

## *Many rebels before the Taliban also promised moderation after seizing power.*



By Max Fisher

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The Taliban may occupy Afghanistan's border crossings and government offices, but what they control falls far short of a fully functioning country. Services like water, electricity and trash pickup are faltering as state employees hide out at home. The central bank sits effectively empty, with Washington having frozen Afghan government reserves held in U.S. bank accounts.

At a news conference this week, Zabihullah Mujahid, the group's chief spokesman, said that "animosities have come to an end" — part of a strategy to appease the very foreign powers the Taliban have dedicated their lives to expelling, and to smooth over the hard-line ideology that animates their movement.

It is a strategy pursued by almost every modern rebel group to take power.

The Taliban, too, have been here before: On first taking power in 1996, the group sought global acceptance by pledging moderation at home and conciliation abroad. But their efforts toward those goals were halting at best, hampered by inexperience, internal divisions and ideological fervor.

Regardless of whether today's Taliban leaders have moderated ideologically, their grasp of diplomatic matters and concern with global standing appears to have deepened substantially.

"The quest for diplomatic and political recognition has been a constant in the Taliban's struggle" to regain power, Barnett R. Rubin, an Afghanistan scholar, wrote this spring.

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