India’s role in Afghanistan

What is the issue?

India must be prepared for the potential consequences of withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

What is the shift in U.S. policy?

- According to it, U.S. troops would remain involved in the country until conditions mandated the return of the troops.
- Also, U.S. would put Pakistan on notice for its support to the Taliban and a political settlement with the Taliban would only follow after an effective military effort.
- Finally, the strategy would focus on further developing the strategic partnership with India.
- Despite the strategy, casualties of Afghan National and Defence Security Forces (ANDSF) in May-September 2018 were higher compared to corresponding periods since 2001.
- The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan also documented more civilian deaths in the first nine months of 2018 than during the same period in 2014.
- US has also appointed a special envoy to have direct talks with the Taliban.
- This show that it has reversed its earlier position of not engaging the Taliban, until Taliban engages the Afghan government.
- However, the efforts of the special envoy too fail to deliver much on the
peace process.

Hence, the US seem to pull-out its troops and reduce its presence in Afghanistan.

As a result, the U.S. war in Afghanistan evolved into a mission for ensuring democracy and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Accordingly, the U.S president has suggested that regional players like Russia, India and Pakistan should be more involved in stabilising the situation.

What should be the role of India?

- The U.S. administration has welcomed Indian investment in Afghanistan, which is shown by its temporary waiver on Chabahar port development in Iran.
- The port development could pave the way for an alternate passage of facilitating easy movement of goods into the country through Iran.
- However, India cannot replace Pakistan’s position geographically.
- The decision to abandon the SAARC in favour of groupings like BIMSTEC, BBIN and IORA may have provided some short-term returns for India in isolating Pakistan.
- However, it has had the effect of cutting Afghanistan loose from Indian leadership of South Asia as well.
- Thus, India’s best course with Afghanistan remains its own regional strategy, not becoming a part of any other country’s strategy.
- As the U.S.’s eventual pullout as Afghanistan’s peacekeeper is inevitable, close bilateral consultations should be made to help Afghanistan according to its own needs.