

DELHI SHOULD HAVE A BIGGER ROLE IN PEACE PROCESS: AFGHANISTAN

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Afghanistan wants a larger role for India in the peace and reconciliation process, said visiting Foreign Minister Haneef Atmar, adding that he had discussed President Ghani's new peace plan, the ongoing Intra-Afghan dialogue and "Extended Troika" talks in Moscow last week with the Indian leadership. Mr. Atmar met National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Tuesday, after holding bilateral talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday.

"India has legitimate interests in the peace and security of Afghanistan and we are seeking a greater role for India," Mr. Atmar told journalists at the Indian Women's Press Corps after his official meetings in Delhi. "We are negotiating to make sure that Afghanistan does not become a safe haven for international terrorists who are keen to turn it not just in their battlefield but into a safe haven including, unfortunately, against India as well. So, India has a role not just in Afghanistan but with other regional and international partners," he said.

After his meeting with Mr. Doval, the Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said Mr. Atmar had discussed the Ghani government peace plan, which is understood to include fresh elections within the year if the Taliban agrees to a ceasefire, and for Mr. Ghani to hand over power to the elected government. The plan runs counter to the U.S. proposal, revealed in a leaked letter from US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, that suggests Afghan-Taliban negotiations for a power sharing arrangement, and for an interim government to take over from President Ghani's government.

"[Mr. Atmar] said the plan would pave the way for a lasting peace based on the will of the Afghan people and strengthen Afghanistan's role as a bridge for connectivity and cooperation between regional countries and the international community," an MFA readout of the meeting said, adding that Mr. Doval had said "the unity among Afghans and consensus at regional and international levels were essential factors for achieving sustainable peace".

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