



Department of Political Science

**Chair: Diplomacy and
Negotiation**

The Afghan Peace Process: From Insurgency to Negotiation

Supervisor

Professor Pasquale Ferrara

Candidate:

Giampaolo Pericotti

Student Reg N. 635772

Co-supervisor

Professor Alfonso Giordano

Academic year: 2018/2019

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter I: Should we negotiate with terrorist groups?	12
1.1 Introduction.	12
1.2 Negotiation With Terrorists: An Ethical Perspective.	13
1.3 Negotiation with Terrorists: A Problem Solving Perspective.	16
1.4 Phases of Negotiations.	17
1.5 Pros and Cons of Negotiation.	19
1.6 Negotiation Tactics.	24
1.7 Conclusion.	32
Chapter II: The Strategies of Negotiation in the War in Afghanistan (2001-present)	34
2.1 Background and Historic Overview.	34
2.3 Cons of Negotiations.	39
2.4 Pros of Negotiation.	42
2.5 The Situation At Present.	54
Chapter III: United States Negotiations with the Taliban: Current Events (2018-2019)	57
3.1 Current life in Afghanistan: violence and women’s rights.	57
3.2 Main actors and negotiating parties.	61
3.3 United States goals and Afghan response.	64
3.4 What has to be negotiated.	70
3.5 Intra-Afghan follow-up negotiations.	75
3.6 Pakistan involvement in the Afghan war.	78
3.7 Conclusion.	81
Chapter IV: What is Next?	83
4.1 Introduction.	83
4.2 United States Government Objectives.	83
4.3 Latest Developments.	85
4.4 Expected Outcome.	90
4.5 A Controversial Issue.	93
4.6 Spoilers.	96
4.7 Conclusion.	102
Conclusion	104
Bibliography	107

Introduction

Afghanistan has always been a country that lacked stability due to its complex geopolitical situation and as it is made up of a variety of ethnic groups. Because of this root, a series of civil wars occurred that led to the rise of a terrorist organisation named the Taliban. This organisation was able to take power of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. On September 11th, 2001, five different terrorist attacks ideated by the Taliban hit the United States. After the attacks, the United States government responded militarily, beginning the Afghan war which is still active today. As this violent conflict does not seem to have a military resolution, a diplomatic strategy is continuously growing as the preferred solution in order to reach stable and permanent peace.

During the Afghan war, Afghanistan's security was further negatively affected by the tensions between the government and the Taliban leadership. The aid provided by the international community through Operation Enduring Freedom by NATO forces and the U.S.A.-ISAF has been fundamental in helping the government in Afghanistan to develop necessary institutions and furnish military and police training in order to put the brakes on this degenerating problem. These forces have also been fighting the Taliban with both ground and air operations for the past eighteen years without being completely successful. This is why there have been intra-Afghan talks that attempted to find a diplomatic solution. The Afghan government, in these past eighteen years, have initiated a variety of negotiations with the Taliban through commissions that ended up in failure due to structural, strategic, and behavioural approaches of the negotiation theory.¹ Hence the reason to change diplomatic strategy in the talks between the United States and the Taliban, along with the possible follow-up intra-Afghan talks between the government and the terrorist organisation.

This thesis will concentrate on the diplomatic negotiations that are occurring in the context of terrorist groups in the context of the war in Afghanistan. Moreover, qualitative research will be analysed, focusing on a variety of secondary sources, and insights from different academic articles. In addition, the case of the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban will include a historical analysis method.

In recent years, diplomacy has returned central to international politics. After years where the United States have put diplomacy on the back burner, it seems as though it is reconsidering it as a fundamental tool in solving conflicts with extremism. Regarding the conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan, diplomats have been as busy as military generals. Determining conditions in order to

¹ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

begin negotiations is complex, and even more so in the shadow of terrorism. Ongoing violence is the main wall against negotiations. The capability of radical groups to thwart talks through the use of violence highlights a high stakes dilemma for policymakers: Should negotiations be initiated with these groups in order to reach a peace settlement, or should suppressing radicalism be set as a precondition to negotiations? This question has afflicted peace efforts around the world. In Afghanistan, a terrorist group called the Taliban is using violence to destabilise a government that is already weak.²

The cessation of violence is the most common precondition to a negotiation. However, there are other preconditions that governments impose, even on themselves as negotiating with parties that perpetrate blood is not generally seen in a positive light. This is the reason that demonstrates the importance to set preconditions. The assurance of a permanent halt to bloodshed leads to a possible and tangible peace settlement. Nevertheless, unrealistic preconditions or ill conceived preconditions are likely to eliminate the prospect of a diplomatic engagement. It is necessary when evaluating which preconditions to impose that the other party is able to meet the demand of that precondition. Moreover, if a precondition that a party wants to impose will significantly reduce the other party's bargaining power, then the other party will certainly reject that precondition. Hence preconditions are effective and may be implemented when they are achievable by the other party, and when they do not weaken bargaining power. When these conditions are not realistic, it is better to follow the advice of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin: "Fight terrorism as if there is no peace process; pursue peace as if there is no terrorism." Therefore a government must never set preconditions without having a deep understanding of the other party's perspective and the constraints the other party is under.³

Governments, in addition to setting preconditions on other parties, generally set preconditions on themselves as well. Governments that favour diplomatic strategies have a difficult time sitting at a table with a terrorist group, hence they publicly state that they refuse to begin negotiations with radicals. This action is dictated by a virtue of ideological purity. However, it has the vice of impracticality. Furthermore, a government may decide to wait until there is sufficient support among constituents for a peace process, or set the precondition to having multilateral talks instead of bilateral talks.⁴

² Malhotra, D., *"Without Conditions: The Case for Negotiating With the Enemy"*, (2009), HeinOnline

³ Malhotra, D., *"Without Conditions: The Case for Negotiating With the Enemy"*, (2009), HeinOnline

⁴ Malhotra, D., *"Without Conditions: The Case for Negotiating With the Enemy"*, (2009), HeinOnline

Governments should encourage forming ties between those who are willing to negotiate, and those who are responsible for initiating the violence. If negotiations are between those who have not initiated violence, then the most important precondition, the cessation of violence, will be impossible to be enacted. Nevertheless many governments in the past have used their diplomatic efforts to carefully select negotiating partners who are not linked to extremist violence. For example, the United States in its de-Baathification effort in Iraq had done exactly that. It is already extremely difficult to convince radical groups to join the bargaining table, but excluding those groups *a priori* is self-defeating and will not resolve the issue at large. However, politicians who are opposed to negotiation with terrorist groups tend to cause strategic blunders with ill-conceived preconditions because when these preconditions are not met, they provide an excuse not to continue with the diplomatic effort to negotiate. Politicians instead who are in favour of initiating talks, even if it is with an extremist group, but are wary of their constituents' consensus or lack thereof, favour preconditions because if met, they furnish an early win.⁵

A foreign policy that truly aims to reach peace settlements understands the importance of negotiations, and removes as many impediments to diplomacy as possible. Ill-conceived negotiations remain one of the biggest obstacles to negotiated peace. Limiting their use by setting only realistic preconditions would allow for a more successful foreign policy.⁶

A historical example of resolving a conflict was the United States negotiations in Vietnam. The leader of these negotiations was the diplomat Henry Kissinger. According to former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the Vietnamese are affected by a "syndrome" which marked also the peace negotiations in Paris. This "syndrome" highlights dual emotions, from optimism to bewilderment and euphoria to frustration. For example, they were euphoric about the bombing halt but soon after were disputing with Saigon over its participation to the negotiations. Kissinger explains that the conflict is incredibly complex and not able to be solved in a single dramatic stroke. It was a civil war that lasted twenty years and involved international powers. He goes on to note that trust is a rare commodity, but even with trust formed by the parties in the negotiations, the complexity of the conflict would still entail a difficulty in negotiating a peace settlement.⁷

Additionally, the criteria in which one is able to measure the progress made are not easy to establish, and they have not been easy to establish during the war either. United States General Westmoreland visited Washington in November 1967. During this occasion, in a speech to the

⁵ Malhotra, D., "*Without Conditions: The Case for Negotiating With the Enemy*", (2009), HeinOnline

⁶ Malhotra, D., "*Without Conditions: The Case for Negotiating With the Enemy*", (2009), HeinOnline

⁷ Kissinger, H. A., "*The Viet Nam Negotiations*", (1969), Foreign Affairs

United States Congress, he claimed that the war in Vietnam was in the process of being won militarily. In the State of the Union speech two months later, United States President Johnson declared that the “pacification program” which entailed the full control of Saigon in Vietnam towards the countryside was progressively satisfactory. To be fully effective, it had to provide security to the population, and establish a political and institutional link between the villages and Saigon. However, impatience to highlight progress led the United States to not be able to meet these two conditions.⁸

Just a week after President Johnson’s speech, the Tet Offensive by Vietcong was put in practice, and was able to delay indefinitely the consolidation of governmental authority. This military offensive, albeit being a United States military victory, allowed Vietcong to increase its psychological morale. The United States had promised to protect an ever so large number of villages, a promise which with the offensive they did not maintain. For the United States, the issue had been the use of traditional strategies both for military actions and nation-building in a conflict that had nothing traditional. Americans’ military strategy followed the classic doctrine that depended on a combination of control of territory and attrition of the opponent. However, both the nature of guerrilla warfare which differs from traditional military operations, and the asymmetry in the definition of what constituted unacceptable losses caused this strategy to fail. The guerrilla wins if it does not lose, while the conventional army loses if it does not win. The United States did not fully realise this aspect of the war. As the United States were not able to transform this military victory into a political advantage, the war faced a stalemate. Vietcong used guerrilla tactics in order to prevent the consolidation of governmental authority. While Saigon was able to control the majority of the country during the day as troops could move without significant problems, Vietcong was able to do the same at night. This has been named the pattern of dual control.⁹

The Tet Offensive was a turning point in the war. It marked the recognition that only a negotiated solution existed to solve the conflict, as a commitment to a political solution was inevitable as the military goals set by the Americans would not be achieved within a period of force levels politically acceptable to them. President Johnson had announced that he would be ready to negotiate, unconditionally, at any moment, anywhere. This claim left the timing of negotiations to the other party. Hence a formula was being created in order to begin negotiations. Vietcong publicly proposed the following: previous Geneva Accord would shape the basis of the peace settlement, American forces would ultimately be withdrawn from Vietnamese territory which would also not serve as a

⁸ Kissinger, H. A, “*The Viet Nam Negotiations*”, (1969), Foreign Affairs

⁹ Kissinger, H. A, “*The Viet Nam Negotiations*”, (1969), Foreign Affairs

host for any foreign bases, and reunification of Vietnam should come about through a direct negotiation between the Vietnamese. A peace settlement which amounts to unilateral withdrawal of American presence could cause an even more dangerous international situation than prior to the settlement. When a conference has to be set up, there are two opposing points of view: those who oppose negotiations, which believe that they equate to surrender, and those who favour negotiations. Those who oppose talks decide to negotiate only to define the conditions of the enemy's capitulation. Pragmatism and bureaucracy together produce a diplomatic style marked by rigidity in advance of formal negotiations and excessive reliance on tactical considerations once negotiation starts. The United States, in the preliminary phase of negotiations, generally lack a negotiating program as bargaining considerations tend to shape the discussions during a conference. In this phase Americans do not judge the progress.¹⁰

Secret contacts, typical of the pre-negotiation stage, were numerous. In this stage, there was a tendency of each party to overestimate the freedom of manoeuvre of the other party as there was a lack of information disclosure. After four weeks of talks, the decision of the location for the conference was Paris. Through negotiations, each party claimed that it retained control and ultimate decisions over the incurring events. As negotiations were lasting a long time, it seemed as though they were progressive through a series of apparent stalemates. This led to the need of a diplomatic momentum. The negotiation styles of both parties were completely different. On the one hand, North Vietnam used diplomacy to operate in a cycle of reconnaissance and withdrawal in order to be able to assess the opponent's reaction. It therefore was defining the terrain. North Vietnam planned out its diplomatic strategy, publicly stating that it preferred, "to deal with cases as they arise, on their merits".¹¹ On the other hand, the fact that the United States government has declared its intention to negotiate does not imply that it already had a strategy or that it had formulated its goals. Hence the need for inter-agencies negotiations. The diverse styles of negotiation between the two parties led to a massive breakdown in communication especially during the preliminary stages of negotiation. Nevertheless, as Henry Kissinger stated: "Our strategy and our diplomacy were conducted in isolation from each other."¹²

Kissinger continued by claiming that, "If negotiation give the impression of being a camouflaged surrender, there will be nothing left to negotiate (equality of conditions). Support for the side which

¹⁰ Kissinger, H. A., *"The Viet Nam Negotiations"*, (1969), Foreign Affairs

¹¹ Kissinger, H. A., *"The Viet Nam Negotiations"*, (1969), Foreign Affairs

¹² Kissinger, H. A., *"The Viet Nam Negotiations"*, (1969), Foreign Affairs

seems to be losing will collapse.”¹³ The mutual preconditions that were being decided on were part of President Johnson’s “San Antonio Formula”: the United States would stop bombarding Vietnam, both aerial and naval bombardments, only when productive talks would begin, and only if North Vietnam would not take advantage of the situation. However, Hanoi insisted that the stop of the bombardments would have to be unconditional in order to claim early victory. Nevertheless the United States government needed some assurances as to how the negotiations would proceed after a bombing halt. The talks about the conditions of the bombing halt lasted six months. The delegations used “your side, our side” formula: Saigon with the United States and NLF with Hanoi even if there was the problem of recognition. Henry Kissinger’s proposal for the procedure included three forums. The first was a plenary session to legitimise the work of two committees. The second were the two committees, one between Saigon and the United States and the other between NLF and Hanoi, which did not to be formally established so that they could meet secretly and discuss the internal structure of South Vietnam. The third was an international conference that would work out guarantees and safeguards. Furthermore, Kissinger believed that the best strategy was a staged withdrawal of external forces, thereby creating a maximum incentive for contending forces in South Vietnam to work out a political agreement. If the United States became so involved in South Vietnam’s internal arrangements, there would be two disadvantages. The first is the lack of deep knowledge of Vietnamese politics, while the second is the pressure the United States would put to Saigon would likely cause an obstacle to negotiations.¹⁴

The main issue that the United States faced in Vietnam, according to Henry Kissinger, is the fact that it has been unable to create a political structure able to oppose Hanoi militarily after having withdrawn its own troops. Hanoi would have never been able to defeat the United States militarily, hence the obligation for Hanoi to accept negotiations in order to have American troops withdrawn from Vietnamese soil. Hence during negotiations the United States must focus on reducing casualties and concentrate on protecting the Vietnamese population. The United States should continue to strengthen the Vietnamese army to permit a gradual withdrawal of some American forces, and encourage Saigon to broaden its base so that it is stronger for the political contest with the communists. Negotiations must move towards a peace which grants the people of Vietnam what they have so long struggled to achieve: an opportunity to work out their own destiny in their own way. Of course, it would have been easier for the United States if it had 100 percent control over 60

¹³ Kissinger, H. A., *“The Viet Nam Negotiations”*, (1969), Foreign Affairs

¹⁴ Kissinger, H. A., *“The Viet Nam Negotiations”*, (1969), Foreign Affairs

percent of the country, rather than having 60 percent control of 100 percent of the country.¹⁵ This anecdote will help better explain the analysis of the current negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, further highlighting the mistakes that must not be repeated.

¹⁵ Kissinger, H. A, *"The Viet Nam Negotiations"*, (1969), Foreign Affairs

Chapter I: Should we negotiate with terrorist groups?

1.1 Introduction.

The fear of terrorism has been one of the shaping factors of the twenty-first century. Terrorism has threatened security and stability numerous times in peaceful democracies. It is a drastic method used by individuals or communities in order to achieve a political or religious goal. Because of this method, states have swiftly developed counter-terrorism strategies. There are contrasting opinions on whether a state or a community of states should negotiate with terrorist groups, and the instances that such negotiations should occur along with the methods. On the one hand, people believe that negotiating with terrorists is wrong from its foundation. The foreign is viewed as an individual that is different, different in ethnicity, culture, tradition, and religion. This makes it easy to implicitly enact a dehumanisation process towards this individual, leading to believe that this individual is less worthy or even inferior. Because of this process, the foreign is viewed as less rational, less warm, less worthy of kindness, or less deserving of help. This is a process that people subconsciously enact towards terrorist groups. Collaboration or aid are two actions that are thus not taken into consideration. As such, this belief is argued by scholars who are convinced that terrorists act more rationally than assumed, and have specific goals that are beyond destruction. Terrorists are radicals that would defend and fight for their cause at all costs, whether it be a religious, an economic, or a political cause. For this reason negotiation is fundamental, and the question should not revolve around whether or not a state or community should negotiate with terrorist groups, but when and how one should negotiate with terrorists.

While armies and intelligence communities are the backbone of fighting terrorism, politics and economics are at the core of resolving the conflict. Clearly negotiation with terrorist groups should not be the first option, one that occurs at the beginning of the conflict, but it is fundamental to learn from history. History teaches us the right moments to make contact with terrorists, to build a relationship upon trust, to make use of third parties, and to actually begin to negotiate with all of its phases. Therefore diplomacy is a fundamental aspect in resolving conflicts even with terrorists, not only with states. Terrorist groups rarely have surrendered in the past, hence using only military pressure will simply lead to death and lack of a peaceful conclusion. As President Kennedy stated: "A willingness to resist force, unaccompanied by a willingness to talk, could provoke belligerence- while a willingness to talk, unaccompanied by a willingness to resist force, could invite disaster." Military pressure is important in order to contain violence, and politics and diplomacy are important in order invite participation. Critics, however, claim that terrorist participation implies providing

recognition and encouragement to continue in their quest of destruction. Nevertheless while the principle of recognising a terrorist group is wrong, it is a strategy lead by *realpolitik*, a strategy that offers a pragmatic view in order to resolve the conflict.

Can a state negotiate with a terrorist organisation? Considering the constant increase of terrorist attacks, this subject will likely represent even in the future one of the most important points in the agenda of national leaders. Although the literature on the subject of terrorist negotiations has increased after the 9/11 attacks, there still is a lack of international consensus on the topic. The two ethical theories more relevant in the West are the consequentialist and deontological theories. The first one postulates that the moral choice must maximise the utility of one's own consequences. The second one postulates the rational principles of justice and frees the moral choice from the consideration of its consequences. On the one hand, in a consequentialist prospect for the state it is morally legitimate to negotiate when negotiations promise better advantages than no negotiations. On the other hand, the deontological theory views a solution as more complex. However the prospect of no negotiation cannot be a rational principle. If we sustain the principle that the deontological theory prohibits any kind of negotiations with terrorist groups, then we would fall in the aporia that no just war is able to be resolved through negotiations. Hence in the end both theories accept the moral possibility of negotiating with terrorists.¹⁶

1.2 Negotiation With Terrorists: An Ethical Perspective.

There is a difference in negotiating with terrorist groups that are on the crest of a wave in terms of momentum, confidence, and propaganda, and using soft power when the hard power has profoundly weakened the terrorists. It is nevertheless difficult that the assessment of the terrorists' strength by the terrorists themselves is the same as the state engaged in the conflict.

No one obviously is happy to negotiate with a terrorist group, as emotionally terrorism is viewed as pure evil. Politicians usually build on this emotion by claiming that terrorists will be suppressed by force in order to be elected. They further back up their argument by stating that talking to terrorist groups goes against any sort of human value and international norm as they do not respect any aspect of society. Additionally, even if terrorist groups have goals connected to legitimate reasons, these reasons become illegitimate if the group resorts to violence. It is the same as giving in to blackmail. This will inevitably encourage other groups to resort to violence as well.

The argument that terrorists are psychopaths is countered by a variety of studies that demonstrate how terrorists do not show traits and characteristics that lead to mental disability. Terrorists have

¹⁶ Marcovina, M., "*Negoziare coi Terroristi?*", (2016), Sicurezza Nazionale

their own set of rational values that pushes them to achieve their objectives. Whether or not negotiations are possible depends on the rationality of the terrorists. The medical studies conducted on terrorists have generally shown that terrorists cannot be classified as clinically insane individuals. Regarding the terrorists' motivations and objectives, there are two contrasting points of views: the strategic interaction model and the sociodynamic model.

From a critical confrontation, the strategic interaction model is the more explicative model. It derives from Martha Crenshaw's studies in the eighties and is well summarised by Kydd and Walter.¹⁷ Terrorists are considered to be strategically rational actors, aware that their actions are risky and costly, but at the same time very efficient in coercing the state they are acting against. Paper holds that even suicide bombers are strategically rational because the degree of success measured in such attacks obtaining political concessions is around fifty percent. Following this model and excluding normal eradication due to police activities, any antiterrorist policy such as negotiations must alter the balance between costs and benefits of choosing to commit terrorist actions and render it strategically irrational. Hence the development of game theory models like the one made by Browne and Dickson that will be later discussed.

In the sociodynamic model, terrorists use political violence as a result of a progressive socialisation process in this direction following frustrating social protests and detachment from reality. The experience of adhering to a clandestine organisation creates strong social relations and provokes a sense of personal fulfilment. The ultimate goal of the organisation is not to extort political concessions from the state but to highlight its existence and public relevance. This allows the organisation to receive moral and financial support, and recruit more members. The sociodynamic model bases itself on numerous empirical observations.¹⁸ Although it is true that generally terrorists are not insane individuals, they nevertheless tend to be alienated subjects that need external validation. Additionally, and in contrast with the strategic model, the sociodynamic model states that terrorism is not able to extort substantial political concessions.

Supporters of this model do not negate explicitly the utility of negotiations, but they warn not to negotiate with terrorist groups as if they were strategically rational actors. For example, according to one of these supporters, Abrahms, terrorists cannot be deterred.¹⁹ Thus negotiations are bound to fail unless there are dissimulated attempts that are instrumental in the collection of information and internal group split. This means that not only one of the actors is presumed to be strategically

¹⁷ Marcovina, M., *"Negoziare coi Terroristi?"*, (2016), Sicurezza Nazionale

¹⁸ Marcovina, M., *"Negoziare coi Terroristi?"*, (2016), Sicurezza Nazionale

¹⁹ Abrahms, M. *"What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy"*, (2008), International Security

irrational, but more importantly that negotiations with terrorists would help them in the progressive socialisation process.

