**Running out of options**

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

September 27, 2021

Everyone has a viewpoint on what needs to be done to bring peace in the war-torn Afghanistan, but no one is ready to offer practical solutions or the material help Kabul desperately requires. Sadly, no one is listening to any logic or paying attention to the realities on the ground. Without reaching a consensus on ‘how to go about it’, piece-meal hypothetical explanations are being offered while wishfully expecting others to follow suit. New paradoxes are being injected into the existing contradictions in the socio-political fabric of a country whose culture hardly allows any outside influence let alone accepting unfair conditions on running its day-to-day affairs. The demand of an ‘inclusive’ government in Kabul suits the aphorisms of democracy but its imposition on the Taliban looks more like extortion than a recommendation.

Keeping the strict condition of loyalty, the Afghan culture only allows friends to reap the benefits of any victory. Unlike in an ideal democratic set-up, sharing power with enemies particularly after winning the war, is a virtual impossibility. The question is: was the recently toppled government of Ashraf Ghani inclusive enough to justify its existence as per the demands and requirements of a true democracy? Come to think of it, if the Taliban’s struggle had failed and Ghani’s government had prevailed, would the latter’s government have considered co-opting even one member of the Taliban in the Cabinet? Secondly, how many of the successive governments in Kabul fulfilled the criterion of ‘inclusiveness’? Now that representatives of other ethnic and political groups have also been included in the Cabinet, would the Taliban be spared the criticism of not bringing in a lady-member or resuming the executions and amputations in Kabul? Is the buck likely to stop anywhere?

[Adnan Qazi has left audience spell bound in his next music video venture](https://nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2021/adnan-qazi-has-left-audience-spell-bound-in-his-next-music-video-venture)

Observing the cardinal principles of human rights seem more important than humans themselves. Here also, the Taliban are not being treated fairly. Forestalling a humanitarian crisis in a war-ravaged country is certainly being put on the altar of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What kinds of rights are infringed when one country freezes another country’s assets merely because the faces in a far flung country’s Cabinet don’t look familiar? Dealing with a country on the basis of observing human rights would have seen countries like India out of favours a few decades ago as it still continues to violate all sorts of human rights in the Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK). In fact, more than ninety percent of countries in the world should be out of the United Nations system if the principles of human dignity were strictly applied across the table.

Amidst not-so-pleasing messages emanating from the countries that ostensibly run the world’s political and financial systems, Pakistan has accepted the challenge of entering into negotiations with the Taliban on certain ‘demands’ put forward by the West on extending ‘legitimacy’ to the newly formed government in Kabul. By no means is it an easy task. Soon we would see Pakistan in a catch-22 situation if Islamabad did not play its cards wisely. Regardless of the outcome of its efforts, Islamabad would be facing certain difficult questions requiring elaboration and justification. If the efforts do not come to fruition, Islamabad would be blamed for falling short of expectations. If it succeeds in prevailing upon the Taliban and a government of ‘choice’ is actually formed in Kabul, Islamabad would be confirmed to have ‘influence’ over the Taliban thereby opening the hitherto tightly closed Pandora’s Box.

['Sharif's committed corruption in motorways construction'](https://nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2021/sharif-s-committed-corruption-in-motorways-construction-fawad-chaudhary)

Proceeding in the right direction, Pakistan must not overlook a few important facts. Firstly, the affordability aspect must be kept in mind particularly when assuming responsibility on bringing peace in Afghanistan on the lines being drawn by the West. Secondly, Pakistan must not forget that it is sitting at the negotiating table with a superpower. The respective positions need to be factored in whenever a step is taken or a decision is made. Afghanistan must be dealt with by keeping Pakistan’s own national interest in mind. Thirdly, we must bear in mind that the West simply does not want the Taliban to rule the country. Hence, fresh demands are likely to arise once the previous ones are met. Fourthly, the serpents coming out of IMF, FATF, GSP+ and even cricket must not be overlooked along with the so far improbable looking future sanctions.

Moreover, making it a scapegoat, Pakistan will continue to be targeted by design to deflect the world’s attention from the undesirable results of the foreign forces’ two-decade stay in Afghanistan and all the follies committed in between. Lastly, Pakistan must not expect any ‘extra’ material favours for its newly assumed mediatory role and get ready to hear the ‘do more’ hymn with increased frequency. Under the circumstances, Islamabad may feel satisfied if in turn, it succeeds in having the unnecessary pressures on it removed particularly in the economic domain through Washington or its like-minded capitals.

[Lightning strikes in Thar kill four women, minor boy](https://nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2021/lightning-strikes-in-thar-kill-four-women-minor-boy)

The ‘wait and watch’ policy suits the West. As China, Russia, Iran and Turkey don’t seem to be rushing into the ‘legitimacy’ rigmarole any time soon; Islamabad may also hold its horses, exhibit patience and let the process take its normal course. Meanwhile, let us ascertain how the international community responds to PM Imran Khan’s tactfully conveyed recommendations on Afghanistan in his recent address to the UN General Assembly. Let us also read between the lines what Secretary Blinken has recently conveyed or not conveyed to FM Qureshi to ascertain if Islamabad’s wishful thinking needed to be replaced by an objective assessment of Pakistan’s overall national interest. The world does not begin and end with Afghanistan. Washington’s complete silence over Pak-US bilateral relations must not be taken lightly. The bottom line is that a ‘defiance mode’ may win laurels at home but it hardly helps in winning an argument internationally particularly if one is asking for favours. What Islamabad has argued for is important. More importantly, however, is how the international community responds to what has been argued.