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AFGHAN PEACE DEAL

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The **USA President** has envisaged a **New Peace Initiative (Plan)** to decide on the roadmap for peace in Afghanistan.



USA President's New Peace Initiative

- Under the plan, the USA proposed a regional conference under the United Nations auspices with foreign ministers of the USA, India, Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran to discuss a “unified approach” on Afghanistan.
- This peace plan has kept open the possibility that the USA troops, currently deployed in Afghanistan, might stay on for a longer time.
- Under the earlier **USA- Taliban Deal**, the USA had promised to **withdraw all troops by May, 2021**.
- The USA is pressing the Taliban to accept an immediate agreement to reduce violence for 90 days that will provide the space for the peace initiative.
- The USA will not be “dictating terms” to the Afghan parties, but facilitating an inclusive interim government, an agreement on the “foundational principles” for a new political order, and a “permanent and comprehensive ceasefire”.
- The USA is asking Turkey to convene a **meeting of the government in Kabul (capital of Afghanistan) and the Taliban to finalise a peace settlement**.
- The USA asked the United Nations to convene a meeting of the foreign ministers from China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India and the United States to develop a “unified approach” to peace in Afghanistan.
- The four-page pact was signed between ZalmayKhalilzad, **US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar**, political head of the Taliban on February 29, 2020.
- US officials and Taliban representatives have signed a final peace deal after months of negotiations in Qatar’s capital to end the United States’s longest war, fought in Afghanistan.
- Agreement, signed in Doha in the presence of leaders from **Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan**, will pave the way for the United States to gradually withdraw its troops.
- The two sides have long wrangled over the US demand for a ceasefire before the final peace agreement was signed.
- The **Taliban ordered all its fighters to halt fighting and “refrain from attacks”**.
- More than 2,400 US troops have been killed during the conflict.

Key Elements of the US-Taliban Pact:

- **Troops Withdrawal:** The US will draw down to 8,600 troops in 135 days from the present 14000 troops. And all troops will be out within 14 months.
- **Taliban Commitment:** Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies (does not include India)
- **Intra-Afghan Negotiations:** Taliban would engage with Kabul government directly from March 10th to find a lasting solution to the civil war
- **Sanctions Removal:** UN sanctions on Taliban leaders to be removed by three months (by May 29) and US sanctions by August 27.
- **Prisoner Release:** Up to 5,000 imprisoned Taliban and up to 1,000 prisoners from “the other side” held by Taliban “will be released” by March 10 — which is when intra- Afghan negotiations are supposed to start, in Oslo
- **Ceasefire:** The agreement states ceasefire will be simply “an item on the agenda” when intra-Afghan talks start and indicate actual ceasefire will come with the “completion” of an Afghan political agreement.

What Went Wrong?

- **U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration** is currently reviewing the deal his predecessor, former President Donald Trump, sealed with the Afghan insurgency and deciding whether to pull the remaining 2,500 American soldiers from Afghanistan to close America’s longest war.
- The U.S. review process has stemmed from widespread allegations the Taliban have not lived up to their commitments, including those of cutting ties with al-Qaida and other terrorist groups that threaten the U.S. and the security of its allies.
- The **so-called intra-Afghan negotiations** started in September, six months later than scheduled in the U.S.-Taliban deal because of a rift between the Afghan government and the Taliban over the release of 5,000 insurgent prisoners.
- The **Taliban say their deal with the U.S. required** the release of another 7,500 insurgent prisoners from Afghan jails and the removal of names of top Taliban leaders from a U.N. sanctions list by now, but those terms have not been fulfilled by the opposing side.
- The insurgents also dismiss Kabul’s demand for a ceasefire, saying they have reduced battlefield attacks as part of the deal with Washington, but a complete cessation of hostilities, they insist, is linked to a political agreement the warring parties intend to reach in the ongoing intra-Afghan negotiations.

Timeline of USA and Afghanistan

- **September 11, 2001:** Al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four commercial aircraft and crashed them into the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC. The fourth airliner crash-landed in a field in Pennsylvania. Nearly 3,000 people were killed. Soon after, Osama bin Laden, the head of the Islamist terror group, was identified as the man behind the attack.
- **September 18, 2001:** Taliban, the regional Islamic political and military force running Afghanistan, was protecting Bin Laden and refused to hand him over to the United States. In response, then US President George W Bush signed into law the Authorisation for Use of Military Force (AUMF). As per this law, the

country could use force against the nations, organisations or persons behind the 9/11 attack — namely the Al-Qaeda and Taliban.

