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The Devil You Know: The Prospects of Negotiating with the Taliban.

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ABSTRACT

Nearly eight years after the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan remains a country in turmoil. Recently, the attention of the international community has returned to Afghanistan in an attempt to resolve the ongoing conflict. This paper examines the prospect of negotiating with the Taliban as a solution to the crisis in Afghanistan and postulates the conditions that must be created to allow the negotiations to occur. Following a brief review of the background of the rise of the Taliban, the paper describes the conditions that allowed the Taliban to re-emerge in Afghanistan, as well as the changes in strategy and ideology that the Taliban have embraced in order to become an enduring movement. Pros and cons of negotiating are discussed, as are examples of negotiations with insurgent organizations in Pakistan, Iraq, and Northern Ireland. The thesis concludes that negotiating with the Taliban is an inevitable step on the road to peace in Afghanistan. However, this should take place only after the Government of Afghanistan and the international community have established the necessary conditions for security, governance, and reconstruction. Once these conditions have been established, and the Taliban are convinced that they must accept the government and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, earnest negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban can begin, culminating in a national *loya jirga* to determine Afghanistan's future.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The people of Afghanistan have witnessed violent conflict unfold continuously in their country over the past thirty years. The Soviet Union's 1979 invasion brought the Cold War to Afghanistan and launched a ten year struggle from which the *mujahedin* emerged victorious and the Soviet Union limped away as the latest of the great powers to be defeated in Afghanistan. Instead of uniting the country, Afghanistan fell into a bloody civil war in the early 1990s, a time of chaos that ended when the Taliban, an Islamic fundamentalist movement, came to power in September 1996. The Taliban's actions and policies quickly made them international pariahs, and a struggle between the Pashtun-dominated Taliban and numerous other factions concluded only when the attention of the United States of America (U.S.) was brought to Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11. The quick defeat of the Taliban by a U.S.-led coalition gave a sense of optimism to the Afghan people, but over the past eight years that optimism has been replaced by a growing sense of pessimism and despair. Though the Taliban were defeated and removed from power, they were able to survive in the border area with Pakistan and from there have evolved into a complex insurgency with strong ties to al Qaeda.

Although Afghanistan has remained in the international spotlight over the past eight years, its central role in the Bush Administration's "Global War on Terror" waned as the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq began in late 2002. The massive American commitment to Iraq and the multi-faceted insurgency which arose from the chaos of the post-Saddam Hussein era meant that Afghanistan assumed a role of secondary importance for the U.S.

Only recently has the attention of the U.S. been forced back to Afghanistan. Spurred on by an increasingly violent insurgency and talk from Afghan politicians,

international diplomats, and Western military commanders of the possibility of negotiations, Afghanistan is finally returning to centre stage in the quest to combat militant Islamic extremism. President Barack Obama has clearly signalled a shift in the focus of the strategy to combat terrorism from Iraq to Afghanistan. His announcement of a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, coupled with a firm timeline for withdrawal from Iraq, has placed Afghanistan back in the same kind of spotlight that it occupied from September 2001 until late 2002.

After more than eight years of fighting the Taliban insurgency and billions of dollars of investment in reconstruction and development, the international community is no closer to a lasting peace in Afghanistan. Corruption in the Afghan government, ethnic and tribal rivalries, regional actors, and the drug trade all play a role, but it is the prospect of some form of peace with the Taliban that is the most daunting challenge. While the United Nations (UN)-sanctioned, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is being reinforced by substantial increases in American forces and may be able to deny the Taliban territorial control of any significant part of the country, it will not be able to impose a permanent military defeat on the Taliban movement. This suggests that the only possible road to peace in Afghanistan is political, and it is through negotiations. This thesis will postulate the conditions that must be created in order for the Taliban to enter into a peace process that will finally free the people of Afghanistan from the yoke of thirty years of devastating warfare.

ORGANIZATION OF PAPER

This paper is divided into five chapters. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter Two will discuss the rise and fall of the Taliban. It will highlight the conditions that led to the birth of the Taliban, beginning with the Soviet invasion in 1979 and

continuing until Mullah Omar's first organized actions in Kandahar Province in 1994. The major influences which shaped the original Taliban Movement will be discussed, including the role of Islam, the Pashtun culture and Pakistan. The chapter will then briefly examine the Taliban's time as Afghanistan's governing authority from 1996 to 2001. Finally, it will consider the rapid fall of the Taliban in the months following 9/11.

Chapter Three will deal with the Taliban's resurgence. It will first look at the conditions that arose from the December 2001 Bonn Agreement that hampered the effectiveness of the new Afghan government and neglected to consider any role for the Taliban. The weaknesses and missteps of both the Government of Afghanistan and the international community will then be examined. The resurgence of the Taliban, its strategy, ideology and outside supporters will also be studied in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four will deal directly with the issue of negotiations. It will detail the history of negotiations with the Taliban at the national, provincial and local level in Afghanistan, and present a substantive analysis both for and against negotiations as a means for ending the conflict in the country. The chapter will also provide a number of analytical comparisons to other conflicts which have attempted to use negotiations with insurgents to end conflict. In particular, Pakistan's recent experiences in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are examined, as will similar experiences in Iraq and Northern Ireland.

Chapter Five will present recommendations on the way ahead for negotiations in Afghanistan. It will set out the pre-conditions that must be accepted by all participants in the negotiating process, including the Afghan government, the international community, and the Taliban. Finally, it will summarize the findings of this thesis and point the way ahead to a peaceful resolution of the Afghanistan debacle.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TALIBAN

Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (K.Yancey 11/22/05)

Figure 2.1: Map of Afghanistan.

Source: Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (updated 2 September 2008), 71; available from http://italy.us embassy.gov.pdf/other/RL30588.pdf; Internet; accessed 21 January 2009.

INTRODUCTION

In order to discuss potential solutions to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, it is important to understand how the Movement itself came to be. This chapter will describe the conditions that brought about the formation of the Taliban, track its rise from Kandahar Province in 1994 to its ascension to power in Kabul in 1996, its reign as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, and its rapid fall from power following the U.S. intervention in the aftermath of the events of 9/11.

PLANTING THE SEEDS: THE SOVIET INVASION AND THE CIVIL WAR

Following a forty year period of relative calm, the events that precipitated the last three decades of violence in Afghanistan began in 1973, when King Mohammad Zahir Shah was overthrown in a military coup orchestrated by his cousin Mohammad Daud.[1] Daud's government began to establish a closer relationship with the Soviet Union, who since 1958 had provided steadily rising levels of economic and military aid to Afghanistan. Daud permitted the increased influence of two rival communist parties in Afghanistan while at the same time commencing a crackdown on the country's nascent Islamic fundamentalist movement. Both of these decisions would prove costly for Daud: first, the spread of communism led to his execution by Marxist officers of the Afghan Army in 1978; and second, a number of leaders and *mujahedin* (soldiers) of the Islamic fundamentalist movement fled south to Pakistan, where they received sanctuary and the support of Pakistan's Frontier Corps.[2]

Following Daud's execution, the rival communist parties struggled for control of the country and began implementing radical changes to Afghan society, such as land redistribution and the inclusion of women in the government. The rivalry soon turned violent and resulted in the execution of Daud's successor. Frustrated with the chaos, on 24 December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and appointed a President of their choosing. The presumed purpose of the invasion was to prevent Islamic fundamentalists from seizing power in Afghanistan as well as an attempt to stem the spread of radical Islam to the Soviets' Central Asian republics. However, the Soviet

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[1]The reign of King Mohammand Zahir Shah (1933 to 1973) is often regarded as a time of peace and progress in Afghanistan. Important events included the drafting of a constitution in 1964 and the establishment of many freedoms for women.

[2]An excellent and concise explanation of these events is presented in Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (New York: Viking, 2008), 8-10.

invasion gave the *mujahedin* an even greater purpose: *jihad* (holy war) to drive foreign invaders out of Afghanistan.

Over the course of the next ten years, the *mujahedin* received three billion dollars worth of economic and covert military assistance from the U.S., which was quick to seize upon the opportunity to weaken its Cold War rival.[3] The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) established links with Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate (ISI) in order to facilitate the flow of weapons and cash into Afghanistan. A large number of Arab Muslims travelled to Afghanistan, including Osama bin Laden, the future leader of al Qaeda. During the Soviet occupation as many as 1.5 million Afghans were killed and 5.5 million fled to refugee camps, mainly in Pakistan and Iran.[4] Although the Soviets withdrew in February 1989, the communist Afghan government survived until 1992.

In April 1992 *mujahedin* forces entered Kabul and agreed to a power-sharing government amongst the various major factions. However, infighting amongst the *mujahedin* soon led to a bloody civil war. While some prominent *mujahedin* commanders struggled for control of Kabul, others fought for control of the lucrative local poppy trade or established checkpoints along roads where they collected tolls for personal gain.

American support to the *mujahedin* had diminished significantly once the Soviet withdrawal began, and officially ceased in September 1991.[5] Iran remained interested in maintaining influence in the Shi'a-dominated areas along its western borders with

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[3]Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (updated 2 September 2008), 2; available from http://italy.usembassy.gov.pdf/other /RL30588.pdf; Internet; accessed 21 January 2009.

[4]Shahid Afsar, Chris Samples and Thomas Wood, "The Taliban: An Organizational Analysis," *Military Review*, (May-June 2008): 59; and Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2001), 18.

[5]Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 2.

Afghanistan, and Pakistan's ISI continued their involvement in Afghan affairs, particularly in the Pashtun-dominated provinces of southern and eastern Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Interest in Afghanistan

Ever since its formation in 1947, Pakistan has had a keen interest in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was the sole dissenting vote against Pakistan's admission to the UN in 1947 due to the long-standing border dispute between the two countries. The border, demarcated by the 1893 Durand Line, has never been accepted by any Afghan government, primarily due to the fact that it cuts directly through the territory of the ethnic Pashtuns. Although Pashtuns comprise the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, accounting for 40 to 42 percent of the population, there are more Pashtuns living in Pakistan than in Afghanistan.[6] Figure 2.2 on the following page displays the ethnic demography of Afghanistan.

Pakistan's influence in Afghan affairs began to grow in the 1970s as it accepted a large number of refugees who fled communist efforts to root out Islamic fundamentalism. Pakistan's willingness to accept the Afghans was largely due to their desire for "strategic depth," a theory which held that a friendly or at least pliable government in Kabul would provide a secure western border and allow Pakistan to focus their efforts on their eastern borders and the dispute with India over Kashmir.[7] Pakistan's government, military, and,

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[6]Due to the fact that Afghanistan has not conducted a census since the 1970s, population figures are estimates. The figure of 40 percent comes from Rashid, *Taliban…*, 2; most U.S. government sources, such as the CIA World Factbook (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html) list the 42 percent figure. Approximately 25 million Pashtun live in Pakistan, compared to 15 million in Afghanistan.

[7]Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, *The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan* (London: Routledge, 2007), 19.

Figure 2.2: Map showing ethnic divisions in Afghanistan. Note that the green Pashtun area extends well into Pakistan, and comprises what some call 'Pashtunistan'.

Source: http://maps.nationalgeographic.com/maps; Internet; accessed 30 Mar 2009.

in particular the ISI, was becoming more fundamentalist in their Islamic beliefs, and in the 1970s started permitting the construction of thousands of conservative madrassas in Pashtun areas of Pakistan.[8] The educational programme taught at the madrassas reflected a transnational approach to Islam, emphasizing religion over ethnicity.

The Conditions Set

[8]Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 70. The construction costs for the madrassas were paid for by private Saudi donors.

By 1994, Afghanistan had endured 21 years of seismic political change and over 15 years of unabated violence. With the departure of the Soviet Union and the fall of the communist government, the *mujahedin* lost their motive for cooperation and began to feud over an ineffectual government that was unable to provide security or basic services to the population. Many *mujahedin* commanders, bereft of a foreign opponent for *jihad*, reverted to an old Afghan tradition – that of the regional warlord. It was in this tempestuous climate that the Taliban was born.

THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN

Birth of the Taliban

The Taliban movement was founded by Mullah Mohammed Omar, a cleric virtually unknown outside of his rural village of Sangisar, as a reaction to the lawlessness and corruption that in 1994 transcended Afghanistan in general and Kandahar Province in particular. The size and reputation of the Taliban quickly began to grow, and they garnered Pakistan's attention when they were able to dismantle a plethora of illegal checkpoints and gain control of the main highway leading from Pakistan into Kandahar Province.

Mullah Omar and his followers were not initially interested in anything beyond re-establishing law and order in their local area. The original Taliban's

> . . . perspective was local, their horizons were limited, and their concerns were immediate . . . they had no interest in, and perhaps no knowledge of, the hardships of the Palestinians or Kashmiris, or Muslims elsewhere . . . They were preoccupied with local problems.[9]

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[9]Robert Canfield, "Fraternity, Power and Time in Central Asia," in *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, ed. Robert Crews and Amin Tarzi, 212-237 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 217.

However, the desire to implement their particular brand of Islam on a larger scale led the Taliban to expand throughout the south and eventually towards Kabul. By the spring of 1995, the Taliban numbered 12,000 Afghan and Pakistani students and controlled 12 of Afghanistan's 31 provinces.[10] What had begun as a ". . . local puritanical movement quickly absorbed the support base of rival militia factions as fighters joined sides with the newest guerrilla on the scene."[11]

Factors Leading to the Strength of the Taliban

The Taliban's incredible expansion from 1994 to 1996 has been examined by numerous authors who have offered a variety of differing opinions on the key factors that enabled the movement's success. Three of the main factors credited are the Taliban's commitment to Islam, their understanding of the Pashtun culture, and the support of Pakistan. A closer examination of each of these factors will reveal the significance of their direct influence on the rise of the Taliban.

Islam

The Taliban were inspired by the radical beliefs of Deobandism. The Deobandi movement, which began in India in 1867, sought to emulate the life and times of the Prophet Mohammed, and believed that a Muslim's primary obligation and principal loyalty were to his religion rather than to his ethnicity or country. It also promoted the view that it was the sacred obligation of Muslims to wage *jihad* in order to protect Muslims worldwide.[12]

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[10]Rashid, *Taliban.*…, 29-30.

[11]Gordon Smith, Canada *in Afghanistan: Is It Working?* Report prepared for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (March 2007), 15; available from http://www.cdfai.org/PDF/Canada%20in%20Afghanistan%20Is%20it%20Working.pdf; Internet; accessed 1 February 2009.

As the Taliban increased their area of control they began to implement the ". . . strictest interpretation of Sharia law ever seen in the Muslim world . . ." [13] that was influenced by ". . . extremist Islamic teachings in Pakistan and a perversion of *Pashtunwali*,"[14] the ancient Pashtun tribal code. Stories of the Taliban's harsh edicts are well-known: preventing education of girls, banning women from working, outlawing most television, radio and music, and decreeing that all adult males would grow 'proper' Islamic beards.

The Taliban's extreme adherence to Islam was appealing to many because of the steady rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan since the 1970s, a rise that was greatly aided by the *mujahedin's* success against the Soviet occupation. The devotion to Islam and enforcement of Sharia law differentiated the Taliban from the corrupt warlords who had established virtual control over large swathes of the country during the civil war.

The Pashtun Culture

Another key factor in the Taliban's rapid growth was their ability to mobilize the Pashtun population. Abdulkader Sinno explains that ". . . if history is any guide, whoever mobilizes the Pashtuns rules Afghanistan, and Afghanistan cannot be ruled without their consent."[15] Sinno argues that the Taliban were able to successfully mobilize the Pashtun due to their expert knowledge of the Pashtun power structure. The Taliban's ability to establish law and order was also respected. However, some initial supporters, including

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[12]Seth Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 27.

[13]Rashid, *Taliban…, 29.*

[14] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos,* 14.

[15] Abdulkader Sinno, "Explaining the Taliban's Ability to Mobilize the Pashtuns," in *The Taliban and the Crisis…*, ed. Crews and Tarzi, 59-89, 59.

Hamid Karzai, withdrew their support when some of the Taliban's harsher methods became widely known.

Pashtuns, who had ruled Afghanistan almost continuously since the 18th century, were willing to support a unifying force that they believed could return them to their dominant position in Afghan society. The Taliban were the faction that seemed most capable of helping them achieve that goal.

Pakistan's Support

Pakistan's role in supporting Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan and in establishing a series of madrassas along their border with Afghanistan has already been established. The Taliban were able to gain Pakistan's support due to their initial success in eliminating their rivals in southern and eastern Afghanistan and their tendency to be far more trustworthy than "unscrupulous soldiers of fortune" such as Gulbuddin Hikmetyar, the Pashtun power broker originally favoured by the ISI after the fall of the communist government.[16]

Pakistan was also influenced by the Taliban's popularity amongst the Pashtun in northern Pakistan, and soon began providing the Taliban with economic assistance. They permitted the Taliban to use Pakistani territory as sanctuary and as a base for training and recruiting fighters. In return, Pakistan began employing more Pashtuns in their state-supported insurgency in Kashmir. The Pashtun-dominated ISI took a particular interest in the Taliban and ensured that they received a steady supply of arms and professional training.[17]

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[16]Hafeez Malik, *US Relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Imperial Dimension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91.

The final steps towards power

In April 1996 Mullah Omar entered a Kandahar mosque where the Cloak of the Prophet, believed to have been worn by the Prophet Mohammed himself, was kept. In front of over one thousand Pashtun religious leaders and hundreds of Taliban, Omar wrapped himself in the cloak and was pronounced *Amir al-Muminin* (Commander of the Faithful).[18] The Taliban, who had been locked in a battle for Kabul since the previous summer, were re-energized by this emotionally charged event, and regained the momentum that they had experienced during their earliest days. By early September 1996 the Taliban had surrounded Kabul, and on the evening of 26 September they entered the city, quickly capturing, torturing and hanging the former communist president Najibullah. In just over two years, the Taliban had progressed from a small rural movement to the most powerful force in Afghanistan.

THE REIGN OF THE TALIBAN

Although the Taliban declared themselves the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan after seizing Kabul, they received extremely limited international recognition and quickly attracted much global condemnation and criticism.[19] The execution of Najibullah earned a rebuke from the UN and the implementation of draconian interpretations of Islamic law rapidly turned international opinion strongly against the Taliban. In particular, they were

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[17]Cheryl Bernard *et al*, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics and the Way Ahead* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008), 56; Malik, *US Relations…*, 91; and Hodes and Sedra, *The Search for Security . . .*, 19.