Objections to this model are numerous. The first one is that not all terrorist groups are the same. Cronin offers a taxonomy: religious, of the political left, of the political right, and ethnically nationalists/separatists.²⁰ Hoffman considers Islamic terrorism from the nineties which he defines as “new terrorism” as completely different from the previous one both in relation to its objectives and behaviour. Different groups tend to demonstrate different levels of rationality.²¹ Those that tend to be the most strategically rational are the one that fight due to specific grievances and objectives, such as separatist groups like the IRA. Furthermore, leftist groups such as the Red Brigade, demonstrate the will of its members to abandon the organisation if the hopes of the objectives would not be reached. They even attempted to achieve a negotiated compromise through the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, an Italian Prime Minister. Religious terrorist groups, however, tend to be less rational as they are stuck in their ideology and cannot compromise their dogma. Neumann nevertheless observes that even Islamic terrorism shows signs of rationality due to the will of founding a global Islamic regime.²² Furthermore, it is important to distinguish the level of rationality between the leader and the other members. The affirmation that terrorism never pays on the strategic field is too black and white. A study found that the rate of success of terrorist groups in reaching their objectives from what was promised is around five percent. Although this percentage may seem low, terrorism is still a sensible option for a group that has no other coercive means to achieve its goals. In conclusion, the strategic rational model remains a valid theoretical instrument to analyse interactions between states and terrorist groups. Because terrorist groups are at least partially rational, negotiations are a valid option.²³

The cessation of bloodshed should be the highest priority. Therefore talking to terrorists is an ethical perspective for the future. It is based on humanistic precepts that place saving lives as more important than not recognising terrorist groups or the fact that it is immoral to negotiate with them. The argument against negotiating with terrorists is straightforward: democracies must never give in to violence, and terrorists must never be rewarded for using it. If governments decides to negotiate with a terrorist group, they automatically legitimise them and their violence, thus undermining those who have used peaceful methods to achieve political change. Negotiations with terrorists pose the exact opposite effect as the one hoped as it causes destabilisation of political systems, undercut

²⁰ Cronin, A. K., “*Behind the Curve: Globalisation and International Terrorism*”, (2006), International Security

²¹ Marcovina, M., “*Negoziare coi Terroristi?*”, (2016), Sicurezza Nazionale

²² Neumann, P., “*Negotiating with Terrorists*”, (2007) Foreign Affairs

²³ Marcovina, M., “*Negoziare coi Terroristi?*”, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

international efforts to outlaw terrorism, and set a dangerous precedent. Of course democracies profess peaceful methods of change, but they secretly often negotiate with terrorist organisations. However because they have to publicly claim that there is no contact between terrorists and themselves in order to not jeopardise their integrity, there is no systematic exploration of how to successfully conduct talks.²⁴

1.3 Negotiation with Terrorists: A Problem Solving Perspective.

Democracies, when dealing with terrorists, must not just end violence, but they must achieve peace by minimising the risk of setting dangerous precedents and destabilising its political system. This is a complex process that involves a variety of conditions for it to be successful. Affirming that negotiations are always appropriate would be no more valid than assuming that negotiations are never appropriate. The process of setting up a negotiation has to consider whether or not the terrorist group makes a good negotiating partner. Experts such as Bruce Hoaman of Georgetown University and William Zartman of John Hopkins University believe that assessing the ideology and aims of terrorists should provide an answer to the question.²⁵ They distinguish and separate terrorist groups between those who have apocalyptic goals and those who are believed to be instrumental or political in their aspirations and hence may be more prone to solve a conflict through negotiations. The distinction between irrational and rational terrorists is heavily influenced by Western culture as it classifies according to its belief who is irrational and who is rational. For this reason, Western governments view Al Qaeda, an international Islamic terrorist group, as irrational because they are based heavily in ideology and hold no realistic goals. While on the other hand, the Irish Republican Army and ETA, a Basque separatist group, are seen as more rational due to their nationalist and more realistic separatist goals. But rather than assessing the ideology of such groups, governments should examine their thinking on the utility of violence because the core problem of terrorist groups is their use of violence and not their political goals. Additionally, organisations tend to move towards violence, and thus become terror groups, after a long frustration when they realised that their political goals could not be achieved. For this reason they may be persuaded to stop the violence and further their cause through negotiation and nonviolent agitation.²⁶

Another important factor that democracies should consider is the level of internal cohesion of the terrorist group because certain leaders of a terrorist group may not accept the terms of a settlement,

²⁴ Neumann, P., *“Negotiating with Terrorists”*, (2007) Foreign Affairs

²⁵ Neumann, P., *“Negotiating with Terrorists”*, (2007) Foreign Affairs

²⁶ Neumann, P., *“Negotiating with Terrorists”*, (2007) Foreign Affairs

and may also not be able to control its rank and file. Although terrorists always profess that they are a tightly knit group, the conditions under which they operate are shrouded in such secrecy that makes it difficult for them to maintain a perfect chain of command. For example, in the case of Al Qaeda, the leaders barely play operational roles as they simply serve as ideological inspiration and moral sanction. Negotiations with a terrorist group become even more difficult if the group is supported by an internationally recognised state, and therefore any settlement must also be supported by the supporting state. It may be a more efficient solution to negotiate, if possible and after having assessed the relationship between the state and the terrorist group, directly with the supporting state. Timing also plays a crucial role in assessing a conflict and whether negotiation is plausible, which is usually in a period of the conflict where the terrorist group is not almost defeated but is questioning the utility of violence.²⁷

Alan Dershowitz, professor at Harvard Law School, believes that with a terrorist group negotiations are in no case appropriate because when the terrorist group is facing various hardships it is easier to suppress the group completely.²⁸ History has nevertheless shown that such situations are never black and white. Terrorists are trained for pain, sacrifice, and when faced with an escalation of these obstacles they usually respond with additional violence, perhaps with the use of weapons of mass destruction. Hence it is not necessarily positive to eliminate the group when they are on the verge of defeat. It may be a better idea to begin negotiations, albeit with a higher degree of caution. States may attempt to initiate negotiations and hastily conclude them. Before negotiations may begin, terrorists groups must declare a permanent cessation of violence which works as a litmus test of their intentions. If this potential cessation of violence is breached, it will have severe consequences as the public commitment to any negotiation may decrease and harm government policy in the end. Furthermore, it allows the group to be in the mindset of international norms and protocol, exposing them to democratic practices.

1.4 Phases of Negotiations.

Another terrorist expert, Paul Wilkinson of the University of St. Andrews, believes that during negotiations the government should make no concessions as it would risk appearing weak, thus undermining its political system.²⁹ However, as is the case with those who are against negotiations, it is not a practical argument in resolving a conflict without further violence. It may be useful, as

²⁷ Neumann, P., "*Negotiating with Terrorists*", (2007) Foreign Affairs

²⁸ Neumann, P., "*Negotiating with Terrorists*", (2007) Foreign Affairs

²⁹ Neumann, P., "*Negotiating with Terrorists*", (2007) Foreign Affairs

Moty Cristal, a negotiator at Camp David for the Israeli government had claimed, to shift the terms of a negotiation from the demands of the terrorists to their personal fate.³⁰ This strategy may not always be used, but sometimes it helps create distinction.

Governments may follow two track negotiations with two distinct kinds of concessions. Terrorist's demands would be part of primary concessions, while personal fate would be part of secondary concessions. These would be discussed at the same time, even though primary concessions would be subjected to a broad process that involves a democratic mandate of the group, while secondary concessions would be directly discussed between the governments and the group. The terrorist groups seeking to gain primary concessions aim to change the political system of their state, and no democratic government can allow constitutional change led by a once-violent conspirator.

Regardless, terrorists negotiate if they believe that such change is possible. Therefore primary concessions may be granted solely in the context of democratic norms in which the terrorist group has a democratic mandate to make sure that change is wanted by majority of the citizens of that state. This will also allow for internal compromises that will inevitably lead to less radical change.³¹ Secondary negotiations instead ensure an orderly demobilisation of the terrorist group. These negotiations are quite tedious as they involve personal matters such as arrangements for prisoners. It may be in the interest of solving a conflict to provide amnesty to a terrorist, but it is an action that could provide public backlash. Nevertheless, such action could be justified as it delegitimises the radicals in the terrorist group and removes pretexts for the group to resort to violence once again. Furthermore, this action provides ground on primary-track issues.³² Public opinion may be swayed towards the government's view if it understands that primary and secondary-track issues are interconnected, and that in order to peacefully resolve a conflict, certain concessions must be made. Therefore the difficulty for the government lies in balancing public opinion with terrorist demands and resolving the conflict. In cases such as with the terrorist group al Qaeda, the chances for resolving the conflict are incredibly slim. Although the ideological leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have ordered cease-fires to the US governments and European governments, no one knows if this order will be respected. Including al Qaeda in primary negotiations is not plausible at the moment due to it constantly resorting to violence for its global aspirations. The structure of al Qaeda is not territorially based in order to constitutionally define its territory. These conditions pose obstacles in beginning a negotiation process. It would only furnish political legitimacy to such a group and undermine Muslim moderates along with the negotiating

³⁰ Neumann, P., *"Negotiating with Terrorists"*, (2007) Foreign Affairs

³¹ Neumann, P., *"Negotiating with Terrorists"*, (2007) Foreign Affairs

³² Neumann, P., *"Negotiating with Terrorists"*, (2007) Foreign Affairs

governments.³³ Democratic governments must find ways to bring about conditions to begin negotiations with a terrorist group. Giving terrorists a stake in the political process must come about only if the terrorists agree to respect the international democratic rule of law. Additionally, they must avoid providing any reason for the radical faction of the terrorist group to augment its use of violence, while at the same time persuading the moderates to find a peaceful solution. In order to appease public opinion, the governments must remain firmly opposed to the use of violence for political ends.³⁴

1.5 Pros and Cons of Negotiation.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush exclaimed: “No nation can negotiate with terrorists, for there is no way to make peace with those whose only goal is death.” Dick Cheney, his vice president, spoke to the stomach of Americans stating: “We don’t negotiate with evil, we defeat it.” The United States has had a history with intending to suppress terrorism with force. In a 1985 speech President Ronald Reagan spoke against terrorism: “America will never make concessions to terrorists. To do so would only invite more terrorism... Once we head down that path there would be no end to it, no end to the suffering of innocent people, no end to the bloody ransom all civilised nations must pay.” This policy is not only a Republican stance. Susan Rice, President Obama’s national security adviser, stated that the policy of the United States is to never negotiate with terrorists.³⁵ Wanting to suppress any terrorist group with force is understandable especially after an attack like 9/11. No one seriously hopes that a terrorist may change into becoming one eligible for the Nobel peace prize. Likely one of the most relevant figures that argue for not negotiating with terrorists is American lawyer Alan Dershowitz:

Never negotiate.

By listening to terrorists you are fulfilling their aims, and encouraging them... The reason terrorism works... is precisely because its perpetrators believe that murdering innocent civilians they will succeed in attracting the attention of the world to their perceived grievances... We must commit ourselves never to try to understand or eliminate its alleged root causes, but rather to place it beyond the pale of dialogue and negotiation. Our message

³³ Neumann, P., “*Negotiating with Terrorists*”, (2007) Foreign Affairs

³⁴ Neumann, P., “*Negotiating with Terrorists*”, (2007) Foreign Affairs

³⁵ Powell, J., “*Terrorists at the Negotiating Table*”, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan

must be this: even if you have legitimate grievances, if you resort to terrorism as a means toward eliminating them we will simply not listen to you, we will not try to understand you, and we will never change any of our policies toward you. Instead, we will hunt you down and destroy your capacity to engage in terror.³⁶

While this argument is quite logical especially after having images of the horrors committed by terrorist groups, it does not make a fundamental distinction. Negotiating with terrorists means talking with them, not giving into them or their demands. If a democratic government were to give in terrorists' demands, the democratic government would cease to exist. Terrorists are often labeled as psychopaths and therefore talking with psychopaths provides no utility in solving the conflict. Although their actions seem like actions taken by psychopaths due to their violence, in reality terrorists are incredibly rational in wanting to achieve their goals. Furthermore studies such as one by Stanford University demonstrates that there is no evidence of personal pathologies in terrorists.³⁷ We may not comprehend the rational that terrorists follow, but it is fully logical and hence paramount for us to comprehend such logic if we intend to solve a conflict.

Additionally, governments have relations with states that violate human rights and use violence against their own people, hence it is hypocritical to talk with nondemocratic states but not with terrorist groups. In order for terrorists to change their mindset and behaviour, a democratic government needs to talk with them to make them understand that there are other ways to achieve certain goals and that violence is never the solution. No one wants to talk with people who committed horrendous crimes as it is not morally comfortable, but not talking is never practical as communication is always the key to resolve a conflict. The most important thing is the cessation of violence, and as the former head of the Israeli internal security agency Shin Bet stated, "Anything you can do to shorten the war is ethical."³⁸ There are academics such as John Bew, Martyn Frampton, and Inigo Gurruchaga, that have more moderate views regarding not negotiating with terrorists. They put forward an argument claiming that negotiation is helpful in conflict resolutions only in particular instances. When the terrorist group is on the crest of a wave in terms of propaganda, confidence, and momentum, talking is detrimental as it only feeds their ego and intention of achieving their goals through violent means. Talking in the beginning may furnish the perception that the government is weak, consequently if the terrorist group escalates violence, the group may achieve their intent.³⁹ Negotiations often involve providing legitimacy to the terrorist

³⁶ Powell, J., *"Terrorists at the Negotiating Table"*, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan

³⁷ Powell, J., *"Terrorists at the Negotiating Table"*, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan

³⁸ Powell, J., *"Terrorists at the Negotiating Table"*, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan

³⁹ Powell, J., *"Terrorists at the Negotiating Table"*, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan

group which critics of negotiation claim that it strengthens the positions of the terrorists. However democratic governments do not recognise the terrorist group as the sole legitimate representative of its people, which is the first demand of the group as that would only be detrimental and deny the existence of peaceful groups that represent the community. Rather, democratic governments provide temporary legitimacy simply to begin talks. It is important not to undermine moderate groups that represent the community, but negotiations have to be engaged with all parties, one simply cannot ignore a group because it takes up arms especially when the main goal is the cessation of violence. A risk involved with negotiation is undermining allies who have committed to counterterrorism efforts. However allies should understand the importance of solving a conflict and help the democratic government with support in the negotiations. Another argument against negotiation is the fact that a ceasefire gives the terrorist group the opportunity to rest and regroup. If this were the case it would be an opportunity also for the democratic government, but in reality a ceasefire works against the terrorists group as it loses momentum, support, and morale. Additionally, a ceasefire means more lives saved. Negotiation becomes the best strategy for solving a conflict only when terrorist groups have been made to realise through hard power that they will not be able to achieve their goals by using violence.⁴⁰ Talking to terrorists only when they are losing assumes that terrorists have the same perception that they are losing as the democratic government, which may very well not be the case. As Martin van Creveld argued in *The Transformation of War*, history such as the Americans in Vietnam demonstrates that democratic governments have never been successful in waging a low intensity conflict against an opposition that is clearly weaker financially, organisationally, and technologically.⁴¹

In the end, more than being arguments against negotiation with a terrorist group, the criticisms should be used as warnings to negotiate properly. If negotiations are properly conducted, terrorist groups may be faced with reality and change their positions. Of course, negotiation has its risks, but the other alternative, force, implies more risks as it further radicalises the positions of the terrorist group. Furthermore, it increases costs, loss of lives, and international commitment. For this reason the best option is to negotiate with a terrorist group with a certain degree of military pressure since negotiations offer a way out that may lead to a peaceful solution. Violence may especially at first be kept in check with military pressure, but at the same time the grievances of the terrorists must be undercut by making them participate in talks and offering solutions. The real question, then, is whether there is an alternative to the strategy of negotiation because the ethical imperative of saving lives outweighs the moral arguments of not talking to terrorist groups. Moreover, the moral

⁴⁰ Powell, J., *Terrorists at the Negotiating Table*, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan

⁴¹ Powell, J., *Terrorists at the Negotiating Table*, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan

arguments against talking to terrorists, if looked at deeply, become arguments on how democratic governments should approach terrorists rather than not approaching them at all. It is almost impossible to eradicate every single terrorist from the face of the earth, hence it is vital to talk to them in order to resolve conflicts. Democratic governments should begin negotiations sensibly, learning from our history, learning how to communicate and build trust, how to combine hard and soft power, how to use third parties, how to reach a peaceful agreement and be sure that the agreement will be implemented. As journalist Eliza Manningham-Buller put it regarding 9/11 in her BBC Reith Lectures: “Despite talk of military action, there was one thing we all agreed on: terrorism is resolved through politics and economics, not through arms and intelligence, however important a role these play.”⁴²

There are regardless different stages before reaching the negotiation phase in a peace process, all of which differ based on which terrorist groups one is involved with. After having made contact with the group, it is fundamental to build a channel in order for the parties to communicate safely and accurately. As American academic Dean Pruitt argued, such contacts:

Can overcome most of the concerns that make parties (governments or terrorists) reluctant to negotiate openly with each other. They allow low-cost exploration of the other party’s flexibility and trustworthiness. If concession made in back channels are not reciprocated, they can easily be disavowed and prior positions reasserted...Also, because they are not publicised, back-channel talks do not accord legitimacy to the terrorists and their complaints and demands. Furthermore, there is relatively little risk that hawks will find out about them and attempt to discredit a leader who engages in them.⁴³

The establishment of a clandestine channel is often conducted on behalf of the government in the first instance by members of the intelligence agencies as they have the necessary skills to do so safely, and the ability to act deniably. It can help to develop a channel to bring one armed group that has been through a peace process to meet another just starting down the same road, as they have more credibility than diplomats or NGOs. Having a good reference from other armed groups and a track record of being evenhanded can also help. Building a personal relationship is important if the talks are going to work, although that does not necessarily mean becoming friends.⁴⁴ In a negotiation one party must persuade the other party to compromise on certain that they may not specifically want to compromise on. If both parties care about maintaining a good, working

⁴² Powell, J., *“Terrorists at the Negotiating Table”*, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan

⁴³ Powell, J., *“Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts”*, (2014) Penguin Random House

⁴⁴ Powell, J., *“Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts”*, (2014) Penguin Random House

relationship, it may make them more likely to make an effort in compromise. The logistics of maintaining a channel with a clandestine armed group are time-consuming and complicated and sometimes involve breaking laws as direct communication may be rare, but they also demonstrate reliability and willingness to negotiate. Even the simplest tasks take an inordinate amount of time, such as days to reach a meeting because one needs to “stencil cars and mobile phones and going around and around traffic circles to make sure you are not being tailed.”⁴⁵ One of the key ways to build trust is to start treating the members of the terrorist group like human beings. They are subject to their own traumas, such as torture when captured, and like on the run is tough. The first time they talk about their family or how hard life is underground, they tend to get tearful. Nevertheless, one needs to take into consideration the risk of the Stockholm syndrome. One must be weary of the terrorist’s attraction to the excitement of clandestine activities. This is however a small risk as there is a high barrier to be surmounted before trust can even begin to be built. Part of the point of building a channel is educative. Clandestine armed groups generally have lived in their own ghettos, real or metaphorical, for a long time. They mainly talk to people who share the same views as them. Their leaders are generally those who are prepared to be the most radical. Having contact with them can help open their eyes to how they are perceived by the outside world, to what might be realistically attainable in a negotiation, and what is out of the question. It helps the other side further understand what the terrorist group really wants.⁴⁶ The Berghof Centre in Berlin, an expert body on peace processes, argues that “pre-negotiation contact and dialogue with an armed group can...play a socialisation function by helping to build trust and foster the political will essential to making concessions and moderating demands or behaviour...Engagement also helps to prepare armed groups for negotiations, encouraging them to think about peace-process requirements and to develop a negotiable political agenda.”⁴⁷ Opening and developing a channel with an armed group is much more likely to be successful if the group is united rather than split among many factions. The terrorism and radicalisation expert Peter Neumann says a “factor in deciding whether to negotiate with a terrorist group should be its level of internal cohesion.”⁴⁸ When terrorist groups are fragmented it is much more difficult to negotiate with them effectively, and all of them are subject to the fragmentation. In this occasion, the government side should build up the moderate faction. If the government side furnishes help through ammunition, the moderates may be more successful in winning an internal argument. The most important aspect of the development of a channel is trust.

⁴⁵ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

⁴⁶ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

⁴⁷ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

⁴⁸ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

Because pre-negotiations are informal, and thus are not subject to any binding contract, both groups must trust that the promises will be maintained.

One of the most influential proponents of negotiating with a terrorist group was former Foreign Minister of Israel, Abba Eban. In a 1994 “op-ed” article from the Washington Post, he argued that leaders of democratic governments have an obligation to negotiate in the first stages of a conflict with even the most radical terrorist group as the group likely poses a real threat to the established democratic order. Regardless of the root of the conflict, achieving a compromise is better than violently suppressing a terrorist group because it avoids violence, hence saves lives. Too often leaders of democracies are submerged by their ideologically moral superiority which does not allow them to view the end goal pragmatically, and leads to misconceptions of the concepts of virtue, justice, and legitimacy. Eban calls diplomatic negotiation with terrorist groups as a “new diplomacy.” As he claimed, however, “this is what diplomacy has always been about: finding accommodation among intrinsically self-interested parties.”⁴⁹

Nevertheless this kind of diplomacy is still perceived with a certain degree of skepticism.

Chamberlain appeasing Nazi Germany’s aggression in Czechoslovakia is historical proof of the failure of “new diplomacy.” One example of negotiation gone wrong should not stop others to attempt this route.⁵⁰ As experts Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991), stated, there is no better alternative than a BATNA, or negotiated agreement.