- **October 7, 2001:** American and British forces jointly launch attacks on Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. This was the opening salvo in the US' proposed "war on terror". The mission, dubbed 'Operation Enduring Freedom', began with a series of air strikes which did manage to soften Taliban defences.
- **November, 2001:** Taliban forces began to crumble and retreat from several of their strongholds across the country, including Kabul. Later that month, the UNSC called for the formation of a transitional administration and invited member states to send across peacekeeping forces for maintaining stability.
- **December 2001:** The All-Qaeda initiated a truce, which many now believe was merely a cover-up to help Bin Laden and several other al-Qaeda leaders escape into Pakistan.
- In early December, the UN invited a number of major Afghan factions to a conference in Germany, where the Bonn Agreement was signed. The agreement provided for an international peacekeeping force to maintain security and peace in Kabul.
- **On December 9,** the Taliban surrendered Kandahar and Taliban leader Mullah Omar fled the city. This is widely considered to have been the end of the Taliban regime in the country.
- **May 1, 2003:** The then-US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld announced an end to "major combat" in Afghanistan. On the same day, President Bush made a similar announcement about combat operations in Iraq. At the time, there were around 8,000 US troops in Afghanistan.
- **October 9, 2004:** The country's first democratic elections since the fall of the Taliban was held and around 80 per cent of Afghanistan's voting population cast their ballot for Hamid Karzai, who was serving as an interim leader before the polls.
- **October 29, 2004:** Osama Bin Laden released a recorded message days after the presidential election, in which he mocked the Bush administration and claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks.
- **2005:** The year 2005 was marked by the gradual resurgence of the Taliban with violence increasing across the country. But this time they changed their tactics — while they had once engaged in open combat with the US and NATO forces, they were now resorting to suicide bombings and using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), resulting in many casualties.
- **2009:** Then-US President Barack Obama announced that he was increasing military presence in Afghanistan to 68,000 troops, making good on one of his key campaign promises of shifting military focus from Iraq to Afghanistan.
- **2010:** In November, **NATO members signed a declaration** stating that they would hand over responsibility for maintaining peace and security in Afghanistan to Afghan's own security forces by the end of 2014.
- **2011:** On May 1, 2011, Bin Laden was killed by US forces in **Abbottabad, Pakistan**, where he was hiding with some of his family members. He was buried in the Northern Arabian Sea the same day.
- **By June,** Obama announced his plans to withdraw 30,000 troops by 2012. At the time, Obama was facing overwhelming pressure from the American public, who were largely against the war in Afghanistan, as per polls.
- **2013:** NATO handed over control of security to Afghan forces. Instead, the coalition focused on military training and counterterrorism in the region. Meanwhile, the Taliban and US officials resumed talks in Doha, Qatar.

- **2014:** President Obama unveiled his plan for withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2016.
- In **September, Ashraf Ghani was elected president** after a lengthy delay following the presidential election. He signed the **Bilateral Security Agreement**, which Karzai had previously refused to sign towards the end of his presidency, which permitted approximately 13,000 foreign troops to remain in the country.
- On December 28, the US and NATO formally ended their combat mission in Afghanistan. 2019: The US ramps up peace negotiations with the Taliban in Doha. Taliban officials vowed to block International terrorist groups from Afghanistan in exchange for the US withdrawing its troops.
- In **September**, Trump abruptly called off peace talks merely a week after the US' Ambassador to **Afghanistan ZalmayKhalilzad** announced he had brokered an agreement "in principle" with Taliban leaders. Trump claimed his decision was sparked by the recent killing of a US soldier by Taliban fighters.
- **2020:** The US and Taliban signed an agreement, paving the way for foreign troops to be significantly withdrawn from Afghanistan. But without a ceasefire, Taliban fighters launched a series of attacks on Afghan security forces in the days that followed. In response, the US launched an airstrike against the Taliban forces stationed in the Helmand province.
- **2021:** President Joe Biden announced that the US will not meet the May 1 deadline for withdrawing troops laid down in the US-Taliban agreement. Instead, troops will retreat completely by September 11, 2021, he said.

