Syllabus subtopic: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India’s interests

Prelims and Mains focus: about the peace deal and its significance; about US invasion of Afghanistan

News: More than 18 years after the US invaded Afghanistan, President Donald Trump has conditionally approved a peace deal with the Taliban, potentially beginning the end of America’s longest war.

What is the deal about?
The deal would see the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the start of peace talks between the insurgents and the Afghan government.

What is the condition on the deal?
The agreement will go ahead only if the Taliban abide by a pledge to reduce violence over a seven-day period.

Has there been any peace agreement in the past?
- The two sides have revived the same draft agreement that came close to being signed in September 2019, which calls for a timeline for a U.S. troop pullout in exchange for the Taliban agreeing to cut ties with terrorist groups and entering into peace talks with their foes in the Afghan government.

- But the attempt fell apart at the last moment and it remained unclear if the Taliban was ready to negotiate a genuine peace settlement with a government in Kabul that it has long rejected as a "puppet" of the United States.

What if the deal gets implemented?
- If the agreement goes ahead, it would potentially bring an end to
America’s longest war by launching direct peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government for the first time.

- A deal would give President Donald Trump a talking point in his bid for re-election, allowing him to argue he fulfilled a campaign promise to extricate America from "endless" wars abroad.

About the US-Taliban peace talks

- Since the U.S. and Taliban renewed discussions in the Qatari capital Doha at the end of 2019, the talks have focused on a U.S. demand for the Taliban to scale back its attacks across the country as a test of its commitment to ending the conflict. In an earlier round of negotiations, the Taliban rejected the idea of a full-blown cease-fire, and as a result U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has pursued a deal to "reduce" violence, though U.S. officials have yet to explain exactly what that would entail.

- In the recent talks in Doha, Khalilzad — a veteran diplomat who once served as ambassador to Kabul — first proposed a wider reduction of violence deal that the Taliban rejected. The insurgents then came back with a more limited proposal, which the Americans viewed as inadequate but worth negotiating further. In recent weeks, the two sides have found common ground around a compromise deal to reduce violence.

War in Afghanistan (2001–present)

- The War in Afghanistan code named Operation Enduring Freedom (2001–14) and Operation Freedom's Sentinel (2015–present) following the United States invasion of Afghanistan of 7 October 2001, when the United States of America and its allies successfully drove the Taliban from power in order to deny al-Qaeda a safe base of operations in Afghanistan who were the main suspects of the September 11 (9/11) attacks.

- Since the initial objectives were completed, a coalition of over 40 countries (including all NATO members) formed a security mission in the country. The war has since mostly involved US and allied Afghan government
The war in Afghanistan is the longest war in US history, having raged for 18 years and claimed the lives of around 2,300 troops.

From January 2009, when the United Nations began systematic documentation of civilian casualties, to September, some 34,000 civilians have been killed as a result of the armed conflict.

The U.S. has 12,000 to 13,000 troops in Afghanistan, but in December the Trump administration was poised to withdraw approximately 4,000 of them.