[18]Introduction from Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis…*, 45.

[19] Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were the only countries to formally recognize the Taliban as Afghanistan's legitimate ruling government.

criticized for their harsh treatment of women and their harbouring of international terrorists, including the leader of al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

Although the Taliban sought international recognition as Afghanistan's legitimate government, they did little to prove that they were capable of governing the country, which they now referred to as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The International Crisis Group points out that the Taliban was ". . . hardly a government-in-waiting and . . . displayed little interest in providing for the population, rather leaving this to NGOs and the UN."[20] Mullah Omar remained in Kandahar, visiting Kabul only twice during the Taliban's reign, and his ministers had little to no experience in governing or in the administration of a bureaucracy. The Taliban was

> . . . a terrifying oddity in the politics of the modern world, dependent upon support from its allies in Pakistan's military intelligence, eccentric in its ideological disposition, ruthless in dealing with those it categorised as opponents, and utterly unequal to the tasks of either comprehending the global environment within which it operated, or crafting solutions to the enormous problems by which Afghans were confronted after two decades of mayhem and disruption.[21]

The regime attracted attention for the use of extreme physical punishment to enforce compliance with their edicts.[22] In 1998, UN Security Council Resolutions 1193 and 1214 called on the Taliban to end their discriminatory laws towards women.[23] The

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[20]International Crisis Group, "Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?" *Asia Report* no. 125 (11 December 2006), 28.

[21]William Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban* (New York: New York University Press), vi.

[22]Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 4. The punishments were carried out by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice, who were known for their fanatical dedication to Taliban edicts.

resolutions were ignored; if anything, the attention only seemed to strengthen the Taliban's resolve.

Sanctuary for bin Laden

Osama bin Laden returned to Afghanistan in 1996 after being exiled from Sudan. He had maintained links with Afghan *mujahedin* commanders after his departure in the 1980s, and upon his return he quickly established a relationship with Mullah Omar. Afghanistan represented an ideal place for bin Laden to establish al Qaeda training camps, and the Taliban proved to be willing hosts.

The U.S. began adopting a hard-line policy against the Taliban in 1997.[24] The Clinton Administration ordered the closing of Afghanistan's Washington embassy in August 1997 and in April 1998 dispatched their UN Ambassador to Kabul in order to request that the Taliban expel bin Laden. Pressure on the Taliban to hand over bin Laden intensified following the August 1998 al Qaeda attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, leading to the launching of cruise missiles at suspected al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan later that month.[25]

The Taliban were steadfast in their support for bin Laden and refused all overtures to hand him over or to expel al Qaeda. Bin Laden became increasingly influential with Mullah Omar and may have played a role in encouraging some of the Taliban's more outrageous acts, such as the destruction of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan Province in

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[23]Information available from http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1998/scres98.htm; Internet; accessed 3 April 2009. The resolutions also condemned the interference of outside actors in the war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, the increasing scope of Afghanistan's drug trade, and general human rights abuses committed by the Taliban.

[24]The U.S. had briefly attempted to befriend and negotiate with the Taliban on the issue of constructing an oil pipeline from Central Asia through Afghanistan. Rashid, *Taliban…*, 162.

[25]Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 5.

March 2001. What is certain is that the Taliban's provision of sanctuary to bin Laden and al Qaeda lead directly to its downfall in late 2001.

Battles with the Northern Alliance

Although the Taliban eventually conquered 80 to 95 percent of Afghanistan's territory, they were never able to achieve a lasting strategic victory over the Afghan forces that opposed them.[26] The Taliban suffered their first serious setback and military defeat in the northern province of Mazar-e-Sharif in 1997, and also had great difficulty in dealing with the legendary *mujahedin* leader Ahmad Shah Masood in the Panjshir Valley north of Kabul. Eventually, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and some Pashtun elements formed the Northern Alliance, which began to receive money, equipment and training from Russia, India and Iran.[27]

Although the Northern Alliance had numerous commanders, perhaps the biggest thorn in the Taliban's side was Masood, the 'Lion of Panjshir'. Masood was assassinated by al Qaeda operatives in a brazen suicide bombing during a television interview on September 9, 2001, an act widely seen as al Qaeda's way of recognizing the Taliban's role in providing their organization sanctuary. Masood's death threatened to tear apart what had long been a fragile alliance. However, events that occurred halfway around the

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[26]80 percent is cited by Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan", *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 74. The 95 percent figure is cited by Afsar, Samples and Woods, "The Taliban: an Organizational Analysis," 60. Similar to the current debate over what percentage of the country is controlled by the Taliban and what percentage by the government, accurately determining such statistics is extremely difficult in a country ravaged by thirty years of war and with only limited road networks to rural areas.

[27]James Dobbins, *Ending Afghanistan's Civil War,* Testimony presented before the House Armed Services Committee on January 30, 2007 (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007), 1; and Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 5.

world two days after Masood's death brought American military support, money, and technology to the Northern Alliance and helped bring about the fall of the Taliban.

THE FALL OF THE TALIBAN

Once the attacks of 9/11 occurred, suspicion quickly centered on al Qaeda, and attention turned immediately to their hosts, the Taliban. Within a day, the UN Security Council had passed Resolution 1368, which expressed the determination to ". . . combat by all means threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts," recognized the right of individual and collective self-defence, and called on member states to ". . . bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of these terrorist attacks."[28] NATO followed suit on 12 September, invoking Article 5, the collective-defence provisions of the North Atlantic Treaty, for the first time in its history.[29]

President Bush, addressing a Joint Session of Congress on 20 September, demanded that the Taliban immediately deliver al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan to U.S. authorities, close all terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, and allow the U.S. access to the camps to ensure that they were indeed closed.[30] Later that month, the U.S. presented a list of seven demands to Pakistan, putting pressure on the Taliban's most ardent international supporter to cut their ties and support the American "Global War on Terror."[31]

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[28]UNSCR text available from http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/533/82/PDF/N0153382.pdf?OpenElement; Internet; accessed 11 March 2009.

[29]Canada, *Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan* (Ottawa: January 2008), 10; available from http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf; Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

[30]Malik, *US Relations…*, 186.

[31]*Ibid*., 188-189. Secretary of State Colin Powell was responsible for presenting these demands, and won rare praise from the more conservative members of Bush's cabinet when Pakistani President

The military defeat of the Taliban took less than three months to achieve.[32] The Taliban were hopelessly overmatched by the technological superiority that the U.S. provided to the Northern Alliance. By November 12, the Northern Alliance had entered Kabul, and on December 9, the Taliban surrendered Kandahar City.[33] Mullah Omar fled Kandahar, likely for the mountains along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, or possibly directly into the Pakistan city of Quetta.

"DOWN BUT NOT OUT"

The Taliban's fall came about as quickly as their meteoric rise to power. The Bonn Agreement, which paved the way for Hamid Karzai's interim administration, was signed on December 5, 2001. American forces and their Afghan allies continued operations against Taliban and al Qaeda fighters, enjoying much success. As 2001 wound to a close, it seemed that the international community was very much focused on Afghanistan's future. However, decisions were already being made that prevented the elimination of the Taliban and set the conditions for their survival and eventual return as a full-fledged insurgency.

Pervez Musharraf agreed to all seven. As will be discussed in future chapters, the Pakistani government and the ISI paid lip service to a number of these demands and continued their support of the Taliban.

[32] Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 7. The victory was achieved by 15,000 Northern Alliance fighters, 100 CIA officers, and 350 US Special Forces soldiers.

[33] Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 7.

CHAPTER THREE: RESURGENCE INTO INSURGENCE

INTRODUCTION

By early 2002, the rapid defeat of the Taliban, the seeming U.S. commitment to Afghanistan, and the early promise of Hamid Karzai and his interim administration gave a sense of optimism about the future of the country. The people of Afghanistan were ". . . extremely war weary from at least 23 years of continual and incessant warfare . . . *most of the Afghan population desperately wanted peace and stability*."[1]

Today, the search for peace and stability continues. This chapter will provide some critical insights on how the Taliban were able to rebuild and become the formidable insurgency that challenges the very future of Afghanistan. It will begin with a description of the initial errors made during the formation of the new Afghan government, particularly at the December 2001 Bonn Conference. The ramifications of these errors will then be examined by looking at the weaknesses and missteps of the Afghan government and the international community over the last eight years. The final part of the chapter will describe how the Taliban came to be the movement that they are today: it will outline their rebuilding from a routed force in 2002 to a full-fledged terrorist insurgency by 2006, and examine their strategy, ideology and external support bases in order to determine exactly who the neo-Taliban are.

THE BONN AGREEMENT

Bonn, Germany, was the site of a conference to determine the course that Afghanistan would take as it attempted to leave behind the legacy of Taliban rule and

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[1]Thomas H. Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy: The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2007): 104; available from http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May_2007/Johnson.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 January 2009. Italics are Johnson's.

reintegrate with the international community. The framework for Afghanistan's rebuilding was set out in the Bonn Agreement, signed on 5 December.[2] The Bonn Agreement's most important decisions were the formalization of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) with Hamid Karzai at the helm, and the scheduling of two *loya jirgas*: one that would occur in the summer of 2002 to determine the shape of the Afghan government, and another to draft a new constitution in 2003.[3]

From the perspective of international cooperation, it appeared that the Bonn Agreement was a success – the UN, the major Western powers and the key regional powers had all been involved, and for the most part had worked together in order to promote Afghanistan's best interests.[4] From an Afghan perspective, however, there were several troubling issues. The first issue was the actual composition of the Afghans who attended the conference, a ". . . relatively diverse, yet unrepresentative group."[5] Lakhdar Brahimi, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) from October 2001 to December 2004, later reflected that ". . . the deal was reached hastily, by people who did not adequately represent all key constituencies in Afghanistan, and it ignored some core political issues."[6]

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[2]The official name of the Bonn Agreement was the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions.

[3]*Loya jirga* is Pashtu for 'grand assembly' or 'grand council.'

[4]In particular, many have noted that Iran was very helpful and use it as an example to argue that the U.S. should actively seek Iranian support in their current quest for a resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan. See Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (updated 2 September 2008), XXX; available from http://italy.usembassy .gov.pdf/other/RL30588.pdf; Internet; accessed 21 January 2009.

[5]Barnett R. Rubin and Humayun Hamidza, "From Bonn to London: Governance Challenges and the Future of Statebuilding in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 1 (February 2007): 8.

Most notably, there was no Taliban representation. Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf had tried to ensure Taliban representation in any discussion of the future Afghan government, and had received some influential support. During a visit to Pakistan in October 2001, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell had announced that there would be a role for moderate Taliban in the new government; however, the Northern Alliance strongly protested and publicly rejected any such notion.[7] There are differing opinions as to whether or not it would have been advisable, or even feasible, for the Taliban to participate in some form in Bonn. Antonio Giustozzi argues that the Taliban were in disarray and would not have been in a position to negotiate given the stringent opposition of the other Afghan factions involved, while William Maley is sceptical that the Taliban could have been involved in Bonn, due to the crushing weight of international opinion against them at the time and the difficulty of determining exactly who could have represented them.[8] On the other hand, there is criticism that the lack of Taliban representation contributed to the failure to lay the foundations for national reconciliation. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Michael Schoiswohl argue that

> . . . while the Taliban undeniably defied democratic and human rights principles, justifying a cautious approach to their immediate inclusion, their marginalization

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[6]Lakhdar Brahimi, "A New Path for Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, 7 December 2008; available from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article /2008/12/05/ AR2008120503191 .html; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009.

[7]Hafeez Malik, *US Relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Imperial Dimension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 194.

[8]Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 229; William Maley, *Stabilizing Afghanistan: Threats and Challenges*, Report on Foreign Policy for the Next President, prepared for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (October 2008); available from http://www.carnegieendowment.org /files/stabilizing_afghanistan.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 February 2009.

> impeded the possibility of reconciliation on the one hand, and led to the false premise that the war had been won or settled on the other hand.[9]

Any prospects of Taliban reintegration into the AIA were made more difficult by the fact that they were now seen as outside the legitimate political process.[10]

Others have noted that the Northern Alliance, which had no significant Pashtun representation, was ". . . basically regarded by the Pashtun population as a foreign entity."[11] Although Karzai himself is Pashtun, his appointment was seen more as a realization that "no one but a Pashtun could eventually rule Afghanistan" than a legitimate attempt to include the Pashtun in the structure of the new government.[12]

A final argument for the Taliban's inclusion in Bonn was the questionable reputation and motives of many of the Afghans who did participate. Numerous warlords participated in the negotiations and were rewarded with positions in the interim government as they had been prominent commanders in the Northern Alliance.[13] As a result,

> . . . far from marginalising or even containing these commanders, (in the Bonn Agreement) the international community enabled them to extend their authority into the heart of the state, giving them a virtual veto over elements of the state-building process.[14]

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[9]Shahrbanou Tadbakhsh and Michael Schoiswohl, "Playing with Fire? The International Community's Democratization Experiment in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 2 (April 2008): 261.

[10] Gordon Smith, *Canada in Afghanistan: Is It Working?* Report prepared for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (March 2007), 20; available from http://www.cdfai.org/PDF/Canada%20in%20Afghanistan%20Is%20it%20Working.pdf; Internet; accessed 1 February 2009.

[11]Johnson, "On the Edge of…" 95.

[12]*Ibid.*, 95.

[13]International Crisis Group. "Afghanistan: New U.S. Administration, New Directions," *Asia Briefing* no. 89 (13 March 2009), 4. Three such examples were Mohammed Fahim, who became Minister of Defence, Abdul Rashid Dostum, who was made Fahim's deputy, and Ismail Khan, who was appointed Governor of Herat Province.

Given their prominent positions in the Northern Alliance, it is unrealistic to believe that it would have been possible to exclude them from the government. Their influence, however, was furthered by the U.S. military's reliance on local warlords and their militias as part of the ongoing hunt for al Qaeda under Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF).[15]

The AIA officially began their term on 22 December 2001; two days earlier, UN Security Council Resolution 1386 had provided the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) a mandate for peace enforcement under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter and ordered the withdrawal of Northern Alliance forces from Kabul. The process of rebuilding Afghanistan was set to begin.

WEAKNESSES IN GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY

The international commitment which had been promised at Bonn soon began to wither away. The majority of the blame is often directed towards the U.S., which believed that the quick victory heralded a new era in warfare that would permit them to avoid lengthy commitments to nation-building. Michael Ignatieff termed the U.S. approach as "nation-building lite", accusing the Bush Administration of rebuilding Afghanistan ". . . on the cheap, at the lowest level of investment and risk."[16]

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[14]Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, *The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan* (London: Routledge, 2007), 12.

[15]Operation ENDURING FREEDOM is the operational name for the U.S. 'Global War on Terrorism' throughout Asia. Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Afghanistan denotes that the activities that occur specifically in Afghanistan, just as there is a Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Philippines and an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Horn of Africa. For the purposes of this paper, OEF will refer specifically to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Afghanistan.

[16]Michael Ignatieff, "Nation-Building Lite," *New York Times*, 28 July 2002; available from http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C05E4DE1538F93BA15754C0A9649C8B63; Internet; accessed 10 February 2009.

A major security issue was the lack of U.S. support for the expansion of ISAF's mandate outside of Kabul. Colin Powell argued for ISAF expansion but was unable to convince President Bush, who supported Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld's opinion that technological superiority and small, highly mobile forces were the proper solution.[17] The ISAF mission was of secondary importance to the U.S., who focused their resources on the OEF mandate of tracking down terrorists. However, even with OEF, the belief that a small ground force supported by overwhelming technological superiority could replace boots on the ground led to troop levels that were lower than almost every other American military mission since the Second World War.[18]

As early as the summer of 2002, plans for the invasion of Iraq began to divert resources away from Afghanistan. Once the invasion began in March 2003, there was no doubt as to where the American priorities lay. Anxious for justification of further reductions in their military commitment, in May 2003 Rumsfeld announced that major combat operations in Afghanistan were completed and that OEF was entering a "cleanup phase."[19] This shift of focus was to have a long-lasting effect: in 2007, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen told the Senate Armed Services Committee that ". . . in Iraq, we do what we must. In Afghanistan, we do what we can."[20] This was made

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[17]Karin Von Hippel and Frederick Barton, "Getting It Right in Pakistan and Afghanistan," *Center for Strategic and International Studies Commentary*, (28 January 2009), 36; available from www.csis.org; Internet; accessed 5 February 2009.

[18]Seth G. Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 24.

[19]Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 7; and Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 73.

[20]Editorial, "How Not to Lose in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, 26 January 2009; available from http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/26/how-not-to-lose-afghanistan/; Internet; accessed 27 January 2009.

very clear by the coherence of a national strategy for each country; the U.S. Government issued their *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* in November 2005, while an official strategy document for Afghanistan was not produced until March 2009.[21]

The Bush Administration was by no means the only culprit to blame for the lack of international commitment to Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era. In Bonn, various nations had agreed to take the lead in specific areas: the U.S. in establishing a national army, Germany in policing, Italy in establishing a judicial system, and Japan in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. Ahmed Rashid described Germany's efforts as "pathetic" and "next-to-useless" and said that it, along with Italy's ". . . apathy in rebuilding the justice system. . .", comprised the ". . . two weakest points in the international community's efforts to rebuild state institutions in Afghanistan."[22]

ISAF's manning was also problematic. From December 2001 to the summer of 2003, several different nations assumed the lead for ISAF, resulting in a wholesale change of staff every six months. At the request of the UN and the Afghan government, NATO assumed command of ISAF in August 2003, providing more continuity for the existing mission; two months later, UN Security Council Resolution 1510 gave ISAF the mandate to begin expanding outside of Kabul. This led to the subsequent phased

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[21]Catherine Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Report for Congress, (23 January 2009), 8; available from http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40156.pdf; Internet; accessed 24 February 2009. President Obama ordered an official strategy to be drafted shortly after taking office. The review was written by his special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, former CIA officer Bruce Reidel, and Undersecretary of Defense Policy Michele Flournoy, and unveiled by the President in a White House speech on 27 March 2009. The speech is available at http://kabul.usembassy.gov/press_280309.html; Internet; accessed 29 March 2009.

[22]Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (New York: Viking, 2008), 204.

expansion of ISAF and international Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) across the entire country.[23] Figure 3.1 shows ISAF's current disposition.