The Heart Of Asia-Istanbul Process

- The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is a regional initiative of Afghanistan and the Republic of Turkey, which was launched on 2 November 2011 in Istanbul. It was launched with the motto "**ISTANBUL PROCESS ON REGIONAL SECURITY AND COOPERATION FOR A SECURE AND STABLE AFGHANISTAN**".



- The process aims to promote regional security, economic and political cooperation centered on Afghanistan through dialogue and **confidence building measures (CBMs)**.
- The conference was inaugurated by the presidents of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of Turkey with the foreign ministers of the participating countries, delegations of supporting countries and regional/international organizations in attendance.
- Afghanistan is the permanent Co- **Chair and coordinator of the process with the support of other participating countries.**
- The Heart of Asia comprises 15 participating countries, 17 supporting countries, and 12 supporting regional and international organizations.

Member Countries of Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| • Afghanistan | • India |
| • Pakistan | • Tajikistan |
| • Azerbaijan | • Iran |
| • Russia | • Turkey |
| • China | • Kazakhstan |
| • Saudi Arabia | |

- Turkmenistan
- Kyrgyzstan
- United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- Uzbekistan –

Supporting Countries of Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process

- Australia
- Iraq
- Canada
- Italy
- Denmark
- Japan
- Egypt
- Norway
- European Union
- Poland
- France
- Spain
- Finland
- Sweden
- Germany
- United Kingdom
- United States

Goals of the Process

- The HoA-IP aims at promoting and strengthening peace, security, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and in the region.
- The HoA-IP has become one of the most interactive voluntary state-groupings in the HoA Region.
- It brings Afghanistan's immediate and extended neighbours as well as international supporters together through the following focus areas:
 - ❖ **Political Consultations**
 - ❖ **Implementation of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)**
 - ❖ **Cooperation with Regional Organizations**

Ministerial Conferences (Mcs)

- Ministerial Conferences takes place annually and is a platform, in which participating and supporting parties comprised of foreign ministers and high-level officials come together to exchange ideas on the progress, the HOA - IP has made during the year and discuss ways to tackle challenges that still lies ahead.
- The participants continue their deliberations throughout the day of the conference.
- By delivering their statements of support, all parties reaffirm their commitments to the Process during the MC.
- Further, the co-chair and host of the next MC is officially announced.
- Another important outcome of the MC is the annual declaration of the HOA - IP that is developed by the senior officials prior to the MC.
- Each declaration highlights a set of priorities that all participating countries agree to follow in the year ahead.
- These priorities include areas for fostering dialogue, special initiatives and the emphasis on the timely implementation of the CBMs.
- The following is the list of Ministerial Conferences held:
 - ❖ **11 Nov. 2011: Istanbul, Turkey**

- ❖ 14 June 2012: Kabul, Afghanistan
- ❖ 26 April 2013: Almaty, Kazakhstan
- ❖ 31 October 2014: Beijing, China
- ❖ 9 December 2015: Islamabad, Pakistan
- ❖ 3-4 December 2016: Amritsar, India
- ❖ 1 December 2017: Baku, Azerbaijan
- ❖ 9 December 2019: Istanbul, Turkey
- ❖ 30th March 2021: Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Key Highlights

- **Ministerial Declaration, November 2nd, 2011** The Declaration on "Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan" was adopted in Istanbul, Turkey on November 2nd, 2011, at the Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan. The declaration was adopted by Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyzstan Republic, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the United Arab Emirates.
- **Ministerial Declaration, June 14th, 2012:** In the first follow-up conferences to the Heart of Asia in Kabul, Afghanistan, a declaration on political consultation involving Afghanistan and a sustained approach to implementation of CBMs (Confidence Building Measures) were adopted.
- **Ministerial Declaration, April 26th, 2013:** The President of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr NursultanNazarbayev inaugurated the third conference in Almaty, The Republic of Kazakhstan. The declaration on joint cooperation between member nations, combating terrorism and conference was adopted.
- **Ministerial Declaration, October 31st, 2014:** In the fourth conference in Beijing, the People's Republic of China, a declaration aimed at promoting peace and co-operation between Afghanistan and its neighbors was adopted. The conference was co-chaired by the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Afghan Foreign Minister Zarar Ahmad.
- **Ministerial Declaration, December 9th, 2015:** The conference was held in Islamabad, Pakistan. A joint declaration on combating security threats, both internal and external, promoting economic connectivity and strengthening Confidence Building Measures were adopted.
- **Ministerial Declaration, December 4th, 2016:** In the conference held at Amritsar, India, members reiterated their belief in principles of sovereignty, independence as enshrined in the UN charter. They also consented on eliminating non-tariff barriers to trade.
- **Ministerial Declaration, December 1st, 2017:** The conference held at Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan, the declaration on "Security and Economic Connectivity towards a Strengthened Heart of Asia Region" was adopted. Mr ElmarMammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Mr Salahuddin Rabbani, Foreign Affairs Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan were the co-chairs of the conference.
- **Ministerial Declaration, December 10th, 2019:** The conference was held in Istanbul, Turkey. The declaration of firm commitments was adopted. The revised action plans of the seven confidence-building measures (CBMs) were also adopted and a new CBM, Women Empowerment, was added to the existing ones. Afghanistan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Turkey President H.E. RecepTayyipErdoğan inaugurated the conference.

