



AIR Discussions (August 3rd Week)

AIR SPOTLIGHT: DEVELOPMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE CHALLENGES FOR INDIA

CONTEXT:

- Afghanistan has been plunged into chaos after the **Taliban took over in the wake of the pull out of American forces from the country.**
- President Ghani left the country, Afghan National Defence and Security Forces put up no resistance and Taliban fighters walked into Kabul, took control of the Presidential Palace without any bloodshed.
- Experts fear that it could lead to a catastrophe for Afghanistan.
- Many feel that it is **a repeat of the 1975 Fall of Saigon**- when the capital of the US-backed South Vietnam fell to Communist-ruled North Vietnam two years after the withdrawal of American military presence of 19 years.
- The Taliban **wants to reimpose its version of Islamic law as the country's system of governance.**

BACKGROUND:

- The Taliban emerged in the early 1990s following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, before the demise of the Soviet Union.
- 2001 – US-led coalition marches into the Afghan capital after 9/11 attack as Taliban regime had turned down U.S. demand to hand over al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, who plotted the attacks.
- 2001- The **Bonn Agreement** is signed.
- 2001 – Karzai is sworn in as chairman of a **29-member governing council** established under the Bonn Agreement.
- 2004 and 2009 – General elections are held and Karzai is elected president.
- 2014 – U.S. negotiates a power-sharing deal for a so-called **Unity Government**, with Ghani serving as president and Abdullah as chief executive.
- 2014 – **American and NATO troops formally end their combat mission**, transitioning to a support and training role.
- 2015-2018 – The Taliban surge further.
- 2018 – President Trump **appoints veteran Afghan-American diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad as negotiator with the Taliban.**
- 2018-2019 – Zalmay engages in on-again, off-again talks with the Taliban, mainly in Qatar. The Taliban refuse to negotiate with the Kabul government
- 2020 – The **U.S. and the Taliban sign a deal in Doha**, Qatar, laying out the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan; the deal also envisions intra-Afghan talks on a future political road map. In the agreement, the Trump administration promised that it would withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021.
- President Joe Biden endorsed the Trump-Taliban deal, but pushed the deadline for withdrawal to September 11.
- 2021- **Blinken Proposal:**
 - United Nations will convene a meeting of the foreign ministers from China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India, and the United States. It will develop a “unified approach” to peace in Afghanistan.
 - The peace plan has kept open the possibility that the 2500-odd US troops in Afghanistan might stay on for a while.
 - The United States has asked Turkey to convene a meeting of the Afghan government and the Taliban to finalise a peace settlement.
 - The US has asked the Taliban to accept an immediate agreement to reduce violence for 90 days.



- US has asked the Afghan Government and Taliban to move towards a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and form an interim unity government.
- 2021: US troops will withdraw from Afghanistan.
- 2021: Taliban takes over.
- The U.S. had reached the conclusion that the war is unwinnable.

TALIBAN:

- The Taliban, or **students in the Pashto language**, emerged in the early 1990s in northern Pakistan following the **withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan**.
- It is an **Islamic fundamentalist political and military organisation** operating in Afghanistan. They have dominated Afghan polity for quite some time and feature regularly in international affairs.
- The Taliban **have been fighting against the U.S.-backed government in Kabul for around 20 years**. They seek to **reimpose their strict version of Islam in Afghanistan**.

CHALLENGES FOR INDIA:

