

UPSC EDITORIAL ANALYSIS 22 JUL 2021

EDITORIAL 1: INDIA MUST DIRECTLY ENGAGE WITH TALIBAN 2.0

Topic: General Studies Paper 2 (Indian & its Neighbours)

Context:

- India has decided to ramp down its civilian presence in Afghanistan, since after the withdrawal of U.S it has become a war-torn country.
- India has 'temporarily' closed its consulate in Kandahar and evacuated its diplomats and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel stationed there.
- Also the operations in Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Herat are also suspended and now India only has Embassy in Kabul and the consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif.



The Taliban's sway

- India betting only on the government in Kabul was a big mistake, as it ignored the threat Taliban poses to Indian assets and presence in Afghanistan.
- India's Afghan policy is at a major crossroads; India to safeguard its civilian assets must fundamentally reset its Afghanistan policy.
- India, out of its own national interest, must begin open talks instead of back channels to have healthy relationship with Afghanistan.
- More than 400 districts of Afghanistan are under Taliban control, hence the talk-to-the-Taliban-option is the best available of the many less than perfect options available to India.
- India has been steadily abandoning its puritanical policy towards the Taliban.
- For Example, In the 2018, Moscow conference which had members from Taliban, members of the Afghan High Peace Council, and other countries from the region, India only sent a 'non-official delegation' of two retired diplomats to Moscow.

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- India has also joined the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha and has started reaching out to the Taliban in pursuance of our long-term commitment towards development and reconstruction in Afghanistan.
- Instead of half-hearted, half-embarrassed, ideologically-hesitant talks, India must engage in more direct and unambiguous talks as the new rationale approach to the Taliban.

Rationale for indirect talks

1. If India engages with the Taliban directly, it could make Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani, India's trusted partner uneasy, as a result Ashraf may look towards China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) for national security and personal political survival.
2. There is a dilemma of who to talk to within the Taliban as India has very little access to the members of the Quetta Shura or the fighters on the ground in Afghanistan. Hence India can only engage with the Doha-based Taliban negotiators or leaders such as Abdul Salam Zaeef whose beef with Pakistan is well known.
3. Taliban future intentions of what they would do after ascending to power in Kabul is also unclear due to the global opprobrium that Taliban faces.
4. Also, there is a possibility of Pakistan acting out against India in Kashmir if India were to establish deeper links with the Taliban.

Hence India's indirect talks with Taliban are not completely erroneous, but India should engage with the Taliban more proactively and openly. For one, whether we like it or not, the Taliban, as in future Taliban is going to be part of all political scheme of things in Afghanistan, and unlike in 1996, this time a large number of players in the international community would recognise, negotiate and do business with the Taliban.

The Pakistan factor

1. Taliban is looking for regional and global partners for recognition and legitimacy, Hence the less proactive the Indian engagement with the Taliban, the stronger Pakistan-Taliban relations would become.

Hence, India should engage more with Taliban to keep Pakistan out of it.

2. Though Taliban is widely propped up by Pakistan, after gaining power in Kabul, whether Taliban will continue to be Pakistan's servile followers is doubtful as a worldly-wise and internationally-exposed Taliban 2.0 would develop its own agency and sovereign claims also questioning the legitimacy of the Durand Line separating Pakistan and Afghanistan.
3. A Taliban-dominated Afghanistan, next door to its Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan-infested tribal areas, may hedge their bets on how far to listen to Pakistan and this would be the right time for India to engage with Taliban.
4. India to ensure security of its civilian assets, needs to court all parties in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, also it makes neither strategic nor economic sense to withdraw from Afghanistan after

spending over \$3 billion, and withdrawing from Afghanistan now will highlight how weak our strategic resolve is.

5. If India is not proactive in Afghanistan now, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and China will emerge as the shapers of Afghanistan's political and geopolitical destiny, and which would be detrimental to Indian interests there.

