India's Shifting Position on Taliban

What is the issue?

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- India sent two former diplomats as “non-official” participants at the recent “Moscow format” multilateral meeting that included Taliban delegates.
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- Indian government-nominated representatives sharing the table with a Taliban delegation for the first time is notable.
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What is Afghanistan's stance?

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- Afghanistan did not send delegates from its foreign ministry, but from the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC).
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- They were joined by the Ambassador to Russia.
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- The HPC is a government-appointed forum tasked with the peace and reconciliation process.
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- India is understood to have consulted Kabul about the level of its participation.
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- The Indian representatives did not make a statement at the meeting.
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What was India's traditional position?

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- India was among the countries that had refused to recognise the Taliban regime of 1996-2001.

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- India watched Taliban's growth with concern, assessing early that it was being driven by Pakistan’s army and the ISI.
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- The Kandahar hijack of Indian Airlines flight IC-814 forced India to negotiate.
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- At other times, it supported anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan.
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- Throughout the 1990s, India gave military and financial assistance to the Northern Alliance fighting the Pakistan-sponsored Taliban regime in Afghanistan.
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- Meanwhile the 9/11 attacks and the US crackdown leading to the fall of the Taliban regime took place.
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- When the Taliban re-emerged in 2006-07 to once again challenge US forces, India maintained it was not going to talk with the Taliban.
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What was the further development?

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- The Taliban grew in strength, and the US decided to withdraw troops by 2009.
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- So the Afghan government reached out to the Taliban with a peace and reconciliation process.
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- In the International Conference on Afghanistan in London in 2010, India made a quiet shift.
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- It said it is for the elected Afghanistan government to draw the “red lines” - the terms for negotiating with the Taliban.
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- [The red lines are the rights of the people, especially women’s rights, the right to education, the democratic process all of which are enshrined in constitution.
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- The “red lines” had defined the Kabul-Taliban negotiations and these will not be compromised during the talks.]
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- The Afghan government had stated that the Taliban must accept the Afghan Constitution.
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- It called for it to renounce violence and sever all ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations.
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- This was endorsed during the International Conference. That was the first diplomatic opening.
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- Although India would not directly talk to Taliban, this shift meant it was approving the outreach if the Taliban adhered to these red lines.
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What is the significance of the recent move?

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- Over the last couple of years, the US, China and Russia brokered reconciliation and peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.
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- With this, India stopped public articulation and insisting on the “red lines”.
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- It just insisted that the peace process be “Afghan-led” and “Afghan-owned”.
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- But it is felt that the current efforts as the Moscow format meeting are not being “Afghan-led”; Russians or the Americans are taking the lead.
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- India’s participation, however, is crucial, even though it is at a non-official level.
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Source: Indian Express

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