- **Ministerial Declaration, March 30th, 2021:** The theme of the 9th Ministerial Conference of HoA-IP was "Strengthening Consensus for Peace and Development". The conference was planned to be held in 2020 which could not be held due to situations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the conference, the Afghanistan President appreciated the number of regional connectivity initiatives including the Chabaharport project, as well as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline.

India on Afghanistan

- Previously, India refused to recognise the Taliban regime of 1996-2001 and rather supported the 'Northern Alliance' in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.
- India has long held the position of dealing only with the elected government in Kabul and has always considered the Taliban a terrorist organisation backed by Pakistan.
- India **supports an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process.** Afghanistan serves India's security and economic interests
- 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.
- The **pipeline project TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India)**, which seeks to connect an energy-rich Central to South Asia, will only see the light of the day if stability is established in Afghanistan
- India's interest in Afghanistan relates to its need to reduce Pakistani influence in the region. For access to the landlocked Central Asian countries that border Afghanistan. The country is home to resource deposits worth one trillion dollars, according to the US Geological Survey
- During the **Soviet-Afghan war (1979-89)**, India was the only South Asian nation to recognise the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.
- Following the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, India continued to provide Afghan government with humanitarian aid.

Editorial

- The peace conference hosted by Russia in Moscow between the Afghan government and Taliban representatives is the latest example of growing international concern about the future of Afghanistan as the May 1 deadline for the proposed U.S. troops pull out nears. No breakthrough was expected from a single-day conference between the parties that have been fighting each other for nearly 20 years. The Russian plan was to bring together the Taliban and the government, whose Doha peace talks have stalled for months, to jump start the peace process. The U.S. has also called for an UN-led multilateral peace conference. The Afghanistan conflict is a multifaceted one, with its primary actors being the government, the Taliban and the U.S. Others such as Russia, China and India are worried about the conflict's spillover effects.
- There is a consensus among all these countries that Afghanistan needs to be stabilised now. U.S. President Joe Biden, who is reviewing the administration's Afghan strategy, said this week that it would be "tough" to withdraw all U.S. troops by the May 1 deadline as the Trump administration agreed in an accord with the Taliban. On the other side, the Taliban have threatened to launch a new offensive if the U.S. does not leave according to the schedule. It is a stalemate.
- Mr. Biden's dilemma is that he cannot commit troops endlessly to a war that the U.S. is certainly not winning. But if he pulls back without a peace agreement, the civil war could intensify, and the Taliban, already in control of much of rural Afghanistan, could make rapid gains and if he decides to keep the troops even for a short term, it could trigger a tough response from the Taliban. So, the U.S. administration

is trying to put together a new peace process, with other regional actors, which would not just buy time for the Americans but also seek to find a lasting settlement. It seems Russia, China and India are on board. Pakistan, which hosts the Taliban leadership, will also participate in the peace process. The flip side of this diplomatic push is that all the main stakeholders agree that the Taliban would play a critical role in shaping Afghanistan's future. The U.S. already wants the Afghan government to share power with the Taliban. Russia has asked the Afghan government and the Taliban to make "necessary compromises". The jihadist group, whose reign of Afghanistan during 1996-2001 was notorious for extremism, violence and suppression of basic rights, is on the cusp of power again. The international actors pushing for peace with the Taliban should at least extract compromises from them. After the Moscow meet, Russia, China, the U.S. and Pakistan said that a peace agreement should "include protections for the rights of all Afghans". They should make it their top priority in the coming talks.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUBileLPWZl2jyfjIZYiZQ>