1.6 Negotiation Tactics.

There is another distinction that must be made. One difference between negotiations at the tactical level and negotiations at the strategic level as for the state the cost-benefit analysis is not the same.⁵¹ At the tactical level, such as negotiations to free hostages, the potential advantages for the state are limited and the risk to fuel an upsurge is high. After all, the terrorist group received concessions and will continue to operate. This situation resembles the situation in the game theory model where it is not rational to negotiate. For these reasons it may seem as though it is tactically better to not negotiate. Negotiation is nevertheless not a big mistake unless it does not become a frequent option. Sporadic negotiations of this kind may be conducted by benefitting of the “plausible deniability”,

⁴⁹ Spector, B., *“Deciding to Negotiate with Villains”*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation

⁵⁰ Spector, B., *“Deciding to Negotiate with Villains”*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation

⁵¹ Marcovina, M., *“Negozicare coi Terroristi?”*, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

thus without bringing important strategic consequences.⁵² At the strategic level, negotiations that have as a goal the demilitarisation of the conflict promise considerable results. The biggest one is the cessation of violence, others are the collection of important informations, the alienation of moderate supporters if the failure of the negotiations is attributed to the terrorists, and the fracture of the terrorist group due to debate on whether or not to negotiate. There are also greater risks involved. One is to furnish the terrorist group with political legitimacy that may destabilise the political scenario. Consequently, the broken promise that violence will be ceased. For this reason it is important to embark on negotiations step by step.⁵³

In a study that takes into considerations all the terrorist groups after World War II, the results show that strategical negotiations occur less than the eighteen percent of the times. Of these cases, Cronin argues that thirty percent fully ceases violence, and it stabilises it in another twenty-seven percent of cases.⁵⁴ Lack of success is due to the lack of will to actually negotiate by terrorist groups or simply because the concessions asked by the groups are inconceivable for the state. Sometimes the state believes it has a better BATNA, such as with ideologically radical political terrorist groups from the sixties to the eighties. States exclude negotiations if they believe that the risks involved are too high. For example, non negotiation policy of the Italian state with the Red Brigades was due to the belief that allowing the group to enter into the political arena would have caused a serious political crisis with the communist party, and would have destabilised the equilibrium found after World War II. Another relevant example is the fact that negotiations with Islamic radicals may weaken moderate Middle Eastern governments.⁵⁵ On the contrary, it is more likely that there is a margin of compromise when terrorists fight for specific goals confined in a specific geographical location, and the hope of militarily eradicate them are minimal like the IRA. The other necessary condition for negotiations is a realistic expectation that a cessation of violence will be reached. It is fundamental also to make certain considerations regarding the risk that terrorist groups, through negotiations, gain political legitimacy with the the consequent weakening of moderates. The state must realise moments of statement where both parties are at a disadvantage. In these situations both parties are likely to gain more than lose in a negotiation, the state will understand that non negotiations policies do not lead anywhere, and terrorists will be more prone to respect the terms of the agreement. As

⁵² Marcovina, M., *“Negoziare coi Terroristi?”*, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

⁵³ Marcovina, M., *“Negoziare coi Terroristi?”*, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

⁵⁴ Cronin, A. K., *“Behind the Curve: Globalisation and International Terrorism”*, (2006) International Security

⁵⁵ Marcovina, M., *“Negoziare coi Terroristi?”*, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

Zartmann claims, pre-negotiation concessions may be seen as a sign of weakness.⁵⁶ This follows Cronin's empirical evidence that the agreement to a negotiation by a terrorist group is related to its length of life.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the structure of the terrorist group must be sufficiently monolithic and disciplined in order for leaders to impose the terms of the agreement to the rest of the members. Even the most disciplined and organised terrorist groups such as the IRA have had the most radical members split from the group and found new group, such as the Real IRA in 1997, which continues its campaign until today. If the group is strongly cohesive and unique in its genre, the success of an agreement due to a negotiation will lead to a stabilised cessation of violence. The radicals of the group may be marginalised if an agreement is reached with the group in general. The issue lies in the lack of organisation by the group where there are various factions that have the same power. In this case an agreement with one of the faction will be useless. All the factions must be part of the negotiation process, rendering the process itself more complex as the different factions will likely have different objectives even if the end goal is common.⁵⁸

Communicating with terrorist groups allows governments to exert meaningful influence over them. Solely through a negotiation, a democratic government may know and comprehend the reasons and goals behind the actions of terrorists. Ethics should not be taken into consideration when attempting to solve a conflict with a terrorist group. It is more important to find peace and save lives than not solving a conflict because one's ethical reasons imposes to behave in a way that does not lead to a peaceful resolution. Enemies are persons, groups, or countries perceived to be threatening or harmful, whether or not that perception is based on fact or a projection of fears (Finlay, Holsti, and Fagen 1967; Klare 1995). The most extreme kind of enemies are called villains, portrayed as such by others, as they act on complete opposition to the norms of the international community. Causes that define a villain as such are: support of terrorist groups, drug trafficking, illegal arms sale, no respect for human rights, inciting revolutions, and complete disregard for international norms.⁵⁹ Villains are generally lead by criminals, and they are subjected to sanctions and by the international community who has legitimate reasons for not negotiating with them. The first result of being portrayed as a villain is usually embargoes and no invitation to participate in diplomatic events. The

⁵⁶ Zartman, I. W., *"Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond, in International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War"*, (2000)

⁵⁷ Cronin, A. K., *"How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns"*, (2009) Princeton University Press

⁵⁸ Marcovina, M., *"Negozicare coi Terroristi?"*, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

⁵⁹ Spector, B., *"Deciding to Negotiate with Villains"*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation

stop of both formal and informal levels of communication generally create extremely harsh conditions for the villain. Sanctions are imposed in order for the villain to change its course so that peaceful negotiations can be once again enacted. Unfortunately these sanctions only increase the villainous actions of the villain, at least in the beginning. Villains behave this way because they follow their own internal logic to pursue certain goals, may them be political or religious. They do not define themselves as villains, but they would do anything to defend their “cause.” Some experts believe that villains are created because certain democracies need enemies to use them as scapegoats.⁶⁰ These democracies have a power ploy to enhance their international influence and create more patriotism inside the country. They must increase their export or domestic consumption of home goods showcasing the fact that the villains are no more considered to be economic legitimate partners, with the same consequence possible for allies of the villainous state. They use tactics of demonisation and dehumanisation in order to clearly state that they are the good, and the enemy is evil.

However this also creates the risk of a conflict with potential loss of human life. This process of portraying a state to be a villain intends to mobilise the public opinion of the state against the villain as preparing a war against a villain is easier if the government has popular consent.⁶¹ Generally the process of villainisation leads to a stalemates in diplomatic relations but may in the short term be resolved. If these situations are not entirely resolved and leave deep-rooted issues in the back burner, the villainisation process, or “villainiser’s dilemma,” must be pushed aside in favour of a negotiation process. Continuing the struggle only keeps the flame of the conflict alive. The decision to negotiate does not necessarily mean that the democratic government abandons its core values. It just means that the democracy realises the need for negotiation in order to achieve peaceful relations. It is important not to become hypocritical, however, as a deveillainisation process may furnish such perception. From devils they become partners.⁶² This occurred to President Carter in 1994 when he negotiated as a private citizen with the Bosnian Serbs to achieve a ceasefire. He understood, nevertheless, that communication, respect, trust, and granting legitimacy are essential to ending conflicts (Rose 1995). The villainiser’s dilemma lies in attempting to find a peaceful resolution after sanctions have been imposed but not complied with by the villain. If there is continued violation of human rights and loss of lives, the democracy may be pressured by the international community to change strategy. Hence they may pursue one of the following three options: impose harsher sanctions, take limited military action, or negotiate. The first two are likely

⁶⁰ Spector, B., *“Deciding to Negotiate with Villains”*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation

⁶¹ Spector, B., *“Deciding to Negotiate with Villains”*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation

⁶² Spector, B., *“Deciding to Negotiate with Villains”*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation

to increment the level of the conflict rather than solve the problem as it increases the villain's defiance, whereas the third option, albeit with risks involved, may solve the conflict at its core.⁶³ Although the primary argument for not negotiating with villains is that one cannot speak with people who constantly violate human rights, it is precisely for this reason that one should negotiate with the villain because one must do everything one can in order to stop the abuses of human rights. Negotiation does not mean forgiving or forgetting the past doings of the villain, but it separates the present with the past so that a conflict does not block opportunities for peace. The issue with negotiating for an immediate ceasefire is that it may save lives in the short run at the cost of accepting the violations committed in the past. Therefore it may sometimes be better to negotiate a longer term solution that resolves the conflict at its core but requires time and other lives lost. The strategy that democracies need to implement in a negotiation is that of ethical pragmatism. This strategy not only includes the ethical concept of saving lives, but also a pragmatist approach in resolving the situation that puts aside ideology for more efficient communication.⁶⁴

The debate of whether to negotiate with terrorist groups or not has brought a study that resulted in a theoretic model. In the equilibria of this novel game-theoretic model, one is able to notice that actors may or may not choose to denounce one another before secret negotiations begin. In this framework, such thinking affects actors' audience costs. Consequently, it will affect the specific outcomes that actors could conclude in these secret negotiations. An actor who makes a public commitment not to negotiate with a counterpart it considers to be beneath diplomacy, but who then subsequently does so, is especially motivated to ensure that negotiations do not fail. This motivation, naturally, reduces bargaining power.⁶⁵ However, under certain conditions, it may be in the actor's best interest to reduce his own bargaining power if that causes the counterpart to accept negotiations. Hence while on the surface publicly condemning negotiations with a counterpart may seem counterproductive for reaching an agreement, in reality it may lead the path for successful secret negotiations. This strategy is well explained within the context of a specific game-theoretic model of rhetoric and negotiations. The results of this model are particularly related to a series of natural specifications altering the specific sequence of events during play. In this model, for example, actors make simultaneous choices at each stage. The core of these results is the fact that the existence of an equilibria in which an actor denounces a counterpart in spite of the attendant reduction in bargaining power remains intact when decision making is sequential instead. "If one considers the equilibrium of this model in which A denounces, but B does not, and negotiations

⁶³ Spector, B., *"Deciding to Negotiate with Villains"*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation

⁶⁴ Spector, B., *"Deciding to Negotiate with Villains"*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation

⁶⁵ Browne, J., Dickson, E., *"We don't Talk to Terrorists: On the Rhetoric and Practice of Secret Negotiations"*, (2010) Sage

ensue, such an equilibrium exists under conditions specified above. The requirements for the conditions to be met are that A has a sufficiently strong desire to negotiate but that B would not be willing to negotiate in the absence of a denunciation by A. The logic of equilibrium does not change if rhetorical strategies are chosen sequentially rather than simultaneously. Under these conditions, if A moves first and denounces, B's best response will be not to denounce, and as before, both actors will then choose to negotiate, whereas if A moves first and does not denounce, B will ultimately choose not to negotiate. Given this kind of responses by B, A will prefer to denounce, and play will be consistent with the original simultaneous-play equilibrium. Similarly, under these conditions, if B moves first and does not denounce, A's best response will be to denounce, and as before, both actors will then choose to negotiate, whereas if B moves first and denounces, negotiations will not take place regardless of what A does. Given this profile of responses by A, B will prefer not to denounce, and play will again be consistent with the original simultaneous-play equilibrium."⁶⁶ This model obviously does not always apply in real life situations. It is nevertheless an accurate explanation of the game-theoretic logic behind one novel mechanism that may be relevant to some important empirical cases. The nature of the assumptions made suggests that this model is more applicable to certain settings than to others. It first presumes that both leaders will suffer audience costs in the event that they break a public commitment not to negotiate. This presumption is likely to be more applicable in situations where the conflict is highly visible and of considerable importance to actors on whose support the leaders rely. The model assumes the existence of an ongoing conflict along with a politician's decision to paint an adversary as indecent is most likely to affect voter sentiment, and potentially lead to audience costs if a public pledge is broken, when that portrayal resonates with historical experience, for example in a setting where the ongoing conflict has involved a history of violent incidents perpetrated by both sides. Secondly, the model requires the possibility of back channels of informal communication, through which leaders can extend and accept offers to engage in secret negotiations without the public's knowledge. The very nature of such informal channels of communication makes them difficult to identify empirically *ex ante*; however, from *ex post* case studies, it is clear that such channels are available to political actors in many conflict settings.⁶⁷ Such back channels are nevertheless quite risky, and the possibility of premature revelation of secret negotiations is a real one. At the same time, while the assumptions we make limit the applicability of the model in some respects, the model is fairly general in certain other respects. For example, the model is equally applicable for conflicts involving long-standing

⁶⁶ Browne, J., Dickson, E., *"We don't Talk to Terrorists: On the Rhetoric and Practice of Secret Negotiations"*, (2010) Sage

⁶⁷ Browne, J., Dickson, E., *"We don't Talk to Terrorists: On the Rhetoric and Practice of Secret Negotiations"*, (2010) Sage

taboos against negotiations and those in which mutual animosity has not previously taken this particular form. In both cases, it is up to politicians to choose whether to make public commitments refusing to negotiate or to make conciliatory statements about the need to explore all avenues to peace.⁶⁸ Furthermore, while the model depends on the potential presence of audience costs, such costs could arise in a variety of political contexts such as the electorate in a democratic context or a group of influential elites in the context of a dictatorship. Lastly, the conflict in question could either be international or domestic. From a broader perspective, this work extends the game-theoretic literature on audience costs and negotiations by describing the logic of a setting in which actors freely choose to weaken their own bargaining position in equilibrium.⁶⁹ More generally still, this framework offers a different perspective on the potential connections between political rhetoric and political outcomes in settings of conflict. Further studies of this model may allow for explorations of the strategic logic of labelling one's enemies in a variety of conflict contexts, particularly in the context of counter-terrorism policy.⁷⁰ Game theories indicate that the non negotiation policy is rationally superior only in the case where preconditions are relatively difficult to encounter in real life situations: both parties must have complete information, dedication to the state towards this policy must be perfectly credible, and terrorists must not be advantaged from a lack of negotiations. Terrorists, however, have some advantages from their attacks as they demonstrate power and fear among the population. In addition, empirical observations exclude a direct correlation between concessions and upsurge of the phenomenon, consequently negotiations do not increase terrorism.⁷¹ Generally at the beginning of a conflict a security campaign is enacted involving the use of force. When the security campaign proves longer than expected, hence the use of hard power is not furnishing the hoped results, military officers argue that resources need to be increased and that politicians should not involve themselves in the issue with debates. If this occurs, the problem would be resolved. In 2009 US military officers used this argument when President Obama was persuaded to increase military aid against the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁷² After this is achieved, the following step is reconciliation and reintegration. However, it is not a reconciliation as the term defines it, but rather a buying off supporters of the terrorist group and offer them a new life and safety. In Afghanistan, this procedure began with "Tier Three Taliban," "simple fighters," who were

⁶⁸ Browne, J., Dickson, E., *"We don't Talk to Terrorists: On the Rhetoric and Practice of Secret Negotiations"*, (2010) Sage

⁶⁹ Browne, J., Dickson, E., *"We don't Talk to Terrorists: On the Rhetoric and Practice of Secret Negotiations"*, (2010) Sage

⁷⁰ Browne, J., Dickson, E., *"We don't Talk to Terrorists: On the Rhetoric and Practice of Secret Negotiations"*, (2010) Sage

⁷¹ Marcovina, M., *"Negoziare coi Terroristi?"*, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

⁷² Powell, J., *"Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts"*, (2014) Penguin Random House

bought off in order to hand in their weapons and receive a guarantee of immunity from prosecution. The next step was to do the same with higher ranking individuals of the group, or “Tier Two Taliban,” which was not as successful as with the lower ranking individuals.⁷³ Although reconciliation programs are able to reduce the amount of the members of the group, it does not resolve the underlying issue behind the armed conflict. For this reasons many governments attempt to address the grievances that the terrorist group feels. This helps in conflict resolutions but never concludes a conflict as governments will regardless want the upper hand militarily and in a negotiation. This occurred in Afghanistan where the US military intended secure a victory before getting into negotiations.⁷⁴ But when does one know that enough military pressure has been achieved in order to have the upper hand? In this case the problem of perspective surfaces as well as there is a chance that the terrorist group does not share the same perception that the group is losing as their sole goal is surviving. Starting negotiations sooner may potentially save more lives. However governments, when beginning talks, often use “megaphone diplomacy” which is the making of public speeches instead of talks face to face with the terrorist group.⁷⁵ This serves for the government to choose the framework of the negotiation. Direct communication will be necessary afterwards because the if it does not convince the terrorists that a peaceful solution exists, the armed conflict will not stop. There are occasions where talks occur when there is a prolonged cease-fire in order to demonstrate that the terrorist group is serious to negotiate. This is called the process of decontamination, and one example may be a period of elections which shows that the group has sufficient popular support to deserve the negotiation. There is a problem of talking directly with terrorists as certain nations, such as the United States of America with the 2010 Patriot Act, passed laws that state it as a criminal offence to have such contacts.⁷⁶ The way that states confront this problem is to engage in secret negotiations and publicly deny any contacts. They do so through the use of intelligence agencies or neutral organisations and academics. Certain experts claim that negotiating with a terrorist group is not the same as a normal political negotiation, and that politics interfere negatively in the peace process. However, others firmly believe that such talks are part of a political process themselves as negotiation will be impacted by politics and in turn impact politics. Because of these issues, governments facing terrorist threats first attempt to eliminate the group by force. If such conflict is becoming too complex and costly, the governments consider the idea of negotiations, albeit first secret ones as they could face public opinion backlash. Furthermore,

⁷³ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

⁷⁴ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

⁷⁵ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

⁷⁶ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

governments know that these are extremely delicate matters to be solved, and solely want experts involved. Nevertheless, history demonstrates, as in the Northern Ireland IRA case, that successful resolutions to conflicts with a terrorist group is when governments stop worrying so much about their sovereignty and instead involve third parties in the negotiations.⁷⁷

As mentioned before, negotiations means preconditions. The fundamental precondition is the cessation of violence. If the terrorist group accepts and implements it, it highlights a real interest in resolving a conflict, providing a sort of guarantee or warranty. It also shows that the leaders of the group are able to control its members. When negotiations are rendered public, the public will become more open to these negotiations if the terrorist group stop the violence.⁷⁸ Deciding the content of the negotiations will be the next step. Neumann advises to separate two crucial questions. One is what will be the future of the terrorist group, and the other one is what will be the political agreement. The people taking part in the negotiations must be various and representative of all parties, so that such agreement truly mirrors the overall consensus and not the result of terrorists' actions. This will allow the delegitimation of the democratic state to be minimised if not completely annulled. Negotiations will also be successful if the government of the democratic state does not choose to negotiate in order to achieve internal consensus and objectives, but is truly committed to peace.⁷⁹

1.7 Conclusion.

In conclusion, negotiations are more straight forward and likely to be successful if the terrorist organisation is well structured and disciplined, has clearly defined goals, is rooted in a specific geographical location, and demonstrates willingness and capacity to cease bloodshed in order to reach an objective.⁸⁰

For all of these reasons it is fundamental to establish an efficient foreign policy as international conflicts are recurrent. Foreign policy is the formulation of a state's grand strategy, or worldview.⁸¹ Diplomacy is the practical implementation of foreign policy, and is associated with the broader idea

⁷⁷ Powell, J., *Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts*, (2014) Penguin Random House

⁷⁸ Marcovina, M., *Negoziare coi Terroristi?*, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

⁷⁹ Neumann, P., *Negotiating with Terrorists*, (2007) Foreign Affairs

⁸⁰ Marcovina, M., *Negoziare coi Terroristi?*, (2016) Sicurezza Nazionale

⁸¹ Wiseman, G. *Engaging the Enemy: An Essential Norm for Sustainable US Diplomacy*

that states should use peaceful means rather than military force in dealing with each other.⁸² In the real of terrorism, diplomacy may be used through the form of continuous dialogue, as there is the belief that diplomatic representation and communication is useful for the relationship of hostile parties. This belief is pushed by the idea that isolating the terrorist group is not beneficial to finding a peaceful solution. More generally, between two states, having continuous diplomatic dialogue helps avoid tensions that lead to the use of force.

The United States of America have, however, lead historically a policy of isolationism. Such policy is rooted in a distrust of diplomacy that dates to the times of Thomas Jefferson, who claimed that diplomacy is “the pest of the peace in the world.”⁸³ An example of this isolationism is the United States’ policy in Vietnam. After the war had ended in 1975 relations were not normalised albeit the willingness to formalise relationship by the Vietnamese government. The United States president at the time, Jimmy Carter, normalised relations only with the PRC. This changed in 1993 when President Clinton lifted the trade embargo and opened a year later a General Consulate, and consequently an embassy.⁸⁴ Nowadays the United States have changed strategy and are more open to dialogue. This is part of sustainable diplomacy which needs to be developed by encouraging diplomats to change their convictions of promoting national interests but rather impose on the ones who sent them a fundamental doubt about their own requirements. Reflexivity is vital for every diplomat as every diplomat uses dialogical reflection with the foreign other and the national self. Sustainable diplomacy should be promoted by the United States through ability and vision to engage the enemy even if it entails risk, a willingness to stick to the agreed norms of diplomatic culture, and a preference for non-hegemonic and persuasive engagement of the enemy to induce cooperation and socialisation.⁸⁵ Using this idea, this will be a critical dissertation in the humanities field, looking at negotiations with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

⁸² Wiseman, G. *“Engaging the Enemy: An Essential Norm for Sustainable US Diplomacy”*

⁸³ Wiseman, G. *“Engaging the Enemy: An Essential Norm for Sustainable US Diplomacy”*

⁸⁴ Wiseman, G. *“Engaging the Enemy: An Essential Norm for Sustainable US Diplomacy”*

⁸⁵ Wiseman, G. *“Engaging the Enemy: An Essential Norm for Sustainable US Diplomacy”*

Chapter II: The Strategies of Negotiation in the War in Afghanistan (2001-present)

2.1 Background and Historic Overview.

Afghanistan is a fundamental country for its geo-political position in Central Asia. Its territory is strategically placed and therefore has been a port for trade and travel between the East and West since the period of the silk road. The country later in the 19th century became a buffer state between the British to the south and east and the Russians to the north. The British empire was never able to fully control Afghanistan, a fact which Afghans take great pride in.⁸⁶

The country's geography and landscape are quite hostile. That combined with it being divided by various ethnic groups created significant challenges for every ruler, causing unstable periods since the end of the British empire. After successive coups that lasted until the 1930s, king Mohammed Zahir Shah was able to maintain power. By not challenging warlords, he was able to achieve policies of national consolidations, increasing relations with foreign states, and internal development. He was overthrown only in 1973 by communists led by his cousin, Mohammed Daoud Khan.⁸⁷

Afghanistan chose to maintain a non-aligned position during the cold war, albeit having close relations with the Soviet Union. Because Daoud had attempted to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on the Soviet Union and defied the communists who had helped him gain power, they assassinated him in the coup of 1978. After another internal communist coup that occurred a year later, in December of 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The country became even more unstable since the Soviet occupation. For the next ten years, a proxy war between mujahideen militias aided by the United States and Pakistan, and the communist government aided by the Soviet Union caused much violence and bloodshed.⁸⁸

In 1989, the Soviet Union retreated its troops from Afghanistan as it marked the beginning of the end of the cold war. This caused the country to be the battleground of a civil war. The opposing parties remained the communists and the the mujahideen militias although alliances were often betrayed. The mujahideen ended up defeating the communists and established a power-sharing

⁸⁶ "Afghanistan Political History", (2019), Norwegian Afghanistan Committee

⁸⁷ "Afghanistan Political History", (2019), Norwegian Afghanistan Committee

⁸⁸ "Afghanistan Political History", (2019), Norwegian Afghanistan Committee

agreement in 1992. The Islamist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar turned down a seat in the government, defied his former allies and entailed a bombing campaign on Kabul and other important cities. The constant violence gave birth to the Taliban, a movement of radical religious fundamentalists. They originate from Kandahar, in the south of the country, in 1994. They were able to take over power in just two years as they had great support with the hope of bringing peace and stability.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, because their rule was extremely fundamentalist and repressive towards human rights, they soon became feared. Hence it is estimated that over six million Afghans fled their country. The mujahideen began revolting against the Taliban, who could not count on foreign aid. However, they could count on the support of al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden. He had moved to Afghanistan in 1996 and furnished the Taliban with financial funds and foreign fighters. After the attacks of September 11th, 2001, United States led combat operations against Afghanistan as Taliban leaders refused to extradite Osama bin Laden. This led to the beginning of the Afghan war. Hamid Karzai became president of an interim government of Afghanistan and later won the elections. However, the United States were not able to achieve stable security in the Afghan territory as it has been more focused to militarily defeat the Taliban rather than developing an approach that would improve the living standards of civilians living in Afghanistan.⁹⁰

After the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, the United States and NATO enacted a joint military campaign against the Taliban, whom they accused of harbouring the perpetrators of the attacks, in Afghanistan. Since the campaign began 17 years, the United States casualties has thus far amounted to 2,400. Additionally, the United States Congress has allocated more than 132 billion dollars for the war in Afghanistan, as well for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. At the present moment, there are around 14,000 United States troops in Afghanistan, and 7,700 troops from the different 39 allied countries.⁹¹ The Taliban regime was replaced by the Karzai government, and as such human development, such as more schools and hospitals and greater civilian rights have increased, even though human development remains low and the future is not so bright for the Afghan people.

