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The Afghanistan Puzzle & India

Gist of **RStv** Debate
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THE AFGHANISTAN PUZZLE & INDIA

INTRODUCTION

India welcomed the power-sharing deal announced by Afghanistan between President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah, which ended months of political discord triggered by last year's disputed presidential election. The Ministry of External Affairs said India hoped the political agreement and creation of a council for national reconciliation will result in renewed efforts for establishing enduring peace and stability, and putting an end to externally-sponsored terrorism and violence in Afghanistan. According to the deal, Ghani will stay as the president while Abdullah will helm the High Council of National Reconciliation (HCNR) with executive authority and his team will have a 50 per cent share in the cabinet. The HCNR has been mandated to lead future peace talks, including with the Taliban. On this edition of the Big Picture we analyse the Afghan situation and India. On this edition of the big picture, the **Afghanistan's power-sharing deal & India** has been discussed from **UPSC** perspective.

Why RSTV? Being a reliable source of information **Rajya Sabha TV discussions** becomes critically important **for Civil Services Examination**. It brings incisive analysis of parliamentary affairs and covers all critical dimensions. Along with focusing on current national and international affairs, it touches upon all the aspects of political, economic, social and cultural life of the people, while promoting scientific temper among masses. Here we are providing **Gist of Rajya Sabha TV discussion** on **Afghanistan's Puzzle & India**.

Topic relevance from RSTV Debate on Afghanistan's Puzzle & India for UPSC: Direct questions can be asked on:

- Afghan power-sharing deal
- US-Taliban peace deal
- Role of United States
- India's stand on the deal
- Importance of Afghanistan for India

EDITED EXCERPTS FROM THE DEBATE**What is Afghanistan's power-sharing deal?**

- Afghanistan's president Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah have signed a power-sharing deal that ends months of political uncertainty.
- Ghani will remain president, but Abdullah's party will appoint half of the cabinet ministers.
- While Ghani has retained the office of the president, the deal gives Abdullah the de facto No. 2 position and power to recommend candidates for 50 percent of the Cabinet.
- The agreement names Abdullah to lead future peace talks with the Taliban, which has already signed a landmark accord with the United States to pave the way for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan.
- Also as part of the deal, Abdurrashid Dostum will be promoted to marshal and will gain a seat on the Afghan National Security Council.

Background:

- Ghani and Abdullah both claimed to have won the disputed September presidential election, triggering months of political and governance crisis in Afghanistan.
- Abdullah, an ophthalmologist, declared himself president and held his own swearing-in ceremony on March 9, the day Ghani was re-installed as president.
- Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah both declared themselves president in parallel inauguration ceremonies in March.
- The latest development comes days after a militant attack on a maternity ward in the capital, Kabul, left 24 people dead. Mothers, newborn babies and nurses were among the victims.
- No group has admitted carrying out the attack that shocked Afghanistan and the world.
- The deal comes as Afghan authorities are hoping to enter peace talks with the Taliban to end years of violence.

**What is US-Taliban deal?**

- A peace agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban signed Feb. 29 calls for U.S. and NATO troops to leave Afghanistan.
- It was seen at the time as Afghanistan's best chance at peace following decades of war.
- Since then, the U.S. has been trying to get the Taliban and the Afghan government to begin intra-Afghan negotiations, but the political turmoil and personal acrimony between Ghani and Abdullah impeded talks.
- Under the U.S.-Taliban deal, the proposed intra-Afghan dialogue was due to begin in early March.
- The crucial talks have been delayed because of an extremely slow-moving prisoner swap between the

Taliban and Kabul.

- The Afghan government has to release up to 5,000 insurgent prisoners in return for 1,000 detainees held by the Taliban.
- So far, only 1,000 prisoners have been set free from Afghan jails while the Taliban have released fewer than 300 detainees.



How India reacted to the deal?