- **Bringing home Indian nationals:** The first concern is for **Indian diplomats, personnel and citizens based in Afghanistan**. With thousands of desperate Afghans seeking to leave the country, the tarmac has been overrun by people blocking the airplanes from taking off or landing.
- **Helping Afghans who want to leave:** **Hundreds of Afghan nationals have applied for visas from the Indian Embassy in Kabul**. Among them are those with links to India, who have studied or trained here, or with families in India, or those who could face reprisal attacks from Taliban militia. **If the government does accept them, then arrangements for what could be thousands of refugees will need to be made.**
- **Recognising the Taliban regime:**
 - Recently talks comprising 12 countries including India, U.N. representatives and Afghan representatives with the Taliban in Doha, a nine-point statement issued made it clear that they will “not recognise any government in Afghanistan that is imposed through the use of military force”.
 - **Recognising Taliban is particularly difficult for India, which was closely allied to the Afghan government, and helped build democratic and constitutional processes there, and sees the treatment of women and minorities as integral to those processes.**
 - India is President of the U.N. Security Council this month, and must take decisions on whether to convene meetings on Afghanistan’s future, including possible sanctions, and is also chairing the committee on Taliban sanctions.

India’s stand on Afghan peace process

- The peace process has to be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.
- Afghanistan should build national consensus for talks with the Taliban.
- All initiatives and processes must include all sections of the Afghan society, including the legitimately elected government.
- Any process should respect the constitutional legacy and political mandate.
- Establishment of democratic process with respect for human rights, including women’s rights.
- The peace process should not leave any ungoverned spaces where terrorists and their proxies can relocate.



- **Dealing with the Taliban regime:**

- Regardless of whether or not India recognises the Taliban as the legitimate ruler in Afghanistan, the **government will have to open channels of communication to engage the Taliban.**
- In the past few months, security officials and diplomats have made initial, furtive contact with the Taliban in Doha, and the MEA said it is engaging “various stakeholders” in Afghanistan.
- Those links will have to be broadened in order to ensure the safety of Indians and the Embassy in Kabul to start with, but also logistical requirements, like using Afghan airspace, transit trade, humanitarian assistance etc in the future.
- Government officials have often said that they would not like a repeat of the situation during the IC-814 hijacking, when India had no ability to contact the Taliban at all.
- India reaching out to the Taliban signals acknowledgement from the Indian side that the Taliban would play a critical role in Afghanistan in the coming years.
- India has **three critical areas in dealing with the Taliban.**
 1. **protecting its investments**, which run into billions of rupees, in Afghanistan
 2. **preventing a future Taliban regime from being a pawn of Rawalpindi;**
 3. **making sure that the Pakistan-backed anti-India terrorist groups do not get support from the Taliban.**

- **Strategic choices with Afghanistan:**

- how its strategic options in Afghanistan will change given the **Taliban’s proximity to Pakistan’s establishment**
 - India’s influence with the new government is likely to be considerably curtailed, as Pakistan’s influence over the Taliban remains strong, and the government will have to reconsider whether to now engage Pakistan directly as well
 - **Concerns that anti-India terror groups could occupy space in Afghanistan to carry out terror attacks against India**
 - Other strategic issues involving **future connectivity, which India had sought to do via Chabahar port in Iran**, must also be considered in the longer term. **Trade through Afghanistan under a Taliban regime** would be routed through Karachi and Gwadar, and the Indian investment in the Chabahar port, meant to circumvent Pakistan, may become unviable.
 - The Taliban’s control will also mean a **bigger hand for the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies to influence outcomes for the country.**
 - For New Delhi, already **countering hostilities at the LAC with China and the LoC with Pakistan, an unfriendly government in Kabul can only complicate its strategic options.**
 - The Indian-built projects, including the already built Zaranj-Delaram Highway and Salma Dam, are already under Taliban control, and a cloud hangs over those under construction, including check-dams, schools and urban projects.
- **Threat of radicalisation:** the threat of growing radicalisation and space for pan-Islamic terror groups in India’s neighbourhood.
 - **New Regional Geopolitical Developments:** There can be **new regional geopolitical alignments (such as China-Pakistan-Taliban)** which may go against the interests of India.
 - **Impact on Afghanistan:** there is the worry for India of the impact on Afghanistan itself, given the **Taliban’s past record in power, of an erosion in women’s and minority rights, the overturning of a democratic system and the imposition of the Taliban’s brutal form of justice.** A Taliban regime in Kabul will have fewer international partners, and receive far less financial assistance, the impact of which will be felt most keenly by Afghanistan’s most vulnerable.