The aim of the United States government is to “prevent any further attacks on the United States by terrorists enjoying safe haven or support in Afghanistan.”⁹² The major current problem that Afghanistan faces is the lack of government control as it has failed to create economic development,

⁸⁹ “*Afghanistan Political History*”, (2019), Norwegian Afghanistan Committee

⁹⁰ “*Afghanistan Political History*”, (2019), Norwegian Afghanistan Committee

⁹¹ Thomas, C., “*Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief*”, (2019), Congressional Research Service

⁹² Thomas, C., “*Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief*”, (2019), Congressional Research Service

combat corruption, increase safety, and soften tensions between the various ethnic groups. This, along with other factors, may contribute to the need for the United States government to begin negotiations with the Taliban in order to reach a peace settlement. As of today, the Afghan government furnishes help to the United States and NATO allies in the conflict against the Taliban insurgency. The insurgency is not just made up of the Taliban, but also by groups affiliated to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Since 2015, the Operation Freedom's Sentinel was developed with the aim to train and assist Afghan government forces along with enacting combat operations against the Taliban.⁹³ The help provided to the Afghan government has contributed greatly to the government's ability to control Afghanistan. Nevertheless stability remains a distant dream. The government faces criticism as it is not able to guarantee security and prevent insurgent attacks. Terrorist attacks still happen frequently, even in major cities, like the capital Kabul.⁹⁴

Taliban forces still maintain control of many rural areas which serves as bases to assault urban areas. The government also faces internal problems due to new political opposition coalitions. United States President Donald Trump has been contemplating withdrawal of some US troops.⁹⁵ Talks to resolve the conflict are complex because of the various ethnic divisions in the country. There have been enormous efforts to address these divisions in the compromise "national unity government" formed in September 2014 in which two candidates at the Afghan presidential election claimed victory. Both candidates came together to form the "national unity government." Another outcome of this crisis was to delay the 2018 Parliamentary Elections, which were also marred by violence and administrative problems, which in turn caused a delay of the 2019 Presidential Elections.⁹⁶

However, United States policymakers have confidence that the economic, and consequently social and political aspects of Afghanistan may improve if the strategic geographic position for trade routes and the underdeveloped natural resources are taken advantage of. Afghanistan is located in a strategic position and has natural resources that may be used in order to develop the country's commerce, both at the private and the public level. It is thus fundamental for the government to manage the resources and establish relations with other states in order to develop its trade system. The political situation in Afghanistan remains unchanged since the national unity government of 2014 was formed with help from the United States, who oversaw the formation of the government.

⁹³ Thomas, C., *"Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief"*, (2019), Congressional Research Service

⁹⁴ *"Afghan Violence: Taliban Bomb Kills Many Amid Peace Talks with US"*, (2019), BBC News

⁹⁵ Thomas, C., *"Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief"*, (2019), Congressional Research Service

⁹⁶ Thomas, C., *"Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief"*, (2019), Congressional Research Service

Subsequent to the disputed elections of that year, the United States helped solve the conflict by leading to Ashraf Ghani becoming president and Abdullah Abdullah becoming chief executive officer. This government has however increased fragmentation between the various ethnicities present in Afghanistan and has created certain political upheavals that have challenged the current government.⁹⁷ These ethnic tensions were largely suppressed during the previous presidency of Hamid Karzai. One key example of the divisions that have caused upheavals is the departure of Abdul Rashid Dostum, the Vice President, in the wake of accusations that he was the mastermind behind the kidnapping and assault of a political rival, perhaps to avoid facing legal justice. He returned in July 2018 and although he is under indictment, no legal proceedings have so far have been filed against him.⁹⁸ Another sign that has undermined political stability has been President Ghani's decision to remove the governor of the province of Balkh, Atta Mohammad Noor, who represented the Tajik minority group and refused to obey Ghani's request for resignation. He subsequently remained in office for another four months before he resigned in March 2018. Another example of the political instability facing Afghanistan occurred in July 2018, when a new political alliance called the Grand National Coalition of Afghanistan was created by leaders such as Dostum and Noor, which became a direct threat to Ghani's government.⁹⁹

For these reasons it is fundamental to unify efforts in order to reach a political peace settlement with the insurgents. It is true that a settlement will require a variety of compromises especially regarding women's rights and the Afghan constitution. United States President Donald Trump stressed this importance in August 2017, stating that a political settlement is the outcome of a military action. Since 2018, President Ghani has repeatedly attempted to open up negotiations with the Taliban. The first attempt to negotiate without preconditions has been rejected by the Taliban, while the second attempt offering cease-fire was reciprocated by the Taliban for three days during which all groups even prayed together. However the Taliban rejected a prolonged cease-fire. Although the Taliban intend to negotiate with the United States directly, the counterpart intended for the Taliban to negotiate with the Afghan government in an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned" process until July 2018.¹⁰⁰ Since then, the Trump administration shifted its foreign policy and established several meetings with the Taliban to begin preliminary negotiations. Such talks have been reportedly led by former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad who has been appointed

⁹⁷ Thomas, C., *"Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief"*, (2019), Congressional Research Service

⁹⁸ Thomas, C., *"Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief"*, (2019), Congressional Research Service

⁹⁹ Thomas, C., *"Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief"*, (2019), Congressional Research Service

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, C., *"Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief"*, (2019), Congressional Research Service

“special advisor” for reconciliation efforts, angering President Ghani who was blindsided by the sudden shift in policy. This change in policy towards Afghanistan is also due to public statements by United States military officials, which state that during the past two years there has been a stalemate, and the territory either contested or controlled by the Taliban has slightly grown, reaching 32 percent of contested territory and 12 percent of controlled territory in Afghanistan.¹⁰¹ Regional dynamics around Afghanistan do not help the ease the conflict. Rather, states such as Pakistan, have negatively affected the peace process and has been accused of funding and aiding the insurgents. President Ghani in February 2018 called Pakistan “the centre of the Taliban”.¹⁰² It is uncertain whether Pakistan is committed to Afghan stability or has ties with insurgent groups such as the Haqqani Network, which is itself tied to the Taliban and is a United States designated Foreign Terrorist Organisation. Additionally, United States officials claimed numerous times that Pakistan is a safe haven for Taliban militants endangering Afghanistan. These statements have nevertheless been questioned due to the increased territorial control of the Taliban within the Afghan territory. It is therefore unclear whether Pakistan is taking advantage of the instability in Afghanistan or whether this instability could create a domino effect and negatively impact Pakistan itself as it has in the past faced insurgencies. Furthermore, the United States have regarded numerous times, perhaps incoherently, Pakistan an important ally against terrorism since the rise of Khomeini in Iran in 1979. This relationship began in order to contain the Soviet Union, and continued after the 9/11 attacks.¹⁰³

The territorial gains of the Taliban may cause them not to negotiate at all since they seemingly appear to be on a winning streak. Nevertheless, the Taliban do not pose a real threat to the Afghan government, especially given the military balance. This would change if the United States decided to drastically lower financial aid or the number of military troops. A collapse of the current political government in Afghanistan would in turn hurt the United States as military and terrorist factions could rise, offering new opportunities for transnational terrorist groups. Hence the United States government must have different outlooks on the Afghan situation and explore different plausible settlements rather than all out victory. It must leverage its assets, influence, and experience in order to help Afghanistan sustain an efficient and inclusive governance. The issues that Congress faces is

¹⁰¹ Thomas, C., “*Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief*”, (2019), Congressional Research Service

¹⁰² Thomas, C., “*Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief*”, (2019), Congressional Research Service

¹⁰³ Thomas, C., “*Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief*”, (2019), Congressional Research Service

the United States role in authorising, appropriating funds for, and overseeing military activities, aid and regional policy implementation.¹⁰⁴

2.3 Cons of Negotiations.

The idea of negotiating with the Taliban in order to stabilise Afghanistan has created a variety of contrasting opinions. Among these are the ones favouring a modification of the current NATO strategy, which is a return to counterinsurgency operations. According to this view, so long as the prominent Taliban figures are convinced that military victory in Afghanistan is inevitable, then it will be impossible to engage in proper and fruitful negotiations with the Taliban. Moreover, by an overwhelming margin of 82 percent to 4 percent, the Afghan public is against the Taliban and hopes that Western forces will be able to defeat them.¹⁰⁵ The Afghan public believes that victory implies erecting a state that is able to control its borders and territory, able to assure the security of its citizens, provide responsive governance and economic development. Therefore what is required is a determination by NATO and the United States to stay involved in Afghanistan as the impatience that is being portrayed to respect election promises will allow the Taliban to outlast the international coalition and induce Pakistan to continue furnishing support for the Taliban in order to protect its interests in Afghanistan. The approach to remain fully involved in the conflict adds to the United States' economic and political burdens, but negotiating the way out of the conflict will eventually have even bigger costs.¹⁰⁶

The inability of American and other NATO troops to defeat the Taliban as quickly as expected, along with the various civilian casualties that occurred during the conflict, have alimeted Taliban propaganda. This led to the worry that the military conflict will never be won if this strategy were to continue being followed. Even the White House under President Obama reviewed the strategy in Afghanistan and came up with a plethora of new solutions, such as dialogue and reconciliation with the Taliban.¹⁰⁷ Although proponents of counterinsurgency operations recognise that talking to the Taliban certainly has its advantages, it is not the right proper strategy to entail. It could exacerbate the ethnic divisions that currently cause tension in Afghanistan, it could make it seem that the

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, C., *"Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief"*, (2019), Congressional Research Service

¹⁰⁵ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹⁰⁶ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹⁰⁷ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Taliban had the upper hand in the conflict, thus making reconciliation less probable, and could even unleash another civil war involving all the regional actors and providing new opportunities for al-Qaeda to gain more power, allowing it to attack the West once again. This would also undermine the credibility American power.¹⁰⁸

The theory of resolving the conflict through negotiation has come up from the initial successes of Operation Enduring Freedom when both Afghan and Pakistani media were discussing the need to allow the more moderate layer of the Taliban to have receive some requests. Prior to President Ghani, even President Karzai had explored the possibility of talking to the Taliban before taking office, as he had close relationships with a variety of Taliban figures throughout the 1990s. Since February 2004, the Afghan government has created and run the Program Takhim-e-Solh, which aims to reconcile insurgents and then entice them to return to Afghanistan peacefully. This is known as the “strengthening peace” initiative, and today offers insurgents who agree to renounce violence and who pledge support to the Afghan State the possibility to rejoin their tribal communities.¹⁰⁹ This program permitted more than two thousand insurgents to return and abandon violence. However, it did not have the hoped success as it has not been able to correctly validate the credentials of these individuals. As such, it has been unable to monitor these individuals after they rejoined their tribal communities, and due to the central government’s failures, the Western allies decided to suspend the financial support towards this initiative. Additionally, there was some backlash regarding whether to grant amnesty to certain high profile figures. In May 2005, this program had offered amnesty to the Taliban Emir Mullah Omar, and the Hizbe Islami Chieftain, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Because this offer was largely criticised at international scale, it was rescinded. Nevertheless the possibility of resolving the conflict through negotiations with the Taliban has not completely waned.¹¹⁰

Discussions about the possibility of negotiations has increased during previous Afghan President Karzai’s reelection campaign when he called Mullah Omar “one of our own.”¹¹¹ Additionally, in order to get reelected, he condemned NATO’s conduct of the conflict with the Taliban to appeal to Pashtuns and lower classes, and deflected the lack of political, social, and economic improvement of the country throughout his first term. However it was precisely the lack of improvement in all

¹⁰⁸ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹⁰⁹ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹¹⁰ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹¹¹ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

those spheres that exacerbated Taliban insurgency. When combined with NATO not being effective in its counterinsurgency strategy which highlights firepower and standoff attacks against the Taliban insurgents but also includes excessive collateral damage, it demonstrates exactly the reasons as to why reconciliation has been debated even during the Karzai presidency, even if it was pushed by the hope for reelection, hence not purely genuine. In April 2008, some members of the opposition National Front have declared overtures towards possible reconciliation with the Taliban as they feared that Karzai and the Taliban would strike a secret deal together and there exclude them. This is further evidence that negotiations were being taken into consideration for preservation of power, and not for bringing stability and peace in Afghanistan. That same year, a leaked statement from British Ambassador to Kabul Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, stated that the best option for the conflict with the Taliban was a reconciliation that involved the exit of all NATO troops.¹¹² This leak received worldwide attention convincing public opinion that a victory in Afghanistan was unlikely and that negotiations would turn out to be the best options. The American Secretary of Defence at the time Robert M. Gates added to this shift in public opinion involuntarily by stating in a NATO defence ministers meeting in Budapest, Hungary on October 9, 2008, that, “there has to be ultimately-and I’ll underscore ultimately-a reconciliation as part of a political outcome.” He then went on to claim that a similar strategy was used in Iraq and was successful as the United States had, “promoted a reconciliation that involved people we were pretty confident had been shooting at us and killing our soldiers.” This is how most wars end, according to him.¹¹³

However, when Karzai was in power, real negotiations and possible settlements were not achieved. When, during his presidential term, Karzai offered to open up negotiations with the Taliban, the Taliban set some unreasonable preconditions for the negotiations, such as the immediate withdrawal of all NATO troops from Afghan territory and the imposition of the Taliban “Islamic” constitution. These preconditions highlighted the fact that the Taliban were not serious about finding a peace settlement and rather aimed to impose their own vision on the country. There was one example of a reported secret meeting organised by Saudi Arabia in Mecca between Afghan diplomats representing the Karzai government and the Taliban’s Rahbari Shura.¹¹⁴ The reports of the details of the meeting are vague and contradictory. However, despite the lack of high ranking Taliban

¹¹² Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹¹³ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹¹⁴ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

representative in these talks, the underlying importance at the time appeared to be the willingness of a major actor, such as Saudi Arabia, to put an end to the Afghan conflict. However, in reality, the Saudi government expressed embarrassment over the meeting, since they do not want any association with the Taliban, and repeatedly ignored the Afghan government's requests to interject in the conflict. The idea of the meeting came instead from Karzai's brother, who is a United States citizen. He tirelessly worked for over two years to find back channels for negotiations, and Saudi Arabia served as a track-two effort by hosting the meeting.¹¹⁵

However reconciliation remains an attractive prospect as it would allow Europeans who intend to exit this conflict and withdraw their troops to avoid making more military contributions. Dialogue and negotiation provide a solution that would have lower costs without any hasty withdrawal of troops or actual defeat. For Americans as well, reconciliation is an attractive option as the public opinion has turned against the Afghan War, as there does not appear to be an end in sight and since there are surmounting domestic problems in the US. Those who are more committed to the ideology behind this conflict against terrorists but are not in favour of the current NATO strategy are becoming more and more supportive of a reconciliation policy.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless there are many obstacles that need to be overcome. Firstly for as many proponents of negotiations there are opponents which are the countries in the neighbourhood around Afghanistan such as Russia, India, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, as they are fervently opposed to Taliban being treated as a legitimate force. Pakistan as well, albeit being a support base for the Taliban, are skeptical of reconciliation for its possible negative effects in Pakistan, and because it would undermine the current military operations. Most importantly, the Taliban themselves represent the biggest obstacle. They entertain the possibility of negotiations when it is most favourable to them and unfavourable to the United States, and their effective propaganda about victory despite military failures may continue to undermine peace settlement efforts, especially due to the irresoluteness of Western countries.¹¹⁷

2.4 Pros of Negotiation.

¹¹⁵ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹¹⁶ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹¹⁷ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

It is fundamental in negotiating to distinguish between those members of a terrorist organisation who are more moderate and pragmatic, and are thus more inclined to talk, and the ideological radicals who will never surrender. Then, after effectively reaching out to the moderate faction, it can be ensured that promises will be kept permanently by all the parties. Hence, it is vital to talk to key Taliban moderates who have shown overture to a possible reconciliation. Negotiations will have greater possibility for success after strategic objectives by the NATO coalition have been achieved. This is true especially because the Taliban are not a homogenous organisation. The more time goes by, the more they are becoming a loose network of individuals united by a common religious ideology, who have a strong desire to regain power in Afghanistan, and a profound antagonism against the West. There are three general categories of the constituent entities that make up the Taliban.¹¹⁸ The first category are leaders of various groups that share the Taliban ideology and objectives who intend to use force to regain power. The second category consists of Afghans and Pashtuns who at times support Taliban operations in order to have another source of income and employment as few other opportunities exist, especially since local Taliban leadership provides security, justice, good governance, and development. Additionally, it is a form of protest against state corruption. The third category is made up of Afghan tribal leaders, who belong to major tribes belonging such as Ghilzai confederation or smaller, deprived Durrani tribes, and who believe that the Taliban are winning or are helpful in advancing local interests.¹¹⁹ However the Taliban are excellent at disguising tribal affiliations as some support the Taliban because of interclass competition, as the Karzai regime often has favoured members of particular tribes for political office, patronage, and resources. Therefore, it overall seems that more than being ideologically attached to the cause, tribes become affiliated to the Taliban for convenience and protests as the first group of Taliban affiliates is the more restricted in number. This group is the least likely to be open to negotiations, and it would be easier to distinguish the individuals and defeat them. The second group may be easily swayed to reconciliation if the Afghan government provides reliable public service and good governance that fights corruption. The third group would also, albeit to a lesser extent, be open for reconciliation as it is not fully committed to the Taliban cause. If the government would be fairer and more effective, the Taliban ideology may start to lose its appeal to certain

¹¹⁸ Tellis J., A., *“Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan”*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹¹⁹ Tellis J., A., *“Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan”*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

supporters of the Taliban.¹²⁰ The Afghan government is thus central to an effective peace resolution between itself and the West against the Taliban. If, with the assistance of foreign partners, the government can implement strategies that provide personal security and opportunities for sustenance to its citizens, fight corruption and abuse of power, and co-opt the tribes through power sharing that reflects democratic principles, the majority of people would be collaborative and constructively support the state for a peace settlement. This would allow a priori to avoid distinguishing between the moderates and the radicals. Formal strategies of compromise will not have as much as an importance if the changes made become incentives to not defy the state. A solution to recidivism would also be found so long as the government effectively addresses the problems posed by the opponents, the danger of relapsing to violence would be minimised significantly.¹²¹

What is fundamental as well is that the coalition of forty-one countries in the International Security Assistance Force, which includes NATO's twenty-six members, to clarify the overarching goals. It seems as though at the moment many of the coalition countries have their own interests and goals as they have different political pressures at home. Hence, the military operations at times lack cohesion undermining the ability to successfully conclude operations. The ultimate goal must be to create in Afghanistan a government that effectively provides good governance, control its territory and borders, and ensuring internal stability. However, in order to properly achieve this goal, negotiations with the Taliban are necessary as there is the risk for Afghanistan to become the United States' "51st state," as Senator John Kerry stated.¹²² There are nevertheless criticisms about helping to build up an effective Afghan government.¹²³ The first relates to the impossibility of doing so because it is beyond the capacity of the Western coalition as Afghanistan has a particular history, and sociopolitical peculiarities. Therefore simply eliminating al-Qaeda should be the ultimate objective. The second critique also claims that Afghanistan has never enjoyed a tradition of strong institutionalised central authority. It is a country shaped by subnational social formation of ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian tribes. Hence the tribal society should be restored by eliminating extremism rather than constructing a centralised state, argues the second school of thought. However, until the

¹²⁰ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹²¹ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹²² Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹²³ Tellis J., A., *"Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan"*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

1970s, Afghanistan has been a relatively stable developing country. Additionally, the lack of a centralised system is dangerous as competition between tribes could lead to even more violence. The third point of view goes even further, stating that even the formation of a moderate acephalous polity would be difficult to achieve because of the deep support for conservative versions of Islam within Afghan society. For this reason the best strategy to end the conflict is reconciling with the Taliban and allowing their confessional system to be integrated within the government. Hence the creation of a mixed polity with fundamentalist components. The fourth and final critique claims that the Western coalition should first eliminate al-Qaeda, then set out to reconstitute a modern tribal society, which would incorporate the Taliban into the government. However, these actions are not sufficient. The Western coalition must create a benevolent authoritarian state in Afghanistan as a democratic state will not be able to achieve stability and effectively control its territory.¹²⁴

While these theories have valid points, they ultimately undermine the minimal strategic reason for the intervention in Afghanistan: to never allow the country to be a haven for terrorist groups anymore. To claim that the Western coalition should focus on simply eliminating al-Qaeda without an effective Afghan state is more difficult than with the help of an effective Afghan state.

Additionally, even if this would be successful, it does not guarantee that successor terrorist groups would attempt to rise using stateless spaces within the Afghan territory. Only the presence of a state which is capable of exercising the Weberian “monopoly of force” with Afghan borders can avert the recurrence of such a threat.¹²⁵ This would also minimise support for such groups and be less costly in the long run. An autocratic state would exacerbate tensions between the various tribes and increase inequalities. It would legitimise the hegemony of one particular social formation. Thus coercion from the state would increase and the benevolence in the authoritarian regime would be completely eliminated. Consequently the possibility of overthrowing the regime could potentially become a reality.¹²⁶

A variation of the first critique is one proposed by Fareed Zakaria, who has argued that the United States should eradicate al-Qaeda but learn how to live with the Taliban:

The United States is properly and unalterably opposed to al-Qaeda—on strategic, political and moral grounds—because its *raison d’être* is to inflict brutality on the civilised world we

¹²⁴ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹²⁵ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹²⁶ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

have significant differences with the Taliban on many issues—democracy and the treatment of women being the most serious. But we do not wage war on other Islamist groups with which we similarly disagree (the Saudi monarchy, for example).¹²⁷

This approach lead commentators to theorise a strategy that involves winding down slowly operations in Afghanistan in order to focus on al-Qaeda in Pakistan. This would put pressure on the real enemy and not a superficial one, and also avoids the issue of asking Pakistan to prevent movement of Taliban insurgents from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Many in the United States government believe that this strategy should be put in practice as it would allow a quick exit from Afghanistan, a country where the real enemies are not even present, and where state-building is expensive and burdensome. However if before September 11, 2001, a distinction between al-Qaeda and the Taliban was clear, after September 11, 2001, the two groups have become intertwined as help each other financially, through technical training, operational coordination, shared logistics, assistance in recruiting, and cooperative attacks. Mullah Dadullah Akhund, a Taliban commander, has described that the relationship his group has with al-Qaeda is one of strict collaboration, almost as if they were part of a larger group made up of both the Taliban and al-Qaeda together. Even the Taliban “night letters” which have been analysed by Thomas Johnson, have invocations to the global ummah, just like al-Qaeda. Therefore if al-Qaeda must be prosecuted, so do the Taliban in Afghanistan. During possible negotiations, it is fundamental to make it a precondition not to allow the Taliban, once in power in Afghanistan, to furnish help to its partners in order to devolve their ideology and further attacking the West.¹²⁸

The United States over the years placed the conflict in Afghanistan on the back burner, choosing to focus on the war effort in Iraq. In 2009, after eight years in Afghanistan, \$171 billion were spent, while \$653 billion were spent in just six years in Iraq.¹²⁹ As of 2019, that figure for the United States increased to almost \$1 trillion in Afghanistan.

According to Ashley J. Tellis who is a strong supporter for continuing the intervention in Afghanistan, In order for a successful campaign in Afghanistan, the FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency would mean that 650,000 men under arms would be required.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the United States

¹²⁷ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹²⁸ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹²⁹ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹³⁰ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

forfeited much of the responsibility to NATO, which sent signals to powers in the region and Afghanistan that the United States is slowly exiting Southern Asia. This then incentivised the powers to pursue their own differing strategies to protect their interests should the Americans withdraw its troops. Pakistan, for example, increased support to the Taliban insurgents. The Taliban saw this as a sign of the limits of American patience with military missions abroad and reinforced the idea that the only necessary action was the insurgents to outlast the United States.