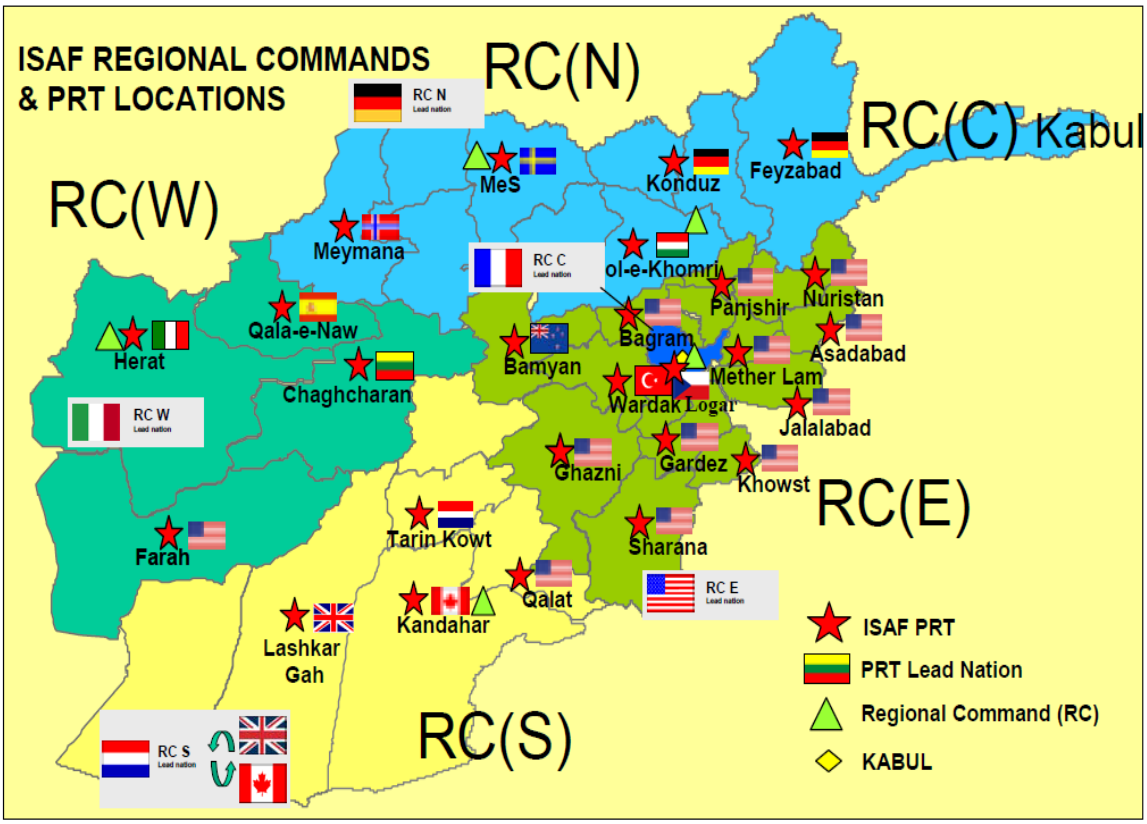

Figure 3.1 – ISAF Regional Commands and PRT Locations as of 13 March 2009.

Source: http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/isaf_placemat.pdf; Internet; accessed 1 April 2009.

The initial ISAF mission consisted of only 4500 soldiers and was slow to build in troop strength.[24] Although ISAF now numbers 56,000 troops from 41 countries, there are

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[23]ISAF expansion took place in four stages. Stage 1 was completed in October 2004 when ISAF assumed responsibility for Regional Command North, or RC (N). Stage 2 followed in 2005 with RC (West), Stage 3 in July 2006 with RC (South) and Stage 4 in October 2006 with RC (East). RC (Capital) is for the forces in Kabul. Information from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-A95D73306BED7A25/natolive/topics_8189.htm?selected Locale= en#evolution; Internet; accessed 4 April 2009.

[24]When NATO assumed command of ISAF in October 2003, the force consisted of 5581 soldiers, and remained under 10000 soldiers until late 2005. The major increases came post-2006: during the height of Operation MEDUSA in September 2006, ISAF numbered 19597 soldiers; by November 2006, with ISAF expansion complete, the total was 31267. By March 2008, the force consisted of 47332 soldiers. Information from NATO, *Afghanistan Report 2009*; available from http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2009_03/20090331_afghanistan_report_2009.pdf; Internet; accessed 1 April 2009. In Johnson

still issues with the well-publicized and much debated caveats that some nations have imposed on the types of missions that their contingents will undertake.[25] The debate has caused friction amongst NATO countries and raised questions about the international resolve to see the mission in Afghanistan to its conclusion.

There have also been significant differences in the approach to the mission by the U.S. and other ISAF-contributing nations. The core U.S. objective is to prevent Afghanistan from reverting to a haven and training ground for international terrorists; European countries and Canada have generally been more focused on reconstruction, capacity-building and governance issues, with the long-term objective of creating a viable and self-governing Afghanistan. Daniel Korski explains the different views of the mission that have existed from its earliest days:

> In Europe, many initially saw the Afghan mission as a largely risk-free peace-building exercise. The repressive and misogynist Taliban regime would be replaced by a democratic government that would build hospitals and allow European NATO soldiers to escort smiling girls to their classrooms – pictures of which would be beamed back to satisfied European publics…For the US, however, the Afghan mission was always tied directly to the attacks of 9/11 and the Bush administration's "War on Terror". . .this underlying approach is apparent in the importance ascribed to military operations over a more political approach. Europeans, by and large, are in favour of the latter; the US remains more wedded to a military-led strategy.[26]

The civilian-led efforts to establish governance and encourage development have also caused frustration. International conferences such as the January 2006 London

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and Mason, "Understanding the Taliban…," 85, the authors note that the level of per capita commitment of soldiers to ISAF and OEF in the 2002 to 2005 period was abysmal: compared to soldiers to citizen ratios of 1:48 in Bosnia and 1:58 in Kosovo during the same period, Afghanistan's ratio was 1:2000.

[25]Statistics available from http://www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/index.html#evolution; Internet; accessed 5 April 2009.

[26]Daniel Korski, "Afghanistan: Europe's Forgotten War," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, (21 January 2008), 5; available from http://ecfr.3cdn.net/fcdc73b8da7af85936_q8m6b5o4j.pdf; Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

meeting that produced the Afghanistan Compact are often viewed cynically by the Afghan population as another ". . . list of unfulfilled promises and more grandstanding by foreign dignitaries talking about basic Afghan needs that should have been provided for already."[27]

Despite four separate international donor conferences being held between 2002 and 2008, there has been an alarming lack of commitment to financial development assistance to Afghanistan.[28] Table 3.1 displays the disparity between the amounts of international aid being provided to Afghanistan in comparison to other countries in conflict at the time.

International Financial Aid per citizen, Spring 2002-Spring 2003	
Afghanistan	$57.00
East Timor	$233.00
Kosovo	$526.00
Bosnia-Herzegovina	$679.00

TABLE 3.1 – Comparison of International Financial Aid.

Source: Robert Crews and Amin Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 325.

While Afghanistan has no doubt suffered from the uneven degree of commitment from the international community, the inability of its government to spread effective governance throughout the country has also allowed the Taliban to gain in strength and influence. Robert L. Canfield argues that the conditions for the ineffectiveness of the Karzai administration and the resurgence of the Taliban were set in the early months of

[27]Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 355.

[28]The conferences referred to were held in Toyko in January 2002, Berlin in April 2004, London in February 2006, and Paris in June 2008.

2002: an economy in ruins, mass unemployment, and a government with a limited reach beyond Kabul.[29]

President Karzai has been derisively referred to as "the mayor of Kabul" and struggles with the stigma of being seen in non-Pashtun regions of the country as ". . . a tool of the Pashto-speaking tribes of the south . . ." while at the same time being viewed by many Pashtuns as a ". . . weak puppet of the Americans."[30] He has faced constant scrutiny for doing little to discourage or control the warlords who populate his government. Corruption has been rampant, and Karzai has been accused of failing to stop it, turning a blind eye, or even being part of the problem himself. Opinion polls conducted in Afghanistan have shown steadily declining support for Karzai.[31] The change in the tone of support from Washington is also telling: while Karzai was spoken of positively by the previous administration and enjoyed a strong relationship with Bush, the Obama Administration has been openly critical of the Karzai government, referring to it as "weak and ineffective".[32]

The Afghan government's inability to extend its reach outside of Kabul has led to suggestions that a strong central government will not work in Afghanistan, and that a decentralized model that gives autonomy to the provinces and regions is more suitable.

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[29]Robert Canfield, "Fraternity, Power and Time in Central Asia," in *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan,* ed. Robert Crews and Amin Tarzi, 212-237 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 228.

[30]Johnson, "On the Edge of…," 100.

[31]Results from ABC News/BBC/ARD Poll – Afghanistan: Where Things Stand (http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1083a1Afghanistan2009.pdf; Internet; accessed 19 March 2009) and Environics Survey of Afghans (http://erg.environics.net/media_room/default.asp?aID=653; Internet; accessed 19 March 2009).

[32]Clint Lorimore and Ryan Clarke, "Obama's Afghan Arm-Twisting: Weakening Karzai to give him Strength?" *RSIS Commentaries* no. 21 (27 February 2009): 1; available from http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS0212009.pdf; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009.

Barnett Rubin has termed the debate over centralized or decentralized government as the ". . . paradox of modern Afghanistan . . .a country which needs decentralized governance to provide services to its scattered and ethnically diverse population has one of the world's most centralized governments."[33]

There is no denying that there has been progress since the fall of the Taliban. The 2002 and 2003 *loya jirgas* set up a democratic system and Constitution, and a series of successful elections have occurred. Despite the Taliban's best efforts, there have been advances in gender equality, particularly in access to education, the number of women employed in government institutions, and the very fact that women have access to the democratic process.[34] There have been dramatic improvements in access to health care, particularly in maternal health.[35] However, all of these improvements have yet to convince Afghans that the international community's commitment and the capacity of the Afghan government are strong enough to prevent the return of Taliban rule.

THE RESURGENCE OF THE TALIBAN

The Taliban were able to use the period from 2002 to 2005 to recover from their expulsion from power and, by 2006, had evolved into a complex insurgency able to challenge Afghan and coalition forces militarily and the Afghan government politically. They were able to accomplish this by pursuing a strategy that catered to their strengths while targeting the weaknesses of their enemies, adapting their ideology to attract a wider

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[33]Barnett Rubin, "Saving Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (January/February 2007): 62.

[34]Cheryl Bernard *et al*, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics and the Way Ahead* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008), 1.

[35]Joesph J. Collins, "Transition strategy: regaining the initiative," *Armed Forces Journal* (20 January 2009); available from http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2009/01/3846067; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009.

cross-section of supporters, and taking full advantage of significant outside support for their struggle.

Strategy

The Taliban's ultimate goal is a return to the days of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: a situation where they would rule an Afghanistan free of Western influence, with a strict Islamic constitution and Sharia law. In order to achieve this, the Taliban have been able to successfully blend a number of classical theories of insurgency into a strategy that best suits their goals.[36] Anthony Cordesman argues that the Taliban are fighting a "war of political attrition" in order to outlast the ISAF-contributing countries and the numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that operate in the country. He posits that the Taliban can be content to expand their political and economic influence and do not have to decisively defeat ISAF or Afghan forces in battle; he believes that the Taliban's ultimate aim is to weaken the international community's resolve and convince the populations of both Afghanistan and the ISAF-contributing nations that negotiations are inevitable.[37]

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[36]The two most notable theories would seem to be Mao's three phased insurgency and Robert Taber's "war of the flea." The Taliban's actions from 2002 to 2005 fit into Mao's first phase, where insurgents concentrate on building political strength and limiting military action to events that can win the support of the local population. By 2006, they had moved into the second phase, which entails conducting military operations to capture arms and wearing down government and coalition forces, gaining strength and consolidating control of base areas, such as regions within the provinces of Kandahar and Helmand. Their bold actions in Kandahar and Helmand Provinces in the summer of 2006 may have indicated an attempt to move into the third phase, which is the committing of regular forces in a final offensive. The decisive defeat of the Taliban around Kandahar City in conventional war fighting during Operation MEDUSA (September-October 2006) may have convinced the Taliban to maintain their insurgency in the second phase until such time that coalition forces have left Afghanistan. See Mao Tse-Tsung, *Mao-Tse-Tsung on Guerrilla Warfare* trans. Samuel B. Griffiths (New York: Praeger, 1961) and Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (New York: L. Stuart, 1965).

[37]Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Afghanistan-Pakistan War: The Rising Threat 2002-2008," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (27 January 2009), 17; available from www.csis.org/burke/reports; Internet; accessed 11 February 2009.

The Taliban's strategy is focused on expanding influence rather than on controlling territory.[38] Most estimates reveal that the Taliban actually control a very small amount of territory: in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2008, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell stated that the Taliban controlled 10 percent of Afghanistan, compared to 30 percent that was under the control of the Afghan government; the rest was assessed to be controlled by a mixture of warlords, tribes and local groups.[39] They have also concentrated their attacks in a relatively small area of the country: U.S. commanders estimate that 70 percent of the violence occurs in only ten percent of Afghanistan's 364 districts.[40]

Ideology: the Neo-Taliban

The Taliban of 2009 are not the Taliban of 1994, or even the Taliban of 2004. They have evolved and learned from their previous mistakes. The term that is often used to describe the current iteration of the Movement is "neo-Taliban."[41] The neo-Taliban have been described as a ". . . political alliance of convenience than an ideological movement . . . a fluid coalition of semi-autonomous insurgent groups . . ." that has expanded beyond the Islamic fundamentalist base of the Taliban to include warlords, drug traffickers, foreign *mujahedin*, and Afghan youths who have few other prospects for employment.[42] The most important difference between the original Taliban and the neo-

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[38] "Talking to the Taliban," *The Economist* 289, no. 8600 (4 October 2008): 41.

[39]Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 10.

[40]*Ibid.*, 24.

[41]According to Amin Tarzi, in Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis…*, 76, the term was first used in a 2003 article in *The Economist*; although it is now a fairly widely used term, some argue that it is a misnomer, as the Taliban never disappeared, but simply blended into the population and regrouped. See Hodes and Sedra, *The Search for Security…*, 25.

Taliban may be the absorption of tactics and ideology from foreign *mujahedin* fighting in Afghanistan and the Taliban's integration into the international *jihad* movement.[43]

There have been numerous attempts to classify the Taliban into different tiers. Table 3.2 shows four such examples. Of particular interest is Rashid's explanation of neo-Taliban tiering; he describes the third and fourth tiers as ". . . a result of the insurgency, not the cause of the insurgency."[44]

Author	Number of tiers	Explanation of tiers
Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, *The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan*.	2	Tier 1: Veterans of the original Taliban. Tier 2: Local rank and file.
Amin Tarzi, "The Neo-Taliban."	2	Tier 1: Those who align themselves with al Qaeda and the views eventually adopted by Mullah Omar and the more radical Taliban towards the end of their regime. Tier 2: Those who have returned to more traditional Pashtun roots and want the Taliban to be a voice for both Pashtuns and Muslim fundamentalists in Afghanistan.
Ali Jalali, "Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum."	3	Tier 1: Disenchanted, aggrieved communities and tribes defying the government; local, defensive and non-ideological in nature. Aimed at re-establishing local equilibrium or returning to previous political and social arrangements. Tier 2: Neo-Taliban - a classical insurgency that is national and strategic in scope and ideological in nature; it fights to seize control of the state and introduce an ideological political system. The Neo-Taliban has a political identity, a cause, and a safe haven.

[42]Bernard *et al*., *Afghanistan: State and Society…*, 58; Ali J. Jalali, "Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum," *Parameters* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 12; and Smith, *Canada in Afghanistan.…*, 15.

[43]Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov…*, 8.

[44]Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 368. Rashid based these tiers upon a joint US/NATO/Afghan intelligence report from June 2007. ISAF has used the tiering system since late 2006, when the author was an infantry company commander with the First Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group in Kandahar Province.

		Tactics include political mobilization, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism. Tier 3: al Qaeda-affiliated – transnational, terrorist-centric, and ideological. Against the US-backed government and its international supporters.
Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.	4	Tier 1: Hardcore extremist leaders linked to al Qaeda. Tier 2: Fighters recruited in Pakistan. Tier 3: Unemployed local youth. Tier 4: Disaffected tribes.

Table 3.2, Tiers of the neo-Taliban movement.

Source: see footnote.[45]

The main point of the table is to illustrate that the Taliban Movement has evolved to include a number of factions with widely divergent goals and opinions as to how those goals can be achieved. In certain regions, they have also made some dramatic changes to their previous policies on television, music, kites, and the shaving of beards.[46]

It has been argued that the Taliban has dissolved into traditional Afghan-style guerrilla warfare, ". . . wherein a lack of a strong central command structure makes it difficult for NATO to identify combatants and groups."[47] While that is a negative development for ISAF and Afghan forces, it could be construed as a positive sign overall: *The Economist* noted that

> . . . historically, the Taliban's strengths were their Islamic credentials, their reputation for imposing law and order and their opposition to tribal factionalism.

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[45]Information from Hodes and Sedra, *The Search for Security…*, 25; Tarzi, "The Neo-Taliban," in *The Taliban and the Crisis…*, ed. Crews and Tarzi, 274-310; Jalali, "Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum," 13; and Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 367-368.

[46] "Talking to the Taliban," *The Economist*, 41; and Sayed Salahuddin, "Taliban calls for peace with Afghans," *National Post*, 26 February 2009; available from http://www.nationalpost.com/story-printer.html?id=1331330; Internet; accessed 26 February 2009. The article in *The Economist* referred specifically to areas of Helmand Province which the Taliban claim to control.

[47]Smith, *Canada in Afghanistan…*, 16.

> If those three weaken, it is harder to distinguish them from the myriad other tribal militias that have long plagued Afghanistan.[48]

If this assessment is correct, it may minimize the Taliban's ability to gain enough popular support to see the insurgency through to a successful conclusion.