WHY IS AFGHANISTAN IMPORTANT FOR INDIA?

- **Security:** A stable Afghanistan is crucial for regional and domestic security and stability for India.
- **Connectivity:** The most important role of Afghanistan is always considered as India's gateway to Central Asia.
- **Energy ambitions:** Peaceful Afghan is essential to address the energy needs of India.
- **Regional Balance of Power:** Afghanistan is tied to India's vision of being a regional leader and a great power, coupled with its competition with China over resources and its need to counter Pakistani influence.
- **Natural Resources:** The country is home to resource deposits worth one trillion dollars, according to the US Geological Survey.
- **India's development initiatives:**





IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN, RUSSIA, CHINA & IRAN

- **Pakistan:**
 - This is a moment of both vindication and concern in Islamabad.
 - The **Taliban are a creation of the Pakistani security establishment.**
 - But the situation **also means Pakistan will need to shoulder the entire burden of the chaos that experts predict.**
- **China:**
 - China would have much to lose from instability in Afghanistan as this could have an **impact on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.**
 - A Taliban regime in Afghanistan might end up **stirring unrest in the Xinjiang Autonomous region, home to the Uighur minority.**
 - Conversely, **as an ally of Pakistan, it could see a bigger role for itself in Afghanistan.**
- **Russia:**
 - The US exit is for Russia a **full circle after its own defeat at the hands of US-backed Mujahideen and exit from Afghanistan** three decades ago.
 - In recent years, Russia has taken on the role of peacemaker in Afghanistan.
 - But both the Taliban and the Afghan government have been wary of its efforts.
 - **Russia's growing links with Pakistan could translate into a post-US role for Moscow in Afghanistan.**
- **Iran:**
 - As a country that **shares borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, Iran perceives active security threats from both.**
 - And a Taliban regime in Kabul would only increase this threat perception.
 - Despite the mutual hostility and the theological divide between the two, **Iran opened channels to the Taliban a few years ago, and recently, even hosted a Taliban delegation at Tehran.**

WAY FORWARD:

- **Address the immediate challenges:**
 - The first is to **securely evacuate Indian diplomatic personnel and other citizens from Afghanistan. This will require a major logistical effort.**
 - The government of India must also **offer refuge to a large number of those Afghans who have worked with Indian initiatives and are desperate to avoid potential retribution from the Taliban.**
 - The **second is diplomatic.** India must make all possible efforts to get the international community to hold the Taliban to its word on letting all foreigners leave in peace, protecting the lives of all Afghan citizens and respecting international humanitarian law.
 - As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Delhi will have a voice in shaping the international debate on the situation in Afghanistan.
 - The **final challenge is domestic.** Tensions are bound to rise on India's western borders. Delhi must maintain vigil against a resurgence of cross-border terrorism that could quickly destabilise Kashmir and escalate the conflict between India and Pakistan.
- **Options available:**
 1. The **first option is to stick to its principle of backing only a democratically-elected government in Kabul, and providing political and humanitarian support while that lasts.**
 2. The **second would be to go further and supply the ANDSF with military supplies, including ammunition and air power, possibly via the Iranian route.**
 3. The **third would be to accelerate contacts with the Taliban.**
 4. 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.
- **Broader Diplomatic Engagement:** India should consider appointing a special envoy dedicated to Afghanistan. The envoy can ensure that Indian views are expressed at every meeting, and broaden engagement with the Taliban.



- **Decoupling of Taliban-Pakistan:** The Taliban is bound to seek a measure of autonomy from Pakistan. India will have to wait a while before the current issues between India and the Taliban can be overcome.
- **Balancing the Opportunities in Afghanistan:** Structuring the internal balance of power within Afghanistan has always been hard. However, for a patient, open-minded and active India, there will be no dearth of balancing opportunities in Afghanistan.
- **Leverage Indian Infrastructural Developments:** Indian USD 3 billion assistance to Afghanistan is in concrete projects that serve its population and have earned it their goodwill that will endure.
- **Continued Training and Investments:**
 - India should provide more military training to Afghan security forces and invest in longer-term capacity-building programs.
 - It should actively support and invest in the National Directorate of Security
 - Finally, given the continued levels of violence and the impact of the coronavirus on the Afghan economy, India should expand its development assistance.

