Pakistan's Neutrality, Taliban's Worry

What is the issue?

Pakistan's so-called foreign policy independence or neutrality is going to have severe implications for its allies in Kabul.

What are the challenges for Taliban?

- The Afghan Taliban will face huge challenges in saving Afghanistan from
  - an economic catastrophe
  - financial bankruptcy
  - a humanitarian crisis
- A Taliban regime in Kabul has multidimensional, and not just strategic, interests tied to relations with Pakistan.
- Pakistani policy in Afghanistan is determined by the rigidity of the strategic commitment, which makes it virtually impossible for Islamabad to give up its obsession of shaping a new political order across the Durand Line.

What will be the impact of Pakistan's stance?

- **International recognition**- Pakistan's stance will affect the Taliban's chances of getting immediate international recognition as Pakistan's turn towards Russia have further deepened the distrust between the U.S. and Pakistan.
- As the Imran Khan-led hybrid regime has indicated a subtle shift in Pakistan's diplomatic position towards Russia, Islamabad's conversation with Europe on the issue of the Taliban's rehabilitation in the international system will become harder.
- With more than 2 million Ukrainian refugees fleeing the conflict zone and taking shelter in various countries in the EU, Afghan refugees living in Pakistan are likely to receive little from the Western countries.
- **Toll on Afghans**- The situation in Afghanistan has become complex and uncertain with Afghan people desperately requiring food, medical supplies and cash.
- The U.S.'s decision to ease the pain of the sanctions that had led to the collapse of the Afghan economy have not reversed the impact of the U.S.'s prior action of the seizure of half of the frozen 7 billion dollar in Afghan assets.
- Now Pakistan's role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is going to take a toll on Afghanistan and its refugees.
- **Afghan refugees**- Pakistan hosts around 1.5 million Afghan refugees. Since the Taliban took over in August 2021, approximately 3,00,000 Afghans are said to have fled to Pakistan.
- As the loss of crucial foreign aid, a severe drought, and a currency crisis have left Afghanistan's economy in ruins, the Taliban regime is not in a position to take the refugees

back from Pakistan.

- There is already donor fatigue with regard to the Afghan refugees in Pakistan as it has its own set of economic problems.
- **Issues in Pakistan**- As Pakistan continues to remain in the 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force, it has become difficult for the country to ward off the negative implications of an unrecognised Taliban regime.
- The Taliban's unexpected victory in Afghanistan has compounded the threat of domestic terrorism in Pakistan.
- The ISIS-Khorasan recently claimed responsibility for the suicide terror attack in a Shia mosque in Peshawar, which killed more than 60 people.
- **Role of ISI**- Given Pakistan's growing dilemmas, pragmatic voices in the Taliban regime may even demand more autonomy from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in dealing with the outside world.
- The ISI is rightly perceived to be the real force behind the Taliban's military victory over the Western-backed regime.
- Any move by the Taliban to act independently of the ISI's wishes will reduce Islamabad's overall influence on the foreign policy of Afghanistan.

FATF acts as an international watchdog on issues of money laundering and financing of terrorism. Headquartered in Paris, the FATF was set up in 1989 by the G7 countries.

What will be the consequences for Afghans due to Pakistan's foreign policy independence?

- The changing geopolitical scenario and the increasing alignment between Islamabad and Moscow casts a shadow over the Taliban's ability to create a more effective Afghan state.
- With the Ukrainian conflict getting worse in Europe, there are also dangers that Afghanistan might be forgotten soon in western capitals.
- If Afghanistan becomes a lower priority for Europe, its consequences will be severe for Afghans while also eroding Pakistan's position in Afghan affairs.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/pakistans-neutrality-talibans-worry/article65229229.ece

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