

Reading Between the Lines: India Has Sour Grapes over America's Afghan Peace Talks

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Region: [Asia](#)

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*The clearest indication of how the Indian military, intelligence, and diplomatic bureaucracies (“deep state”) truly feel about America’s Afghan peace talks with the Taliban can be seen in retired **Major-General Harsha Kakar**’s recent article on the topic for “The Statesman”, where the otherwise presumably serious former military official shows the sour grapes that his country has over this process by resorting to a chain of emotional arguments to make the implied point that the war must go on at all costs in order to advance India’s strategic interests vis-à-vis Pakistan at the US’ expense.*

Intuiting India’s Interpretation

India, which hasn’t shied away from sounding off about all manner of international issues ever since Prime Minister Modi’s election in 2014, has been uncharacteristically tight-lipped about its attitude towards America’s Afghan peace talks with the Taliban, leading many observers to intuit that it’s extremely unhappy with this process but is applying the age-old wisdom about how “it’s better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt” in order to avoid the ignoble distinction of being the only country in the world to condemn the latest steps taken to end this nearly two-decade-long conflict. These suspicions appear to be confirmed after reading retired Major-General Harsha Kakar’s recent article on this topic for “The Statesman”, where the otherwise presumably serious former military official shows the sour grapes that his country has over this process by resorting to a chain of emotional arguments to make the implied point that the war must go on at all costs in order to advance India’s strategic interests vis-à-vis Pakistan at the US’ expense.

Double Standards On Democracy

In his piece about “[Who will be responsible for Afghanistan mess?](#)”, Kakar hits the gate running by comparing the US’ possible withdrawal from Afghanistan to its prior one from Vietnam, remarking that

“Donald Trump appears desperate to fulfill his campaign promise, ignoring sound advice.”

Seeing as how Trump was democratically elected as President of the United States partly on his campaign promise to draw down America’s involvement in costly overseas conflicts, Kakar is implying that the will of the people should be ignored in order to promote the interests of the US’ permanent military, intelligence, and diplomatic bureaucracy (“deep state”), which is superficially hypocritical for someone from the self-professed “world’s

largest democracy” to say but makes sense when one realizes that the Indian “deep state” (of which Kakar is a part) hijacked control of the country after Modi took office. For reasons of “narrative convenience”, Kakar ignores the fact that the withdrawal from Vietnam was extremely popular with average Americans, just like a similar one from Afghanistan would be as well.

Who will be responsible for Afghanistan mess?

The US lost face in Vietnam and it is a memory which continues to haunt them and so will Afghanistan in the years ahead.

Harsha Kakar | New Delhi | February 5, 2019 1:15 am



Screengrab from The Statesman

Frustration Over “America First”

Another important factor that Kakar ignores is Trump’s signature “America First” foreign policy, as he writes that

“It appears the US is presently only concerned about itself, rather than the people of Afghanistan and other states which have a stake in the country.”

This should have been self-evident because Trump’s foreign policy is all about prioritizing US interests instead of ‘taking one for the team’ and ‘doing favors’ for its international ‘partners’ who he feels have been exploiting America for far too long by freeloading off of it. India, it can be said, is one such ‘partner’, at least when it comes to Afghanistan, though this will be returned to in the next section of the present article. Continuing along, Kakar’s next series of points touch upon his views on how wounded US and NATO veterans, as well as those who lost their brothers-in-arms in the conflict, might dislike that Trump’s withdrawing without a victory, but the Major-General seems to be out of touch with the rank and file because otherwise he’d know that this war is very unpopular with them.

For the second time in two paragraphs, he then whines about “America First” again by writing that

“Trump has made up his mind and would follow his intuitions, the world be damned”, adding that “He did it in Syria and is repeating it here.”

Once more, Kakar’s angle of approach to this issue is the same as Trump’s “deep state” foes’ in that he deliberately overlooks just how popular the President’s intention to withdraw from Syria is among average Americans in order to further his own ‘class’ institutional interests at their expense. The next chain of interconnected points that he tries to make is that the Taliban will go back on its previously stated commitment to peace and inclusive governance as part of a preplanned conspiracy with Pakistan, though not before Islamabad “obtains US largesse, has doors for IMF loans opened and pressure...applied on India to pull out of Afghanistan.” It’s actually these three outcomes of Pakistan’s diplomatic facilitation of the peacemaking process that Kakar – and by extrapolation, the Indian “deep state” that he represents – is most fearful of.

Cutting Off India’s Free Ride In Afghanistan

The Major-General doesn’t really care about the US’ international reputation potentially taking a hit after its ‘second Vietnam’ or what its wounded veterans think about the withdrawal, but his emotional embellishment of these two topics appears to be nothing more than a poorly thought-out attempt to misportray Trump’s peace talks with the Taliban in the worst possible light because of how worried India is about the strategic consequences of their success. New Delhi knows that its interests in Afghanistan are only secured so long as the Pentagon is there to protect them and that the US’ possible withdrawal from the country would remove India’s strategic depth vis-à-vis Pakistan, therefore largely stabilizing the situation in South Asia to what New Delhi’s “deep state” believes would be their ultimate detriment per the “zero-sum” paradigm that guides their decisions. Put another way, despite the War on Afghanistan being a total military failure for the US, India wants Americans to continue dying for them in order to advance their country’s regional interests.

It was written earlier that Trump’s “America First” policy is aimed first and foremost at cutting off the US’ freeloaders, so bearing in mind the aforementioned insight about how India used the US all these years as its “cat’s paw” against Pakistan by strategically profiting off of its people’s sacrifices in blood and treasure, it can be said that the application of “America First” to the War on Afghanistan is a nightmare scenario for New Delhi. Fearing that the withdrawal of American troops will leave Indian investments without protection, Kakar suggests the deployment of historically ineffective UN peacekeeping forces as a desperate last-ditch measure to defeat the same National Liberation Movement that not even the US could crush with over 100,000 troops at the height of the Obama-era surge. Of note, for as much as he hypes up the US’ possible loss of face following any prospective withdrawal from Afghanistan, Kakar doesn’t talk about what a loss of face and money it would be for India if the Taliban seizes its many investments there in the aftermath.

The End Of An Empire, But Which One?

Right near the end, Kakar predicts that “Trump would have demitted office but would remain in history books for being responsible for the death of a nation”, concluding that “It would only prove the adage of ‘Afghanistan being the graveyard of empires’”, but the US

might actually save itself from collapse by withdrawing from the war-torn state, reinvesting its money in domestic infrastructure and socio-economic projects instead, and getting out of the quagmire while it still can.

On the other hand, the same can't be said for Modi and his envisaged empire of "Akhand Bharat", which might both be dealt political death blows ahead of India's general elections in May if serious concern over the geopolitical consequences of a possibly impending American withdrawal from Afghanistan combines with other issues to convince voters to kick the hyper-jingoist Hindutva ideologues out of office before they lead their country to ruin. It's little wonder then that India's "deep state" has sour grapes over the US' Pakistani-facilitated peacemaking progress in Afghanistan because it could end their dreams of a regional empire once and for all.

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