

# Turkey Calls for Recognition of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate

by [Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](#)

Mar 17, 2022

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](#)

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where his research focuses on Sunni Arab jihadi groups in North Africa and Syria as well as the trend of foreign fighting and online jihadism.



Brief Analysis

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**Ankara has taken a leading role in rehabilitating the group's image, but many other countries have reached out as well, making eventual recognition a fait accompli.**

**S**ince the Taliban took over Kabul last August, the group has sought international recognition for its Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. When Taliban forces first held the country from 1996 to 2001, only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates recognized their rule. Today, no government has officially done so.

On March 13, however, Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told the Antalya Diplomacy Forum that humanitarian aid on its own cannot adequately address Afghanistan's problems, and that countries should offer diplomatic recognition of the Islamic Emirate as well—the first time a foreign political leader has publicly called for this step. The remark was delivered in the context of Turkey and Qatar reportedly nearing a deal with the Taliban to run the international airports in Kabul and other cities.

The Antalya forum also provided the Taliban with opportunities to demonstrate the thawing of its international isolation firsthand. Its foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, met with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the event—the second leader to host him since he visited Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan last November. In addition, the group held side meetings with the foreign ministers of Bahrain, Finland, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Qatar, Somalia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela, along with U.S. special representative for Afghanistan Thomas West.

The developments at Antalya were the culmination of several months' worth of intensive Taliban diplomacy. As of March 17, the group had publicly announced 135 diplomatic meetings since taking over, with several of them occurring in multilateral settings. Turkey was involved in 22 of those meetings, the most of any country.

## Ankara's Relations with the Islamic Emirate

**B**esides Qatar—whose close relations with the Taliban are partly due to Doha’s role in facilitating the U.S. withdrawal agreement—Turkey has been the country most engaged in working with the group. This relationship began in earnest last October, when Cavusoglu invited a Taliban delegation to Ankara for discussions on bilateral relations, trade, humanitarian aid, refugees, and aviation. The visitors also met with the head of Turkey’s Diyanet religious institution, as well as delegations from the *ulama* (Islamic scholars), the Turkish Red Crescent, and the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, indicating that religious solidarity would join humanitarian assistance as an important aspect of the budding relationship.

One of the key conduits for deepening these relations has been Turkish ambassador Cihad Erginay, who stated in January, “When everyone left and closed their diplomatic missions, we stayed in Afghanistan to help the Afghans.” Two months later, Turkey expanded its in-country diplomatic corps by opening consular services in Mazar-e Sharif. Turkey has also delivered the most humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, reaching at least thirteen of the country’s thirty-four provinces. This assistance extends beyond the government level, with several key Turkish NGOs delivering aid as well: Red Crescent, the Humanitarian Relief Fund (IHH), Heyder Helping and Solidarity Association, Besir Association, Hayrat Yardim, International Blue Crescent, and the Turkish Maarif Foundation. Beyond immediate relief, IHH has engaged the Taliban on projects such as strengthening agricultural cooperation and building an orphanage in Ghazni province. Similarly, the Maarif Foundation has opened a few Afghan-Turkish schools and aims to add more soon.

The Turkish government is likewise looking to boost the education sector. Earlier this month, Ambassador Erginay met with the Taliban’s minister of higher education, Abdul Baqi Haqqani; they were joined by the embassy’s advisor for education affairs and the head of the Turkish Education Foundation. During a follow-on meeting with members of the foundation and the president of Kabul University, Haqqani called on Turkey to help standardize religious and modern sciences curricula as the leader of the Islamic *umma* (nation). Ankara has also promised to help establish a maternity ward at Aliabad Teaching Hospital and an online teaching program at Afghan International University.

On the commercial front, the Taliban has engaged with delegations from the Turkish Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (MUSIAD) and the Afghan-Turkish Businessmen’s Union. Both organizations have expressed a desire to invest in Afghanistan.

## Recognition Is a Fait Accompli

**T**hese and other developments indicate that the formal legal step of granting the Taliban de jure recognition is only a matter of time for some countries—at least a few such announcements can be expected in the near to medium term. Unlike the first time the group was in power, it is now far more connected to the international system. Thirty-four countries have shown some level of engagement with Taliban authorities, and de facto recognition—that is, acknowledging a new regime via noncommittal acts, without making it eligible for a seat at the United Nations—has become an accepted reality.

To be sure, Western countries will be more reticent to offer formal recognition anytime soon given the first Islamic Emirate’s hostile track record, which included hosting al-Qaeda and allowing Afghanistan to become a staging ground for the 9/11 attacks and other terrorist operations. Yet transactional humanitarian assistance and diplomatic engagement from the West will likely grow over time.

For the United States, the biggest question is whether the Taliban will fulfill its pledge to prevent any actors inside Afghanistan from launching terrorist attacks abroad. According to the [2022 Annual Threat Assessment \(https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2022/item/2279-2022-annual-threat-assessment-of-the-u-s-intelligence-community\)](https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2022/item/2279-2022-annual-threat-assessment-of-the-u-s-intelligence-community) issued by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, senior al-Qaeda leaders currently “lack an operational presence in Afghanistan.” Yet Washington

should continue tracking this issue closely even if it seems manageable at the moment.

U.S. officials should also stay abreast of Turkey's leading role in rehabilitating the Taliban's image and integrating the group into the international system. This entails continued dialogue with Ankara about the progress it is making on this front, so that the U.S. government remains fully informed about the Taliban's activities as a nascent governing entity.

*Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow Fellow at The Washington Institute and a visiting research scholar at Brandeis University.* ❖

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