Open the congested frontier

- Opening up the congested north-western frontier will help India's continental grand strategy.
- Backchannel talks with Pakistan, ceasefire on the Line of Control, political dialogue with the mainstream Kashmiri leadership and secret conversation with Taliban indicate that India has already opened up its congested north-western frontier.

Conclusion:

- ✓ India's engagement with the Taliban may or may not be successful, but non-engagement will definitely hurt Indian interests.
- ✓ After the U.S withdrawal none can stop Taliban from gaining power in Kabul, So New Delhi must exorcise the demons of IC-814 (the December 1999 hijacking) from its collective memory and engage with the Taliban 2.0 in a much open manner instead of secret and back channel talks.
- ✓ At the same time, open engagement with Taliban doesn't mean tolerating or accepting the condemnable atrocities committed by the Taliban.

Reference:

India must directly engage with Taliban 2.0: <https://thg.page.link/3hcMCyafAXubxRch9>

EDITORIAL 2: A COMPROMISE AMID UNCERTAINTY

Topic: General Studies Paper 2 (Regional groupings)

Context:

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has the world's largest untapped crude reserves, may quit the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).
- In the UAE's recent deal with Saudi Arabia, one of the world's biggest crude exporters, and Russia, a non-OPEC state, the UAE's demand for an increase in its oil output quotas, in recognition of its higher production capacity, was accepted.
- Also, The baselines for Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq and Kuwait were raised.



The compromise:

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is an intergovernmental organization or cartel of 13 countries. Founded on 14 September 1960 in Baghdad by the first five members, it has since 1965 been headquartered in Vienna, Austria, although Austria is not an OPEC member state.
- Currently, the Organization comprises 15 Member Countries – namely Algeria, Angola, Congo, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, IR Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.
- Till 2022, The bloc shall increase its crude production by 400,000 barrels a day starting from August.
- The output boost is in response to rising oil prices due to a rebound in economic activity as the lockdown restrictions have eased and there are increased COVID-19 vaccinations in different parts of the world.
- Earlier The cartel had cut oil production by 9.7 million barrels a day (mbd) as oil demand fell from 100 mbd to 91.1 mbd and prices plummeted from \$70 to \$20 in 2020 due to Lockdown restrictions.
- After that, The bloc has gradually rolled back these steep cuts and may return to its production to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022.
- When OPEC+ tried to ease production cuts, as the economy was recovering from the pandemic, the UAE insisted that members who diluted the original output reductions should compensate through even steeper cuts.
- Though the internal rift has been resolved through the Sunday meeting, the danger cannot be ruled out of an increasingly economically and politically assertive UAE flexing its muscle.

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- Traditional allies, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Bilateral relations are at strain as the UAE established diplomatic ties with Israel and withdrew troops from the Saudi-spearheaded war in Yemen.
- Also recently, Riyadh has imposed tariffs on imports from the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council.
- Now, Saudi Arabia is planning to exclude from the GCC tariff agreement goods made by companies with a workforce of less than 25% of locals and industrial products with less than 40% of the added value after their transformation process, this will affect UAE the most as it has a huge migrant population.

The peak in oil demand

- The latest OPEC compromises recognition of the delicate balance between competing domestic and global priorities.
- OPEC Countries want to maximise their returns on their substantial hydrocarbon resources, due to the peak in oil demand within sight.
- Based on Paris Climate Change Accord, The demand for oil peak may be in 2030, owing to the proliferation of alternative fuels and electric cars.
- However, due to population growth and expansion of the middle class for continued increase in oil demand IEA (International Energy Association) Has forecasted the oil peak in the 2040s, and a 5% rise or fall relative to the demand before the pandemic within a decade.

Conclusion:

- ✓ The OPEC countries are concerned about stabilising the world oil prices without jeopardising national expenditure programmes and diversifying their economies in anticipation of the unfolding global energy transition.
- ✓ UAE instead of moving out from OPEC should consider the fact that Unity would be of the essence amid this uncertainty.

Reference:

A compromise amid uncertainty: <https://thg.page.link/trFHF4E8i7cAukR6>

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