India has signalled its acceptance of the U.S.-Taliban and U.S.-Afghanistan peace agreements in Doha and Kabul that aim to end the 18-year war in Afghanistan, by sending envoys to witness them.

What are the agreements called?

1. **US-Taliban agreement:** “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognised by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban, and the United States of America.”

2. **US-Afghanistan agreement:** “Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.”

Aim of the agreements signed

The two agreements set out a course for the next 14 months, including the pull-out of U.S. troops, the denial of space to foreign terrorist groups and any violence against the U.S. and allies, and intra-Afghan dialogue.

What are the salient points of concern?

1. **Does the term “U.S. and Allies” include India?**

In the Doha agreement, the Taliban has guaranteed “enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual
against the security of the United States and its allies”. However, it is unclear whether India, which is not a U.S. ally, is included in this definition, and whether Pakistan-backed groups that threaten India, would still operate in Afghanistan. The Kabul declaration with the Ghani government more specifically commits to stopping “any international terrorist groups or individuals, including al-Qaeda and ISIS-K, from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States, its allies and other countries.”

2. Impact of prisoner release and lifting sanctions

- Officials worry most about the “mainstreaming of the Haqqani network”, which Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists reportedly fight alongside and were responsible for the 2008 bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul.

- According to the agreements, 5,000 Taliban prisoners will be released by March 10, 2020, the first day of intra-Afghan negotiations, and the remainder in another three months. Officials also point out that the U.S. has committed to taking Taliban leaders off the UN Security Council’s sanctions list by May 29, 2020, which could considerably bring down the number of terrorists Pakistan is accused of harbouring, according to the FATF grey-list conditions. This might benefit Pakistan during the June 2020 FATF Plenary, when it faces a blacklist for not complying.

3. Handing powers to Taliban

- In the Doha agreement, the U.S. has committed to clearing five bases and bringing troop levels down to 8,600 in four and a half months, and even appears to submit to the possibility of a Taliban-led government, by extracting promises that the Taliban will not provide “visas, passports, travel documents or asylum” to those threatening the U.S. and its allies. This appears to sideline the “Intra-Afghan” dialogue, and India’s support for the election process for leadership in Afghanistan.

- In the last section of the agreement, the U.S. and Taliban seek “positive relations with each other and expect that the relations between the United States and the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations will be positive”.
4. Afghan govt. in peril?

This indicates that the Ghani government, which India has recognised as winner of the 2019 election, will only serve for an interim period. This also raises a big question mark on the future of Afghanistan’s government, and whether it will remain a democracy.

5. Terms of agreement still nebulous

- All Taliban demands have been front-loaded, while the actual terms of the ‘peace deal’ are yet to be negotiated between the Taliban and the Afghan side, facilitated by the U.S. So, much of the heavy lifting remains.

- There is no reference to the Constitution, rule of law, democracy and elections.

6. Impact on India

- After a closer look at the texts of the two agreements distributed to news agencies diplomatic and security experts say the impact on India may be a cause for worry for the government.

- Experts warned the Afghanistan-Pakistan dialogue facilitated by the U.S. on cross-border terrorism and mechanisms must not cut India out of the region’s security architecture.