

# DELHI'S POLITICAL DECISION TO STAY WITH GHANI UNDERLINES ITS UNFLINCHING LOYALTY TO THE CURRENT REGIME IN KABUL

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Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s congratulatory message to Ashraf Ghani, who was declared re-elected as president of Afghanistan earlier this week, was certainly not a routine diplomatic courtesy. Delhi appears to have taken a deliberate decision to ignore the considerable political controversy surrounding Ghani's re-election. Delhi is among the few international entities to have endorsed the results from an election that was conducted nearly five months ago and has been the subject of a protracted dispute and painful recounting of votes. On Tuesday, election officials had declared that Ghani had secured a little above 50 per cent of the vote needed to avoid a run-off between the top two candidates. Ghani's principal rival, Abdullah Abdullah, an old friend of India, has called the announcement a "coup", demanded that the election officials be stopped from fleeing the country, and threatened to form a parallel government involving all sections of the Afghan political spectrum. Abdullah is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Afghan government.

Abdullah was also a contender for the presidency in the earlier election held in 2014 and disputed the proclamation of Ghani as the winner. But the US stepped in to broker a power-sharing agreement between Ghani and Abdullah. This time, though, there is no indication so far that the US, the principal international guarantor of the Kabul regime, is interested in a mediation between Ghani and Abdullah. For Washington, pacifying the factional fights in Kabul has become secondary to its current efforts to find a peace settlement with the Taliban. The two sides have agreed upon a week-long reduction of violence on the Taliban's part, to be followed by negotiations between various Afghan groups on the transition to a political arrangement in Kabul. The US has promised to schedule a withdrawal of its troops in Afghanistan in sync with the advances in the peace process.

That Kabul was not a part of the negotiations with the Taliban had already begun to erode the political legitimacy of the government led by Ghani. As the Trump Administration prepares to downsize its military presence in Afghanistan, if not fully withdraw, and paves the way for Taliban's return to power, the political prospects for a coherent Kabul look rather dim. Delhi's political decision to stay with Ghani, at least for the moment, underlines its unflinching loyalty to the current regime in Kabul. One would presume, however, the decision is a temporary one. For good or bad, the post-Taliban order is breaking down in Kabul, and sooner rather than later, Delhi will have to make significant revisions to its Afghan policy.

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