US re-engagement in Afghanistan

What is the issue?

Though it seems that US troops are set to withdraw from Afghanistan, but US will re-engage in the region due to security concerns.

What has happened in Afghanistan?

· The US has led a global counter-terrorism (CT) campaign-a multi-theatre war on terror- in response to 9/11 attack.

· The US-led airstrikes removed the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001 and helped in creating, training, equipping and assisting local security forces.

· As an outcome, Afghanistan wrote new democratic constitution and invited the UN missions.

How was local troops raised in Afghanistan?

· The earnest build-up of the Afghan forces started around 2009, when the Taliban posed a serious threat across Afghanistan.

· In the same year, the US declared a surge of troops and promised withdrawal by 2014.

· By January 2015, all security responsibilities were handed over to Afghan forces and US troops reduced to 10,000.

· But the war did not end as Afghan forces were still ill-experienced and ISIS was expanding its footprint across the globe.

· Hence a NATO-led Train-Advise-Assist Mission commenced for Afghan forces, while the US CT mission also continued in partnership with Afghan Forces.

Why US reduced its forces in the Afghanistan?

· The US has correctly assessed that AQ in Afghanistan stands degraded and ISIS and AQ networks are scattered across the globe.

· The threat of the caliphate is over and the threat of genuine ISIS taking root in Afghanistan has been reduced due to the US-Afghan partnership.

· Over the last seven years, Afghan forces got evolved and they started to conduct most operations on their own.

· So US signed the Doha agreement in February 2020, for a full withdrawal, hoping that Taliban would agree to be part of an interim government.

· As new players are in the peace process, including Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, and Qatar, the US made the smart move to approach the UN to broker peace.

· However, it appears unlikely that China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran will send troops to fight the Taliban under a peacekeeping mission.

Will there be a shadow of US presence in the region?

· Due to the current geopolitical compulsions-US-China competition, China-Pakistan embrace, China-Russia strategic partnership, and China-Iran deal- Afghanistan has become strategically important.

· Thus, despite US withdrawal, there will be shadow of US-NATO in the region with a focus on preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven.

Will US influence the national government?

· In the Afghanistan 2.0 engagement, few points are clear — Afghanistan is part of the US-led Coalition against ISIS.

· The Afghan government will take a sovereign decision to ask for training or operational support and the US has sufficient resources in the Central Command theatre on land, sea, and air.

· It will provide immediate support on request and has the option of drone strikes in Afghanistan and beyond.

· Also US will retain its soft power over Afghan institutions and

personalities.

What can we infer from this?

· The UN-led peace process is expected to be slow, it is certain that the Taliban-ISKP-Pakistan will unleash much more violence.

· This chaos would create more ungoverned spaces strengthening the terror infrastructure.

· Hence, the developments in Afghanistan will continue to raise security concerns, far beyond South Asia.

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