Ending the ‘Great Game’ in Afghanistan

What is the issue?

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- A recent IS attack in Kabul and Taliban's new announcement have signalled an increased security challenge for Afghanistan.
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- At this juncture, global and regional powers must desist from playing the ‘Great Game’ and build peace.
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What is the recent IS attack?

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- A bomb attack took place in Kabul at a voter registration centre, killing more than 50.
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- It carries a doubly dangerous message from the Islamic State.
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- One, it was the group's attack on Afghanistan’s fragile democratic process.
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- It implies that elections next year could face more violence.
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- Two, a majority of the victims were Shias.
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- This highlights the sectarian turn in the conflict.
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What is the Taliban threat?

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- Taliban has rejected Afghan President Ghani’s offer of talks “without preconditions”.
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- Moreover, Taliban has announced its new “spring offensive”.
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- It includes the targeting of American forces in Afghanistan.
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Have the earlier efforts paid results?

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- Last year, the U.S. announced a new ‘South Asia policy’ for Afghanistan. Click here to know more.
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- It was officially welcomed by both New Delhi and Kabul.
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- It was hailed as a game-changer for the region.
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- But now the policy itself seems uncertain.
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- The U.S. administration has taken some steps on Pakistani funding of terrorism.
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- This is particularly across the Durand Line (border between Pakistan and Afghanistan).
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- However, it has clearly not yielded calm on the ground.
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- Continuous wave of terrorist violence has lashed Kabul and other cities.
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- The Afghan forces control just a little over half the territory today.
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- It is down from nearly three-fourths in 2015.
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- The U.S. policies guiding Afghanistan are not making much headway.
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- This is the same with Kabul’s efforts to protect its own people.
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What is the concern with the approach?

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- Growing U.S.-Russia tensions are creating space for proxies for both on

Afghan soil.
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- The attacks by al-Qaeda and IS-related terror groups have their roots in the larger war between Iran and the Arab world.
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- Tensions between India and Pakistan cast a shadow over Afghanistan.
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- China, to secure itself from Islamist groups, is trying to build a rival military base in Afghanistan.
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- Clearly, countries are motivated not only by peace in Afghanistan but by other interests too.
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- Efforts have been made for bilateral and multilateral peace talks in recent months.
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- But each one has amounted to too piecemeal an effort.
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What could possibly be done?

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- There is a need to stop the ‘Great Game’ by countries for influence in Afghanistan.
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- It is necessary for both US and Afghanistan to take a more hard-headed, realistic view.
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- It must be acknowledged that the current situation is a danger to all.
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- Defeating terrorism in Afghanistan needs every stakeholder to put aside the differences and build peace.
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Source: The Hindu

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