**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
troops battling Taliban insurgents.

- 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.