- India welcomed the power-sharing deal announced by Afghanistan between President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah.
- India hoped the political agreement and creation of a council for national reconciliation will result in renewed efforts for establishing enduring peace and stability, and putting an end to externally-sponsored terrorism and violence in Afghanistan.
- India is concerned over continuing violence and terror attacks in Afghanistan and called for an immediate ceasefire as well as assistance to people reeling under the coronavirus pandemic.
- India has consistently supported inclusive governance, national unity, strong institutions, constitutional order, rights of all sections of society and the territorial integrity of Afghanistan.
- The continuing and enhanced violence and terror in Afghanistan is a matter of deep concern.
- India calls for an immediate ceasefire and assistance to the people of Afghanistan to deal with the humanitarian situation arising from Covid-19.

Importance of Afghanistan for India:

There is a strong economic, politico-strategic and security component in the India-Afghanistan relations.

- **A key to Central Asia:** India's economic assistance and support to democracy is a step to reduce Afghanistan's dependency on Pakistan and helps India to establish links with energy rich Central Asia.
- **A balancer:** For India, a friendly and pro-active democratic regimes in Afghanistan would act as a balancer in the region.
- **TAPI:** India also sees Afghanistan as an essential component of the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline. To address its energy needs to sustain its economic growth, pipelines from Iran and Central Asia would be extremely important.
- **Geo-economic importance:** Geo-economically Afghanistan is very important for India, the foreign trade policy of India and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), hosts a tremendous promise that could help the country develop economic and strategic importance in Eurasia and Central Asia.

India's role in Afghanistan

India has played an active role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and its expanding partnership has grown into multi-sectoral activities in all parts of Afghanistan.

- **AIFD:** The most important symbol of India's assistance in the reconstruction of Afghanistan has been the construction of the multipurpose **Afghan India Friendship Dam (AIFD)**.
 - The project was inaugurated in June 2016. It has an installed capacity of 42 MW and supplies water for irrigating 75,000 hectares of land.
- **Chabahar Port:** Chabahar Port, located in the Sistan-Baluchistan province in Iran, is an important infrastructure

development project being currently undertaken by both India and Iran for enhancing sea-land connectivity with Afghanistan and the Central Asian Region.

- **Connecting Highway:** India has constructed a 218-km road from Zaranj to Delaram for facilitating the movement of goods and services to the Iranian border.
 - The highway, completed in 2010, connects Iran with the Garland Highway, which links Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif Herat, and Kunduz.

Challenges in Afghanistan:

- **Poverty:** Despite 18 years and billions of dollars in international aid, Afghanistan remains desperately poor. The poverty level soared from 35% of the population in 2012 to more than 55% last year. Poverty in Afghanistan is defined as a person who survive on \$1 or less a day.
- **Corruption:** Successive Afghan governments, including Ghani's, have been accused by international watchdogs of widespread corruption.
- **Devastated health care system:** The country's health care system, devastated by four decades of war, is woefully unprepared for a major outbreak.
- **Uncontrolled disease spread:** Meanwhile, Kabul and other cities are in lockdown to stem the spread of the coronavirus. Afghanistan has performed only limited testing so far with about 22,000 tested. The country has more than 6,400 confirmed infections in a nation of 36.6 million. As more testing becomes available, the country's confirmed infection numbers will likely rise sharply.

Significance of the power-sharing deal:

- **Stability in the region:** The agreement will help put Afghanistan on the road to greater stability.
- **Good example of political compromise:** The signing of Ghani-Abdullah political agreement set a good example in political compromise in Afghanistan. The agreement demonstrated that Afghan leaders are capable of showing extreme pragmatism to make hard tradeoffs and compromises.
- **Capability to manage:** It also emphasizes the fact the Afghans can manage to settle their disagreements among themselves without seeking external mediation—even though interventions from Turkey and Iran, plus lurking US aid pressure, played a role in making the deal happen.

Collective responsibility: The agreement comes at the right time and provides an important first step in a continuing exercise to bring the Afghan political class together to assume/share the growing burden of responsibility and better manage the country

CONCLUSION

With the tentative peace deal under fire, continuing havoc wreaked by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a looming US troop withdrawal, the breakthrough in the Afghan government's political deadlock. As the government continues to work through political differences and unite behind the preservation of Afghanistan's republican institutions, it remains yet to be seen how rivals to its democratic consolidation, chiefly the Taliban, will react to the newfound strength and resolve of a unified Afghan government.

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