The Pashtun question

It is questionable if the Taliban have the ability to expand their influence beyond the Pashtun populations of Afghanistan and Pakistan, or if they are simply a ". . . ethno-nationalist phenomenon, without popular grassroots appeal beyond its core support in sections of the Pashtun community."[49] Pashtuns have seen their culture change significantly over the last three decades, to the point where there has been a ". . . reformulation of what it means to be a Pashtun: Pashtun nationalism has been replaced by religious nationalism and has taken the form of political Islam."[50]

However, there is some question as to how many Pashtuns truly support the Taliban and their extremist Islamic ideology, or whether they see the Taliban as ". . . a vehicle for their own nationalism and political dominance within Afghanistan."[51] Samina Ahmed of the International Crisis Group notes that

> . . . while the Taliban were Pashtuns, all Pashtuns were not Talibs . . . Then, as now, the acceptance of the Taliban's political and military dominance in Afghanistan's Pashtun belt was based far less on willing acceptance than on fear of retribution or a pragmatic willingness to support the winning side.[52]

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[48]"Talking to the Taliban," *The Economist*, 41.

[49] International Crisis Group, "Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?" *Asia Report* no. 158 (24 July 2008): i.

[50]Shuja Nawaz, *FATA – A Most Dangerous Place.* (Washington: CSIS Press, January 2009), 27; available from http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/081218_nawaz_fata_web.pdf; Internet; accessed 5 February 2009.

[51]Smith, *Canada in Afghanistan…*, 13.

[52]Bernard *et al*., *Afghanistan: State and Society…*, 57.

The Taliban have been able to maintain a strategic approach despite a diverse set of actors who are conducting decentralized actions throughout Afghanistan. They have also benefited from significant outside assistance, as will be shown in the following paragraphs.

Role of Outside Actors

Pakistan

> "The Taliban belong to neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan, but are a lumpen population, the product of refugee camps, militarized madrassas, and the lack of opportunities in the borderland of Pakistan and Afghanistan. They have neither been true citizens of either country nor experienced traditional Pashtun tribal society. The longer the war goes on, the more deeply rooted and widespread the Taliban and their transnational milieu will become."[53]

In the weeks following the events of 9/11, Pakistan found itself facing enormous demands from the U.S. Pressured for a quick commitment, the rushed agreement between the two countries ". . . changed Pakistan's behaviour but not its interests."[54] Rashid argues that

> . . . Musharraf was not about to discourage or arrest these Taliban fighters who had been nurtured for two decades by the military. For Pakistan they still represented the future of Afghanistan, and they had to be hidden away until their time came.[55]

A large number of fighters and commanders from the Taliban and al Qaeda fled south into the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) of Pakistan and began to establish themselves in various locations throughout the country. The majority of the Taliban's leadership moved to Quetta, where it is believed that Mullah Omar conducts the *shura* for

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[53]Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 401.

[54]Rubin, "Saving Afghanistan," 70.

[55]Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 240.

his inner circle. In Pakistan, the Taliban were able to develop their strategy, conduct recruiting amongst the numerous madrassas and disaffected Pashtun youth, contact international supporters, raise money, and earn a respite from combat in Afghanistan.[56] There is considerable evidence to indicate ISI compliance and assistance to the Taliban during this period.[57]

The importance of the Pakistani sanctuary to the insurgency is hard to overstate. The Taliban have a virtual free reign in FATA, an area that ". . . has never been under the explicit control of anyone but the Pashtun tribes that dominate the area."[58] The refugee camps along the border area account for over 40 percent of the Afghan population living in Pakistan, providing the Taliban a ready pool of recruits.[59] The Taliban influence in Pakistan has grown to the point where there is a separate but allied Taliban movement, known as the *Tehreek-e Taliban-e-Pakistan* (TTP), led by Baitullah Mehsud in the tribal area of South Waziristan.[60]

In addition to the traditional argument of strategic depth, it is alleged that Pakistan's support for the Taliban also seeks to pressure the Afghan government for a resolution of the border issue, and send a message to the world that ". . . no settlement of

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[56]Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 30-32.

[57]As detailed in Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 30-32, and Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 222-223. This support ranged from mid and low-level ISI officers tipping off the Taliban about the movement of Afghan and coalition forces, to reports of the ISI running Taliban recruiting camps north of Quetta and arranging for money and arms to be supplied by private sponsors from Arab states.

[58]Johnson, "On the Edge…", 110.

[59]*Ibid.*, 112.

[60]Pashtu for Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan. Nawaz, *FATA – A Most…*, 7.

the Afghan problem can be obtained without Islamabad's interests being taken into account."[61]

Other Actors

In a region where ". . . alliances shift like a kaleidoscope," there are numerous other actors who have influenced the resurgence of the Taliban, either directly or by attempting to limit the effectiveness of the Afghan government and the international community.[62] One such example is Iran. Although Iran nearly came into direct conflict with the Taliban in 1998 and naturally opposes the Taliban's anti-Shi'a views, it has been suggested that Iran takes a pragmatic view of the insurgency and sees it as a buffer between the American influence on the Karzai administration and their own government.[63] Barnett Rubin believes that Iran's strategy is to "bog down" the U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan, damaging America's domestic credibility and at the same time avoiding the spread of liberal ideologies to Iran.[64]

Two other significant outside actors that must be recognized are transnational entities: al Qaeda and the global drug trade. Although the whereabouts of bin Laden are unknown, it is widely assumed that he has continued to operate in the mountainous

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[61]Frederic Grare, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era," *Carnegie Papers* no. 72 (October 2006): 8; available from www.carnegieendowment.org/files/cp72_grare_final.pdf; Internet; accessed 1 February 2009. Grare also suggests that Pakistan is very concerned about its position once the international community leaves Afghanistan, which Pakistan firmly believes will happen in a way similar to the early 1990s exodus following the Soviet Union's withdrawal.

[62]Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004), 210.

[63]*Ibid.*, 168. Iran seriously considered entering into direct conflict with the Taliban after the Taliban killed nine Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif.

[64]Bernard et al, *Afghanistan: State and Society…*, 16. Recently, Iran has shown signs of being interested in taking a larger role in Afghanistan and possibly cooperating with the U.S. and other Western nations. The heroin coming out of Afghanistan has had a major impact on Iran and caused a serious drug problem amongst their youth. However, they still strongly oppose the presence of Western soldiers and have voiced their displeasure with the planned U.S. surge.

regions along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and that he maintains contact with the Taliban leadership in Quetta. Al Qaeda has a vested interest in supporting the Taliban as part of its global *jihad*. Although a return to Islamic rule in Afghanistan would be the ideal outcome for al Qaeda, attempting to keep the U.S. and its Western allies in a quagmire in the region also serves the terrorist organizations' needs.

In 2007, Afghanistan accounted for over 80 percent of the world's heroin production.[65] The drug trade has profited greatly from the insurgency: once the Taliban fell from power, the lingering insecurity and lack of government control over the main drug-producing regions set the conditions for a dramatic rise in poppy production.[66] The Taliban have entered into a marriage of convenience with the drug lords, and there is no unified international solution for dealing with the Afghan economy's dependence on the opium trade.

"RESURGENT INSURGENCY"

The Taliban's resurgence has been due to a combination of many factors. First, the Bonn Agreement excluded the Taliban while including a large number of equally unsavoury actors, many of whom found themselves in positions of power in Afghanistan's new administration. Second, the international community has maintained an uneven level of political, military and economic assistance to Afghanistan, hampering the efforts of an Afghan government already handicapped by corruption and warlords. Finally, the Taliban have displayed an ability to shrewdly execute an insurgency by adapting their ideology and opening the door to outside support. The ICOS Group has

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[65]The highest figure cited is 95 percent, by Hodes and Sedra, *The Search for Security…*, 35. This is a somewhat disputed figure, as the International Crisis Group places the 2007 figure at 82 percent in their report "Afghanistan: New U.S. Administration…," 3.

[66]Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 14.

noted that ". . . of the four doors leading out of Kabul, three are now compromised by Taliban activity."[67] The next chapter will attempt to deal with ways to avoid the fourth door being shut by examining the precedents and arguments for and against negotiating with the Taliban.

[67]International Council on Security and Development, *Struggle for Kabul: The Taliban Advance* (London: ICOS, December 2008), 5; available from http://www.icosgroup.net/documents/Struggle_for_Kabul_ICOS.pdf; Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROS AND CONS OF NEGOTIATING

INTRODUCTION

Current events are rapidly accelerating international dialogue on the possibility of negotiations with the Taliban. Since taking office, President Obama has consistently mentioned reconciliation when discussing the future of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. In February, Pakistan made international headlines when a deal was agreed upon between Taliban-affiliated militants and the government in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) to institute Sharia law in the Swat Valley. As a result of these two recent developments, nary a day goes by where the topic of negotiating with the Taliban is not near the top of major international news stories.

This chapter will analyze the question of whether negotiations with the Taliban are a realistic option. It will begin by examining the history of attempts at negotiation or reconciliation between the Afghan government and the Taliban since 2001. It will then focus specifically on the latest manoeuvring and current position regarding negotiations of the Afghan government, the Taliban, the U.S., and other key international players. It will also try to assess the opinions of an important group that is often neglected in the ongoing debate: the people of Afghanistan.

The next section of the chapter will deal with the main arguments for and against negotiating with the Taliban. On the arguments for negotiations, the focus will be on the requirement for a political solution to accompany the military counter-insurgency strategy, the debate as to whether Afghanistan can sustain a strong central government, and the belief that negotiations can target the perceived lack of cohesion within the Taliban. The arguments against negotiations will deal with the deleterious effects that they could have on the legitimacy and future of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; the

resolve of the Taliban; and the belief that negotiations cannot occur until the Afghan government and the international community have established themselves in a position of sufficient strength for the Taliban to conclude that the objective of taking over the country by force is not achievable and that a negotiated settlement of the conflict, which would give them a voice in the country‘s future, may be the limit of what is possible.

The chapter will conclude by examining some international examples of negotiating with insurgents. The history of Pakistan’s various deals with Islamic militants since 2004 will be looked at in some detail, while experiences in Iraq and Northern Ireland will also be examined to determine if any lessons have been learned in those countries that could apply to Afghanistan.

ATTEMPTS AT NEGOTIATION AND RECONCILIATION

Early Attempts (2001-2003)

There was early intent and interest in some type of reconciliation with the Taliban in the period immediately following their defeat. However, the victorious Northern Alliance had little interest in allowing the inclusion of the Taliban in any form in the new Afghan administration, and international opinion generally considered the Taliban to be irreconcilable extremists in the same vein as al Qaeda.

Upon being named the head of the interim administration, Hamid Karzai intended to offer amnesty and the chance for reconciliation to all members of the Taliban, including Mullah Omar, if they agreed to disarm and support the process to build a new Afghan government. However, Karzai was pressured by the U.S. to omit Mullah Omar and other key leaders; as a result, Karzai’s offer in early 2002 was made to all Taliban

except for 142 senior commanders.[1] Both Karzai and Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005, maintained the belief that there was a core of moderate Taliban with whom reconciliation and inclusion in the government was possible.[2] Despite this optimism, there was little progress in trying to bring former Taliban into the government. In April 2003, Karzai announced a formal series of amnesties that were aimed at integrating Taliban fighters into the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, providing that they surrender their weapons and pledge loyalty to the new Afghan state.[3]

The Attempts Continue (2004-2007)

Attempts at reconciliation continued in 2004 and 2005, but the fact that it was widely assumed that the Taliban were incapable of anything beyond staging small-scale local attacks limited the effort that the Afghan government put into their overtures. In the run-up to the 2004 Afghan presidential election, Karzai appealed to the Taliban to take part in the democratic process; his request was viewed as having been at least partially successful, as the expected increase in attacks prior to the election never materialized.[4]

In March 2005 the Afghan government created the Program for Strengthening Peace and Reconciliation (PTS). Given the lack of success in reconciling with Taliban commanders, the PTS aimed to bypass Taliban leadership and appeal directly to the rank and file fighters. The PTS experienced a slow start, only being implemented nationally

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[1]Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 206.

[2]Robert Crews, "Moderate Taliban?" in *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, ed. Crews and Amin Tarzi, 274-310 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 238.

[3]*Ibid.*, 239.

[4]*Ibid.*, 239.

toward the end of 2005. It also suffered from an initial lack of credibility: until the late summer of 2006, the programme was administered by junior officials in the vital province of Kandahar.[5] Although the Afghan government claims that over 5000 Taliban have renounced violence and joined the political process, there has been a dearth of commanders co-opted into the PTS.[6]

Meanwhile, the increase in the insurgency's intensity and violence in 2006 began to encourage calls for negotiations with the Taliban. In Canada, New Democratic Party Leader Jack Layton earned the derisive nickname of "Taliban Jack" for suggesting peace talks with the Taliban during a period of mounting Canadian casualties in September 2006. Bill Frist, the Republican Senate Majority Leader at the time, received a considerable amount of attention after returning from a visit to Afghanistan in October 2006 and stating that the war could never be won militarily; he urged that the U.S. support efforts for the "people who call themselves Taliban" to be brought into the Afghan government via negotiations.[7]

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[5]Information culled from Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and …*, 207-209; and International Crisis Group, "Countering Afghanistan's Insurgency: No Quick Fixes," *Asia Report* no. 123 (2 November 2006), 20. Once Haji Agha Lalai, a respected tribal elder from the Panjwayi district, was appointed to head the PTS in Kandahar Province in September 2006, the number of Taliban who accepted the terms of the government's proposal rose by ten percent. The conditions for amnesty under the PTS are accepting the Afghan Constitution, denouncing violence, and turning in weapons.

[6]Figure of 5000 Taliban comes from Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (updated 2 September 2008), 26; available from http://italy.usembassy .gov.pdf/other/RL30588.pdf; Internet; accessed 21 January 2009. Abdul Waheed Baghrani, a powerful commander in northern Helmand Province, is considered to be the highest ranking Taliban commander to have accepted the government's offer of amnesty. Baghrani was profiled in Hafeez Malik, *US Relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Imperial Dimension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 234. Baghrani was also featured in numerous American newspapers and magazines following his agreement to pledge his support to Karzai's government, likely in the hope that it would convince others to follow suit and provide a success story. Baghrani justified his decision by saying that "We have an Islamic country and Sharia law, and we should accept the rule of the (Karzai) government."

As the resurgent Taliban began to attract more international attention in 2007, President Karzai continued his efforts at encouraging reconciliation. In March 2007, he signed the National Stability and Reconstruction bill, an amnesty plan that exempted combatants dating back to the battle against Soviet occupation from prosecution for their actions.[8] In September 2007, Karzai publicly offered to meet with Mullah Omar. Through a spokesman, the reclusive Taliban leader refused to consider such a meeting until three conditions were met: the departure of all foreign soldiers from Afghanistan, the adoption of a new Islamic constitution, and the imposition of full Islamic law.[9] To date, these conditions remain the Taliban's publicly stated prerequisites for negotiations to occur.

In 2007, mounting Afghan and coalition casualties prompted more serious discussion of negotiations. In September 2007 British Minister of Defence Des Browne suggested that negotiations were required, saying that ". . . the Taliban will need to be involved in the peace process, because they are not going away any more than I suspect Hamas are going away from Palestine."[10] By the end of 2007, there was considerable international consensus that negotiations were likely going to be necessary, although the question of ". . . who talked to them and about what was a problematic issue."[11]

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[7]Associated Press, "Frist: Taliban Should Be Part of Afghan Government," *Fox News*, 3 October 2006; available from http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,217198,00.html; Internet; accessed 16 January 2009.

[8]Crews, "Moderate Taliban?" in *The Taliban and the Crisis…*, eds. Crews and Tarzi, 240.

[9]Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 26.

[10]International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: the Need for International Resolve," *Asia Report* no. 145 (6 February 2008): 16.

The Musa Qala Ceasefire

As international debate regarding negotiations grew, British forces in Helmand Province conducted a local experiment. A ceasefire in the Musa Qala district was suggested by tribal elders and negotiated by Helmand's governor at the time, Mohammed Daud. The agreement, which took effect on 12 September 2006, was based on a plan that called on Taliban fighters to leave the area and allow reconstruction projects to progress and schools to reopen.[12] The deal was supported by UNAMA and Governor Daud, but did not receive the approval of the Afghan government. Karzai expressed doubt regarding the prospects of success, while his Foreign Affairs Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta openly voiced his opposition.[13] The deal collapsed when the Taliban captured the town of Musa Qala in February 2007, expelling the local police and raising their own flag at the district centre.

The deal was roundly condemned by the U.S., and any further local truces have been strongly discouraged by ISAF. Although the district experienced a five month respite from open fighting between the British soldiers and insurgents, it has been suggested that the Taliban took advantage of the vacuum that was created to augment their attacks in other areas of the province.[14]

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[11]Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Michael Schoiswohl, "Playing with Fire? The International Community's Democratization Experiment in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 2 (April 2008): 261.

[12]Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 259.

[13]Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop…*, 211-212.

[14]Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, *The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan* (London: Routledge, 2007), 46.

The Musa Qala ceasefire raised questions about the reliability of local truces and reinforced the requirement for the Afghan government to be involved in any formal negotiations with the Taliban. To date, there have not been any further ceasefires negotiated in Afghanistan.

Recent Developments (2008-2009)

The past six months has seen a flurry of activity regarding the question of negotiations with the Taliban. With progress occurring on an almost daily basis, this section will seek to discuss some of the more significant developments.

In September 2008 Karzai announced that he had sought the support of Saudi Arabia to engage in talks with Mullah Omar. Saudi-mediated talks were held between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Mecca in late September, although it is unclear who exactly represented the Taliban. While the U.S. publicly denounced the talks at the time, analysts believe that Karzai is unlikely to have initiated ". . . such a bold effort on an issue as politically sensitive as engaging the Taliban in peace talks without the tacit consent and approval of Washington and its allies in the region."[15] Topics that were discussed reportedly included the possibility of soldiers from Western nations being replaced by forces from Islamic countries and a power-sharing arrangement in the government.[16]

One difficulty in assessing the likelihood of successful negotiations is the lack of open communication by the Taliban. The Taliban's official media response to the reports

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[15]Chris Zambelis, "Going to 'Plan B': Negotiations with Taliban May Shape a New Afghanistan," *Terrorism Monitor* 6, no. 22 (25 November 2008): 1-2. The talks coincided with a summit between Karzai, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Saudi King Abdullah.

