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India needs to be proactive in Afghanistan

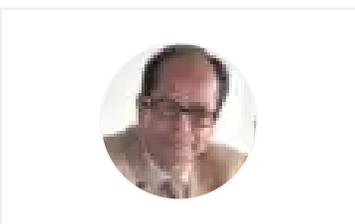
August 18, 2021, 5:56 PM IST / Jagdish Batra in Cultural Inputs, India, World, TOI

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Every country has its own foreign policy based on self-interest. To blame America for the fiasco in Afghanistan is hardly justifiable. Nobody had

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Jagdish Batra

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thought of the Taliban entering in the manner in which they did with the Afghan National Army doing a vanishing trick in the hour of utmost need. It is not only America that trained the Afghan forces, India too had been doing so for a pretty long time, but as Biden said, you can't infuse in the army of another nation, the will to fight. However, we need not be led by America at this point of time. After all, America ignored India at the high table with its late Troika or Troika plus formulations even though its move failed to cut ice with the Taliban. In that its ostrich-like vision is to blame.

India must recognize the new reality and should be acting independently in its own interest. For this, it has to be pro-active in recognizing the new regime not much later than the other neighbours – Pakistan and China do so. There are several face-savers here. The UNSC had resolved not to recognize any regime that took power through violence, but as it is, the Ashraf Ghani government simply abdicated and there was no violence during the takeover of the capital Kabul. Regarding Indian concerns, the olive branch held out by the new regime provides the window to

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initiate a positive relationship. One, the new dispensation has vowed not to use its territory for terrorist activities against other countries; two, it has desired the continuation of Indian projects. What else do we want? No doubt, China is waiting in the wings but the immense goodwill that India has enjoyed historically among the Afghan people, as also through its key role in infrastructure development goes to its credit. India has to secure its investment and the Indian-origin people in Afghanistan.

As for the fears manifest in the people trying to flee Afghanistan through desperate means and the reminders of the human rights violations by the previous Taliban government are concerned, all that need not be true in case of this new government. It is in its own interest for the new dispensation in Kabul to try to prove its difference from the previous version and Pakistan, already under pressure from FATF would also like to see such an image of the Afghan government. There have been some positive feelers like the women have been assured that they would be allowed to get an education and do work. If the Taliban government goes back on its promise in future, it

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will also face international pressure like Pakistan, unless of course, it chooses the North Korean model of isolation. In that case, the world community may not be able to do much, but then there is no way to change the real picture that obtains now.

It is not that all is lost for India. The new dispensation is not without its internal contradictions which create hurdles with the neighbouring countries. If Pakistan is worried about the TTP, China is concerned about the Taliban's ideological affinity with the Uighar Muslims. India has trucks with the Pashtun and Uzbek populace in Panjshir that is still against the Taliban. It would be better to be a player in the power game that will follow than be a bystander and let the initiative be taken by others.

At the same time, India does need goodwill of countries like Russia and Iran which are still not entirely lost to India. The relationships in the contemporary world are based more on economic interests than on political ideologies and Russia was upset mainly because of our reduction in defence purchases from it as we

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preferred America. Similarly, in case of Iran, we buckled under the American pressure and curtailed purchase of oil from it. In this multipolar world, it is quite possible to side with the US in the South China Sea but to be a bit neutral in the Afghan region. Modi's foreign policy has paid off in the past and it can weather the storm now too.

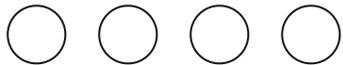


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