



Balancing act in Afghanistan

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India should be informed of the developments in the peace process for which the U.S. is taking Pakistan's help

- In recent weeks, a new policy conundrum has emerged for the U.S. as it attempts to help launch a peace process in Afghanistan.
- Soon after the U.S. government formally requested Pakistan's assistance to bring the Taliban to the table, Islamabad helped facilitate meetings between senior Taliban representatives and U.S. officials in Abu Dhabi.
- The U.S. government appears to be acknowledging that Pakistan, given its influence over the Taliban, is an important and potentially helpful player in the peace process in Afghanistan.
- However, it has also signalled its desire for India, its growing defence partner, to be more involved in reconciliation efforts and in Afghanistan more broadly.
- Herein lies the dilemma: the U.S. cannot have it both ways. If Pakistan is enlisted in reconciliation efforts, India won't be keen to get involved.
- But if India does take on a larger role, then Pakistan may well step back.
- To be sure, India and Pakistan have proved to be willing and able to partner regionally.
- Of course, partnering in Afghanistan is much more delicate and challenging.
- Fortunately for the U.S., this policy dilemma may work itself out on its own. Despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's desire for a more robust regional foreign policy, India appears content to keep a low profile in Afghanistan, outside of its continued development and economic assistance projects.
- Tellingly, New Delhi has distanced itself from the Indian Army Chief's remark supporting talks with the Taliban with no preconditions.
- Still, it is important that India not be left on the outside looking in amid efforts to spark a reconciliation process with such major implications for it.
- Accordingly, the U.S. should keep India fully informed, at the highest

levels, about any developments in reconciliation.

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