[16]Reuters, "Taliban's Omar rejects report of Peace Formula," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 23 December 2008; available from http://www.rferl.org/content/Talibans_Omar_Rejects_Reports_Of_Peace_Formula/1362664.html; Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

of the meeting was typical of their obfuscation. On behalf of Mullah Omar, the following statement was released:

> The fact is that the Islamic Emirates has neither held any negotiations in Saudi Arabia or in the United Arab Emirates and neither anywhere else . . . I neither have sent any letter addressed to Saudi . . . King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, or to the [Afghan government] and neither have [I] received any message from them.[17]

Two months later, Karzai publicly offered Mullah Omar safe passage to Kabul in order to allow him to attend peace talks. The U.S. objected due to the fact that the Taliban had not renounced violence or condemned al Qaeda; Karzai rebutted, saying that if he wanted ". . . protection for Mullah Omar, the international community has two choices, remove me or leave if they disagree."[18] The Taliban responded that they had no need for the offer of safety and reiterated their stance that negotiations would not take place until foreign soldiers had departed Afghanistan.[19]

On the heels of a spate of recent international conferences, talks of negotiations have sprung up again.[20] The increase in international dialogue on the issue has prompted suggestions that the Taliban are concerned about the renewed focus on Afghanistan and may be willing to retreat from their insistence on forming the Afghan government.[21]

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[17]*Ibid.*

[18]Liam Stock, "Karzai's bid for negotiations with Taliban roundly rejected," *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 November 2008; available from http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/1118/p99s01-duts.html; Internet; accessed 28 January 2009.

[19]*Ibid.* In a show of bravado, they also threatened a strike against Paris!

[20]The end of March and beginning of April 2009 featured three significant international meetings: the 31 March UN International Conference on Afghanistan in The Hague, the 3-5 April NATO Summit in Strasbourg, France, and the meeting of G-20 leaders in London, England on 4 April. At the conference in The Hague, Hillary Clinton suggested that those Taliban who gave up "extremism" would be granted an "honourable form of reconciliation." Kim Sengupta and Jerome Starkey, "Taliban in policy shift on beards and burqas," *The Independent*, 2 April 2009; available from http://license.icopyright.net/user/viewFreeUse.act?fuid=MzEwNDc0MA%3D%3D; Internet; accessed 3 April 2009.

The Afghan government's attempts at negotiations have not focused solely on the Taliban. Jalaluddin Haqqani has reportedly entered into preliminary negotiations with the government. Haqqani is a high-ranking insurgent commander who operates out of North Waziristan, maintains close ties with al Qaeda, and is believed to be responsible for orchestrating the Taliban's campaign in Kabul as well as in the eastern provinces along the border with Pakistan. His network, though affiliated with the Taliban, is often considered to be a separate entity from Mullah Omar's movement. Overtures to insurgent groups other than the Taliban is not without precedence: in July 2007 Gulbuddin Hikmetyar, leader of the Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG), expressed his willingness to discuss a cease-fire with the Afghan government, although no action was taken and in 2008 he issued statements indicating that he intended to keep fighting against the government.[22] Whether or not such talks will result in any agreements, the mere fact that they are taking place indicates the government's willingness to negotiate and perhaps acknowledgement by insurgents that they may have to explore avenues other than violence in order to achieve their aims.

Positions on Negotiations

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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[21]*Ibid*. The article quotes the former Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salaam Zaeef, who claims that he participated in September's peace talks in Mecca. Zaeef claims that the Taliban would agree to drop their demand of returning to power if religious scholars and technocrats who meet their approval participated in a *loya jirga*. The concept of a *loya jirga* between the Taliban and the government will be discussed extensively in Chapter 5.

[22]Information on negotiations with Haqqani from Anand Gopal, "Key Afghan insurgents open door to talks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 March 2009; available from http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0319/p01s01-wosc.html; Internet; accessed 19 March 2009. Information on negotiations with Hikmetyar from Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance…*, 23.

The position of the Afghan government remains much the same as it has been over the last seven years: reconciliation is possible if violence is renounced and the Taliban agree to work within the construct of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Karzai has invited the Taliban to form a political entity, stating ". . . there is a constitution; there is a way of life. Let them come and participate [in elections] and win."[23] What has changed over recent months is the willingness of the international community, particularly the U.S., to seriously consider negotiations.

Karzai may increase the pace of negotiations in order to have tangible signs of progress in place for August's presidential election. There has been some question regarding the timing of Karzai's renewed push for negotiations: a recent *Washington Times* editorial noted that his primary concern at the moment is re-election and that many see the ". . . outreach to the Taliban as a means of securing votes in the areas under their control."[24]

The Taliban

Blustery rhetoric aside, it would seem that the Taliban are not completely opposed to negotiations. In February Mullah Mutassim, a former Taliban minister of finance and a member of their political council, stated that the Taliban are willing to

> . . . take an Afghan strategy that is shared and large-scale, in consultation with all the Afghan groups, to reach positive and fruitful results . . . [the United States] has to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan as soon as possible, because the real starter of crises and complication of matters is the presence of foreign forces in the

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[23]Senlis Council, *Peace in Afghanistan – Made in Canada* (Ottawa: Senlis Council, September 2007), 25; available from http://www.icosgroup.net/documents/Peace_Afghanistan.pdf; Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

[24]Editorial, "Talking with the Moderate Taliban," *The Washington Times*, 18 March 2009; available from http://washingtontimes.com/news/2009/mar/18/talking-with-the-moderate-taliban/; Internet; accessed 18 March 2009.

> country . . . If these forces leave, the problem will be over, the question will be finished, and peace will prevail.[25]

However, he reiterated that the Taliban were not willing to share power in the government, pointing out that the ". . . Islamic Emirate demands to rule the country so as to establish an . . . Islamic system in it, not in order to occupy high positions in the agent government."[26]

There are those who believe that this is the public front that the Taliban maintain in order to keep their front-line fighters motivated, while negotiations are conducted privately.[27] Anthony Cordesman suggests that the Taliban's actual goal is to force the Afghan government into either making them part of the administration or ceding them control of some territory, likely along the border with Pakistan.[28] Barnett Rubin believes that there are signs that the Taliban are ". . . preparing to drop their maximalist demands and give guarantees against the reestablishment of al Qaeda bases, [so that] the Afghan government could discuss their entry into the political system."[29]

The United States

The election of Barack Obama signalled a seismic shift in the U.S. tone regarding negotiations. One of Obama's first acts as President was to appoint the well-respected Richard Holbrooke as his special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, illustrating the

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[25]Sayeed Salahuddin, "Taliban calls for peace with Afghans," *National Post*, 26 February 2009; available from http://nationalpost.com/story-printer.html?id=1331330; Internet; accessed 26 February 2009.

[26]*Ibid*.

[27]Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*…, 135.

[28]Anthony H. Cordesman, "Winning the War in Afghanistan: The Realities of 2009," *CSIS Reports* (9 October 2008); available from www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,5062/type,1/; Internet; accessed 16 February 2009.

[29]Barnett Rubin, "Saving Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (January/February 2007): 73.

President's assertion that at ". . . the heart of a new Afghanistan policy is going to be a smarter Pakistan policy."[30] Holbrooke has been very busy during his first few months on the job, visiting the region, meeting its key players, and leading the review of U.S. policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

General David Petraeus has also taken a central role in discussing the option of negotiating with the Taliban. The success of his counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq gives him the authority to be a credible spokesman for the idea of negotiations. Petraeus's language, which discusses the need to identify and separate "irreconcilables" from "reconcilables", has been adopted by many a Western leader, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper and U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden.[31] Obama has specifically mentioned Petraeus's experiences in Iraq while discussing negotiations with the Taliban.[32]

Obama's planned surge has been viewed as an effort to entice the Taliban into negotiations – an ". . . attempt to whack the Taliban round the head because they will not negotiate unless they are hurting."[33] It is clear that the U.S. is seriously considering negotiations, and that it is willing to do what is necessary to ensure that the Afghan government can approach those negotiations from a position of strength.

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[30]Transcript, "Obama's Interview aboard Air Force One," *The New York Times*, 8 March 2009; available from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/08/us/politics/08obama-text/html?page wanted=all; Internet; accessed 19 March 2009.

[31]General David Petraeus, "The Future of the Alliance and the Mission in Afghanistan," *Small Wars Journal* (8 February 2009); available from http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2009/02/the-future-of-the-alliance-and/; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009.

[32]Transcript, "Obama's Interview aboard…"

[33]Rory Stewart, "What worked in Iraq won't help Afghanistan," *The Times*, 17 March 2009; available from http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article5920064.ece; Internet; accessed 18 March 2009.

Other key international players

With the Afghan and U.S. governments seemingly in agreement that some type of negotiated settlement with the Taliban is inevitable, other key players in the region are voicing their opinions. Pakistan has welcomed the possibility of negotiations; during Holbrooke's February visit to Pakistan, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told him that the surge would only work if accompanied by political engagement of moderate Taliban, and urged the U.S. to ". . . reach out to reconcilable factions among the Taliban insurgents as an essential move towards bringing peace to the region."[34] Given Pakistan's recent problems in FATA and the NWFP, they may welcome a renewed American interest in the region and the accompanying efforts at establishing dialogue with the Taliban.

Afghanistan's proximity to Russia's former Soviet Central Asian states means that Moscow remains very interested in the conflict's eventual outcome. Ruslan Aushev, who commanded Soviet forces in Afghanistan during the mid-1980s, said that the U.S. was right to plan on sending more troops, but that it also needed to find a political solution. Aushev admitted that the Soviets ". . .made a political mistake and that political mistake led to military mistakes. . .the Taliban are very strong and influential…they need to be engaged if their ideas are going to be defeated."[35] Although neither President Dmitry Medvedev nor Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have publicly commented on the prospect of negotiations, they have a vested interest in the end result.

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[34]Johnathan Manthorpe, "U.S. urged to reach out to moderate Taliban factions," *The Vancouver Sun*, 11 February 2009; available from http://www.vancouversun.com/news/urged+reach+moderate+Taliban+factions/1275914/story.html; Internet; accessed 12 February 2009.

[35]Luke Baker, "Time to talk to Taliban, says former Soviet general," *The Washington Post*, 11 February 2009; available from http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE51A49T20090211?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews&rpc=22&sp=true; Internet; accessed 12 February 2009.

The other major regional powers – India, Iran and China – have had little to say about negotiations with the Taliban. India's primary concern would be the role of Pakistan in any negotiations, and what impact negotiations could have on the situation in Kashmir. Iran is likely to support the Afghan government in an attempt to maintain or increase their influence with their eastern neighbour and reduce American influence in the region. Although China shares a border of only 76 kilometres with Afghanistan, they are the most powerful nation in the region and have their own concerns with Muslim Uighur nationalists in Western China.

The UN and EU both publicly support negotiations. Kai Eide, the Norwegian diplomat who is the UN Secretary General's Special Representative (SRSG) for Afghanistan, has previous experience in negotiations, having served as the UN's special envoy to Kosovo to negotiate between the Serbs and the Albanians. The EU also sees negotiations as a way to bring a political solution to reduce the violent conflict that has embroiled many of their member nations. NATO's Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Schaffer has avoided becoming involved in the debate, stating that ". . . the last thing NATO or NATO partners should do is involve itself in reconciliation."[36] NATO spokesman James Appathurai explained that

> . . . NATO and NATO forces do not engage in the reconciliation process, or in any kind of talks on reconciliation. That is for the Afghan government to decide and lead . . . NATO has always believed that for a solution there must be a political element.[37]

The people of Afghanistan

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[36]From a 19 February press conference with the Secretary-General, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_51362.htm; Internet; accessed 4 April 2009.

[37]From a 19 February Press Conference with Appathurai, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_51359.htm; Internet; accessed 4 April 2009.

Accurately determining Afghan public opinion is a difficult process. However, there are a few polls that have been conducted over the past several years which can be used to gage the thoughts of Afghans on the current government, the Taliban, and the prospect of negotiations.

ABC News, BBC and ARD News of Germany have jointly commissioned four polls since late 2005. Overall, there is no doubt that the level of confidence in the Karzai government has fallen: from a high of 83 percent in 2005, Karzai has fallen to 52 percent. However, only four percent say that they want the Taliban back in power, with 90 percent saying that they still oppose the Taliban.

On the issue of negotiations, 64 percent support negotiations, up from 60 percent one year earlier. When it comes to the conditions for negotiations, 71 percent say that the government should negotiate only if the Taliban stop fighting, as opposed to only 29 percent supporting negotiations while fighting continues. Finally, there is a division of opinion over the most likely outcome of the war: 33 percent believe that the government will win, while another 33 percent believe that the government and the Taliban will negotiate.[38]

The data suggests that while Afghans are tiring of the lack of progress, they are by no means anxious for a return to the days of Taliban rule. There is recognition that

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[38]All statistics taken from the ABC/BBC/ARD News poll, "Afghanistan – Where Things Stand," available from http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1083a1Afghanistan2009.pdf; Internet; accessed 19 March 2009. The numbers in favour of negotiation are very close to an Environics poll conducted on 19 Oct 2007, which had 36 percent strongly supporting and 38 percent somewhat supporting negotiations, compared to only a total of 18 percent opposing negotiations. The Environics poll also asked about the possibility of a coalition government with the Taliban: 54 percent supported the notion, while 33 percent opposed. Environics poll available at http://erg.environics.net/media_room /default.asp?aID=653; Internet; accessed 19 March 2009.

negotiations are likely to occur, but Afghans have definite opinions as to under what conditions these negotiations should occur.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST

Arguments For

Writing on the ongoing negotiations between the Spanish government and the Basque terrorist group ETA, Robert Clark noted that ". . . negotiation may be the best solution to insurgency, not because it is such a good option, but simply because all the others are so bad."[39] The arguments for negotiations with the Taliban reflect this statement: negotiating may not be the ideal solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, but it may be the best solution available. Three key arguments support this position.

Argument 1: Complimentary to COIN Strategy

Over the past few years, COIN (short for counter-insurgency operations) has become a widely used acronym amongst the mainstream media when discussing the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The U.S. recently released an governmental interagency guide to COIN, a sign that there is an increasing understanding that the missions that Americans are conducting today require detailed coordination of political and military strategy.[40] These are not new lessons: it has been 45 years since David Galula wrote that the solution to defeating an insurgency required the ". . . primacy of the political over the military power . . ." and emphasized that, in COIN, ". . . what is at stake is the country's political regime, and to defend it is a political affair."[41]

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[39]Robert P. Clark, "Negotiating with Insurgents: Obstacles to Peace in the Basque Country," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2, no. 4, (Winter 1990): 491.

[40]United States of America, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* (Washington: Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, January 2009), preface and 2.

That theme has been prevalent in the discussions of many who support negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, has talked of the importance of negotiations in COIN, particularly when used to drive a wedge between moderate and hard-line insurgents.[42] Former Afghan interior minister Ali Jalali called the biggest challenge in Afghanistan the ability to ". . . separate the insurgents from the terrorist-minded militants . . ." and said it that could only be accomplished by a closely integrated strategy of military and civil operations.[43]

Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, who commanded British forces in Helmand in 2008, agrees. Carleton-Smith caused considerable controversy last fall when he commented that he did not believe that the Taliban could be defeated militarily, and that ISAF's best hope was to reduce the insurgency to a manageable level that was ". . .not a strategic threat and can be managed by the Afghan Army." He argued that a political settlement was the key to ending the conflict, noting that ". . . if the Taliban were prepared to sit on the other side of the table and talk about a political settlement, then that's precisely the sort of progress that concludes insurgencies like this." [44]

Argument 2: Opportunity for Change in the Central Government

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[41]David Galula, *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 89.

[42]Stock, "Karzai's bid for negotiations…"; Mullen also noted that negotiations have ". . . happened in other insurgencies historically, and I think it will happen here, as well."

[43]Ali A. Jalali, "Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum," *Parameters* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2007-08): 12.

[44]Both quotes from Gwynne Dyer, "Unwinnable Afghanistan," 7 October 2008; available from http://www.gwynnedyer.com/articles/Gwynne%20Dyer%20article_%20%20Unwinnable%20Afghanistan.txt; Internet; accessed 26 February 2009.

There is a belief that negotiating with the Taliban and possibly co-opting them into the government will help solve the perception of Pashtun alienation within the current centralized framework. Many Pashtuns view the Karzai government as foreign and unrepresentative of their interests. The Taliban's support base is strongest in the Pashtun-dominated areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan. If the Taliban could be convinced to participate in the legitimate political process, they could represent the interests of those Pashtuns with whom they share certain fundamentalist Islamic beliefs and a desire for better law and order. The Taliban would be able to advance their own causes from within the government, a situation similar to the Northern Ireland example of Sinn Féin that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Opening up the possibility of Taliban participation in the government may also re-open the debate as to whether or not the government's centralized structure is best for the long-term stability of Afghanistan. Afghanistan does not have a history of strong central governments; traditionally, the various ethnic groups and tribes have kept ". . . the central government at arm's length and deal with it purely on the basis of what each group can get from its relationship with the government."[45] If Pashtun culture and a strong central government are inherently incompatible, then the current template is

> . . .precisely the wrong answer to apply to a highly developed culture in which "central government" is anathema and reaction to it is insurgency: the fact that the insurgency in Afghanistan has grown steadily in intensity, lethality, and amount of territory under Taliban control every year since this policy was enshrined is not coincidence.[46]

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[45]Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004), 167.

[46]Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 54-55.

There is little doubt that including the Taliban in the government would constitute a major shift in the direction of the country since 2001. President Karzai and his government would have to clearly ". . . articulate what is on offer in a public manner and demarcate the boundaries of talks."[47] However, it could be part of the ongoing evolution of the country and perhaps integrate a larger portion of the Pashtun population into the political process.

Argument 3: Targets the Lack of Taliban Cohesion

There are a large number of factions with widely varying motives that currently operate under the Taliban banner. Some have argued that it would be extremely difficult to negotiate with a movement that, as a whole, lacks a coherent agenda, has allies (such as al Qaeda and Pakistan) with divergent interests, and features a leadership that stubbornly refuses to discuss negotiations prior to the withdrawal of foreign soldiers and the imposition of Sharia law.[48] However, others have argued that the "factionalized and fractured" nature of the Taliban make them vulnerable to internal "squabbles and rivalries" that can be exploited.[49] It is likely that, as time progresses and the conflict drags on, those internal disagreements will grow in intensity and cause serious ruptures, a trend that is not uncommon in recent Afghan history.[50]

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[47]Karin von Hippel, "Confronting Two Key Challenges in Afghanistan: PCR Project Research Visit," *Center for Strategic and International Studies Commentary* (17 October 2008), 3; available from www.csis.org; Internet; accessed 1 February 2009.

[48]International Crisis Group, "Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?" *Asia Report* no. 158 (24 July 2008), 1.