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<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/taliban-has-taken-kabul-delhi-must-watch-not-pronounce-doom-7456999/>

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/taliban-gains-complicate-indias-options/article35898057.ece>

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<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/kabul-ashraf-ghani-taliban-afghan-people-7456937/>

<https://qz.com/india/2048396/what-taliban-led-afghanistan-will-mean-for-india/>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-what-kabul-means-in-delhi-7455479/>



NEWS IN BRIEF: PRELIMS SPECIAL

Operation Blue Freedom

- Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment flagged off 'Operation Blue Freedom' to create a World Record at Siachen Glacier.
- **Operation Blue Freedom is a pioneering expedition under which a team of people with disabilities from across the country undertook an expedition to Siachen Glacier to create a new World Record for the largest team of people with disabilities to reach the world's highest battlefield.**
- The team of people with disabilities, trained by 'Team CLAW', a team of Armed Forces veterans, undertook this expedition till Kumar Post (Siachen Glacier) to create the new world record.

<https://newsonair.com/2021/08/16/operation-blue-freedom-an-expedition-by-divyangjans-to-the-worlds-highest-battlefield/>

Draft Electricity (promoting renewable energy through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2021

- The Ministry of Power has circulated these rules which are **proposed for the purchase and consumption of green energy including the energy from Waste-to-Energy plants.**
- The green energy draft rules have **provided details such as Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO); Green energy open access; Nodal Agencies; Procedure for grant of green energy open access; banking; and cross subsidy surcharge.**
- The draft rules **state green hydrogen is the hydrogen produced using electricity from renewable sources.**

<https://newsonair.com/2021/08/16/draft-electricity-promoting-renewable-energy-through-green-energy-open-access-rules-2021-circulated/>

Student Entrepreneurship Program 3.0

- **Atal Innovation Mission in collaboration with Dassault Systems launch Student Entrepreneurship Program (SEP) 3.0.**
- The **theme of SEP 3.0 is based on 'Made in 3D - Seed the Future Entrepreneurs Program'.**
- As part of this program, a **team from each will be allocated seed funding towards creating their own start-up, design and prototype their innovation using 3D printing, prepare marketing campaign, define product pricing and create expansion strategy.**
- Apart from getting exposure to start-up culture and developing an innovative mindset, students and teachers taking part in the program will also get a unique opportunity to interact with French schools.

<https://newsonair.com/2021/08/18/student-entrepreneurship-program-sep-3-0-fostering-young-entrepreneurs-with-innovative-skills/>

National Intellectual Property Awards 2020

- These are **conferred every year by the Office of Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks to recognize and reward the top achievers for IP creation, commercialization and enforcement.**
- There are **11 categories of the awards.**



- The **parameters considered are:**
 - Number of IPRs filed/granted/registered.
 - Growth in IPR portfolio in the last three calendar years.
 - Leveraging of IPRs for achieving commercial goals (manufacturing, licensing, launching of new products/processes associated with granted/registered IPRs, marketing/export, etc.)

<https://newsonair.com/2021/08/18/india-records-572-growth-in-grant-of-patents-in-last-7-yrs-piyush-goyal/>

Kigali Amendment

- Cabinet approves **Ratification of Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol.**
- Under the Kigali Amendment, Parties to the Montreal Protocol will **phase down the production and consumption of Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).**
- **India will complete its phase down of HFCs in 4 steps from 2032 onwards with cumulative reduction of 10% in 2032, 20% in 2037, 30% in 2042 and 80% in 2047.**

<https://newsonair.com/2021/08/18/cabinet-takes-several-steps-to-boost-production-of-edible-oils-reduce-dependence-on-import/>