As Ashley J. Tellis argues against negotiations with the Taliban, he claims that in order for the Western coalition to “win the war” means that there needs to be an Afghan state sufficient enough to marginalise the Taliban and reduce it to the level where domestic law and security enforcement can handle it effectively.¹³¹ Thus, the United States needs to declare that they aim to win the war and to stay as long as necessary to achieve this goal. A lasting presence of United States troops is necessary to curb foreign powers’ influence in the area, and to prevent Afghanistan from becoming once more a base for al-Qaeda and forces hostile to the United States.

Additionally, the current chain of command is too complex and too divided. Consequently, Ashley J. Tellis recommends realigning the entire mission under the United States-Europe Command (USEUCOM), where everything from resourcing to training to combat would be integrated fully under NATO.¹³² There is currently no unified NATO strategy on dealing with counterinsurgency, hence the command must be united under the United States military leadership.¹³³

There also needs to be a better integration between civil reconstruction activities and military operations, as it will ensure that all the reconstruction money can be used where it is needed, and avoid any misuse of funds which also would allow the government to focus beyond areas considered safe. This strategy would also allow the Afghan government and civil society to play a wider role in reconstruction.¹³⁴

Another strategy that Ashley J. Tellis argues must be enacted is the need to shift troops’ actions from destroying the enemy to protecting civilians. The use of heavy force and superior firepower also results in potential casualties which ultimately increase popular support for the Taliban and alienation. Changing America’s current status in Afghanistan is possible because the Taliban do not

¹³¹ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹³² Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹³³ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹³⁴ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

control Afghanistan and nationwide support is not necessary. Another reason to enact this strategy is that the majority of the Afghan people do not view the United States and NATO as occupiers. Those that do are driven more by a different worldview and are influenced by the Taliban. Lastly, most Afghans do not oppose Western military presence in their country, but rather want them to be successful so that after thirty years of war, the Afghan people are able to live a peaceful life.¹³⁵

Another aspect the United States must consider is information and how to counter the Taliban's use of media to spread its message. The Afghan government is plagued with corruption and inefficiency. Ultimately, the best way to defeat the Taliban is to convince the populace in Taliban strongholds that life with Taliban presence is worse than without Taliban presence by using information and the media just like the Taliban do. This will be achieved by building up institutions in Kabul and to restore law, order, and justice.¹³⁶

Another aspect is bringing reconstruction and development down to more local levels, which will allow the fight against narcotics that have made the Taliban wealthy to be more effective. There needs to be a concerted effort to decrease and end drug production in Afghanistan. This may also be done by using the establishment of law and order to prosecute criminals, and the use of more local levels for development to provide alternate incomes.¹³⁷

There also must be central initiatives to increase government efficacy in the ministries. Building human capital and focusing on decreasing joblessness and poverty is fundamental. It is also important that free and fair elections are held and that there is a large number of competing candidates from all backgrounds that can provide genuine alternatives. Using this and spreading civic education can help decrease potential problems and can show that the authority holds power because it was granted by the citizens.¹³⁸

Asides from this, there needs to be some external change. Pakistan, which hosts many Taliban insurgents, needs to be convinced that helping the United States counter the Taliban on Pakistani soil will provide reassurances for Pakistani interests. This can be done by helping strengthen

¹³⁵ Tellis J., A., *“Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan”*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹³⁶ Tellis J., A., *“Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan”*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹³⁷ Tellis J., A., *“Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan”*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹³⁸ Tellis J., A., *“Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan”*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

civilian rule in Pakistan, building Pakistani counterterrorism forces, helping train Pakistani military components for low intensity conflict, and provide financial support.¹³⁹

Lastly connecting southern Asia through an expanded infrastructure network, airlines, gas pipelines, telecommunications can connect central Asia to the Indian subcontinent through Afghanistan, expanding the economic network and potentially bringing increased prosperity to the entire area will allow for the complete elimination of these terrorist groups.¹⁴⁰

There are many risks involved in negotiating with the Taliban, and it is fundamental to be aware and understand them if the United States and its allies embark in such arduous conflict resolution. Prior to the Ghani presidency, Karzai was the leader of the Afghan government. During that presidency, the Taliban controlled over one third of the Afghan territory. They managed to become so powerful from the commerce of drugs as Afghanistan is the leading producer of opium in the world. A Taliban led government in Afghanistan is possible especially if it is the result of the intervention, albeit indirect, of a third state as it would not go against customary international law. Although there are facts supporting the thesis that Pakistan has helped the Taliban between 1994 and 2001, it is legally unclear whether such support continued later on. It is nevertheless likely that Pakistan violated international norms through “indirect armed aggression” according to Art. 3(g) of the UN General Assembly’s 1974 Declaration on the definition of aggression.¹⁴¹ It could thus be legally argued that the military, financial, and political support provided to the Taliban is an aggression against Afghanistan as Pakistan has control over various insurrectional activities. This would fall under the sub-hypothese of “substantial involvement” defined by the International Court of Justice in its judgment of the Nicaragua case in 1986.¹⁴² The Karzai government was established after a unilateral intervention of NATO and coalition of willing states which was led by the United States and the United Kingdom. It was able to not allow the Taliban to overthrow Karzai because of the support of this coalition that spanned from political to financial to military. The problem with the Constitution is that the Afghan people, during the Karzai government, have chosen the organisation of self-determination through the traditional Loya Jirga, or the Afghan constitutional convention

¹³⁹ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹⁴⁰ Tellis J., A., “*Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan*”, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹⁴¹ Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁴² Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

that established a democratic and unitary state that had a presidential system of governance and based on Islamic provisions.¹⁴³

The Taliban is a terrorist organisation made up of about 15 thousand members who intend to establish the Sharia, or the rule of Islam.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, the Taliban are against any sort of Western value, and aim to keep Afghanistan in a cocoon, isolated from any Western influence. They could achieve their goal peacefully if the current Afghan government allowed their entrance in the government. This would legally legitimise the rule of the Taliban in terms of the principle of “to a willing person injury is not done,” from the Latin phrase *volenti non fit iniuria*. The principle “the law arises from the fact,” from the Latin *ex facto oritur ius*, considers it not to be relevant the nature of a regime, even if the regime is related to a terrorist organisation, hence providing further legal acceptance for a Taliban regime.¹⁴⁵ In international legal terms, the condition of a democratic rule of law and fundamental rights in order to legitimise a government would violate one of the principles of the international community: the equality among States. Nevertheless, a State that has a democratic rule of law and fundamental rights does have advantages in the international sphere than other States, especially in the relations with other States and international organisations. However, the notion of power of the Taliban has traditionally been outside of the current world order. The terrorist organisation does not see itself as a political entity claiming a well defined territory based on a common ethnicity, language, religion, culture, and tradition. According to the Taliban this concept nation-State is a concept of modernisation, thus it does not pertain to them. Although this is true and historically the Taliban have furnished ample demonstration for resistance and unwilling to compromise, what has come out recently perhaps shows that times have really changed.¹⁴⁶

Negotiations would be incredible difficult because the Taliban organisation is composed of many layers and is not rigid. They are a mix between Jihadis, Pashtun localists, and poor narco traffickers. This mix dates all the way back to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989.¹⁴⁷ During those years a massive exodus took place from the Pashtun tribal areas. The tribal elites migrated to Europe and the United States, while the other refugees settled in Pakistan. The exodus created a complete restructuring and weakening of tribal society. The refugees followed religious instructions in a host of madrasas, or religious schools, which dotted the border between Pakistan

¹⁴³ Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁴⁴ Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁴⁵ Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁴⁶ Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁴⁷ Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

and Afghanistan. Hence, some of the refugees became the Taliban, which literally is the Arabic word for students. They were raised and educated in these madrasas, which represented the anomic empty space between the tribe and the state. They participated in the Afghan jihad which was monitored and executed by Pakistan, who used money from the United States and Saudi Arabia. When the Soviets finally withdrew from Afghanistan, a civil war occurred and the Taliban emerged as a powerful force using Pakistani support, and managed to settle in Afghan territory, albeit still not having today a clear structure, and having different centres of power.¹⁴⁸

Another aspect of the Taliban as leaders of the Afghan government that is not clear whether it would be accepted is the principle of rule of law, implying that only the State as holder of sovereign power, may create laws. Rather, it seems as though the Taliban favour that a plurality of centres operates making laws as it occurred in a pre-modern traditional State. This is likely due to the fact that the Taliban have a loose and nebulous structure. They would likely not allow the practice of other versions of Islam, which are indeed practiced today in Afghanistan. Therefore, negotiating with them with the intent to allow them to have an important role in the Afghan government would lead to an approach led by force and not popular consensus, violating the fundamental principle of modern statecraft. The rule of law is a legal and political principle that connects power and citizens with the aim at protecting, through juridical norms, the private sphere of the citizens from the power structure of the State. This has three legal dimensions.¹⁴⁹

Firstly, the Taliban concoct the executive, legislative, and judicial organs and would use their own version of Sharia, or Islamic law, interpreted by local mullahs, and holding power through the threat or even use of force. Therefore there would not be a system of checks and balances.¹⁵⁰

Secondly, the relationship between the head of state and citizens is a cause of concern. The rule of law implies that civil and political rights are rights that the State must guarantee as it cannot delve into the citizens' private sphere, and allow them to participate into daily political life. The head of state must have the consent of its citizens to exercise power and protect their lives and liberties. Hence the rule of law allows an individual to become a responsible citizen rather than a mere subject. With Taliban rule, the rule of law may not even be contemplated. Citizens would not be provided with certain liberties and take a role in political life. They would have to follow the dictates of the leaders such as the Mullahs and mujahideens. Women will not be able to reach gender equality under a Taliban rule and would have their rights severely restricted. During the

¹⁴⁸ Serra, G., "*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*", (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁴⁹ Serra, G., "*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*", (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁵⁰ Serra, G., "*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*", (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

years 1994 to 2001, the Taliban, as the Pashtun expressions states, regarded women as “kam asl” or less perfect.¹⁵¹ Additionally, children were subject to forced labour and sexual abuse. Having democratic elections as a result of negotiations between the United States and the Taliban would be a victory, but it would be quite difficult to achieve this as the Taliban view power as either inherited by blood in a tribal system or conferred by God.

Thirdly, the rule of law requires the assurance of a fair trial. There thus must be a tribunal that is independent and impartial, decisions being made that are based on preexisting laws, the hearings must be public, a reasonable duration of the trial, and the equality between the defence and the prosecution.¹⁵² It is unclear whether a future Taliban rule would allow an autonomous judiciary or reinforce traditional mechanisms based on tribal customs, where it is guilty until proven innocent and not the opposite. It is therefore easy to think that if they are allowed to take part in the government in a multiparty system, they will do their best to destroy the system and turn to their tribal one. The current Afghan President is bound to implement the Constitution and legally cannot speak with a terrorist organisation. As stated by Gianluca Serra in *Why not to negotiate with the Taliban*, integrating the Taliban into the Afghan government “would run a risk of repeating President Hindenburg’s decision in the Weimar Republic in the 1930s, when he invited Hitler to power and pushed Germany to the abyss of Nazism.”¹⁵³ This is why it is of pivotal importance to negotiate with the terrorist organisation in a very careful manner, aware of all the risks involved. The concept of negotiating with a terrorist group has come up in discussions among academics regarding the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Because the war led by the United States against the Taliban has been ongoing for years and has been extremely bloody, along with the fact that no satisfactory solution is in sight, allowed for a return of diplomacy.¹⁵⁴

The war against the Taliban has reached its final phase. NATO in 2014 ended combat operations and the Afghan military and police are managing security in their country. This transition is in need of a diplomatic strategy, necessary after every armed conflict. Training Afghan security forces is not enough to ensure stability in Afghanistan. What is needed is a political strategy that settles the differences between the ethnic groups and militant factions that live in the country. What must be avoided is a civil war between the Taliban and the current regime. Hence the Afghan government and even Pakistan must in some way take part of peace settlement talks. The Royal United Services

¹⁵¹ Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁵² Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁵³ Serra, G., “*Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective*”, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies

¹⁵⁴ “*Talking to the Taliban*”, (2012), Financial Times

Institute, a think-tank, formulated a report in September 2012 demonstrating that successful negotiations with the Taliban are more than a mere possibility.¹⁵⁵

Many journalists, such as Anatol Lieven, have spoken to figures close to the Taliban to attempt to comprehend whether or not there is a real possibility of negotiating with the terrorist group.¹⁵⁶ Such option has shown to be more than a possibility, so long as the Taliban are not pictured as being the defeated party. One recently development that opens up towards the path of negotiation is the willingness of Taliban members to distance themselves from al-Qaeda. If Mullah Omar decided to surrender and negotiate, the other members would follow suit. Additionally, the Taliban may very well consider accepting United States bases and military advisers in Afghanistan, which is something that contradicts every statement previously made by the terrorist group. Separation of men and women will continue to be an unbreakable condition in Afghanistan, but the Taliban seem willing to commit to expanding existing health and education programmes. Hence what appears to be occurring is a distancing of the ideology in favour of pragmatism.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, the Taliban are not against the content of the Afghan constitution, they simply intend to have it debated and approved nationally, without making it a precondition of talks as demanded by the United States government. If talks were to succeed, the Taliban would have the share power in government with other groups. The terrorist group recognised that they must include members of the current regime although they have simply stated that only less compromised groups could take part as it is fundamental to exclude “very corrupt and brutal people” such as the head of the government Hamid Karzai.¹⁵⁸ Considering these aspects of possible pragmatic negotiations, one may wonder if agreeing to US bases in Afghanistan used for continued drone attacks and raids against al-Qaeda is realistic. As these attacks would continue to target Pashtuns in Pakistan, it would provide Pakistan an opportunity to break any peace settlement through its allies in the Haqqani network. Additionally, one may wonder if and how the US government would persuade its Afghan allies to accept a peace settlement with the Taliban that would exclude them from power. What could potentially help negotiation is the disdain that both the United States government and the Taliban have for President Karzai, who will likely not have any power as well and his family members will

¹⁵⁵ “*Talking to the Taliban*”, (2012), Financial Times

¹⁵⁶ Lieven, A., “*Lessons from my Talks with the Taliban*”, (2012), Financial Times

¹⁵⁷ Lieven, A., “*Lessons from my Talks with the Taliban*”, (2012), Financial Times

¹⁵⁸ Lieven, A., “*Lessons from my Talks with the Taliban*”, (2012), Financial Times

be impeded from gaining power. This report must be nevertheless taken with a grain of salt as the figures interviewed are moderate and are not currently part of the terrorist organisation.¹⁵⁹

2.5 The Situation At Present.

The Doha negotiations have been ongoing intermittently from six months between the Americans, “who have the watches,” and the Taliban “who have time,” as argued by Ahmad Shah Masud, the mujaheddin hero killed on the eve of the September 11 attacks.¹⁶⁰ Not even a visionary like him, however, would have ever imagined that Americans and Taliban would sit around a negotiating table. Prior to the September 11 attacks, conflicts were resolved differently, and especially after the election of Donald Trump the American foreign policy took a turn.¹⁶¹ His predecessors would have never conceived to begin a true dialogue with the Taliban. Bill Clinton allowed Pakistani and Saudis to speak with them, while George Bush gave them marginal importance until 2001 after the attacks. During the Obama years, negotiating with the Taliban was still considered a heresy as reconciliation was a process in which Afghanistan had the responsibility to undertake. President Trump, on the other hand, had promised the withdrawal of the troops during his campaign.¹⁶² For this reason there is a dual conception of time. For the Americans who intend to declare peace this fall, time is deciphered with watches as there are deadlines that must be faced because of elections. For the Taliban, time is a conception of the past that always comes back as long as the Taliban wait for the right moment.¹⁶³ They thus have not put any card on the table yet. Their strategy is to wait for the first set of American troops to leave Afghan soil, and then they will decide what to offer in exchange, which will likely be a promise not to export the jihad outside of Afghan borders. In the meantime the Taliban are laying the groundwork for negotiations with the Kabul government that up until now was able to stand up to the Taliban thanks to the international contingent. In 1992, there was a precedent: Moscow abandoned the Najibullah government to its destiny and thus consequently the country descended into chaos, and allowed for the black turbans of Mullah Omar

¹⁵⁹ Lieven, A., “*Lessons from my Talks with the Taliban*”, (2012), Financial Times

¹⁶⁰ Gentilini, F., “*La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l’America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul*”, (2019), La Stampa

¹⁶¹ Gentilini, F., “*La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l’America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul*”, (2019), La Stampa

¹⁶² Gentilini, F., “*La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l’America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul*”, (2019), La Stampa

¹⁶³ Gentilini, F., “*La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l’America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul*”, (2019), La Stampa

to conquer the country without difficulty.¹⁶⁴ Afghans retell continuously the story of the events that occurred centuries ago. It is as if all the past powers and empires, who have attempted to invade Afghanistan, such as Alexander, Gengiz, and Babur were still alive, and as if the British army in the 1800s and the Russian army in the 1900s were still retreating from Kabul. They naturally have a precise end goal: to demonstrate their invincibility. This is a motive for which they take pride in the painting *Remnants of an Army* by Elizabeth Thompson as it is the portrait of the only survivor among 16 thousand British that in 1842 attempted to escape Afghanistan towards India. Zalmay Khalizad, the American envoy, states that, “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed,” listing the other important subject of the negotiations.¹⁶⁵ From guarantees against terrorism to a cease fire agreement and the future of the political situation in Afghanistan. Nevertheless the international community is skeptical, and so are the Afghan people. They fear that the ordeal of these years did not end up accomplishing anything, and that the rush of a president that only thinks of demobilising could compromise the positive steps taken in Afghanistan regarding women’s rights, education, healthcare, minorities.

Today Afghanistan is arguably a better place than when the religious police and the department for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice dictated the law. Therefore, while at Doha there are rumours regarding an imminent agreement, uncertainty reigns in Kabul.¹⁶⁶ It is urgent that negotiations successfully conclude, hoping that it does not produce a low-ball settlement. It is even more urgent to speed up an intra-Afghan dialogue, perhaps with a European help, as only an agreement between the Pashtun tribes, and then between the Pashtun, Tagiki, Hazara, and Uzbeki ethnic groups might the country be at last at peace. It will be a complicated process, in which people must be put in the centre rather than power sharing. For the Afghans, who love their poets, peace is born from oblivion, it is the negation of memory in the sense that only by forgetting blood, wrongdoings, and deaths there may be reconciliation. After peace is achieved, the violence of the past must be remembered and the country must focus on reconstruction and development. Because for every future development and event that happens, there are underlying causes that are traced to

¹⁶⁴ Gentilini, F., “*La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l’America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul*”, (2019), La Stampa

¹⁶⁵ Gentilini, F., “*La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l’America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul*”, (2019), La Stampa

¹⁶⁶ Gentilini, F., “*La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l’America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul*”, (2019), La Stampa

the past. For now these goals are not discussed at Doha, where rather at the negotiating table, it is all a ticking of watches.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Gentilini, F., *“La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l’America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul”*, (2019), La Stampa

Chapter III: United States Negotiations with the Taliban: Current Events (2018-2019)

3.1 Current life in Afghanistan: violence and women's rights.

Amidst negotiations to reach a peace settlement, the war in Afghanistan is still ongoing. The consequences of the war continue to be devastating, especially on the civilian population. According to the United Nations, more than two thirds of the people living in Afghanistan are affected by the violence. Thousands of civilians are living in extremely precarious conditions, and informal settlements and in provides refugee camps are in constant incrementation. In addition, there are over 550,000 internally displaced people and talk about external refugees. The refugees often face tough conditions, for examples having to endure extreme weather conditions with minimal protection. For example, for the 160 families who are staying in the Hussain Khail camp located on the outskirts of Kabul, they knee-deep in ice cold mud watching life go by as they have no option to make a life for themselves, settle, and look for a job. They have been staying in that camp either ten days or ten years. These refugees come from the Kunduz province, and are all part of the same clan. Most of them do not have any official documents, and the only concern they have is making sure there is food on the table. Their future is the most unclear of all of the Afghan citizens.¹⁶⁸

The result of a private meeting at Doha between Taliban representatives and twenty Afghan emigres including three women from the United States and Europe on April 20th, 2019 has been surprisingly positive with regards to women's rights. The Taliban were represented by Cher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the group's chief negotiator. Masuda Sultan, an Afghan American activist and board member of the nonprofit organisation Women for Afghan Women, who participated in this meeting, stated that:

I know some people will say we were naive, but they asked for our advice, they said they had made some mistakes and they said they were serious about wanting peace. They spoke with us for more than six hours. If we do not engage with them in dialogue, we will just be continuing the same war that has gone on for 17 years.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Recchia, F., Tugnoli, L. *"Hardship and survival - -the daily struggles of internally displaced people"*, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁶⁹ Constable, P., *"Taliban meets with women's rights activists, others after talks with Afghan officials collapse"*, (2019) The Washington Post

The Taliban have stated that they intend on accepting a more active role for women in the Afghan society, although they have not furnished a detailed explanation of what they are referring to.¹⁷⁰ At the beginning of 2019, Taliban insurgents in the western Faryab province of Afghanistan stopped a woman who was driving back home from pharmacy school. They ordered her to not go back to college, threatening her with the burning of her family's house if she did not follow the orders.¹⁷¹ Another young woman who was stopped at a Taliban checkpoint who had the same experience as the first woman, successfully persuaded the Taliban by stating that they would surely want their daughters and wives to be treated by a female doctor. These two anecdotes were reported by a staff member of the Afghan Women's Skill Development Centre in Kabul who uses these stories to demonstrate that the Taliban are more open-minded than they were during their rule of the second half of the 1990s. Then, they used cruel physical punishments to enforce their radical beliefs.¹⁷² Although there are still several lashing and stoning of women for illicit sex in remote provinces of Afghanistan, the terrorist group generally finds itself on compromising regarding the participation of women in school or health care. In addition, it is promoting sensible reforms such as the ban of extravagant dowries and weddings. This in order to contrast the heavy debts that poor families often face as a result of social pressure. For example, a physician and former member of parliament, Roshanak Wardak, works in a private women's clinic in the Wardak province of Afghanistan, a province under Taliban control.¹⁷³ At her job, she treats women relatives of the Taliban for free and the Taliban themselves ignore the demand not to admit female patients without male relatives by their side. In return the Taliban allow her to travel and accept her medical opinions. She claimed that she has friendly relations with them, and also praised their efficiency in property cases at local Taliban courts.¹⁷⁴

Women in Afghanistan, as Robina Hamdard of the nonprofit Afghan Women's Network affirmed that: "We are not the same women of twenty years ago. We know our rights, and we will fight not to

¹⁷⁰ Constable, P., "*Taliban meets with women's rights activists, others after talks with Afghan officials collapse*", (2019) The Washington Post

¹⁷¹ Constable, P., "*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*", (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁷² Constable, P., "*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*", (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁷³ Constable, P., "*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*", (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁷⁴ Constable, P., "*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*", (2019), The Washington Post

lose them.”¹⁷⁵ Hence as negotiations proceed, the Taliban, if they return in power with a power-sharing agreement, will meet great backlash if they intend to not furnish women the rights they have been enjoying these past twenty years despite being amid a violent conflict.

