[**Looming Afghan disaster**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1633114/looming-afghan-disaster)

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AFGHANISTAN is heading towards a full-blown civil war, following the [US-led troop pullout](https://www.dawn.com/news/1632763) and, with Pakistan fearing the inevitable fallout of that slide into chaos, the military and intelligence chiefs [briefed a parliamentary committee](https://www.dawn.com/news/1632670/military-calls-for-avoiding-of-divisive-politics), notably including opposition members, this last Thursday.

In the words of Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid Ahmed, the meeting [marked the beginning of a national consensus](https://www.dawn.com/news/1632550) where all political parties shunned their differences and decided ‘to stand behind the army’ on this issue critical to national security.

Although bound by in camera rules and, therefore, unwilling to share many details of the briefing, all that some other participants were willing to say was that the meeting was marked by the bonhomie one parliamentarian attributed to a ‘timid’ opposition. Barring one nobody raised any thorny issue.

And the reported response to the member asking a difficult question or two or merely sharing an unwelcome observation perhaps deflated all others who might have been clenching their fists and convincing themselves to muster the courage to share their thoughts with candour. One clear message: institutional supremacy and interests trump all.

What was once seen as ‘strategic depth’ is threatening to turn into a nightmare.

Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, one of the PML-N leaders said to be firmly in the ‘vote ko izzat do’ camp, told a journalist later what they did for some ‘five hours was indeed vote ko izzat do’, as a parliament that has largely remained ineffective for three years debated such a vital issue.

This was indeed a brand new meaning to the slogan ‘vote ko izzat do’. It remains to be seen if PML-N leaders Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz Sharif endorse this new definition. One is left wondering if their near-total current silence, while the Shehbaz Sharif school is ascendant, is a tell-tale sign.

Little surprise then a lot of pointless ‘I am also here’ half volleys were bowled which were played back with a gentle straight bat and the process continued for several hours before shifting to a dinner hosted by the speaker. The one or two substantive issues that were raised, like [Ali Wazir’s release](https://www.dawn.com/news/1626931), were reportedly dismissed.

Whatever reality unfolds in the long run, for now the opposition is content to play within the existing scheme of things and the demand of the PML-N for a new social contract seems like nothing more than a dream abandoned. The PPP, for its part, hasn’t even had that dream of late.

In any case, the Afghan Taliban seem in a hurry to extend their control to more and more parts of their country and, while the ‘troika’ (US, China and Russia) [meeting](https://www.dawn.com/news/1613343) in March that included Pakistan agreed that the Afghan Taliban will not be allowed to establish an Islamic emirate, it is not clear how they can stop the Taliban if that were to happen.

In 1996, after the Taliban took Kabul in a lightning offensive, the declaration of the establishment of an Islamic emirate headed by the ‘amir’ Mullah Omar followed. And then came two decades of a US-led Nato military presence in Afghanistan — first to degrade Al Qaeda, which took responsibility for the 9/11 attacks on American soil, and then to prop up West-friendly governments.

Over the period, the US reportedly spent a trillion dollars and took heavy military casualties. An untold number of Afghans, including innocent civilians, lost their lives in the conflict. That dark, bloody night may be coming to an end, but the country is accelerating towards another.

Of course those at the helm in Kabul as we speak have air assets that could slow down or halt the Taliban march on the capital. They have also enlisted the help of the ‘warlords’ of yesteryear to come together to try and stop the resurgent Taliban, raising the spectre of a full-blown civil war.

From my memories of visiting Afghanistan in 1971 with my parents as a child and driving from Quetta-Chaman to Kandahar and on to Herat and across the border into Iran on a journey that ended in Beirut, the country I remember is long gone.

Kabul, friendly, calm, open, tolerant and incredibly cosmopolitan, is etched in my mind from our return journey that year and then the drive back home via Jalalabad-Torkham where I can never forget the joy that gripped me when I saw the Pakistan flag fluttering atop the FC fort, a picture of towering tranquillity.

**Afghan war closet:** [*'US had decided to overthrow Taliban regime a month before 9/11'*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1630861)

That serenity is long gone. As are Pakistan’s hopes that the Taliban will always be a trusted ally who will pay heed to Islamabad’s concerns and never turn on Pakistan. What was once seen as ‘strategic depth’ by our military commanders is threatening to turn into a nightmare.

Ironically, it was Pakistan that served as the strategic depth for the Taliban. Many of their leaders, their families and even foot soldiers sheltered across Pakistan, and their war wounded were extended medical help as their forces faced a US-led onslaught.

Even in the past, when so much of their well-being depended on Pakistan’s goodwill, the Afghan Taliban refused to publicly condemn the terrorist activities of the TTP or to do anything to stop them. With the foreign forces gone, and much greater freedom of movement in Afghanistan one wonders what policy they’ll have towards their counterparts in Pakistan.

In recent weeks, there has been a spurt in attacks — whether via IEDs or direct fire — on Pakistani security forces. Shaikh Rashid says that 88 per cent of the border (Durand Line) has been fenced which should enhance security. Some of the attacks seem to be coming from within Pakistan.

This is a huge foreign security policy challenge. Let there be no mistake that an opposition treated with contempt by the hybrid government for the past three years is now suddenly being embraced by the former.

Is that happening because with an imminent policy disaster on the cards more and more bodies are needed to share the blame? Even if those being roped in had no role in the making of this fiasco? One of the main ‘knowns’ is that a compromised, defeated opposition is willing to play the game on any terms.

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