[49]Zambelis, "Going to Plan B…", 3.

[50]International Crisis Group, "Countering Afghanistan's Insurgency…", 8. The civil war that followed the withdrawal of the Soviets, and the inability of the various *mujahedin* factions to agree upon a form of government that suited their interests, is but one example.

One of the major divisions that negotiations can attempt to exploit is between those who support the Taliban as a Pashtun entity, and those who support al Qaeda as part of the global *jihadi* movement. On two occasions, Taliban spokesmen have told *The New York Times* that the main Taliban movement has broken ranks with al Qaeda. Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid propose that

> . . . an agreement in principle to prohibit the use of Afghan (or Pakistani) territory for international terrorism, plus an agreement from the United States and NATO that such a guarantee could be sufficient to end their hostile military action, could constitute a framework for negotiation. Any agreement in which the Taliban or other insurgents disavowed al Qaeda would constitute a strategic defeat for al Qaeda.[51]

Frank J. Cilluffo and Joesph R. Clark argue that such an approach would require two fundamental changes on the part of the coalition of nations serving in Afghanistan: first, learning to "disaggregate" the Taliban from those who support al Qaeda to those who are focused on the re-establishment of Pashtun power in the Government of Afghanistan; and second, the willingness to politically engage the "Pashtun oriented" Taliban leaders who possess much more legitimacy and authority in their regions than does the Afghan government.[52] This strategy is not new, but determining how to successfully accomplish such a "disaggregation" remains a challenge for Afghan and international forces.

Arguments Against

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[51]Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (November/December 2008): 39.

[52]Frank J. Cilluffo and Joesph R. Clark, "Micro-Diplomacy in Afghanistan: Disaggregating and Engaging the Taliban," *Homeland Security Policy Institute Commentary Series*, no. 11 (17 February 2009): 1; available from http://www.gwumc.edu/hspi/Commentary_Brief_Afghanistan.htm; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009.

The conventional wisdom regarding negotiations with insurgent organizations is fairly straightforward:

> The argument against negotiating with terrorists is simple - democracies must never give in to violence, and terrorists must never be rewarded for using it. Negotiations give legitimacy to terrorists and their methods and undermine actors who have pursued political change through peaceful means. Talks can destabilize the negotiating governments' political systems, undercut international efforts to outlaw terrorism, and set a dangerous precedent.[53]

The literature on negotiating with insurgents is very limited, which Robert Clark explains is ". . . at least partly because most writers on the subject presume that negotiations are a bad idea."[54] This is certainly true with the opinions of much of the academic literature regarding negotiations with the Taliban. The three main arguments will be discussed below.

Argument 1 – Negative Impact on the Government of Afghanistan

As previously discussed, the Karzai government's strength is tenuous, and its ability to effectively govern the country is questionable. Still, the current construct represents the solution that was decided upon during the *loya jirgas*, and there is a strong belief that it represents the best hope for Afghanistan's continued existence.

Karl Eikenberry, the incoming U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, has stated that he considers the greatest threat to Afghanistan to be the ". . . potential irretrievable loss of legitimacy of the government of Afghanistan. . ." if the population come to view the Taliban as a stronger force than their own government.[55] It has been suggested that

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[53]Peter R. Neumann, "Negotiating With Terrorists," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 1 (January/February 2007): 128.

[54]Clark, "Negotiating with Insurgents: Obstacles…", 491.

[55]James L. Jones and Thomas R. Pickering, "Revitalizing Our Efforts Rethinking Our Strategies," *Center for the Study of the Presidency Afghanistan Study Group Report* (30 January 2008): 28; available

negotiations could cause an irreversible erosion of the government's legitimacy and credibility. This is a particular concern if negotiations are perceived as being driven by outside actors. Negotiations at the provincial, district or regional levels have been discouraged so as to reinforce and maintain the authority of the central government.

Critics worry that negotiations at this point in Afghanistan's recovery could threaten to undo many of the positive gains that have been made since 2001. Rubin and Rashid argue that

> . . .whatever weaknesses the Afghan government and security forces may have, Afghan society – which has gone through two Loya Jirgas and two elections, possesses over five million cell phones, and has access to an explosion of new media – is incomparably stronger than it was seven years ago, and the Taliban know it.[56]

Many fear that including the Taliban in the government would re-open debate on the role of women in government, Sharia law, and the Constitution itself. Even discussing the possibility raises concerns that the percentage of the population who are neutral might be convinced to support the Taliban in ". . . anticipation of future rewards and fear of retribution."[57] It is a particularly distressing prospect for women who have supported the democratic reforms of the past eight years and would likely see most, if not all, of their rights that they have gained erased by a Taliban eager to reframe Afghan society in their fundamentalist style.

There is a concern about returning to the type of civil war that engulfed Afghanistan during the early 1990s. The International Crisis Group notes that making

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from http://www.thepresidency.org/pubs/Afghan_Study_Group_final.pdf; Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

[56]Rubin and Rashid, "From Great Game to. . .", 40.

[57]International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: The Need for…", 16.

> . . . unilateral concessions to those Pashtun commanders who have benefited by the rule of the gun could fuel another round of conflict should their equally well-armed ethnic adversaries see their interests threatened or the perception be created that violence brings rewards.[58]

The proposed alternative to negotiations is devoting the necessary effort and resources into ensuring that the Afghan government is able to govern the country effectively. Due to the ongoing insurgency, a common criticism of the international effort in Afghanistan is that the focus is often solely on security, to the detriment of governance and development. Promoting governance and taking measures to ensure that the rule of law is enforced in Afghanistan are vital concepts that have not received as much international attention as the effort to combat the Taliban. This suggests that, as opposed to negotiating with the Taliban,

> . . . the international community would be better served by . . . ensuring that the Kabul government is worth fighting for and focusing on community outreach to ease local conflicts and fault lines. If counter-insurgency is to be effective, the population must not live in fear of being abandoned, but rather be confident that the counter insurgents have the means, ability, stamina and will to win.[59]

There is little doubt that corruption is systemic in Afghanistan's government, and that the enthusiasm that Karzai generated early in his tenure as President has mostly faded away. Despite these challenges, those who oppose negotiations maintain that a weak Afghan government free of Taliban influence is preferable to a stronger government that compromises some of Afghanistan's democratic principles in order to survive.

<u>Argument 2 – The Taliban are more cohesive than they appear</u>

In direct contrast to the argument that claims that divisions in the Taliban movement can be exploited comes the argument that the Taliban are, in fact, far more

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[58]International Crisis Group, "Taliban Propaganda…", 33.

[59]International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: the Need for…", 16.

cohesive than it would appear. Gilles Dorronsoro argues that many observers of Afghanistan mistakenly believe that the diversity of views and interests that exist within the Taliban will result in a split that can be achieved through political negotiations. Dorronsoro notes that although there are ". . . different strategic perspectives within the Taliban, the movement has the means to exert control over its members."[60] He maintains that the Taliban are much more organized than they are given credit for, and uses the examples of the June 2008 attack on the Sarposa prison in Kandahar and the strategy of gradually positioning forces to encircle Kabul as proof of an "impressive capacity for coordination."[61]

Although there are a number of factions within the Taliban, they seem to have little influence on the movement's overall strategy as dictated by Mullah Omar and the Quetta *shura*. A recent report discussing the direction of the Obama Administration warns that it should not

> . . . embark on a premature dialogue with the Taliban in the misguided belief that this would help stabilise the state and ensure an orderly withdrawal of foreign forces. While the Taliban are a disparate network of groups using the name as they pursue different agendas, there is an absolutist Taliban leadership fighting for power, not merely representation in the cabinet, parliament or provincial administrations. Its demand for the withdrawal of foreign troops, if met, would only return the country to civil war, ceding further ground to transnational, regional and local jihadis.[62]

In essence, this argument points out that the hypothesis that the lack of cohesion

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[60]Gilles Dorronsoro, "Focus and Exit: An Alternative Strategy for the Afghan War," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (January 2009): 5; available from http://carnegieendowment.org/files/afghan_war-strategy.pdf; Internet; accessed 16 February 2009. Dorronsoro backs up his argument by pointing out that were no notable defections of leadership even after the resounding defeat in late 2001 and early 2002.

[61]*Ibid.*, 5.

[62]International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: New U.S. Administration, New Directions", *Asia Briefing* no. 89 (13 March 2009): 6.

within the Taliban can be exploited rests on a number of assumptions that are questionable considering the history of the Movement over the past eight years.

Argument 3 – Don't Negotiate Unless from a Position of Strength

The final argument against negotiations is that none should occur until the Afghan government has established itself in a position of strength relative to the Taliban. This is precisely what many believe that Obama is attempting to achieve with the surge of U.S. forces into Afghanistan.

The logic behind the argument is clear: it has been suggested that ". . . Pashtuns do not negotiate when in a position of relative strength or when they appear to be winning, as the all-Pashtun Taliban believe they are now."[63] The Taliban have access to the same opinion polls as Western decision-makers, and are well aware that there is no guarantee that their governments have the patience or the desire to see the conflict in Afghanistan through to its conclusion. They only need to look back two decades to see an example of the international community largely turning its back on the country following the Soviet withdrawal. Arguments over withdrawal dates and mission renewals in Europe or North America can be easily exploited by the Taliban.

There is also the question of what incentive exists for the Taliban to agree to negotiations at this particular point in the conflict. As Dorronsoro asks,

> (W)hy should some Taliban *now* join a central government in Kabul that, according to most Afghans, has irredeemably failed? What is so attractive about working with Kabul when the United States, seen as the real decision maker, does not offer more than an amnesty and marginal or non-existent participation in the political process? Only when people perceive the central Afghan government as having long-term prospects will they be willing to support it.[64]

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[63]Johnson and Mason, "No Sign until…", 75.

[64]Dorronsoro, "Focus and Exit…", 7.

The Taliban have shown that they will use periods when negotiations are being conducted as an opportunity to rearm themselves or focus their efforts onto a different region of the country. Any negotiations would have to carefully consider what monitoring functions would be employed to ensure that the Taliban were living up to the conditions stipulated in an agreement.

Most important in this argument is the feeling that no negotiations should occur until the Taliban drop their conditions regarding the replacement of the current government construct with a return to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. This would require a genuine willingness on the part of the Taliban to subjugate themselves to the Afghan Constitution and a requirement that they realize that the Islamic Republic will be able to survive the eventual withdrawal of the international community.[65]

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Although no two insurgencies are exactly alike, it is possible to examine some examples where negotiations with insurgents have been pursued as a way of trying to end a conflict. The three examples that have been chosen are Pakistan, Iraq and Northern Ireland. Pakistan will be dealt with in considerable detail, as the insurgencies in Pakistan and Afghanistan are inextricably linked. The cases of Iraq and Northern Ireland will be reviewed with a view to determining what lessons learned from those two countries could be applied to Afghanistan.

Pakistan

General

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[65]*Ibid.*, 2.

The Taliban have long had a strong presence along both sides of the Pashtun-dominated Afghan-Pakistan border. In Pakistan this is particularly true in FATA and the NWFP. Within FATA, the tribal areas of North and South Waziristan have been the epicentre of Taliban activity.

Waziristan has been referred to as ". . . for all intents and purposes an independent country with an independent foreign policy."[66] In an ethnic group already noted for its conservatism and resistance to change and outside influence, Waziri Pashtuns are often regarded ". . . as the most conservative and irascible. They passionately oppose any outsider who might attempt to penetrate their land."[67]

Both the Haqqani network and Baitullah Mehsud's *Tehreek-e Taliban-e Pakistan* (TTP) operate from Waziristan: Haqqani from North Waziristan and the TTP from South Waziristan. While Haqqani's network focuses on operations in Afghanistan, Mehsud has regularly conducted operations against Pakistani government forces. Both men consider the presence of the army in their tribal area as a violation of Pashtun territory and an ". . . affront to tribal honour."[68]

Peace Agreements to Date

The first of the series of peace agreements in FATA was a verbal deal reached in April 2004 with the Taliban-affiliated commander Nek Mohammed in South Waziristan. In return for agreeing to refrain from attacking Pakistan government targets and expelling

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[66]Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 84.

[67]Malik, *US Relations with…*, 208.

[68]Shuja Nawaz, *FATA - A Most Dangerous Place*. (Washington: CSIS Press, January 2009), 26; available from http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/081218_nawaz_fata_web.pdf; Internet; accessed 5 February 2009.

foreign *mujahedin* from the territory which he controlled, Nek was to be left alone by the Pakistani army, who would largely withdraw from the area. The deal lasted a matter of weeks before Nek reneged; by the end of June he had been killed by a U.S. missile strike.

Although ultimately unsuccessful and short-lived, militants viewed the deal as reconciliation rather than a peace agreement, which ". . . means in tribal code accepting the other group as equally powerful and legitimate. By signing the deals with the militants, the army gave them legitimacy and allowed them to consolidate themselves."[69]

The second peace agreement to be signed was also in South Waziristan. In February of 2005, Baitullah Mehsud signed a deal, allegedly on behalf of Mullah Omar. The agreement was similar to the previous deal, and again contained provisions concerning the handing over of foreign fighters. The conditions were never met, and the agreement was repudiated by Mehsud shortly thereafter.[70]

The next deal came about in August of 2006 in Miranshah, North Waziristan. The North Waziristan political agent concluded the agreement with tribal elders and clerics who represented the Taliban.[71] This deal saw the imposition of the harshest conditions yet on the Pakistani government.[72] In addition to the standard agreement regarding the expulsion of foreign fighters, the Taliban agreed to cease their attacks on Pakistani forces and to stop crossing the border to conduct attacks in Afghan territory. Almost

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[69]*Ibid.,* 27.

[70]Hodes and Sedra, *The Search for…*, 21.

[71]Political agent is the term for the representative of the Pakistani government in the tribal area.

[72]The deal called for the release of all militants who had been captured during fighting in the regions; the return of confiscated material, including weapons; the restoration of tribal privileges; reparations for damages caused by the Pakistani army during fighting; and, most alarmingly, an agreement by the army to close checkpoints, cease operations in the area, and withdraw to large garrisons in towns and along important crossroads. From Johnson and Mason, "No Sign until…," 56.

immediately, the insurgents claimed that they had never made the promise to stop sheltering foreign fighters.[73] They also did little to stop the attacks into Afghanistan: in the three months following the signing of the peace agreement, the number of cross-border attacks tripled.[74] By August 2007, the ". . . policy of appeasement was beyond spin control. . ." and the deal collapsed.[75]

The latest deal is all the more troubling as it was reached in the NWFP's Swat Valley, an area that is, in theory, under the full control of the Pakistani government. Swat Valley is located in the Malakand region of the NWFP, and is in a strategically critical location as it provides a route from Afghanistan and FATA to Kashmir. The peace agreement, made on 16 February 2009 between the Taliban-linked Tehrik Nifaz-e Shariat Mohammedi[76] and the NWFP government, shares many similarities with the earlier deals in FATA. One noticeable addition, however, was the agreement to impose Sharia law in the region. The deal has been termed an

> . . . even greater capitulation to the militants than earlier deals by the military regime in FATA. . .(it could) entrench Taliban rule and al-Qaeda influence in the area; make peace more elusive; and essentially reverse the gains made by the transition to democracy.[77]

The agreement to allow the imposition of Sharia law in Swat Valley has been called the ". . . most serious blow to the country's territorial integrity since the civil war

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[73]Johnson and Mason, "No Sign until…", 56.

[74]Roland Paris, "NATO's Choice in Afghanistan: Go Big or Go Home," *Policy Options* (December 2006-January 2007): 41.

[75]Johnson and Mason, "No Sign Until. . ." 56.

[76] Pashtu for Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law

[77]International Crisis Group, "Pakistan: the Militant Jihadi Challenge," *Asia Report* no. 164 (13 March 2009): ii.

of 1971" and has been roundly condemned internationally.[78] However, there have been suggestions that the U.S. privately supports the deal, as they believe that it may result in a wedge being driven between the Swat Valley Taliban, who focused their campaign on the demand for the imposition for Sharia law, and Mehsud's al Qaeda-affiliated TTP.[79] Whether or not that theory has any merit, the agreement appears to be going the same direction as the FATA accords: less than two weeks after the ceasefire, Pakistani Taliban in Swat had kidnapped a Frontier Corps district commander, four soldiers and three government officials, attacked a military vehicle, and killed two security personnel.[80]

Opinions on the Agreements

Given the track record of the insurgents in adhering to the conditions of the peace agreements, it is not surprising that the overwhelming weight of opinion is strongly against the deals. Those who do see merit in the agreements claim that they have allowed Pakistan to clamp down on the presence of foreign fighters in FATA, thus facilitating the fight against al Qaeda.[81] It has also been argued that it is a pragmatic strategy for the government as it seeks to separate the international *jihadis* from the Taliban, and could facilitate Pakistan's eventual goal of integrating FATA into the NWFP.[82] Both of those

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[78]Patrick French, "Touting religion, grabbing land," *International Herald Tribune*, 26 March 2009; available from http://www.iht.com/articles/2009/03/17/opinion/edfrench.php; Internet; accessed 18 March 2009.

[79]Dean Nelson, Javed Siddiq, and Emil Khan, "US privately backs Pakistan's 'Sharia law for peace' deal with Taliban," *The Telegraph*, 17 February 2009; available from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/4681480/US-privately-backs-Pakistans-Sharia-law-for-peace-deal-with-Taliban.html; Internet; accessed 18 February 2009.

[80]International Crisis Group, "Pakistan: the Militant Jihadi Challenge," 2.

[81]Hodes and Sedra, *The Search for…*, 23.

arguments suffer, however, if the alarming agreement in Swat Valley means that the extremist movements in FATA are spreading virtually unchecked to the NWFP.

There is an absolute mountain of criticism that exists regarding the deals. Pakistan has been accused of allowing FATA to "…become the jihadist sanctuary that *Operation Enduring Freedom* was supposed to foreclose in Afghanistan."[83] From Afghanistan's perspective, the sanctuary that the Taliban enjoy in Pakistan has been made even safer by the peace agreements, which have had the ". . . effect of licensing the insurgents to step up their murderous activities inside Afghanistan."[84]

Summary

The peace agreements that have been reached in FATA and the NWFP provide a cautionary tale for Afghanistan. First, they reinforce the fact that negotiating local ceasefires is ill-advised. Any negotiations in Afghanistan should be conducted by the Afghan government. Second, the conditions that are agreed to in negotiations must be carefully considered. The Pakistani army was put into an incredibly difficult situation given the restrictions placed upon their movement and missions. Third, there must be a way to effectively monitor the terms of any peace agreement. In all of the cases mentioned insurgents simply ignored terms they did not like and used others to their advantage, mainly by taking the opportunity to increase their attacks into Afghanistan.