Nowadays, the life in the provinces under Taliban control is characterised by an increasing amount of moderation, consequently building up hope for a brighter future for women’s rights. Nevertheless there is still some variety in the Taliban’s actions as behaviour is not homogenous due to their complex structure. Hence behaviour changes based on the various regions, whether they are more rural or more urban, and whether the Taliban pertained to that particular region or to another one. In addition, some people who had been inflicted with Daesh rule welcome the Taliban as they are less violent and more understanding of general people’s rights. Consequently, these families offer a son to the Taliban so that the area the terrorist group controls may be more secure.¹⁷⁶

It is also a possibility that if they were to return to power, the Taliban would act more humanely as that would be not only a simple realisation of changing times, but also part of the negotiation settlement. From a time when girls could not attend school in no way, shape, or form, there are nowadays debates and negotiations about which subjects may be taught to girls.¹⁷⁷

There is however still a problem of conservative men in rural areas that share the same values as the Taliban. For example, these men informed the Taliban when Saida Moradi, who works for a woman’s group in Kabul, organised a meeting with women in the Faryab province of Afghanistan to inform them of their rights. The men especially became suspicious because she spoke English. She was nevertheless able to flee before the Taliban reached the site of the meeting.¹⁷⁸

Afghan citizens often highlight the problem with the rights of women if the Taliban were to gain power again. However, a murder on May 11th, 2019 of a woman in the streets of Kabul and a chaotic brawl that occurred in the Afghan parliament in the same months have demonstrated that there is still a long way to go for women’s rights, and that the steps forward women have made in

¹⁷⁵ Constable, P., “*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*”, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁷⁶ Constable, P., “*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*”, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁷⁷ Constable, P., “*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*”, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁷⁸ Constable, P., “*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*”, (2019), The Washington Post

the past eighteen years are fragile. The country is still incredibly traditional and it is difficult for such traditions to be changed.¹⁷⁹

Mina Mangal only superficially seemed to be the symbol of a successful and urbanized Afghan woman as she was working as an adviser in parliament, and prior was a television news presenter and active social media commentator, freely expressing her opinions. She had recently hinted that her life was in danger. The day of May 11th, 2019, Mangal was shot dead at close range as she was leaving her home to go to work. The murder was, according to the local police, a consequence of a fight in her family. This shed light to her private life, which was not at all like her successful public life. She had been unhappily married to an abusive man after an arranged marriage. Thanks to her family, she received legal protection and was able to file for divorce. Mangal's mother had also affirmed to the media that her daughter had been abducted by her husband and his relatives and beaten. This is the reason her family is certain that the individual responsible for Mangal's murder is her ex-husband, albeit not publicly identified.¹⁸⁰

This case received media attention because of the identification of the woman murdered. However, in more rural places in Afghanistan, where conservative values are more prevalent such as restrained freedoms and codes of honour and revenge, murders like Mangal's may be occurring without any media attention. In a United Nations report, more than half of the women in Afghanistan have been subjects of domestic violence, while the worldwide rate is at 35 percent.¹⁸¹ This close-minded mentality is also present in Afghan politics. President Ghani had hoped to change the political culture into a modern technocracy. On May 19th, 2019, as votes were being tallied in parliament for an election of speaker of the house, a dispute occurred, which led to a brawl, albeit leaving no one injured as security guards intervened. The next day the brawl nevertheless continued. This brawl highlights the internal obstacles that Afghanistan faces due to ethnic divisions that still undermines its aspiration to become a democracy. One problem is that there are many that do not distance themselves that much from the Taliban beliefs.¹⁸²

In women prison compounds in Afghanistan, women are serving sentences for crimes such as prostitution and drug smuggling. It is rare that a women serves time for acts of serious violence

¹⁷⁹ Constable, P., "*Even without a Taliban peace deal, progress for Afghan women and democracy seems vulnerable*", (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁸⁰ Constable, P., "*Even without a Taliban peace deal, progress for Afghan women and democracy seems vulnerable*", (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁸¹ Constable, P., "*Even without a Taliban peace deal, progress for Afghan women and democracy seems vulnerable*", (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁸² Constable, P., "*Even without a Taliban peace deal, progress for Afghan women and democracy seems vulnerable*", (2019), The Washington Post

such as homicide. Most of these hundreds of women are poor and uneducated. They usually did not act alone in their crimes, but following the orders of a man who had power over them and then escaped. In many countries, male intimidation is an acceptable and legitimate mitigating defence argument by women who commit crimes. However, as Afghanistan is a male-dominated society, this is not the case, especially since most prosecutors and judges are men. Women who flee their abusive homes are either sent back when caught, or taken to shelters that are similar to prisons. In addition, the women who are forced to participate in crimes that men commit are not considered to be victims but rather accomplices with low morals.¹⁸³

For these reasons there has been an increase in the past few years of foreign organisations such as the International Legal Foundation based in New York City that provide free legal representation for defendants that they believe have been treated unfairly by the Afghan judicial system. Samira Ishaqai, a lawyer, stated: “We are all still scared. People threaten defence lawyers, and they threaten prosecutors, too. We are trying to create justice, but many people want revenge. We are educated women, but there are still very few of us in the system.” She also added that there are many illiterate women who have been rejected by their families, and without female defence lawyers, they would be completely alone.¹⁸⁴

During the Eid celebrations of 2018, the Taliban paused the violence for an unprecedented cease-fire that lasted three days. It was President Ghani who offered this cease-fire with no conditions, and the Taliban accepted the offer. They joined celebrations along with Afghan civilians and security force members. This was the first unexpected outpouring of hope and would lead to the eventual negotiations.¹⁸⁵

3.2 Main actors and negotiating parties.

Scholars underline two conditions under which terrorist groups remain optimistic about their military prospects. The first condition occurs when terrorist groups receive military and sanctuary support from established states, and the second condition is when terrorist groups receive their funding from illicit economic activities. The Taliban currently meet both conditions: they have a sanctuary leadership in Pakistan and Iran; they may be receiving military support from Russia; and

¹⁸³ Constable, P., “*In male-dominated Afghanistan, justice for women is complicated*”, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁸⁴ Constable, P., “*In male-dominated Afghanistan, justice for women is complicated*”, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁸⁵ Constable, P., “*In Remarkable Scenes, Taliban Fighters Join Eid Celebrations Across Afghanistan as Cease-Fire Begins*”, (2018), The Washington Post

the drug trade and kidnappings continue to provide high earnings. Because of this, the United States has attempted to curtail the Taliban's confidence by increasing airstrikes and the use of drones.¹⁸⁶

However, these airstrikes have not significantly damaged the terrorist group but rather impacted and damaged cities, including Kabul. The seemingly change in Pakistani policy, which now intends to support the United States because of its new head of state, may have contributed to the reasons for accepting negotiations.¹⁸⁷

In addition, there is another problem that has not presented itself yet but may occur soon or during the intra-Afghan talks: the spoiler problem. As scholars defined it, the spoiler problem transpires when an unhappy faction resorts again to violence in order to derail the negotiation process.¹⁸⁸

Including a third party, in this case the United States in the case of the follow-up negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, serves not to maintain momentum of the talks and to act as a check that to ensure there is no violent flare-ups during the negotiations.

These follow-up negotiations are especially necessary not only because the Taliban intend to gain power, but also to avoid the "coup-civil war trap", as political scientist Philip Roessler named it.¹⁸⁹

This trap involves the president of Afghanistan, who would likely choose a civil war against the Taliban over a coup d'état by a number of selected factions in the president's coalition. This happens when a country is governed by a group of ethnic factions and may help ignite hostilities between the different factions. The peace talks with the Taliban may risk estranged factions from being included in the talks or settlement and thus causing potential future hostilities.¹⁹⁰

President Trump has long questioned the utility of being involved in Afghanistan, seeing it as a wasteful expense and a conflict without a clear victory strategy. Throughout the year of 2018, United States diplomats worked tirelessly in order to convince the Taliban to sit at the negotiating table, and only towards the end of the year did the Taliban accept. This is because scholars of civil war suggest that terrorist groups or rebels in general prefer fighting over negotiations when external state support and illicit economies make them confident that they will be able to win. The Taliban strategy has always been to erode the United States' resolve to stay in Afghanistan. The terrorist organisation has successfully obtained important military victories against Afghan forces who were

¹⁸⁶ Mir, A., "Afghanistan's road to peace won't be an easy one", (2018), The Washington Post

¹⁸⁷ Mir, A., "Afghanistan's road to peace won't be an easy one", (2018), The Washington Post

¹⁸⁸ Mir, A., "Afghanistan's road to peace won't be an easy one", (2018), The Washington Post

¹⁸⁹ Mir, A., "Afghanistan's road to peace won't be an easy one", (2018), The Washington Post

¹⁹⁰ Mir, A., "Afghanistan's road to peace won't be an easy one", (2018), The Washington Post

supported by NATO troops. Consequently the Taliban have continued to retain control over large parts of rural areas of Afghanistan.¹⁹¹

Hence, there is skepticism over the withdrawal of United States troops from the country, as that could furnish the Taliban an advantage to accelerate their pace of attacks, boosting their confidence and potentially the size of territory they control. If achieved too hastily, the withdrawal of United States forces may trigger domestic political realignments in Afghanistan, destabilising the current system. The Afghan political elite, claims senior Afghan journalist Sami Yousafzai, are comparing this period to the 1989 Soviet withdrawal from the country, which created chaos and a realignment of politics.¹⁹² After the 1989 withdrawal, warlords and armed groups fought to gain power as President Mohammad Najibullah lost its great power patron, the Soviet Union. Should the settlement that arises from the current negotiations be vague, the worst case scenario that may occur would be a complete ignored of the settlement and a multiparty civil war to occur. This would then prompt the Afghan political elite to take all the necessary steps to take the scenario into account and attempt to prevent it. Prevention would be necessary as some political leaders could mobilise their ethnic bases to take up arms, while also reaching out to their foreign patrons in order to receive material support.¹⁹³

Another aspect that must be taken into consideration is al-Qaeda's structure, which is very complex and has a serious skeleton capability in regions such as Paktika provinces in eastern Afghanistan, on the border with Pakistan, where it is actively attempting to rebuild for local and external operations. This could allow for the allocation of more resources in support of the Taliban to help combat this threat, however only with the promise of the Taliban cutting all ties with Al Qaeda. What could potentially solve this hypothetical situation, which would lead to a better management for future international terrorist attacks, could be the use of United States intelligence infrastructure such as aerial surveillance and communication interception, and armed striking platforms such as drones. The main issue that must be resolved for this to work is the current corruption and defections in Afghan intelligence, and therefore unable to furnish efficient support to the United States intelligence. What would help the intelligence system in Afghanistan is a more stable government. Another problem is the cost of these operations, which can be very high and may convince the Trump and any future United States administration not to enact such an expensive program.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Mir, A. "US troop drawdown in Afghanistan raises big questions", (2018), The Washington Post

¹⁹² Mir, A. "US troop drawdown in Afghanistan raises big questions", (2018), The Washington Post

¹⁹³ Mir, A. "US troop drawdown in Afghanistan raises big questions", (2018), The Washington Post

¹⁹⁴ Mir, A. "US troop drawdown in Afghanistan raises big questions", (2018), The Washington Post

3.3 United States goals and Afghan response.

While Trump has stated that he intends to remove as quickly as possible the 14,000 troops present in Afghanistan as he is too impatient to achieve an important electoral victory, military advisers continue to propose a slower and smaller withdrawal as the best and most cautious move. For this reason, negotiations with the Taliban are still in the decisional process, a process in which a party is still establishing strengths and weaknesses and makes predictions on negotiations. What is certain is that the Taliban intend to have all United States forces outside of Afghan soil, and that President Trump is impatient to remove the troops, complaining that military advisers would like him to stay in “all these wars forever.”¹⁹⁵

The Department of Defence, despite being against the withdrawal of troops, is at the disposal of Khalilzad reconciliation efforts with the insurgents by providing ground information that may be used during the talks. It is fundamental as retired Army Colonel Christopher D. Kolenda stated, “unilateral troop withdrawals simply eviscerate the leverage of our negotiator, when you’re in negotiations, forfeiting more of your leverage voluntarily is strategic malpractice.” Furthermore, the situation is incredibly complex and critics such as retired Air Force Colonel and now scholar with the libertarian Cato Institute Erik Goepner claims that President Trump is not concerned with the details of the conflict. He believes that although troop withdrawal is the end goal, unilateral withdrawal with no detailed plan may lead to loss of lives as a lack of international support to build back a stable social and military system may increase Taliban violence who would take advantage of the situation.¹⁹⁶

Just a year ago, residents of Afghanistan were incredulous and did not believe a return to power of the Taliban would be possible. However, this year it has once again become a plausible solution that worries many. Women forced to wear burqas and day labourers fleeing rural fighting are all aspects that many Afghan citizens hoped to leave in the past. While years ago it may have been unthinkable for the capital city Kabul and other cities to develop into urban areas with apartment complexes and town halls today many fear that these areas may return to being a disheartened and deserted city patrolled by the religious police. There are various experts and officials that believe that the Taliban’s puritanical stances, with the rigid enforcement of that Sharia or Islamic law, have

¹⁹⁵ Lamothe, D., Dawsey, J., “*Trump wanted a big cut in troops in Afghanistan. New US military plan falls short*”, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁹⁶ Lamothe, D., Dawsey, J., “*Trump wanted a big cut in troops in Afghanistan. New US military plan falls short*”, (2019), The Washington Post

not softened, and that they are masking it through diplomacy.¹⁹⁷ They will eventually seek the reimposition of their strict interpretation of Islamic law. Furthermore, the citizens of Afghanistan who have memories of the Taliban rule and lived through their brutality have a difficult time believing that the terrorist group has truly changed. Another reason that adds to this logic is that Ahmad Nader Nadery, a close aide to President Ashraf Ghani and a former official of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, noted that the Taliban have said that their intention is to directly address Afghans and bypass the government, which would undermine the Afghan state and its institutions, which have been built in the past eighteen years with enormous sacrifice and loss of lives.¹⁹⁸ Because of this, the United States has worked to assure that there will be follow-up negotiations where the Taliban would be able to talk directly to Afghan citizens, but through the Afghan government, thus ensuring that the government and its institutions are not undermined. There is however an impoverished and displaced (due to the conflict) minority that would not mind a return to Taliban rule, if the Taliban manages to improve security and reduce crime. Nevertheless the majority of Afghans are in total and complete opposition to any Taliban return in power as the society has dramatically changed and the codes that the terrorist organisation would want to impose would never be accepted because people would revolt in order to defend their rights.¹⁹⁹

The terrorist group has not explicitly made clear what its intentions are if it would come back to power, and many fear this to be simply a bargaining ploy. However, the Taliban have never attempted to mask their religious convictions even though in various districts that the group controls they have installed functional governing systems demonstrating moderation to a certain extent, such as girls being allowed to attend school. It remains to be seen whether this moderation will be extended across the country if the Taliban regain power. For forty year old Afghan citizen and woman, Shahlah Darwish, the difference between Taliban rule and today is like “night and day.”²⁰⁰ Under the Taliban, they did enjoy security, but they were not able, as women, to receive an education, to watch television, and had the obligation to marry young. After eighteen years,

¹⁹⁷ Constable, P., “*The return of a Taliban government? Afghanistan talks raise one-unthinkable question*”, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁹⁸ Constable, P., “*The return of a Taliban government? Afghanistan talks raise one-unthinkable question*”, (2019), The Washington Post

¹⁹⁹ Constable, P., “*The return of a Taliban government? Afghanistan talks raise one-unthinkable question*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁰⁰ Constable, P., “*The return of a Taliban government? Afghanistan talks raise one-unthinkable question*”, (2019), The Washington Post

Darwish is a medical doctor, who dresses as she pleases and walks outside with her face uncovered.²⁰¹

Negotiations to reach a peace settlement between the United States and the Taliban have not been completely smooth sailing. The sixth scheduled round of negotiations in Doha, for example, that was due to occur in late April, had been canceled. The halt of the negotiations occurred because of a debate over the size and composition of the Afghan delegation. A group of twenty delegates who were Afghan emigres in the United States and in Europe had been invited to the cancelled talks, and later met with the Taliban privately. These delegates had blamed the Ghani government for the the halt in negotiations. No Afghan official had traveled to Doha for the canceled talks. Meanwhile, President Ghani in a statement blamed the Qatari government for the cancellation of the meeting as they did not accept a list of proposed Afghan delegates, and countered with one that was “not balanced and a disrespect to the national will of the Afghan people.”²⁰² The Taliban, on their side, did not comment the cancellation of the talks. The final list of Kabul negotiators was made up of 250 delegates including various politicians and civic leaders from across Afghan society. The Taliban had objected to this list because, according to them, it was too large. Afghan officials attempted to decrease the number of delegates, but by that time the effort to sit down at a table for negotiations had collapsed amid arguments over the individuals that should have been included or excluded, especially since the Ghani government believed that the contested number of Afghan delegates had to be decreased in order to make the government weak at the negotiating table. For this reason a number of Afghan delegates withdrew from the planned talks and accused the Taliban of attempting to sabotage the peace process and of ridiculing the Afghan government. One delegate, a political activist named Mohammad Idrees Stanikzai, claimed that the Taliban contested the size of the delegation in order to exclude vocal critics of their rule of 1996 to 2001. Other delegates, believed that Ghani’s peace team was poorly managed and the Taliban had excessive demands. This is because of the Taliban’s insistence that any Afghan officials could participate as a private individual so that the terrorist group could avoid conferring legitimacy on the current Afghan government, which is an “American puppet regime” according to the group. The Taliban also compared the Afghan delegation as an Afghan wedding or party in general due to its lack of

²⁰¹ Constable, P., “*The return of a Taliban government? Afghanistan talks raise one-unthinkable question*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁰² Constable, P., “*Talks between Afghan leaders and Taliban canceled, in setback to U.S.-led peace process*”, (2019), The Washington Post

organisation and size, noting that the previous talks with United States officials had been well planned and orderly.²⁰³

Frustrated that his government had not been included in peace talks between the United States and the Taliban, President Ghani of Afghanistan denounced the United States government through his national security adviser, Hambdullah Mohib, who claimed that a deal between the United States and the Taliban would dishonour fallen United States soldiers. He also went on to assert that Zalmay Khalilzad is an American viceroy who has ambitions to become the leader of an interim Afghan government.²⁰⁴ The response of the State Department was that these attacks on Khalilzad could potentially affect bilateral relations and the peace process negatively. The Trump administration likely sees the Ghani government as no longer vital to achieve and maintain peace. Meanwhile Afghan specialists claim that these attacks should serve as a wake up call to Washington to include the Afghan government as no peace can be achieved without the government of the directed state. Additionally, the talks are being conducted behind closed doors and United States officials have not responded to Afghan officials concerns regarding the content of the negotiations. Rivals of President Ghani and various analysts, who worry about the risk of the upcoming presidential elections that could cause violence and halt the peace process, support an interim government, especially because the Taliban's morale is at moment high while the morale of the Ghani government, who has lost aides and allies, is low. Ultimately for many people, at the end of the day, peace is more important than who the next president of Afghanistan will be.²⁰⁵

The first week of July of 2019 experienced two Taliban attacks in the conflicted Ghazni province. The second attack killed twelve people and wounded at least 179 people. The attack was made with a deadly suicide bomber at a national intelligence compound, and it occurred just prior to the opening of new peace negotiations at Doha between the United States and the Taliban. Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attacks and affirmed that at least a dozen of intelligence employees were part of the casualties, while intelligence officials in a statement claimed that two employees were killed and 80 were wounded.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Constable, P., *"Talks between Afghan leaders and Taliban canceled, in setback to U.S.-led peace process"*, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁰⁴ Constable, P., *"Afghan government, shut out of US-Taliban peace talks, running short on options"*, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁰⁵ Constable, P., *"Afghan government, shut out of US-Taliban peace talks, running short on options"*, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁰⁶ Constable, P., *"Taliban car bomb hits intelligence compound in Afghanistan, killing at least 12 and wounding schoolchildren"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Although some, especially Afghan citizens, believe that the attacks are a demonstration of not being serious in resolving the conflict, others believe it is a strategy which permits the Taliban to negotiate from a position of strength. Thus, strengthening the most important of the points of the talks between the United States and the Taliban: to reach a permanent cease-fire agreement.²⁰⁷

The attacks came as fifty Afghan leaders along with several government officials acting in a “personal” capacity were prepared to spend two days informally talking to the Taliban in order to familiarise with each other. Nevertheless, Afghan security forces have increased their airstrikes and ground attacks in the Ghazni province in order to restore order and peace as they were able to regain control of a few key districts of the region. The Taliban attack may thus have also been intended, as the president of the Ghazni Provincial Council Nasir Ahmad Faqiri stated, to “hide their recent failures as they have come under pressure from Afghan air and ground attacks.”²⁰⁸

On July 8th and July 9th, an informal meeting at Doha between Afghan political leaders and Taliban officials concluded positively, producing a joint resolution that included a “road map for peace in eight points.”²⁰⁹ The most important among the eight points of the peace talks is the institutionalisation of the Islamic system in Afghanistan, which contradicts the demand of many Afghans who want their country to remain a democratic Islamic republic with a modern constitution as the return of the Sharia law restricts the rights that Afghans are enjoying today. Several analysts stated that the meeting was a positive step because it outlined the specific conditions needed to achieve peace. However it did not address key issues, such as various timings relating to additional talks and if those talks would include Kabul authorities. Other points included international monitoring, assurance of no foreign state interference, and securing future support from donor states.²¹⁰

Each participant in the meeting concluded that lasting peace would occur only through negotiations that include all Afghan parties. However, it is still difficult to convince the Taliban to negotiate directly with the current Afghan government, and no date has been set for new meetings between the parts to discuss the details of these eight points. The meeting was composed of an Afghan delegation of fifty people, among which were six women legislators, showing the progress made by

²⁰⁷ Constable, P., “*Taliban car bomb hits intelligence compound in Afghanistan, killing at least 12 and wounding schoolchildren*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁰⁸ Constable, P., “*Taliban car bomb hits intelligence compound in Afghanistan, killing at least 12 and wounding schoolchildren*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁰⁹ Constable, P., “*Marathon talks between Taliban and prominent Afghans conclude with positive if vague peace road map*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²¹⁰ Constable, P., “*Marathon talks between Taliban and prominent Afghans conclude with positive if vague peace road map*”, (2019), The Washington Post

the Taliban to accept women and reach a settlement that ensures that Afghan women's rights would not be set back by any settlement. The joint agreement did mention the assurance of women's rights "within the Islamic framework of Islamic values."²¹¹

On July 28th, 2019, vice-presidential running mate Amrullah Saleh survived a bomb attack that left twenty dead and fifty injured. The terrorist attack was carried out by a suicide bomber and a squad of half a dozen gunmen who besieged Saleh's office in Kabul, causing a great part of the five-story concrete building to be reduced to rubble. According to his aides, Saleh, who was back after an opening campaign rally with President Ghani and was supposed to meet with supporters and aides, ran to the roof through the stairs and was able to use a ladder to reach the adjacent building. He was able to escape and managed to suffer only a slight wound on one arm. Meanwhile security forces shot from the roof the gunmen who invaded Saleh's office building and who were shooting everyone in sight. They battled the attackers for six hours, shooting some in sight, while others hid in the building. After having evacuated more than 150 people from the premises, they were able to shoot down four of the attackers. Nevertheless the aftermath was complete rubble and blood both inside the building that was destroyed and around the building.²¹²

