**Testing times for Pakistan’s FP**

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

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In all likelihood, the ‘do more’ mantra is back. Secretary Antony Blinken recently appreciated Pakistan’s support of American interests while expressing Washington’s displeasure over the ‘detrimental’ role it played on many other occasions. On counterterrorism, one could understand Washington’s concerns as both sides viewed the efforts to curb terrorism from two different perspectives. Nevertheless, insinuating that Pakistan was involved in harbouring members of the Taliban seems like an afterthought. Perhaps, this allegation is based on the not-so-credible intelligence reports the US has been receiving in the past few weeks. A couple of days before the Taliban started their cruise towards victory, a confident President Biden was seen fully trusting in the capabilities of the thirty-thousand US trained Afghan Security Forces in putting up a befitting resistance to the Taliban’s onslaught. How and where these thirty-thousand well-equipped and fully trained personnel vanished into thin air remains a mystery.

[Messi to miss Wednesday's Ligue 1 game against Metz due to injury](https://nation.com.pk/22-Sep-2021/messi-to-miss-wednesday-s-ligue-1-game-against-metz-due-to-injury)

Seemingly, a fact-sheet on the role Pakistan played during the Afghan conflict since 2001 has been prepared to present to Islamabad when Washington conveys the nature and extent of its role in the post-Taliban takeover. Responding to whether it was time for the US to reassess its relationship with Pakistan and reassess its status as a major non-NATO ally, Secretary Blinken stated that in the days and weeks ahead, the US will be looking into ‘the role that Pakistan has played over the last twenty years’ and ‘the role we would want to see it play in the coming years and what it will take for it to do that’. The future homework for Pakistan includes upholding international expectations after lining up with a broad majority of the international community in working towards common goals.

Clearly, efforts are underway in Washington to deal with a new-look Pakistan as it is ‘absolutely not’ the one that used to be a part of the Afghan-Pak policy years ago. On the other hand, Pakistan seemingly remains vital for any future engagement with regard to bringing some semblance of normalcy in and around Afghanistan. Now that the Taliban have established a real-time government in Afghanistan, Pakistan is perhaps the only country that could play an effective role as a conduit between Washington and Kabul. For this purpose, Islamabad may be ‘tasked’ to promote the national interests of the US in the region.

[PM to sign two-year performance agreements with federal ministers today](https://nation.com.pk/22-Sep-2021/pm-to-sign-two-year-performance-agreements-with-federal-ministers-today)

Meanwhile, Islamabad seems confident of its newly developed narrative. PM Imran Khan maintains that Afghanistan should not be controlled from outside. Simultaneously, he fears that if the Taliban failed to handle the situation, there would be chaos in Afghanistan including the refugee problem and terrorism. On the other hand, NSA Moeed Yusuf’s critique on the world’s ‘wait and watch’ policy indicates a kind of haste in receiving the desired response from the international community. The Taliban would wish Washington to show ‘heart’ and render the requisite economic assistance urgently to run the government’s day-to-day affairs. Either the Taliban create a congenial environment for the West to extend the eagerly awaited ‘legitimacy’ to their regime or the West miraculously believes in the Taliban’s promises and sets the ball rolling.

Islamabad has recently claimed that the Taliban could show respect for human rights if there was political stability and peace in Afghanistan. Linking the respect for human rights with the elusive peace in Afghanistan and the loosening of the economic squeeze on the newly formed government in Kabul, makes sense when one looks at the dismal economic situation the present-day Afghanistan is faced with. However, placing conditions on fulfilling a legitimate requirement raises certain questions on the Taliban’s intentions. In simple words, it means the Taliban could respect human rights provided the West rescued them by unfreezing Afghan assets worth nine billion dollars and addressed the imminent humanitarian crisis by pouring in additional billions of dollars. One does not need money to promote and respect human dignity.

[Pakistan wants to take US ties beyond counter terrorism, Afghanistan: FM](https://nation.com.pk/21-Sep-2021/pakistan-wants-to-take-us-ties-beyond-counter-terrorism-afghanistan-fm)

The US spent $290 million every day for 7,300 days on its war efforts and nation-building projects in Afghanistan but could neither win the war nor build a nation. This was too much money to handle by a fragile country and in fact was a perfect recipe for sowing the seeds of endemic corruption. Therefore, besides fulfilling the basic requirements of obtaining ‘legitimacy’ from the West, the Taliban regime must also ensure the provision of transparent means to disburse future foreign funding while guarding against the rampant corruption.

Dealing with the Taliban regime on behalf of the West perhaps will be the biggest foreign policy challenge Pakistan has faced in decades. Besides being wise in negotiating on its future role, Pakistan needs the required sagacity and diplomatic skill to create a balance between Sino-Pak and US-Pak relations. By all means, it must avoid finding itself in the middle of a superpower rivalry in the rugged terrains of Afghanistan and beyond. If India could maintain a ‘strategic’ relationship with Russia while keeping the US on its side with regard to Pakistan, China and its nuclear programme, why would Pakistan not try to find a balanced ‘free of emotions’ foreign policy keeping both giants on its side while focusing on its domestic and international needs? It’s time to transform challenges into opportunities.

[Intermediate results to be announced by tomorrow: FBISE](https://nation.com.pk/21-Sep-2021/intermediate-results-to-be-announced-by-tomorrow-fbise)

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