suggest the policy stance or steps which should be taken by India to protect its strategic interests in the region. (150 words)

22 Jul 2022 | GS Paper 2 | International Relations

Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Start your answer by giving a brief about Taliban taking over Afghanistan
- Discuss the significance of Afghanistan for India
- Discuss the Policy options available before India to deal with Taliban
- Conclude suitably

Answer:

After the withdrawal of US Forces from Afghanistan (as per Doha Agreement 2020), Taliban took over the administration of Afghanistan resorting to mass killings of the people and imposing a strict sharia which curbed the basic rights and freedom of the people.

The taking over of Afghanistan by the Taliban also raises various issues and challenges for India for its people and strategic interests

Why is Afghanistan Significant for India?

- **Economic and Strategic Interest:** Afghanistan is a gateway to the oil and mineral-rich Central Asian republics.
 - Afghanistan's main advantage is its geography, as anyone who is in power in Afghanistan controls the land routes connecting India with Central Asia (via Afghanistan).
 - **Located at the heart of the historic Silk Road,** Afghanistan was long the crossroads of commerce between Asian countries connecting them to Europe, and enhancing religious, cultural, and commercial contacts.
- **Developmental Projects:** The massive reconstruction plans for the country to offer a lot of opportunities for Indian companies.
 - **Three major projects:** the Afghan Parliament, the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, and the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (**Salma Dam**), along with India's assistance of more than USD3 billion in projects, hundreds of small development projects (of schools, hospitals and water projects) have cemented India's position in Afghanistan.
- **Security Interest:** India has been the **victim of state-sponsored terrorism emanating from**

Pakistan supported terrorist group operating in the region (e.g. Haqqani network). Thus, India has two priorities in Afghanistan:

- to prevent Pakistan from setting up a friendly government in Afghanistan, and
- to avoid the return of jihadi groups, like al Qaeda, which could strike in India.

Policy options before India to deal with Taliban

Given all these concerns, India has four options, none of which are easy, nor without repercussions.

Stick to Afghan-led, Afghan owned and controlled process: The first option is to stick to its principle of backing only a democratic **Afghan** ally elected government in Kabul and providing political and humanitarian support while that lasts.

Support the Afghan people with the war ammunition: The second would be to go further and **supply the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) with military supplies**, including ammunition and air power, possibly via the Iranian route.

Contacts with Taliban Govt: The third would be to accelerate contacts with the Taliban. However, this is unlikely to give India much leverage, given the Pakistan factor, as well as the fact that all regional and donor countries have already done so.

People to people contacts: The government should promote exchanges of people so that they can have stakes in the economy of each other, which would prompt both the sides to cooperate on other issues as well.

Support developmental and humanitarian Initiatives: The Government of India should provide the humanitarian aid and other reliefs to save the people of Afghanistan from hunger and poverty.

Wait and watch and choose a Winning side: Finally, India could simply wait and watch, until the chaos of conflict reveals a winning side, and weigh its options accordingly. This option seems expedient, but it also denies India relevance at the "high table" where Afghanistan's future is being discussed.

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