Although no one claimed responsibility of the terrorist attack, the Taliban consider him a high-profile adversary as he is popular among the Afghan constituents and was a close associate of the anti-Soviet and anti-Taliban militia leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, assassinated back in 2001. There were his portraits in every room of the attacked building.²¹³

According to President Ghani, the attackers were enemies of the state. Zalmay Khalilzad also denounced the attack and called it a "grotesque and clear act of terrorism," and that the United States stands with Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.²¹⁴

The Taliban have conducted a series of violent terrorist attacks this past year while at the same time attending peace negotiations with the United States. Experts have thus suggested postponing the Afghan elections scheduled for September 28, which were already delayed twice, in order to avoid

²¹¹ Constable, P., "Marathon talks between Taliban and prominent Afghans conclude with positive if vague peace road map", (2019), The Washington Post

²¹² Constable, P., Hassan, S., "Afghan vice presidential candidate narrowly escapes attack that killed 20 people", (2019), The Washington Post

²¹³ Constable, P., Hassan, S., "Afghan vice presidential candidate narrowly escapes attack that killed 20 people", (2019), The Washington Post

²¹⁴ Constable, P., Hassan, S., "Afghan vice presidential candidate narrowly escapes attack that killed 20 people", (2019), The Washington Post

further bloodshed. However President Ghani is firm in his position that there will not be any more additional delays in the elections.²¹⁵

Amrullah Saleh is the leader of the Green Trend political party and is a tough critic of President Ghani, accusing him of not keeping the country safe. When a year ago President Ghani named Saleh interior minister, and later asked him to become his running mate in the upcoming election, Saleh became a strong supporter of the president. After the attack, Saleh has been transferred to a safe location surrounded by security. This is a demonstration of how unstable the political system in Afghanistan is as a seat in power is enough to change opinion but not enough to be positive that there will not be any betrayal. Hence the need, during intra-Afghan talks, for a serious discussion about changes in the political system.²¹⁶

3.4 What has to be negotiated.

Currently, Afghanistan finds itself in a social and political limbo. The negotiations between the United States and the Taliban are producing vague and unclear accords without any real breakthrough. The Afghan presidential elections that will be held on September 28th, 2019 are threatened by possible insurgent attacks. With an already weak government attempting to keep the country in order, there have been debates on whether it be wiser to postpone the elections in order to leave space for negotiations, which may produce lasting peace. President Ghani, who has a significant chance of being reelected especially since his main competitor has quit the race, stated that the election is “vital” to the nation. During that speech, he campaigned for himself listing the achievements of his government, which included a three-day cease fire with the Taliban over a year ago. He assured that Afghanistan will have “peace with dignity” as well.²¹⁷ However, with the return of Zalmay Khalilzad, the United States top negotiator for peace in Afghanistan, to Washington in order to present President Trump with the rough draft of the possible peace agreement with the Taliban, Afghans fear that the agreement will be beneficial only to the terrorist

²¹⁵ Constable, P., Hassan, S., “*Afghan vice presidential candidate narrowly escapes attack that killed 20 people*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²¹⁶ Constable, P., Hassan, S., “*Afghan vice presidential candidate narrowly escapes attack that killed 20 people*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²¹⁷ Constable, P., “*Uncertainty over election and US Taliban peace talks leaves Afghanistan in limbo*”, (2019), The Washington Post

group. A Taliban spokesman claimed that the negotiations in Doha had been “long and useful.”²¹⁸ Their key condition to reach an agreement is the withdrawal of United States troops, a realistic condition as the Trump administration intends to withdraw as soon as possible, and is in a haste to secure a peace deal before the fall as he intends to reach a settlement before the Afghan elections. Another key issue that adds to the limbo of the Afghan social and political situation is the follow-up negotiation. This negotiation will be between the Afghan government and the Taliban who would ideally takeover power of the government. A future power-sharing agreement may be formulated, albeit numerous problems will have to be solved beforehand, ranging from women’s rights to the survival of democratic institutions that have taken shape since the fall of the Taliban rule in 2001. Abdullah Abdullah, currently the government’s chief executive, is challenging Ghani in the upcoming elections. He had already lost the much contested elections to Ghani in 2014. His vice-presidential running mate, Anwar ul-Haq Ahady, declared that peace is of much greater importance than elections, and that if there is no peace settlement by the time of the elections, then the elections must be postponed, which is completely opposite of what Ghani has previously stated.²¹⁹ Another presidential candidate and former innovational intelligence chief, Rahmatullah Nabil, fears that the factional and ethnic divisions that characterise the country and would increase during an election campaign, are likely to hurt the peace talks, especially in the follow-up negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. An election would likely divide, not unify, and there is a fundamental need of a unified national consensus on how to face the future with the Taliban. The United States government as well hopes that in light of inter-Afghan talks, the elections will be delayed. Furthermore, an election is likely to be marred by insurgent violence and fraud, which will only help the Taliban’s negotiating power. This thought is shared by many voters who are praying for a lasting peace but had little interest in the upcoming elections. They expect Ghani to be reelected, although they are not satisfied with his administration. Moreover, they are worried that a withdrawal of foreign troops will consequently allow the Taliban to take over power after using excuses for not respecting the peace agreement. Through a lasting peace, Afghan nationals will be able to find stability, security, and financial freedom. A simple election with the current status of the

²¹⁸ Constable, P., “*Uncertainty over election and US Taliban peace talks leaves Afghanistan in limbo*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²¹⁹ Constable, P., “*Uncertainty over election and US Taliban peace talks leaves Afghanistan in limbo*”, (2019), The Washington Post

country will not be able to successfully address these issues and might if anything exacerbate these problems.²²⁰

A senior aide to Ghani who decided to remain anonymous, also shared some concerns, fearing that the United States would make too many concessions in the negotiations with the Taliban. He nevertheless maintained that elections would provide the new government with more support and power to negotiate with the terrorist group for a power-sharing agreement.²²¹

According to the director of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, David Moradian, the best options are elections albeit fair ones as they would “inject positive energy into politics and peace.” If that is not possible, then it is better to postpone the elections, but only if the Taliban maintain a permanent cease fire and agree that Afghan officials participate in talks. This is because there is the chance that elections will be contested once again like the 2014 elections. If that occurs then there might be the need to form an interim government, and that interim government might have to include the Taliban, especially if foreign troops have been withdrawn. This would risk a Taliban rule that no Afghan citizen would welcome.²²²

Recently, the Afghan people have been anxiously awaiting the results of the negotiations between the United States government and the Taliban terrorist group. They are hopeful for a lasting peace, one that they have not seen for almost twenty years, and real power power-sharing. The other option would be a revived conflict and possible Taliban takeover. On August 16th, 2019, Zalmay Khalilzad, President Trump’s top peace negotiator, presented a rough draft which included the order of thousands of United States troops to return home but did not contain a commitment to a cease fire by the Taliban or any new negotiations with the Afghan government regarding the future political situation.²²³

Although Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who has been excluded by the negotiations, made no statements about this draft his spokesman, Sediq Sediqqi, stated that his government would work with United States officials to achieve a “dignified and sustainable peace.” He went claiming that United States officials had already assured President Ghani that a withdrawal of United States troops would occur only if the Taliban would hold to the commitment of preconditions, especially

²²⁰ Constable, P., “*Uncertainty over election and US Taliban peace talks leaves Afghanistan in limbo*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²²¹ Constable, P., “*Uncertainty over election and US Taliban peace talks leaves Afghanistan in limbo*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²²² Constable, P., “*Uncertainty over election and US Taliban peace talks leaves Afghanistan in limbo*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²²³ Constable, P., “*Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban*”, (2019), The Washington Post

the one to stop the bloodshed and turn violence into political activity. Just hours after this declaration, a bomb exploded at a wedding in Kabul causing at least 38 deaths and one hundred wounded. Although no group claimed responsibility for this terror, two recent bombing attacks in Kabul have been attributed to the Taliban.²²⁴

This draft led to many questions regarding the negotiations. What are the reasons for which talks are being secretly and not publicly conducted? Why does President Trump want a haste return of his troops and how would he guarantee that the Taliban would not takeover power after the withdrawal of foreign troops? Worry pervades the Afghan people, especially after having endured such a long military conflict, that there could be a return to Taliban control.²²⁵

The main Taliban precondition to talks is the withdrawal of the 14,000 United States troops over a set time period. Their aim is to be the dominant group in Afghan public life, replacing the current government with a theocratic Islamic Emirate. The United States' goal is that the Taliban exclude themselves from having any ties with al-Qaeda and other extremist groups, reach a permanent cease fire, and participate in follow-up talks with the Afghan government in order to form a new government based on power-sharing. The rough draft agreement formulated by Zalmay Khalilzad includes the withdrawal of United States troops and the Taliban commitment to cut off all ties with al-Qaeda and other radical groups. However it only mentions a cease fire and follow-up talks with the Afghan government, which is not written in detailed form.²²⁶

The negotiations that are to occur with the Afghan government after a deal is reached between the United States and the Taliban are likely to be the most critical part of reaching a lasting peace. If the United States and the Taliban sign a peace settlement in Qatar soon, follow-up negotiations would soon be held in Oslo. These talks are going to be more complex as they will have the aim to map out a political transition. Presidential elections in late September could potentially hurt or help these negotiations.²²⁷

The history with government transitions in Afghanistan since the 1970s has never created a stable social and political system but rather fomented violence. It would be difficult for the United States government to send back its troops in Afghanistan if the Taliban choose to ignore the conditions set

²²⁴ Constable, P., "*Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban*", (2019), The Washington Post

²²⁵ Constable, P., "*Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban*", (2019), The Washington Post

²²⁶ Constable, P., "*Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban*", (2019), The Washington Post

²²⁷ Constable, P., "*Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban*", (2019), The Washington Post

up by the negotiations. Hence it is a very fragile situation that must be dealt with extreme caution, as badly negotiated settlements would likely increase the violence because they would not permanently satisfy either parties, and would contain ways to go around the agreements.²²⁸

Additionally, Afghan legislator Hameeda Akbari firmly believes that a variety of Taliban members may join other groups or form their own insurgency as they claim that Taliban leaders are betraying them because of these negotiations with the United States.²²⁹

However a well-designed peace settlement could very well draw insurgents away from violence and make them participate into political life. Although peace is the priority, it must include the achievements of the past eighteen years of conflict where many lives have been lost and there has been enormous amounts of money spent in order to build a stable government.²³⁰

President Trump's top peace negotiator in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, arrived in Qatar for the ninth and final round of talks with the Taliban. Khalilzad declared that he was ready to sign an agreement that would end the violent conflict in Afghanistan that lasted eighteen years. Immediately after the last round of negotiations, which will have to find a compromise on the ways that the cease fire will be implemented, Khalilzad will travel to Kabul and present the agreement to President Ashraf Ghani. If President Ghani accepts the agreement, follow-up negotiations will begin, but this time between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Over the summer, Khalilzad and the Taliban mediator Abdul Ghani Baradar, reached an agreement on the time frame that the United States troops will have to withdraw from Afghanistan. This was a crucial point in negotiations. The Taliban demanded United States withdrawal of troops in nine months, while the United States countered with eighteen months. Both parties ended up accepting fourteen months as a time period for withdrawal. However, both President Trump and the emir Hibatullah Akhundzada must accept this condition.²³¹

The Taliban are attempting to show a moderate face to the world. They have condemned the terrorist attack presumably committed by ISIS against the wedding in Kabul, where the casualties were almost all from the Shiite minority. The Taliban also promised to eradicate the Islamic State and al-Qaeda from Afghanistan to ensure there are no longer any foundations of a platform that

²²⁸ Constable, P., *"Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban"*, (2019), The Washington Post

²²⁹ Constable, P., *"Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban"*, (2019), The Washington Post

²³⁰ Constable, P., *"Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban"*, (2019), The Washington Post

²³¹ Stabile, G., *"Afghanistan, l'inviato USA a Doha: "Pronto a firmare l'accordo con i Taleban" "*, (2019), La Stampa

can launch jihadist attacks against the United States and Europe. Eight rounds of talks in Doha have allowed to polish almost all the points of contention. The main issue that remains unclear is the cease fire, especially on the areas in which it should be applied. Only after a permanent cease fire, NATO troops will withdraw from the territory. Khalilzad insists that the cease fire is applied to the entire Afghan territory. The Taliban instead intend to respect it only in the areas where NATO troops are present. Hence they want to be free to act as they wish against the Afghan government. For President Ghani, this is the sign that the Taliban are not sincere in their reconciliation efforts, and that they will continue the attacks to completely destabilise the current government so that they will be able to negotiate from a position of strength. Currently Afghan soldiers and police officers live enclosed in their bases, and are able to control only urban centres and main roads. Without a generalised cease fire these officials are in great risk.²³²

United States diplomats have, by request of the Trump administration, sped up negotiations and made significant steps forwards with the Taliban. Both parties are close to announce an agreement on an initial withdrawal of United States troops in Afghanistan, along with plans to begin talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban themselves. On August 16th, 2019, the Trump administration was briefed by his top negotiator for peace, Zalmay Khalilzad, who presented a rough draft of a potential peace settlement. This draft initiates with an immediate withdrawal of 5,000 of the 14,000 United States troops present in the Afghan territory. The Taliban would in turn stop all activities such as fundraising, recruiting, training, and operational planning for al-Qaeda. President Trump was publicly pleased by the meeting and Hogan Gidley, the Principle Deputy White House Press Secretary stated that: “discussions entered around our ongoing negotiations and eventual peace and reconciliation agreement with the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan. The meeting went very well.” However this does not mean that an immediate result in a decision would ensue.²³³

3.5 Intra-Afghan follow-up negotiations.

After the agreement is signed, the Taliban will have to face new negotiations in Oslo guided by Germany, this time with the current Afghan government in order to develop a political framework

²³² Stabile, G., “*Afghanistan, l’inviato USA a Doha: “Pronto a firmare l’accordo con i Taleban”*”, (2019), La Stampa

²³³ DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., “*Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance*”, (2019), The Washington Post

leading to peace. In the meantime that the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban progress, the Afghan government named a team of fifteen officials to negotiate directly with the Taliban once the United States conclude their negotiations with the Taliban.²³⁴

Critics have nevertheless raised issues both in the United States and in Afghanistan regarding the decision not to include the current Afghan government in the talks between the United States and the Taliban. The Taliban have always said, however, that they were not interested in negotiating with President Ghani, as they claim he is the head of a puppet regime. The United States officials in charge of negotiations have stated that although the Afghan government was not part of these negotiations, it would be central in the follow-up negotiations. After a peace settlement is agreed and signed, the two Afghan sides will begin inter-Afghan negotiations. The accord will include a cease fire agreement even if it is unclear yet whether or not it will halt the violence. The follow-up negotiations will likely conclude with an inclusion of the Taliban in the government, but social issues and women's rights will have to be addressed.²³⁵

A key point in the inter-Afghan talks will be the extent to which the United States could maintain a residual counterterrorism presence in Afghanistan, a point supported both by the Afghan government and the United States Congress. Following the return home of the 5,000 troops, the rest of the American troops will likely withdraw within a time frame of eighteen months. The NATO troops of the other countries are expected to time their own withdrawals also to eighteen months. Various American Congressmen are most likely going to criticise the agreement as they do not trust that the Taliban will cut all ties with al-Qaeda, especially as the group is in a better military position and has more control of the Afghan territory than when the Afghan war began in 2001. In addition, they fear that Taliban dissenters due to a deal struck with the United States will prompt them to join the Islamic State. Senator Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.), for example, in a statement said that, "to trust the Taliban to control al-Qaeda as a replacement for a United States counterterrorism force would be a bigger mistake than Obama's Iranian nuclear deal."²³⁶ President Trump's priority, nevertheless, remains the withdrawal of United States troops from Afghanistan as he has always been opposed to foreign military entanglements of the United States. General Austin "Scott" Miller, the top United States commander in Afghanistan, claimed for a long time that he would be able to

²³⁴ DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., "Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance", (2019), The Washington Post

²³⁵ DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., "Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance", (2019), The Washington Post

²³⁶ DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., "Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance", (2019), The Washington Post

conduct military operations with fewer troops. He intends to keep open Bagram Air Base, from which the United States launches strikes in Afghanistan's eastern mountains. Consequently, he likely intends to maintain a robust presence at the largest United States base in the southern part of Afghanistan, Kandahar Airfield, especially since he has led an intense air campaign against the Taliban since starting his post over a year ago. Army General Miller also believes that political negotiations are absolutely key to ending the conflict: "Neither side will win it militarily, and if neither side will win it militarily you have to move...towards a political settlement here."²³⁷

Other critics believe that by hastily withdrawing from Afghanistan, the United States are furnishing the Taliban with too much leverage in the follow-up negotiations with the Afghan government. The solution would have been to maintain at least some troops until the follow-up negotiations will have reached an agreement. Nevertheless the United States State Department assures that it has secured an agreement with the Afghan government on "next steps on the Afghan peace process."²³⁸

Khalilzad began negotiations in October of 2018. His conditions for negotiations included four pillars: foreign troop withdrawal, assurances that the Taliban or any other terrorist organisation would attack the United States from Afghanistan, a cease fire, and follow-up negotiations leading to a power-sharing agreement for peace in Afghanistan. The first two pillars were quickly solved. However, a former official claimed that the bar had significantly dropped on what Khalilzad would accept. This is due to the approaching Afghan election and the fear that President Trump would withdraw the troops prior to reaching a comprehensive agreement. Hence Khalilzad felt as if he was running out of time.²³⁹

Other critical side issues that seem superfluous but created problems during the negotiations had to be faced. For example, the Taliban insisted that in the documents Afghanistan was referred to as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, but the United States with President Ghani's support resisted. The compromise that the United States found is a reference to the Islamic Emirate as the name of the future Taliban political party. This of course, if the Afghan government will accept such a change. Regarding the cease fire agreement, not much progress has been made. Ghani is seeking for a temporary stop, and may be willing in exchange to release high-profile militants among the more than 10,000 Taliban prisoners the government is holding. The Taliban recognise that today, if they

²³⁷ DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., "Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance", (2019), The Washington Post

²³⁸ DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., "Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance", (2019), The Washington Post

²³⁹ DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., "Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance", (2019), The Washington Post

will have power in Afghanistan, they will need some kind of assistance from the international community. Thus they in no way intend to be marginalised like the last time they were in power. The question is: What and how much are the Taliban willing to give up in exchange for that support?²⁴⁰

If the plan to withdraw the troops from Afghanistan succeeds, it would be one of the biggest steps towards ending the Afghan War, a goal that increasingly has bipartisan support. It would be evidence that negotiations, even with a terrorist organisation, works and is vital in ending bloodshed.²⁴¹

The official view of the Afghan government is that the United States is truly seeking peace through negotiations, however there are certain officials that believe that although Americans claim they are seeking a peace negotiations, in reality the Taliban view it as withdrawal negotiation.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that drawing down the troops is his directive and that President Trump wants them home, “just as quickly as we can get there, consistent with his other mission set, which is to ensure that we have an adequate risk reduction plan for making sure that there is not terror that is conducted from Afghanistan.”²⁴²

Against this backdrop, a former State Department official and Afghanistan expert at New York University, Barnett Rubin, noted that American foreign policy does not have fighting terrorism as its number one priority, referring to the competition with Russia and China. Hence the Pentagon does not intend to use that many resources for Afghanistan. However, an option that the Pentagon may potentially seek is to withdraw all the troops from Afghanistan but leave a counterterrorism mission in order to fight the Islamic State and al-Qaeda even if the Taliban enact their acceptance to cut off all ties with these terrorist organisations.²⁴³

3.6 Pakistan involvement in the Afghan war.

President Trump, on July 22, 2019, held a meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan at the White House in order to discuss foreign policy issues such as the war in Afghanistan. During this

²⁴⁰ DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., “*Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁴¹ Lamothe, D., Hudson, J., Constable, P., “*U.S. preparing to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan in initial deal with Taliban*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁴² Lamothe, D., Hudson, J., Constable, P., “*U.S. preparing to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan in initial deal with Taliban*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁴³ Constable, P., Ryan, M., Sonne, P., “*U.S., Taliban move closer to deal on American troop exit*”, (2019), The Washington Post

meeting he claimed that he could win the war in a week, but that would cause ten million casualties and Afghanistan itself would be wiped out, actions that President Trump stated he is not prepared to act upon, as it would be a humanitarian disaster. President Ghani's administration immediately demanded clarifications over these remarks via diplomatic channels as it specified that while it appreciates the peace efforts of the United States, a country cannot determine Afghanistan's fate. President Trump's remarks have met backlash. For example, Rahmatullah Nabil, a candidate in the upcoming Afghan presidential election, tweeted that after these insults they do not need mediation from the United States or Pakistan, adding that everyone in Afghanistan should unite to make peace among themselves. Others questioned the facts of Trump's statement as the population in Afghanistan amounts to 37.2 million, not 10 million, according to United Nations records.²⁴⁴ Nevertheless the meeting between President Trump and Prime Minister Khan served to strengthen cooperation and bring peace as they reviews the progress together of the Afghan reconciliation efforts. Such efforts Prime Minister Khan claimed are a shared responsibility.²⁴⁵ In a visit of Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to the White House, him and President Trump discussed how to deal with the longest war conducted by the United States. Prime Minister Khan, who is a populist former cricket star who is, as President Trump, a newcomer to politics, is a potential partner in the negotiations with the Taliban. Both leaders are in favour of direct negotiations. Direct talks with the insurgents would have been more improbable during the years of the previous United States administration as President Obama was dubious in negotiating with a terrorist group. During the meeting between Prime Minister Khan and President Trump, they vehemently stated that there is no military solution in Afghanistan, and that both states are committed to finding a peace settlement through United States led negotiations with the support of Pakistan.²⁴⁶

What is clear is that President Trump's intent is initiating a turnaround in the relationship with Pakistan, a country that the United States has frequently accused of playing a double game that has prolonged the war in Afghanistan, supporting the Taliban insurgents and endangering United States troops. Last year, before Imran Khan was elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, President Trump had accused Pakistan of lies and deceit, canceling over one billion dollars in annual military aid. After

²⁴⁴ Gerberg, J., *"I just don't want to kill 10 million people: Trump's comments reverberate in Afghanistan"*, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁴⁵ Gerberg, J., *"I just don't want to kill 10 million people: Trump's comments reverberate in Afghanistan"*, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁴⁶ Gearan, A., Hudson, J., *"Trump claims progress in Afghanistan peace talks, says Pakistan is now helping because of him"*, (2019), The Washington Post

the meeting, Trump changed his statement, claiming the Pakistan never lies and that the military aid could be restored under the new Prime Minister.²⁴⁷

In a statement Klalilzad assured that, “We are not cutting and running. We’re not looking for a withdrawal agreement. We’re looking for a peace agreement. And we’re looking for a long-term relationship with Afghanistan.”²⁴⁸

Prime Minister Khan has successfully used Pakistan’s influence in Afghanistan to strengthen the relationship between Pakistan and the United States as both heads of state praised each other and discussed growth in commerce and trade. President Trump sees Pakistan as a key player in resolving the Afghan conflict, his most important conflict to solve in the South Asia region.²⁴⁹

