



Tough-talking

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India must ensure it's not cut out of the resolution process with the Taliban

- The Taliban reconciliation process is moving at a faster pace than was anticipated.
- Talks facilitated by Russia in Moscow this week, with mainstream Afghan politicians sitting around the table with Taliban leaders, are similar in their approach to the recent U.S.-Taliban talks in Qatar, though the two are rival processes.
- The U.S. and Russia have accepted the idea that peace in Afghanistan is not possible without major concessions to the Taliban, including dialogue without insisting on a cessation of violence.
- And both the Russian and U.S. processes are dependent on cooperation from Pakistan, which retains its influence over the Taliban leadership.
- Clearly, the current talks with the Taliban are not within the “red lines” agreed to by all stakeholders in the past: they are not Afghan-led, owned or controlled, and the Taliban has not abjured violence, or sworn allegiance to the Afghan constitution before joining talks.
- However, despite the deep and obvious misgivings in New Delhi, it would be pointless to ignore or reject the outcomes of the talks, where some progress has been made.
- While India's principled position that it will not directly or publicly talk to the Taliban until it engages the Afghan government remains valid, it is necessary that India stays abreast of all negotiations and isn't cut out of the resolution process.
- It is hoped that a robust channel is open between Indian intelligence agencies and all important groups in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, in order to ensure that Indian interests, development projects and citizens are kept secure.
- New Delhi must intensify its dialogue with regional and global stakeholders, and impress upon them that any dialogue with the Taliban must not come at the cost of the hard-fought victories of the Afghan

people in the past two decades: on establishing constitutional democracy and the rule of law, and securing the rights of women and minorities.

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