[**What went wrong?**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1696783/what-went-wrong)

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WHAT forced the powers that be to enter into negotiations with the TTP? Was it the fast-deteriorating security situation in erstwhile Fata, or something else? Had Fata not been declared clear of militants after the military operations? One wonders as to what went so drastically wrong that militancy found its way back into that area.

At the time of Fata’s merger with KP, tall claims were made that it would become a heaven on earth. Instead, it has become a hell for the people living there. Will the proponents of the merger now show us that heaven they promised?

Erstwhile Fata had borne the brunt of the military operation against the TTP. Now, talks are being held with the same entity, and that too without taking the locals into confidence. How long are we going to keep conducting experiments on the people there? Will they ever be treated as equals?

Decisions imposed from outside will not do. The recent negotiations with the TTP are a case in point. The decision to parley was already made, and the locals were merely used to carry forward that agenda.

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Another anomaly was calling the delegation a tribal jirga. A tribal jirga has its own dynamics and mechanisms, whereas here the members were handpicked.

This was not the right time for negotiations. That opportunity has already been lost. The TTP has reunited and is enjoying the hospitality of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The two have assisted each other in the past and will do so in future, if the need arises.

The TTP, it appears, is not in a hurry. It can wait and use the three-month ceasefire to augment its presence in the border area, and also to further cement its ties with the Afghan Taliban. The latter, on their part, seem reluctant to stop the TTP from using Afghan soil against Pakistan. They do not want to ruin relations with them, which is why they are insisting that Pakistan find an alternative way for the peaceful resolution of differences.

Another reason could be that the Taliban are keeping the option of using the TTP’s safe havens open in case of difficulties in the days ahead. The Taliban are not as united as they were supposed to be. They have differences. It may seem that they have now patched up, but those closely watching developments inside Afghanistan feel that all is not good. Differences exist and affect working relationships among themselves as well as with Pakistan.

The Taliban are trying to remain in the good books of Pakistan, but at the same time pursuing their own interests with our adversary in the region. They are Afghan first, and then friends of others. They won’t compromise on issues of national interest or anything contrary to the wishes of the Afghans. That’s why there was an altercation with our security forces on the fencing of the border.

That was further aggravated by the issue of the Durand Line as the international border. Pakistan considers it as such, and rightly so, but the Afghans have reservations. The Taliban may have been our good friends but that does not mean they will accept things which hurt the feelings of the Afghans. We have to be prudent and circumspect in dealing with them in these sensitive matters.

The Taliban cannot absolve themselves of the responsibility of stopping the TTP from using Afghan soil against Pakistan, while Pakistan cannot give itself the right to resort to aerial bombing inside Afghanistan. The alleged incident of bombing of camps in Khost and Kunar hardly served our long-term interest. It was counterproductive. It would have been far better had a befitting response been given through other available means.

Results of quick fixes are now emer­ging. The Taliban are warming up to India faster than ex­pected. They rec­ently received an Indian delegation and held talks with them to explore the possibilities of close cooperation in various fields. This was further boosted through an Indian TV channel’s interview of Mullah Yaqoob, the son of Mullah Omar and defence minister of Afghanistan. He is reported to have agreed to the training of Afghan forces in India, provided New Delhi establishes proper diplomatic relations with Kabul. India is trying to create space for itself in a country where it had invested heavily during the last 20 years. It wants to resume its activities.

Whether we like it or not, the Taliban are a reality now. We have to deal with it in order to pursue our interests in that country. To do so successfully, we have to reconsider and re-evaluate our approach towards them. Also, we need to be extra cautious about raising contentious issues at this time. That can wait for the right time. The more we press them for a resolution of these problems the more we will be pushing them towards the camps of our adversaries. That should not happen; in fact, it should be avoided at all costs.

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