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[82]Thomas H. Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy: the Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2007): 118; available from http://www.silkroadstudies.org /new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May2007/Johnson.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 January 2009.

[83]Hodes and Sedra, *The Search for…*, 24.

[84]Nick B. Mills, *Karzai*: *The Failing American Intervention and the Struggle for Afghanistan* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2007): 228. Information also taken from International Crisis Group, "Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants," *Asia Report* no. 125 (11 December 2006): 20; and Hodes and Sedra, *The Search for* …, 23.

Fourth, Pakistan's international image has been severely damaged, particularly by the Swat Valley agreement. There is a perception that Pakistan is increasingly losing control not only of FATA, but also the NWFP. Finally, the situation that Pakistan finds itself in is a threat to Afghanistan as well. Instability in the border region easily migrates between the two countries, and any instability at a national level in Pakistan threatens to plunge both countries further into chaos.

Iraq

The move towards negotiations in Afghanistan and the planned surge of U.S. forces into theatre has drawn many comparisons to the situation in Iraq. With General Petraeus now directing U.S. strategy in Afghanistan as Commander CENTCOM, many are wondering if what has seemed to work in Iraq will work equally well in Afghanistan.

The first question that needs to be asked is if what happened in Iraq truly constituted negotiations with insurgents. The answer is both yes and no: yes, in that U.S. forces in Iraq were able to make an agreement with a number of Sunni Arab insurgent groups to cooperate against a mutual enemy, al Qaeda in Iraq. The insurgent groups, which now operate under the banner of the "Sons of Iraq", helped provide local policing in Sunni areas that had been amongst the most violent in both the city of Baghdad and Anbar Province. The answer could be also considered to be no, because it is the U.S. agreement with various tribal militia leaders that had previously opposed the American occupation that many see as the more important factor in reversing the tide of the war in Iraq in 2007 rather than any efforts by the Iraqi government itself.

The next question is whether or not the same strategy could work in Afghanistan. There are undisputedly some similarities between the two conflicts. Both countries have national governments with limited authority across their country and are societies that

rely heavily on traditional tribal power structures at the provincial or district level. This means that

> . . . as in Iraq, there is a need for the Americans to work with the Afghan government to engage local leaders in dialogue to identify local grievances. There is also a need to establish, at the very least, a basic political infrastructure to connect with villagers who would otherwise have no conception of belonging to the nation-state of Afghanistan.[85]

However, there are far more differences between the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan than there are similarities. General Petraeus has warned that tactics that worked in Iraq cannot easily be transported to Afghanistan: Iraq has a far richer economy, many more U.S. and indigenous forces, a unified military command structure, and no sanctuary similar to Pakistan.[86] The situation in Afghanistan is also different due to the limited number of established urban centres, meaning that the influence of tribal communities in rural areas is much greater.[87] Rory Stewart, a British diplomat and academic with experience in both Iraq and Afghanistan, recently spoke of the differences in the tribal societies between the two countries:

> The Shia-run Government in Baghdad could cut a deal with the Sunni groups because they are both relatively powerful and coherent factions backed by mass politics. Go to any southern Iraqi town and you will find a man in a buttoned-up shirt without a tie who says: "I am the head of this party" and who can mobilise thousands. Go to a town in Afghanistan and asks who is in charge and you find six or seven figures with varying sorts of power – perhaps a tribal chief, maybe the police chief or sub-district commander. They do not have mass movements behind them. When we talk about driving the Taliban to the table, we forget that these groups are more insubstantial and fragmented than we acknowledge. The Kabul Government lacks political depth or legitimacy; the Taliban is elusive.[88]

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[85]Li Hongyan, "Afghanistan: Avoiding another Iraq," *RSIS Commentaries* no. 6 (15 January 2009): 2; available from http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS0062009.pdf; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009.

[86]"Petraeus's next war," *The Economist* 389, no. 8600 (4 October 2008): 52.

[87]Hongyan, "Afghanistan: Avoiding another…", 2.

The list of arguments that state that the Iraq template could be successfully transferred to Afghanistan is fairly small. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recently urged U.S. forces to use the example of the close cooperation with local tribal militias in Anbar Province as a solution for Afghanistan.[89] This argument ignores the criticism that the U.S. has received for working with Afghan warlords and their militias ever since the fall of the Taliban, particularly during the early years of OEF. It has also been argued that the strategy could only work if the Afghan population or moderate Taliban were convinced to renounce al Qaeda due to their disgust with the terrorist organization importing non-traditional Afghan tactics such as suicide bombings and attacks targeting civilians. This would be similar to how "…increased friction over al-Qaeda in Iraq's brutal tactics, proclamation of an Islamic state and escalating assaults on ordinary citizens. . ." helped turn the Sunni tribes and "Sons of Iraq" towards working with U.S. forces.[90]

The list of arguments against importing the Iraq strategy is rather lengthy, but three key points are worth noting. First, al-Qaeda in Iraq was opposed by other insurgent groups, often at the local area level. The same situation does not exist in Afghanistan. There have been small skirmishes amongst various Taliban factions or between feuding warlords, but by and large the insurgency in Afghanistan is run by Pashtuns. Foreign fighters, including al Qaeda, do not play as significant a role in combat as they did in

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[88]Stewart, "What worked in Iraq…"

[89]Henry Kissinger, "A Strategy for Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, 26 February 2009; available from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/25/AR2009022503124.html; Internet; accessed 26 February 2009.

[90]International Crisis Group, "Iraq After the Surge I: The New Sunni Landscape," *Middle East Report* no. 74 (30 April 2008): i.

Iraq.[91] Second, as mentioned earlier, there are already plenty of warlords and militias that exist in Afghanistan, and U.S. cooperation with them has caused considerable criticism for negatively impacting the Afghan government's legitimacy. Afghanistan is already ". . . awash with weapons and armed groups. Creating unaccountable local militias – based on false analogies with Iraq – will only worsen ethnic tensions and violence."[92] Third, the deals in Iraq were made by U.S. forces, with only the passive agreement of the Iraqi government. The cautionary tales of local ceasefires and the danger of not having the Afghan government seen as the central figure behind negotiations have already been discussed in this chapter.

In summary, there are too many differences in the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the strategy that has worked in Iraq is not necessarily advisable for Afghanistan. The deals that were made with insurgents and tribes in Iraq bypassed the government, something that cannot afford to be done in Afghanistan. Finally, there is the spectre that the ". . . turn against al-Qaeda in Iraq in not necessarily the end of the story . . . short-term achievement could threaten long-term stability."[93]

Northern Ireland

It would be foolhardy to try to summarize the long and complicated history of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the various incarnations of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political wing, Sinn Féin. Instead, the aim of this section will be to provide

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[91] Dorronsoro, "Focus and Exit…", 6.

[92]International Crisis Group: "Afghanistan: New U.S. Administration…", 3.

[93]International Crisis Group, "Iraq After the Surge I…", i-ii; and Jeffrey Simpson, "Short-term success in Iraq means nothing for Afghanistan," *The Globe and Mail*, 10 March 2009; available from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20090309.wcosimp10/BNStory/specialComment/home; Internet; accessed 10 March 2009.

an example of how negotiations between the British government and the various parties in Northern Ireland eventually resulted in the IRA renouncing violence in order to support the legitimate political process.[94]

"The Troubles", or the period of conflict in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998, saw the establishment of a highly organized insurgency campaign by the IRA. Although the IRA and Sinn Féin maintained the façade that they were not officially linked, in reality the IRA conducted the armed insurgency while Sinn Féin organized the political activities of Northern Ireland's Republican movement.[95] After a series of peaks and valleys in the level of violence and several aborted attempts at peace agreements, events in 1997 and 1998 finally achieved some concrete results. The key factor in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement was arguably the IRA's acceptance of a ceasefire and, over the course of the next few years, full decommissioning of their weapon stockpiles. The IRA agreed to these measures only after Sinn Féin was allowed a seat at the peace negotiations.

Since the Good Friday Agreement, Sinn Féin has been intimately involved in the Northern Ireland Assembly and all other political attempts to resolve the ongoing question of the future of both the country and the Irish nation. Northern Ireland's Deputy

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[94]All references to the IRA and Sinn Féin actually refer to the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and the Provisional Sinn Féin that were created due to a split in the Irish Republican movement in 1969-1970. Provisional Sinn Féin quickly became the main Sinn Féin that still exists today, and due to their predominance within the armed Republican struggle the PIRA were often referred to as the IRA. In order to avoid confusion and over-complicating this section of the paper, IRA and Sinn Féin will be used.

[95]Evidence overwhelmingly supports this statement. Two notable examples: first, current Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness served in the IRA prior to focusing their efforts on the political side of the movement. Second, there is evidence of much coordination between the IRA and Sinn Fein during the 1997-1998 peace talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement. See Parts III and IV in Thomas Hennessey, *The Northern Ireland Peace Process: Ending the Troubles?* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 115-216.

First Minister is Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness, a former IRA member. His inclusion in the government

> . . . exemplifies two key and encouraging realities: first, that the method of campaign previously espoused by such figures has been judged by them not to be successful; second, that such figures have the capacity to bring with them into peaceful politics a constituency previously hostile to the state and previously supportive of anti-state violence.[96]

The possibility of a similar situation in Afghanistan – where Taliban insurgents could become members of the legitimate government – is not out of the question. Thomas H. Johnson and Richard English note that it was the eventual failure of IRA violence to achieve its goals that helped establish the basis for peace talks and a compromise deal, and suggest eventually the Taliban may come to the same realization.[97] They propose that the key challenge if this does occur is that all parties involved in the government would have to realize that, in order to achieve a lasting settlement, it would require ". . .protracted negotiation. . .that it will result in disagreeable ex-opponents being in power and pursuing what might seem unappetizing policies."[98]

The best case scenario in the long-term for Afghanistan may be for the Taliban to develop a political wing similar to Sinn Féin. Doing so would force the Taliban to significantly change their stance towards the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, but it may

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[96]Thomas H. Johnson and Richard English, "Rethinking Afghanistan: Echoes of Ulster and the IRA?" *Policy Options* (June 2008): 20.

[97]*Ibid.*, 20. Johnson and English have written two articles about the similarities between the Afghan and Northern Ireland examples. Amongst the similarities discussed: the "extraordinary power of religiously infused ethnic identity"; the "profound intersection of rival nationalisms with violence" in addition to tension between nation and state; a mix of insurgent tactics and terrorism; and the existence of international support, porous borders and sanctuary or safe haven.

[98]*Ibid.*, 20.

represent their best chance at gaining a say in Afghanistan's future without continuing a long and protracted battle against government and international forces.

As recent events have shown, violence is still being used by insurgent groups in Northern Ireland. At least two IRA splinter groups were involved in the latest round of violence, and they have indicated their displeasure with the current state of affairs in Northern Ireland. It has been nearly 90 years since the Anglo-Irish Treaty that led to the creation of the Republic of Ireland and began the cycle of violence amongst the various incarnations of the IRA. Given the fact that it has taken that long for a problem to be resolved in a developed Western state, the future prospects for peace in Afghanistan seem even more daunting.

"MOVING FROM TALK TO ACTION"

After receiving little support and mixed messages regarding reconciliation with the Taliban, the Afghan government is now finding that the support of the international community is increasingly behind a political, negotiated solution for the conflict. As discussed, there are numerous arguments both for and against such negotiations. The international examples cited in this chapter present some important lessons learned for any attempts at a negotiated settlement to end the insurgency in Afghanistan. With the foundation laid by this chapter, Chapter 5 will now attempt to lay out what could, and perhaps should be done in terms of negotiations with the Taliban.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE WAY AHEAD

INTRODUCTION

With the gradual decline of violence in Iraq and the deteriorating ability of Pakistan to secure its border area with Afghanistan, the attention of the international community seems to once again be focused on the way ahead for Afghanistan. President Obama's new Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy has opened the door to renewed optimism that the U.S. will commit the resources required to find a solution for the long-term stability of Afghanistan and, in so doing, encourage other international actors to follow suit. At last, cautious optimism is emerging about the future of Afghanistan.

This chapter will postulate a way ahead for negotiating a resolution to the Afghan conflict with the Taliban. First, it will determine the steps that are required to stabilize the situation in order to set the necessary pre-conditions for productive negotiations to commence. Second, the role of outside actors and the requirement for a regional solution will be discussed. Finally, it will conclude this thesis by proposing the conditions that are required for a sustained peace in that war torn country.

DEFINING SUCCESS

Prior to discussing the way ahead, it is important to define exactly what Afghanistan's end state after negotiations with the Taliban should be. Expectations cannot be set too low, nor should they be set artificially high. There can be no illusions that Afghanistan will suddenly blossom into a robust democracy free from the influence of religious extremists, predatory warlords or the neighbours around its periphery.

A useful starting point comes from Carl Robichaud in the *World Policy Journal*: Robichaud proposed that the goal of the Afghan government and the international community be to establish an ". . . Afghan state that can constrain the threat of violent

jihadism within its borders and that poses little threat to the international order."[1] This definition seems to largely ignore the fate of the Afghan people, focusing instead on the international impact of the instability in Afghanistan. As a result, the end state for the purpose of this paper is defined as an Afghanistan with a stable, elected government that respects the rule of law; possesses the authority and legitimacy to extend its writ across the country; fields adequate security forces to exercise sovereignty over its internationally recognized borders while maintaining law and order within Afghanistan; and, as a country, is no longer threatened with the spectre of rule by militant Islamists.

THE WAY AHEAD STEP ONE: STABILIZING THE SITUATION

As previously discussed in Chapter Three, many of Afghanistan's current problems are a result of the fact that the process of stabilizing the country following the Taliban's ouster was never actually finished. Although numerous promises were made to establish the security required to improve governance and facilitate development, the international community has largely failed Afghanistan over the past eight years. In order to regain the initiative and make negotiations with the Taliban a proposition with a realistic chance of success, there must be a renewed effort towards meeting past promises. The focus should be on meeting the pillars of the 2006 Afghanistan Compact: security; governance, the rule of law and human rights; and economic and social development.

Security

Obama's strategy for Afghanistan clearly recognizes that there must be a renewed focus on establishing the security conditions that will build the capacity of Afghan

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[1]Carl Robichaud, "Buying Time in Afghanistan," *World Policy Journal* (Summer 2007): 2; available from http://www.tcf.org/publications/internationalaffairs/RobichaudWPJ.pdf; Internet; accessed 28 January 2009.

security forces, target the "irreconcilable" Taliban, and create an environment where Afghans believe that their government will survive the international community's eventual departure. The first step towards this is a renewed focus on training Afghan security forces. Obama has announced that 4000 soldiers will deploy in the spring of 2009 with the specific mission of augmenting the U.S. training programme for Afghan security forces, and has set targets to establish an Afghan army of 134,000 and a police force of 82,000 by 2011.[2]

The focus on training Afghan forces was a major topic at the 3-4 April 2009 NATO Summit in Strasbourg, and it may prove a way to encourage ISAF-contributing countries to sustain or perhaps augment their commitments in Afghanistan. The mission of training Afghan forces is extremely dangerous given the current security climate, but it does not carry the same stigma in the eyes of the Western press and politicians as do the intensive combat missions carried out by both ISAF and OEF forces. An interesting litmus test may occur right here in Canada: if the Government is able to redefine Canada's primary mission as the training of Afghan forces as opposed to the combat role of the Canadian Battle Group, it may be able to rally sufficient public support for an extension past the planned 2011 end date of the country's military mission in Afghanistan.

However, even beyond the increasing focus on the training mission, there is still a requirement to confront hard-line Taliban and other foreign terrorist elements militarily. To that end, the international military commitment to Afghanistan is growing: by the end

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[2] From Obama's speech "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," available from http://Kabul.usembassy.gov/press_280309.html; Internet; accessed 29 March 2009.

of 2009, the number of ISAF and OEF soldiers in Afghanistan is projected to reach 90,000.[3] What will be critical, however, is how the increase in combat power is employed: with the build-up to the August 2009 presidential election already underway, coalition forces must be more cognizant than ever about the requirement to avoid, to the extent possible, collateral damage, including civilian casualties, and ensure that their forces are trained to understand the nuances of Afghan culture in order to avoid providing easy targets for the Taliban to recruit.[4]

Improving security conditions in Afghanistan will send a positive signal to the Afghan population and the international community that the initiative has been wrested from the Taliban and now rests with Afghan and ISAF forces. Local fissures that appear in the Taliban can be exploited, and those fighters who have taken up arms for reasons other than *jihad* may be convinced to quit the fight. Most importantly, it must be made clear to the Taliban that their continued adherence to insurgent terror tactics will continue to be defeated militarily and lead to a continual decline in their support from the Afghan population.

The U.S. military surge represents an opportunity to regain the initiative in the fight against the Taliban. Providing security to a population who have long lived under

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[3]Julian Barnes and Greg Miller, "Taliban leader looks to reclaim Afghanistan, U.S. says," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 March 2009; available from http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-afghanistan-strategy27-2009mar27,0,7036591.story; Internet; accessed 27 March 2009; and NATO, *Afghanistan Report 2009*, 7; available from http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2009_03/20090331_afghanistan_report_2009.pdf; Internet; accessed 1 April 2009. ISAF alone has increased from 43,000 soldiers in February 2008 to 56,000 in February 2009.

[4]In November 2008, Commander ISAF issued new direction to his subordinate commanders that contained specific instructions for minimizing the risk of civilian collateral damage and offending Afghan culture. The direction provided guidance to ISAF on the use of close air support, escalation of force procedures, house searches, reporting, and joint Afghan/ISAF investigations. From NATO, *Afghanistan Report 2009*, 9.

the threat of violence should help the Afghan government and ISAF regain some of the trust and confidence of the populace at the expense of the Taliban.

Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights

> "The most important contribution that we can now make to Afghanistan is a massive and coherent institution-building programme. Institution-building does not provide occasions for ribbon-cutting ceremonies or photo opportunities. But it is the key to enabling Afghanistan to stand on its own feet – and to any international exit strategy." [5]

The above quote from a March 2009 speech by Kai Eide, the UN Special Representative in Kabul, illustrates that the international community has recognized that there is a requirement to commit the necessary civilian resources to complement the increase in military resources for Afghanistan. There are encouraging signs that his plea is not going unheard: although the U.S. military surge has captured most of the headlines, there is also a planned "civilian surge" of American diplomats into Afghanistan that is aimed at helping to build government institutions.[6] The example of this commitment needs to be followed by an increasing number of nations. There must be a renewed emphasis on UNAMA's mandate of promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan by leading the efforts of the international community. As the military effort becomes more U.S. dominated, it will be crucial for the international community to reinforce UNAMA so that it is perceived by Afghans to be the guiding force behind strengthening their country's foundations.

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[5] *Ibid.*, 20.

[6] Gordon Lubold, "Obama overhauls US Afghan strategy," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 March 2009; available from http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0326/p02s01-usmi.html; Internet; accessed 26 March 2009. The State Department is reportedly planning on sending 14 Foreign Service Officers to Afghanistan in the coming months as part of this strategy.

The focus cannot be solely on building the capacity of the central government: the best way to encourage participation in the political process and support for the government may be to ensure that efforts are made to expand its reach to all regions of the country. In particular, regions that are viewed as either neutral or passively supporting the Taliban should be targeted in order to convince the population that the government is capable of providing for their basic needs. However, this must be carefully planned and executed in a manner that does not create a situation where these areas receive preferential treatment over those areas that are already loyal to the government.

At the same time, the Afghan government needs to continue its efforts at reconciliation with the Taliban. Given the renewed push to extend security and reinforce the government's capacity, these reconciliation efforts need to be carried out discreetly. International commitment and practical support may diminish if it is perceived that the situation is already heading towards an inevitable negotiated settlement. The focus should continue to be on reconciliation programmes which seek to bring Taliban rank and file into the legitimate political process or encouraging moderate Taliban factions to renounce the radical Islamic agenda of Mullah Omar and al Qaeda as well as the terrorist tactics that they have imported to Afghanistan.

However, attempts at establishing formal negotiations with Mullah Omar and the hard-line Taliban leadership should be held in abeyance until the military and civilian surges have had time to produce results. Informal contact should continue, but the Taliban leadership should be made aware that formal negotiations will be conducted according to the timeline and pre-conditions established by the Government of Afghanistan.

Economic and Social Development

The Afghan government and the UN need to capitalize on the renewed focus on Afghanistan by reminding the international community of the repeated promises that have been made over the past eight years. As with governance efforts, reconstruction and development aid should be targeted at areas that are neutral or that only passively support the Taliban. Projects must be planned to directly increase public confidence in the strength of the government relative to the Taliban with respect to negotiating a settlement to the conflict.

Money that is promised by international donors must actually be delivered. Frameworks for international support to Afghanistan, such as the Afghanistan Compact and the Afghan National Development Strategy, have set clear goals that have then failed to be met by both the Afghan government and the international community.[7] Pressure must be applied by UNAMA and influential world leaders such as President Obama to ensure that donor commitments are delivered and that the government's capacity to plan and execute major projects is substantially enhanced.

Damage caused by the neglect of the recent past will not disappear overnight. The short-term objectives of improving economic and social development should simply be to increase the confidence of Afghans in their government's ability to direct financial aid where it is most needed and a renewed commitment by the international community to deliver on their promises of assistance.

Summary

Simply setting the pre-conditions for negotiations is not enough. A timeline for negotiations needs to be established, one that allows the impact of the planned civilian

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[7]NATO, *Afghanistan Report 2009,* 33.

and military surges to take effect and build the population's confidence in the Afghan government. Tangible changes will not come quickly, and with the upcoming presidential election set for August, the most important factor may be patience. It is a quality that the Taliban have exhibited; whether the Afghan government and the international community are willing to be as patient with the achievement of concrete results will be the key question as the conflict continues.

THE WAY AHEAD STEP TWO: OPEN NEGOTIATIONS

The second step in the process can begin in earnest when the surge of new forces into theatre is complete and tangible improvements in security, governance and development have been achieved. Clearly, this will not occur until after Hamid Karzai or his successor has received a new mandate from the people of Afghanistan in the upcoming presidential election. The second step will be comprised of two parts: first, consultation amongst the Afghan population, culminating in a *loya jirga*; and second, the involvement of the UN, key international actors and regional powers in developing a solution that seeks a lasting solution to stop the descent of Afghanistan and Pakistan into the chaos of Islamic extremism.

The Next *Loya Jirga*

Formal negotiations with the Taliban will represent a watershed moment in the post-2001 history of Afghanistan. They are also certain to cause great controversy. There is little doubt that opening dialogue with the Taliban will be heavily criticized by many in the current government.[8] There will also be fears from many in the international

[8]Major criticism will no doubt come from the United National Front, which is the political party that is comprised of many former Northern Alliance members. The willingness of such former enemies to

community that talking to the Taliban could mean the end of Afghanistan's current constitution and form of government. This does not need to be the case.

Entering into a serious phase of negotiations with the Taliban will require establishing a set of ground rules. The Taliban's demands that negotiations not occur until after the departure of foreign forces and the imposition of Sharia law must be rejected as unrealistic and detrimental to an earnest peace process. The Afghan government must demand that the Taliban accept the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's Constitution, its governmental structure and, above all, the will of the Afghan people. To accept this would constitute a major shift in Taliban direction. The offer must be made in a way that convinces the Taliban that joining the government offers them the measure of international legitimacy that they never received while they were in power, and that they can pursue their own interests from within the government.[9] It must be made clear that the offer is open to all Taliban; deciding who to negotiate with should rest on ". . . motivation and intent rather than past actions."[10]

Exploiting a crack in the Taliban's leadership does carry some risk. There is already significant disparity between factions that strongly support al Qaeda and a transnational *jihadi* agenda versus those who support the Taliban as more of a Pashtun

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accept the Taliban's entry into the political process will no doubt be an impediment to serious talks, and will require determination on the part of Karzai or his successor.

[9]Gordon Smith, *Canada in Afghanistan: Is It Working?* Report prepared for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (March 2007), 21; available from http://www.cdfai.org/PDF/Canada%20in%20Afghanistan%20Is%20it%20Working.pdf; Internet; accessed 1 February 2009. Smith suggests that issues on which the Taliban could focus are amnesty for their fighters and commanders; eliminating the negative influence of warlords and rampant corruption in the Afghan government; economic gains, development and employment in Pashtun regions; resource-sharing; and an emphasis on Islamic values in the Afghan government.

[10]Frank J. Ciluffo and Joesph R. Clark, "Micro-Diplomacy in Afghanistan: Disaggregating and Engaging the Taliban," *Homeland Security Policy Institute Commentary Series* no. 1 (17 February 2009): 3; available from http://www.gwumc.edu/hspi/Commentary_Brief_Afghanistan.htm; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009.

fundamentalist religious movement. It may be unrealistic to expect the elusive Mullah Omar to ever accept anything less than a return to the days of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. If it proves to be impossible to negotiate with Mullah Omar, a more moderate leadership who are in favour of negotiations will have to represent the Taliban. It is likely that there would be a sizeable element that would reject the authority of any leadership that does not include Mullah Omar, possibly creating a split in the Taliban similar to the split between the "Original" and "Provisional" IRA in 1969. The lesson learned from Northern Ireland is that the faction that ends up negotiating with the government must be recognized and actively promoted as the Taliban's legitimate voice. Every attempt must also be made to marginalize and diminish the influence and credibility of hard-liners who refuse to negotiate with the government.

Northern Ireland also teaches an important lesson with respect to the timing of negotiations. Currently, negotiations are not practical because the Taliban believe that they have the upper hand. While the surge is aimed at creating a balance of power favourable to Afghan and ISAF forces, negotiations should not wait until there is overwhelming superiority over the insurgency. Peter Neumann notes that ". . . for talks to succeed, a terrorist group must be at a strategic juncture: questioning the utility of violence but not necessarily on the verge of defeat."[11] He uses the example of the IRA in the late 1980s and early 1990s, noting that

> . . .although large parts of the organization were not yet ready to swap the bullet for the ballot box, the leadership possessed enough influence and cunning to cajole IRA sceptics into going along with the new strategy. The political process . . . was complicated and often torturous, but its breadth and the British

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[11]Peter R. Neumann, "Negotiating with Terrorists," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 1 (January/February 2007): 132.

> government's insistence that the IRA relinquish violence as a precondition for political participation protected the democratic framework.[12]

The Afghan Government, in consultation with UNAMA and ISAF, will have to closely monitor the situation to determine the appropriate time to launch formal negotiations and, when they do, demonstrate the same tenacity when insisting on the end of Taliban violence as a precondition for commencing serious negotiations.

The most transparent way to involve the Taliban in negotiations will be to conduct another national *loya jirga*. By conducting negotiations in the context of a *loya jirga*, the Afghan government can ensure that the process is conducted openly and involves representatives from all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups. The Afghan government will have to clearly define the parameters of the discussions in order to ensure that the *loya jirga* does not seek to completely reinvent the process that was created in 2002-2003. It can, however, serve as an opportunity to review what has succeeded and what has failed in Afghanistan since 2002, and determine if there are some aspects of the system that require change.[13]

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[12] *Ibid.*, 137.

[13] Similar ideas are brought up in International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: New U.S. Administration, New Directions," *Asia Briefing* no. 89 (13 March 2009); Seth G. Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008); and Joesph J. Collins, "Transition strategy: regaining the initiative," *Armed Forces Journal* (20 January 2009); available from http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2009/01 /3846067; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009. One key topic that is likely to be discussed is whether Afghans still believe that a strong central administration represents the best form of national government for their country. It has been suggested by many that one way to improve the situation in the provinces and districts is to enhance the capacity, authority, and legitimacy of provincial and district governments. Johnson suggests that the federal government could maintain its strong centre but suggests that provincial governors and deputy governors be elected rather than appointed by the government in Kabul. Collins agrees and suggests that the ultimate aim should be ". . . democracy with an Afghan face, a state that exploits the power of the local tribes and councils, but at the same time has enough power and authority at the center to hold the nation together."

Bringing the Taliban into the political process may help alter the perception of the lack of Pashtun representation in the current government. The Taliban could provide a stronger voice in government for a more fundamental Islamic approach to law and order, although their demands would have to be carefully monitored by the President, the Parliament, and the Supreme Court so that it does not usurp the Constitution. These details could be discussed during the *loya jirga*, with some compromise likely required on the part of both the government and the Taliban.

Sporadic negotiations with the Taliban are already occurring, and they should continue to occur. Instead of conducting them behind closed doors, when the conditions are set and the time is right, the best solution for a transparent negotiation process is the consultative framework of a *loya jirga*.

The Role of International and Regional Actors

The formal initiation of serious negotiations, and the proposed framework for those negotiations, must be done in a way that is inclusive and transparent. The negotiations with the Taliban should be Afghan-led, and the solutions Afghan-generated. The assistance of a UN mediator during the negotiations should be encouraged and certainly not be excluded. However, there are limitations to what Afghanistan's government can accomplish when it comes to events outside their borders. The increase in insurgent violence in Pakistan has reinforced the realization that there is ". . . limited benefit in winning the hearts and minds of Pashtuns resident in Afghanistan if the larger number of Pashtuns living in Pakistan remains hostile and ungoverned."[14] This has been

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[14]James Dobbins, *Ending Afghanistan's Civil War,* Testimony presented before the House Armed Services Committee on January 30, 2007 (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007), 7.

clearly recognized by the international community: the problem of the Taliban is now understood to be inextricably linked to relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.[15]

The UN and the U.S. should take the lead in the pursuit of any international negotiations, but to be successful they require the support of the major regional powers. The key regional powers that must be involved are India, Iran, Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia. While it may seem counterintuitive that countries such as Russia, China and particularly Iran would cooperate with the U.S., Leslie Gelb of the Council on Foreign Relations argues that they share a common interest driven by the fact that there is ". . . no motivation greater than the nightmare of extremists controlling Pakistan's nuclear weapons."[16]

One of the key players in this group may turn out to be Iran. Iran has begun to show signs that it is preparing to increase its role in the international community's approach to Afghanistan by participating in the Hague Conference, although it continues to strongly oppose the heavy presence of foreign soldiers in Afghanistan. However, it is no doubt more apt to cooperate with the U.S. since the departure of George W. Bush, who included Iran in his infamous "axis of evil" only weeks after it had played an important role in the negotiations for the Bonn Agreement. President Obama has reached out to the Iranian people via a televised address and he continues to signal that he is willing to move carefully towards some type of cooperation on the future of Afghanistan.[17]

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[15]This message has been evident in the language used in Obama's March 27 Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy announcement, the UN's 31 March Hague Conference, and the April NATO Summit in Strasbourg.

[16]Leslie H. Gelb, "How to Leave Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, 13 March 2009, available from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/13/opinion/13Gelb.html?_r=1&ref=todayspaper; Internet; accessed 13 March 2009.

The regional powers should form a Contact Group for discussing the situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In his strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Obama outlined his concept of such a group:

> . . .together with the United Nations, we will forge a new Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan that brings together all who should have a stake in the security of the region -- our NATO allies and other partners, but also the Central Asian states, the Gulf nations and Iran; Russia, India and China. None of these nations benefit from a base for al Qaeda terrorists, and a region that descends into chaos. All have a stake in the promise of lasting peace and security and development.[18]

In a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid suggested that a Contact Group comprised of the countries suggested by Obama could promote dialogue in the region and achieve at least six goals: first, pursuing a solution to the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir; second, establishing a long term plan for FATA, possibly including integration into the NWFP; third, encouraging Afghanistan and Pakistan to move towards meaningful discussion on their disputed border; fourth, by including Russia, ensuring that the situation does not degenerate into an East versus West issue, as occurred in August 2008 in Georgia; fifth, providing Tehran a guarantee that the role of NATO in ISAF does not constitute a threat to Iran; and finally, ensuring that the regional superpower China has its interests and roles considered in the negotiations.[19]

Although these are all crucial regional issues, the most important role that the Contact Group could play is the isolation and encirclement of al Qaeda and other *jihadi* forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan. If Afghanistan can successfully negotiate with

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[17]On 20 March 2009, Obama gave a televised speech directly aimed at the Iranian people. The speech coincided with *Nowruz*, the Persian New Year.

[18]From Obama's speech "Remarks by the President…"

[19]Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (November/December 2008): 41-43.

elements of the Taliban that reject al Qaeda's agenda and are willing to participate in the political process, the same may be possible in Pakistan. The loss of influence and sanctuary in Afghanistan and Pakistan for al Qaeda could constitute a "strategic defeat" for the organization.[20]

The UN's resolve to broker a regional solution is vitally important to dismantling the borderless threat of the Taliban. A regional solution needs to be pursued concurrent to the Afghan government's conduct of formal negotiations. Taliban-related insurgent groups in Pakistan, particularly those with primarily Pashtun agendas, will be more likely to accept negotiations if their allies north of the border are seen to be doing the same. A failure to deal with the problem of the Taliban and militant Islam in Pakistan would severely limit the effectiveness of negotiations in Afghanistan.

THE WAY AHEAD STEP THREE: SUSTAIN THE PEACE

Even successful negotiations and reconciliation with the Taliban will not be able to completely halt Afghanistan's cycle of violence. Whether the negotiations are conducted with moderate Taliban leaders or Mullah Omar himself, there will undoubtedly be breakaway elements of the Taliban and other insurgent forces that will continue to carry out attacks on ISAF and Afghan forces. Afghanistan will still require significant foreign military assistance for the foreseeable future.

Once negotiations are concluded and the insurgent threat marginalized, ISAF's primary emphasis can shift to the training and mentoring of Afghan forces. When the Afghan National Army and Police are deemed capable of handling the residual violence and maintaining law and order in Afghanistan, ISAF can draw down its mission and

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[20]*Ibid.*, 39.

begin withdrawing soldiers. The decision cannot be made until it is clear that negotiations and a regional solution have dealt with the insurgent threat on both sides of the border.

The UN will be required to maintain a presence in Afghanistan for years to come. Long-term UN assistance is necessary in order to ensure that gains continue to be made in governance, the rule of law, human rights, and economic and social development. The Afghan government needs to continue building on the strengths of its central institutions and ensure that they can provide basic services to all regions of the country.

The international community should not set unrealistically high expectations for the Government of Afghanistan in terms of democracy and human rights. There needs to be an acknowledgement that if a democratically elected central government is to succeed in Afghanistan, it will incorporate certain undesirables: currently this includes numerous warlords; in the future it could mean former Taliban commanders. The UN and the Afghan government can respond by enforcing the rule of law and constantly encouraging reforms. In terms of human rights, Western nations should not impose their own 21st century standards upon an Islamic country that has struggled through over three decades of war. Laws that may seem morally repugnant to the West still have a strong appeal for those Afghans with a very conservative view of Islam. Changes, through improved social, economic and technological conditions, will take time – likely a generation at least. But demographics are in Afghanistan's favour: the country has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 57 percent under the age of 18.[21] Targeting the next

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[21]Barnett R. Rubin and Humayan Hamidzada, "From Bonn to London: Governance Challenges and the Future of Statebuilding in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeepin*g 14, no. 1 (February 2007): 18.

generation of Afghan leaders and decision-makers will be the key to achieving long-term changes in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's independence and neutrality must be recognized and respected by its neighbours, particularly Pakistan, Iran and Russia. It must be made clear that foreign interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs is unacceptable. This will require close monitoring by the UN and constant dialogue amongst the regional powers. Interference by foreign *jihad* groups such as al Qaeda must not be tolerated.

An Afghanistan that has a stable central government, popular and institutional respect for the rule of law, professional security forces, a productive long-term development plan supported by the international community, and the ability to marginalize the influence of radical Islam within its borders, is possible within ten to twenty years. The international community must have patience and continue its support efforts in Afghanistan in order to ensure that the Afghan people are given the opportunity to achieve these objectives for the benefit of all its citizens, including those who once supported the Taliban. Afghans remember only too well the rapid evaporation of American support following the Soviet withdrawal; they also saw the supposed commitment to their country rapidly dissipate once the U.S. began preparations to invade Iraq. The Afghan people must have their confidence in a peaceful future restored by the international community and by their own governing institutions. The first step down this long road to a free and confident Afghanistan is negotiating a peaceful resolution to the conflict and the Taliban insurgency and finding a place for those willing to renounce violence in the main stream of Afghan life.

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