

Why India finds itself 'lost' in Afghanistan: An Opinion

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The swift takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban is a closed chapter now. How it happened and why it was not anticipated not just by U.S officials but officials of other countries including India, will be analyzed and taught as a lesson in the coming years to future and serving Intelligence officers and other workings in similar roles.

Another thing that should pique the curiosity of the interested stakeholders, across the globe, is how and why the U.S and NATO forces were not able to take out all their equipment from Afghanistan despite being well aware of the repercussions it will have on the future of the country. Leaked and officially released videos, coming out from Afghanistan, show the massive amount of arms, ammunition, vehicles, helicopters etc- that were being used by the U.S led forces- are now in the custody of the Taliban commanders.

It is interesting to note in the last such media statement of U.S Central Command, that was released on 10 August, it was stated that the U.S forces had already retrograded material load worth 984 C-17 aircraft. The release further stated that 95% of the withdrawal was completed on 10 August.

However, the fact that the Taliban is now the de-jure, if not de-facto as some would argue, ruler of Afghanistan, it needs to be responded to and respected in that way by all countries, including India.

India, despite having centuries old ties with the people of Afghanistan and investing billions of dollars in building assets in Afghanistan as a gift for the people of the

country, right now finds itself on the last row when it comes to interacting with the Taliban leadership and cajoling or threatening them as the situation demands.

When other countries, with little or no interest in Afghanistan and having no cultural or close ties with the Afghans, were talking with Taliban leadership, India diplomats wasted precious time in taking and sticking to the moral 'high ground' of not talking to a designated 'terrorist group' while conveniently forgetting that it was the U.S, the same country which had first designated the Taliban as a terrorist group, initiating the rapprochement talks.

As a result of this, India now finds itself having neither the good will, nor the personal rapport nor any other asset to reach out to the Taliban leadership to ensure that it continues to enjoy the 'clout' that it enjoyed before August 15 when the government led by Ashraf Ghani was in power. This has happened even as its two regional challengers- China and Pakistan are now sitting among the 'high seats' with the other Taliban leaders with India relegated to a member of the audience. India is now lost in Kabul.

Such was the ineptness, in which the recent developments were handled by the Indian mandarins, that they had to close down the embassy within hours and flee the country.

Hope the people responsible are asked to explain that if they were not able to build a minimum amount of ties and trust with the Taliban which would have entailed them to run their embassy, then what they were doing all these years in the name of diplomacy? Surely, they could have done a better job in enhancing the regional and global image of India.

The reason that Taliban is just another face and front of GHQ-Rawalpindi, as given by majority of security experts while justifying their policy of not engaging with the Taliban, may or may not be true.

However, what is true is that whoever wants to do business or protects its interest in and around Kabul, needs to talk to the Taliban, have some sort of leeway so that a rational relationship of give and take can be maintained. India, as of today, is far-away from this scenario.

With the U.S and other Western officials leaving the country, Afghanistan's future will be decided by Taliban, Pakistan, China, Turkey, Iran and Russia.

Amidst all these developments, a group of Indian diplomats, perhaps sitting in India Habitat Centre in Delhi, will be patting their backs for not engaging with a terror group while sipping on their pale-yellow colored beer on a hot summer noon.

