**Better late than never**

**[Najm us Saqib](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/najm-us-saqib)**

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Pakistan was nowhere to be seen in the Oslo talks held last week between the Taliban and the representatives of Western powers to find ways and means to address the humanitarian crisis facing the forty million Afghans. This was their first visit to Europe since returning to power five months ago and an ‘achievement in itself’. The ‘landmark talks’ that saw the Taliban ‘sharing the stage with the world’ not only focused attention on mitigating the economic crisis, health and education issues but also reflected on the way forward in dealing with the Taliban without officially recognising their regime.

What does it mean for Pakistan?

In simple terms, it means that the world is moving ahead with its plans to deal with the Taliban without Pakistan’s assistance or involvement. The EU is re-establishing its physical presence in Afghanistan for humanitarian purposes but has stressed it was not formally recognising the Taliban-led administration. By saying that it is impossible to unify the war-torn country under one single government, President Biden has indirectly hinted towards an inclusive government in Kabul, keeping the door of future engagement with Afghanistan open if the Taliban behaved.

[Tottenham acquire Bentancur, Kulusevski from Juventus](https://nation.com.pk/01-Feb-2022/tottenham-acquire-bentancur-kulusevski-from-juventus)

The Taliban also seem to have realised that in the absence of any outright political or economic support from the regional actors including Pakistan, it was advisable to continue working towards exercising other options. On the other hand, the Taliban seem to have lost the erstwhile mojo for Pakistan or perhaps reality has finally struck and overtaken the unnecessary emotionalism about the Taliban’s victory over the foreign occupying forces or having a totally amenable government in Kabul. Or, perhaps Pakistan has finally realised the risks and advantages of being the spokesperson of an unpredictable regime and decided to revisit its approach. Lately, the fencing issue created some misunderstandings about Islamabad’s alleged ‘leverage’ over Taliban. TTP’s recent attacks in Pakistan ignoring the ceasefire understanding perhaps dented the Taliban’s mediatory role and credibility in the process. There is no denying the fact that Pakistan paid more attention to what it desired from the Taliban while overlooking what they wanted from Pakistan. After all, Afghanistan is a sovereign independent state.

[Russia seeking to ramp up troops in Belarus to 30,000, US charges](https://nation.com.pk/01-Feb-2022/russia-seeking-to-ramp-up-troops-in-belarus-to-30-000-us-charges)

Does distancing from the Taliban regime mean isolating the people of Afghanistan?

The recently held OIC Session in Islamabad was an endeavour to help the people of Afghanistan in dealing with the imminent humanitarian crisis. By no means was it to extend any kind of support or recognition to the Taliban Government. Secondly, if Pakistan is pondering over improving ‘governance’ in Afghanistan; mitigating the Afghan crisis of sanctions and politico-economic instability; filling the legal, constitutional, security and technological vacuum in Afghanistan; using soft power tools like intelligentsia and academia for public diplomacy; and, advancing the ‘power of geography’, it is in the context of improving relations with the people of Afghanistan. Such measures must not be construed as extending support to the Taliban regime.

Would a real distancing from the Taliban help Pakistan in improving its relations with the US?

Pakistan feels that its engagement with the US has often been narrowly framed and dictated either by short-term security interests or the imperative to deal with common challenges. Clearly, Pakistan desires to take its relations with the US beyond counterterrorism to focus on its geo-economics’ objectives while considering Afghanistan still a common priority. The American perception that Pakistan allegedly supported the Taliban’s coming to power is not helping either. Unfortunately, Pakistan seems to have no plans or diplomatic prowess to woo its erstwhile ally to come to the economic negotiating table. But the fact remains. Advantages of a ‘friendly’ Taliban government in Kabul are far less than securing a better trajectory of Pak-US relations. Both the objectives are mutually exclusive and Pakistan must realise it.

[PSL 7: Multan Sultans crush Quetta Gladiators by six runs](https://nation.com.pk/31-Jan-2022/psl-7-multan-sultans-crush-quetta-gladiators-by-six-runs)

So, should Pakistan write the

last rites on its ‘affiliation’ with the Taliban?

Islamabad is ‘not completely optimistic’ about the Taliban regime and a change of heart seems to be in the offing perhaps in view of the recent differences with the Taliban. The nation has also been informed that Kabul is maintaining cordial ties with Islamabad and the recent border fencing troubles are not part of Taliban’s policy. The question is: if the Taliban are in power in Afghanistan and Afghan soil is still being used against Pakistan, who is letting the perpetrators have a field day? Does it imply that miscreants like TTP are not under Taliban’s control or Kabul is playing a different kind of ballgame?

Initiating an anti-Taliban narrative may defy the basic principles of diplomacy particularly when Pakistan believes its stability largely depends on a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. No one knows what happens after the US and its allies complete the process of dealing with the Taliban regime and the international aid of roughly eighty per cent of Kabul’s budget is re-instated; banking channels start operating to and from Afghanistan; and, India’s horses are placed back on the Afghan chessboard. Time has proved that dancing with wolves was not a good idea. Feeding them for performing your night duty would perhaps be even riskier. If the ultimate objective is to be part of the bigger economic game of regional connectivity, Pakistan must find a middle-way to deal with wolfs sitting right at its doorsteps.