During the Trump administration the number of United States forces present in Afghanistan was raised to 14,000 from 11,000. President Trump claimed that this must change as the troops are not accomplishing what they should accomplish, the defeat of the Taliban, and are stuck building schools and gas stations. President Trump is frustrated by the lack of progress as the stalemate between the United States and Afghan forces and the Taliban persisted along with violence. A Pentagon spokeswoman, Navy Commander Rebecca Rebarich, cleared up that among the 14,000 troops present in Afghanistan, 9,000 are part of the Resolute Support Mission which trains and advices Afghan forces, and 5,000 involved in a counterterrorism mission called Freedom’s Sentinel.²⁵⁰

An issue that will have to be solved is President Trump’s push for the release of the doctor Shakil Afridi, a Pakistan physician who worked for the CIA in 2011 to locate al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. He helped the CIA in finding Osama bin Laden’s secret compound in Abbottabad by running a hepatitis B vaccine program. Although bin Laden was killed by the United States forces, Dr. Afridi was imprisoned by Pakistan. According to the Trump administration, Doctor Afridi is a hero for the United States, and firmly demands his release. However Pakistan has always resisted his release as the government accused him of being a corrupt physician and a traitor. If Prime Minister Khan accepts Afridi’s release in order to secure a better relationship with the United States government, he will face serious backlash at home, especially because he is a

²⁴⁷ Gearan, A., Hudson, J., “*Trump claims progress in Afghanistan peace talks, says Pakistan is now helping because of him*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁴⁸ Gearan, A., Hudson, J., “*Trump claims progress in Afghanistan peace talks, says Pakistan is now helping because of him*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁴⁹ Gearan, A., Hudson, J., “*Trump claims progress in Afghanistan peace talks, says Pakistan is now helping because of him*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁵⁰ Gearan, A., Hudson, J., “*Trump claims progress in Afghanistan peace talks, says Pakistan is now helping because of him*”, (2019), The Washington Post

nationalist Prime Minister. He stated that the United States should have never searched for bin Laden in Pakistan, and that Dr. Afridi is a traitor for helping the United States in their search for Bin Laden. As such, releasing him would go against the Pakistani pride and nationalism that Khan has promoted. Nevertheless Prime Minister Khan promised that he would soon certain situations regarding “hostages,” as President Trump defines them, would have positive outcomes, but it is unclear whether he was referring to Dr. Afridi. (If not Dr. Afridi, then who?) In addition, him and President Trump discussed that they will address the polio vaccines problem in Pakistan for the CIA role in the vaccination campaign led by Doctor Afridi led to backlash in Pakistan against other vaccination efforts, especially against the polio vaccine.²⁵¹

3.7 Conclusion.

On August 6th, 2019, the Taliban have announced that they will disrupt the delayed Afghan presidential campaign and September 28 polls. Just hours before this statement, the United States envoy for negotiating a peace settlement with the Taliban Zalmay Khalilzad had reported excellent progress with the Taliban. The insurgents urged Afghan civilians not to vote and not to participate in events related to the elections in order to become potential targets. According to the Taliban, the elections are not legitimate as the country is under occupation, and called these elections a ploy to deceive the common people, as who ends up deciding the winner are the foreigners who are present in the Afghan territory with their forces. Hence there are many Afghans that believe that this will cause a new postponement of the elections. The Taliban implied that the talks are being conducted fruitfully: “negotiations are underway to bring an end to the occupation and arrangements for intra-Afghan understanding are being put into place. The elections are aimed only at satisfying the ego of a limited number of sham politicians.” Amnesty International, a London based organisation promoting human rights, condemned the Taliban’s threat against the elections and election-related events, stating that it, “demonstrates a chilling disregard for human life, and that Afghans must be allowed to exercise their rights.” The United States through its officials have claimed that they hope

²⁵¹ Gearan, A., Hudson, J., “*Trump claims progress in Afghanistan peace talks, says Pakistan is now helping because of him*”, (2019), The Washington Post

to reach a peace settlement with the Taliban before the elections, but that there is equally high priority on both processes.²⁵²

Negotiations have led to enormous steps being made with the Taliban. Just a year ago, it seemed that the terrorist group viewed violence as an integral part of negotiating. On August 11th, 2018, for example, they assaulted the Afghan city of Ghazni, sacking government buildings, seizing the central prison, and looting and burning police stations. This occurred only three weeks after the United States and the terrorist group held their first high-level talks in almost seven years.

These actions prove as a demonstration for weakening the Afghan government and showing how ineffective it is to protect the Afghan people. Attacks such as the Ghazni assault also serve as proof that the Taliban are strong, thus they negotiate from a position of strength. This is especially true when confronted with the weak Taliban government who is not able to avoid the various Taliban assaults. However, nowadays the United States and the Taliban have made significant process to reach a cease fire agreement. While violence has not stopped, it is occurring less often and in a smaller scale.²⁵³

²⁵² Salahuddin, S., “*Taliban threatens to disrupt Afghan elections, dismisses September vote as ploy*”, (2019), The Washington Post

²⁵³ Lyall, J., “*5 key lessons from the Taliban’s deadly resurgence in Afghanistan*”, (2018), The Washington Post

Chapter IV: What is Next?

4.1 Introduction.

After 18 years, the United States and the international community have profoundly comprehended that the war in Afghanistan cannot be won by using only a military strategy. Only a diplomatic strategy could possibly resolve the conflict. It is for this reason hence that the United States and the Taliban have engaged in political talks. In order for these negotiations to be successful and promote a permanent and stable peace agreement, which would eventually lead to intra-Afghan talks, all subjects must be directly discussed, from mistrust, to the prolongation of the violence, to unrealistic demands and expectations such as immediate foreign troop withdrawal. In addition, external actors such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia must stop the historic aid they have furnished to the Taliban.²⁵⁴ After having resolved these issues, a multi-step approach that begins with the behavioural approach must be taken by the United States government in order to move forward with the process of finding a way to a conflict resolution. After reaching an agreement, intra-Afghan talks must take place between the government and the insurgent group. The result of these negotiations must be an independent and autonomous Afghanistan that may govern in a power-sharing agreement with the Taliban over a stable, secure, and peaceful territory.²⁵⁵

4.2 United States Government Objectives.

President Trump intended to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan and end the mission thereby leaving responsibility to the Afghan government as an electoral promise. Due to this, he was frustrated about the progress of negotiations, as he was hoping to deliver the promise before the United States Presidential Elections in 2020. Ultimately, his actions are motivated based on the opinions of his electorate. If those opinions change, i.e. if the most conservative block of his electorate deliberately comes out claiming that sitting at a table with terrorists, especially Islamist terrorists, is wrong, then Trump, in order to get reelected, might change his opinion to match this section of the electorate and therefore follow the advice of the Pentagon. The Pentagon had always

²⁵⁴ Mohmand, A., “*The United States and the Taliban: Challenges for Effective Negotiations*”, (2013), Jstor

²⁵⁵ Mohmand, A., “*The United States and the Taliban: Challenges for Effective Negotiations*”, (2013), Jstor

advised against withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and rather argued for an increased number of forces to help counter the Taliban and help the Afghan government develop stable and transparent institutions. However, since the various federal departments in the United States follow different objectives, their priorities differentiate. This is the reason why the recommendations of the Department of State is in contrast with the Pentagon and thus sees the complete withdrawal of American troops as an objective, regardless of the need to continue to help the Afghan government fight against the Taliban and to develop institutions that furnish more security for the Afghan civilians.

The main point is that the United States intend to leave Afghanistan in a better situation than when the conflict began. The realisation that the ongoing conflict has been active for too many years, the increasing financial and human costs, the intention to avoid another Vietnam fiasco, President Trump's statement "America first", but most importantly the fact that the Taliban would have never given up and surrendered have forced the United States study and enact a process of negotiations to reach a peace settlement with the Taliban. The terrorist organisation, in contrast, have as their first priority to reach a power-sharing agreement so that they have power in the Afghan government. The Taliban realised that the United States would have not withdrawn its troops anytime soon, and the fact that the unstable Afghan government still has not been able to enact efficient policies for the Afghan people has convinced them that the more plausible option was to accept sitting at a table with the United States government officials, completely ignoring the Afghan government, which they anyway see it as a American "puppet regime."

The most important problem with the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban is that the United States has been too firm on preconditions, especially the cease-fire agreement. This precondition is one of the most difficult ones to enact because if the leaders of the Taliban agree to the cease-fire, they may not have the control to make sure that all the members of the organisation respects it. Generally then preconditions are a double-edged sword. If on the one hand, they highlight the good will and intentions of the parties involved to find an agreement, they may also slow down the negotiations momentum. Preconditions may even suspend the negotiations altogether as it happened recently, with President Trump suspending talks at Camp David with Taliban due to a Taliban attack in Afghanistan that killed many people and one United States soldier. In this case, President Trump fell in the trap of preconditions. A cease-fire agreement is successfully enacted when the negotiations are in the final process and an agreement is about to be signed. This is because it is too difficult for a party to control all of its members, that is making sure that the cease-fire is respected during the negotiations and there are no successful efforts to derail

the ceasefire through spoiler effects. President Trump, in suspending the negotiations fell into this trap and was too firm on preconditions, blaming all of the Taliban, including the leaders that were to sit at the table of negotiations with officials of the United States government, who may not have been involved with the attack. It may be a likely possibility that the attack may have occurred not simply to derail the negotiation process, but also to increase the negotiation leverage of the terrorist organisation who have always attempted to increase their negotiating power in order to negotiate from a position of strength and have more decisional power in the negotiation process.

The Taliban needed to find strategies to have more negotiating leverage as the once support they received from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia seems to be drying up, even if the organisation, as of 2019, controls or contests more than 46 percent of the Afghan territory, which is inhabited by over a third of the population. Pakistan seems to be in search of better relations with the United States in order to receive that aid that was suspended by the Trump administration. The Saudi Arabian monarchy, in contrast, through its Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman al Saud, who intends to open up the country to the West, has made a variety of agreements with President Trump to help face mounting financial difficulties in Saudi Arabia as the world is progressively developing better renewable energy technologies and slowly abandoning oil, which is the main source of Saudi Arabia wealth and the primary driver of the Saudi economy.

4.3 Latest Developments.

President Trump cancelled a secret meeting at Camp David between Taliban leaders, President Ghani, and himself due to the Taliban attack that murdered an American soldier and eleven other people. The meeting was aimed at reaching closer to a peace deal as negotiations between the United States and the Taliban were drawing to an end as a rough draft of an agreement was presented by Khalilzad, and thus follow-up intra-Afghan talks were to occur as soon after the agreement were to be signed.²⁵⁶

The meeting was cancelled on twitter:

Unbeknownst to almost everyone, the major Taliban leaders and, separately, the President of Afghanistan, were going to secretly meet with me at Camp David on Sunday. They were coming to the United States tonight. Unfortunately, in order to build false leverage, they

²⁵⁶ Crowley, M., Jakes, L., Mashal, M., *“Trump Says He’s Called Off Negotiations With Taliban After Afghanistan Bombing”* (2019), The New York Times

admitted to an attack in Kabul that killed one of our great great soldiers, and 11 other people. I immediately cancelled the meeting and called off peace negotiations. What kind of people would kill so many in order to seemingly strengthen their bargaining position? They didn't, they only made it worse! If they cannot agree to a ceasefire during these very important peace talks, and would even kill 12 innocent people, then they probably don't have the power to negotiate a meaningful agreement anyway. How many more decades are they willing to fight?²⁵⁷

This declaration greatly surprised public opinion. A summit of this relevance, especially being held at Camp David, if successful, would have arguably been the most important diplomatic victory for President Trump. In addition, this statement is in complete contrast to President Trump's haste intention to withdraw all United States troops from the Afghan soil, just like the contrast between the State Department's advices on the conflict with the Pentagon's advices. Officials that have been dealing with the negotiating process are stunned that President Trump has decided to cancel the summit. The cause for surprise is because during the negotiations, there have been other attacks that have however not hindered the suspension of the process. During the talks it is the norm that both parties at times resort to violence in order to build more leverage. In addition, there are certain members of the parties that intend to derail the negotiation process and with no orders from their leaders are the cause of a terrorist attack such as members of the Taliban.²⁵⁸

Therefore President Trump's intentions for cancelling the meeting are unclear. His strategy in foreign policy and the diplomatic world is to be unpredictable. There may be plausible reasons to believe that this action is to bring leverage to his side. Another reason for this action could be that he is taking the advice of the Pentagon, especially the retired Army general David H. Petraeus, who has warned that a withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and a peace agreement would mean a return of al-Qaeda, just as the withdrawal from Iraq was said to be the cause of the birth of the Islamic State in Iraq. US troops are still present in Iraq but security is now in the hands of Baghdad and Kurds with some help from the Americans). If President Trump has decided to follow the Pentagon's advice, it surely is because of the importance of the forthcoming elections. As United States elections approach, President Trump's electoral base may be against the withdrawal of the troops and negotiations with a terrorist group, especially an Islamist one. Nevertheless a complete troop withdrawal in Afghanistan was a 2016 campaign promise, and achieving this would

²⁵⁷ Crowley, M., Jakes, L., Mashal, M., *"Trump Says He's Called Off Negotiations With Taliban After Afghanistan Bombing"* (2019), The New York Times

²⁵⁸ Crowley, M., Jakes, L., Mashal, M., *"Trump Says He's Called Off Negotiations With Taliban After Afghanistan Bombing"* (2019), The New York Times

have meant that President Trump would have finally disentangled the US from the one of its longest lasting wars and accomplished what his predecessor President Barack Obama was not able to carry out during his two terms in office. Thus, this highlights the importance of consensus and public opinion, which constantly changes and may influence a state's decision to negotiate, and the strategies used for the negotiations.²⁵⁹

It is nevertheless the reality that Afghanistan is wary of the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban especially because the government has not been included in the talks at Doha, even if supposedly intra-Afghan talks would occur after the agreement is reached. This is due to the fact that both the Afghan government and the many of the Afghan citizens are worried about the base and root that would be the set for the intra-Afghan negotiations. Afghan government officials have privately claimed that Zalmay Khalilzad, United States' top negotiator of the talks with the Taliban, was not firm enough during negotiations and did not force enough concessions from the Pashtun insurgent group in order to ensure stability as United States troops withdraw from the territory. The concessions that the Afghan officials hoped the United States would obtain were assurances of their national elections to be held on September 28th, 2019 and a complete nationwide cease-fire. However, the actual concessions obtained were a reduction of violence in Kabul and Parwan, and prohibiting the Taliban to refer to itself in official conduct as the "Islamic Emirate," a name the terrorist organisation used when it was ruling Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. Thus Afghan officials believe that negotiations have only strengthened the Taliban.²⁶⁰

A negative opinion of what may potentially occur now is provided by former special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Obama administration Dan Feldman:

So what comes next in terms of strategic policy options? The two main ones seem to be either keeping the current troop footprint in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future, which Trump clearly doesn't want to do, or start to draw down anyway, but thus without getting any concessions for it. That seems like the worst possible result - withdrawing immediately and irresponsibly, leaving both a security and political vacuum.²⁶¹

After the September 11 attacks on the United States, no one would have imagined the possibility that the President of the United States would have sat down at Camp David with the leaders of the

²⁵⁹ Crowley, M., Jakes, L., Mashal, M., "Trump Says He's Called Off Negotiations With Taliban After Afghanistan Bombing" (2019), The New York Times

²⁶⁰ Crowley, M., Jakes, L., Mashal, M., "Trump Says He's Called Off Negotiations With Taliban After Afghanistan Bombing" (2019), The New York Times

²⁶¹ Crowley, M., Jakes, L., Mashal, M., "Trump Says He's Called Off Negotiations With Taliban After Afghanistan Bombing" (2019), The New York Times

organisation accused of harbouring those responsible for the attacks (the Taliban was not responsible, it was Al Qaeda). Nevertheless that would have occurred if some members of the Taliban had not caused yet another attack in Afghan territory killing among the twelve casualties an American soldier, Sergeant First Class Elis Angel Barreto Ortiz. Consequently, Trump cancelled the meeting, but this action does not exclude him from attempting to organise the event again if there is process in negotiations with the Taliban as the United States has understood that it has failed to eradicate al-Qaeda and oust the Taliban.²⁶²

Diplomacy is the favoured option among all the parties involved nowadays, albeit for disparate reasons. However, the diplomatic strategy has such wide support because of a common truth: “Let’s not lose sight of the fact that after eighteen years of trying, it’s clear that a military defeat of the Taliban by U.S. and Afghan security forces is not a realistic option,” Andrew Wilder, an Afghanistan expert and the vice-president of the U.S. Institute of Peace’s Asia programs, affirmed.²⁶³

Nevertheless the suspension of negotiations has created an atmosphere of uncertainty in the United States government buildings about whether the foreign policy is now tied to engaging the terrorist organisation, or whether there will be a unilateral withdrawal of United States troops. The latter option could likely weaken the leverage of the United States officials in the negotiations if they were to resume, and could also cause an environment of anarchy and civil war in Afghanistan, an environment that in the nineties was the reality and gave birth to the Taliban in the first place.²⁶⁴ The plan that the Trump administration had developed to avoid this return to this level of conflict has four parts. The first is the withdrawal of United States troops. The second is a commitment by the Taliban that no terrorist attacks against the United States are conducted in Afghanistan. The third is an agreement to a cease-fire by all the parties involved. It thus is not simply a precondition to negotiations, but part of the negotiation peace settlement as well, even if it is usually respected when it is only part of the final agreement. Finally, the fourth is a follow-up negotiation between the Afghan government and the Taliban, hosted in Oslo, in order to formally put an end to this violent conflict and discuss government system and who will participate, and to discuss civil society.²⁶⁵ Although the first two points were agreed by the Taliban, the last two points were more difficult to agree to, especially over process and substance. “The story for months now has been that we are

²⁶² Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁶³ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁶⁴ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁶⁵ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

negotiating only with the Taliban. We are not laying out the demands for a complete cease-fire,” claimed the former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker.²⁶⁶

The meeting at Camp David would not have achieved peace, but rather a commitment to peace. A real and credible peace process will happen only during follow-up intra-Afghan negotiations, hosted by a country that is not the United States. President Trump’s original intent was to hold separate meeting at Camp David with the Taliban and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Members of the terrorist organisation feared that the United States would force them into formal negotiations with the Afghan president, and that they would be pressured to accept a complete cease-fire. These two points were meant to be exclusively enacted in the follow-up negotiations in Oslo after the Taliban reach a peace deal with the United States. This secret summit, although it could potentially have helped the momentum of the negotiations process, came as a surprise even to officials that took part in the process. In addition, the location of Camp David create a kerfuffle amongst some senior Republicans. For example, Liz Cheney, congresswoman from Wyoming and daughter of former Vice-President Dick Cheney, tweeted: “Camp David is where America’s leaders met to plan our response after al Qaeda, supported by the Taliban, killed 3000 Americans on 9/11.”²⁶⁷ Adam Kinzinger, representative of Illinois who served in Afghanistan, tweeted that, “no member of the Taliban should set foot there. Ever. Never should leaders of a terrorist organisation that hasn’t renounced 9/11 and continues in evil be allowed in our great country. NEVER. Full stop.”²⁶⁸ It is clear however that when negotiating peace deals, the opposing party for any side might be considered an enemy. Some of these enemies that were hosted at Camp David in the past, even if there is a risk of legitimising them. President Trump had the objective nevertheless to end the War in Afghanistan and potentially solve the conflict and sign a peace settlement agreement before the American 2020 election campaign heats up, in order to fulfil one of his key policy promises. However after this suspension of negotiations due to the attack that killed an United States soldier, the Afghan war could once again become a main issue of electoral debate on both the Republican and Democrat side during the 2020 elections.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁶⁷ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁶⁸ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁶⁹ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

4.4 Expected Outcome.

What could occur now that the meeting was cancelled and negotiations have been suspended is more violence. Both parties have already threatened it. On one side, United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has claimed that, “Conditions have been worsening and are about to get worse. While this is not a war of attrition, I want the American people to know that President Trump is taking it to the Taliban.”²⁷⁰ On the other side, Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, stated that: “This will lead to more losses to the United States. Its credibility will be affected, its anti-peace stance will be exposed to the world, losses to lives and assets will increase.”²⁷¹ The Taliban have not closed the door to the diplomatic solution, regardless of violence, which they have used throughout the years and also during negotiations. X of the Taliban has stated, “We are committed to continuing negotiations till the end if political settlement is chosen instead of war.”²⁷² Furthermore, President Trump also may continue negotiations to maintain his campaign promises if he does not receive major backlash from his electorate block. He is known to be unpredictable, and has dramatically suspended other diplomatic initiatives only to resume them shortly after, such as the one with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, calling off the May 2018 summit in Singapore, only to fly to Singapore and meet Kim Jong Un three weeks later.²⁷³ A collaborative statement of former United States diplomatic officials who have worked on the Afghan conflict sheds light on what a significant number of experts in the United States Department of State believe the best option to attempt to resolve this conflict is.²⁷⁴

These officials support a peace deal in Afghanistan that is reached through negotiations. A limited number of troops should be withdrawn immediately to demonstrate the goodwill and seriousness of the United States in negotiating, and the rest of the forces should return to the United States once peace is finally reached. Troops present in Afghan soil during negotiations permit Afghanistan to have ensured stability, security, support for women’s rights, and development of Afghan institutions. It is fundamental that Afghanistan does not become again the centre for terrorism harbouring groups that plan attacks on the United States and to never betray American values that will furnish a chance

²⁷⁰ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁷¹ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁷² Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁷³ Wright, R., “*Trump’s Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*”, (2019), The New Yorker

²⁷⁴ Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponte, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., “*US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure*”, (2019), Atlantic Council

for Afghans to determine their own future. Furthermore, although negotiations could be heading in the right direction, it will be vital to comprehend the details, which will ultimately make the result of the agreement successful or not.²⁷⁵

It is important to note today that it is difficult to understand truly whether permanent peace is achievable. The Taliban have never collaborated or worked with other political forces, and they have always been vague on the conditions they would accept in order to reach a peace settlement. Another important detail is the possibility that there will be a return to civil war in Afghanistan, a situation that could be much worse than the current status quo. This could potentially occur if the United States remove all kind of support to the Afghan state. Since Afghanistan is made up of myriads of ethnic divisions, and minorities together comprise the majority of the people, this might increase the likelihood of conflict. In addition, in a potential civil war, the Islamic State would undoubtedly seize the opportunity to expand its presence and thus threaten the stability of neighbouring countries. Furthermore, states like Iran, Pakistan, Russia, China, and India could all support different Afghan factions in a potential civil war, which would only augment the violence and complicate the situation. This would also lead the Taliban to maintain or seek again an alliance with al-Qaeda to hold dominance. A civil war would consequently not only demonstrate that the United States are not a reliable partner and ally, but it would undermine United States national security as well due to potential attacks. Therefore only after stable and permanent peace is reached, a complete United States troop withdrawal should occur. If the withdrawal is hastily attained, the Taliban may believe that they are able to obtain a military victory easily, rather than a diplomatic one and thus they would not negotiate with the Afghan government for peace.²⁷⁶

In addition, it goes against the values of the United States to accept the Taliban's request not to include the government of Afghanistan, the legitimate source of power in the country now, in the negotiations. This is especially true due to the fact that Afghans deserve the liberty to choose who will govern them and that Ashraf Ghani was chosen through elections. A possible alternative to elections is the formation of an interim government. This alternative is put forward for two reasons. The first is that the elections may require a runoff, possibly delaying the peace talks. The second reason is that the elected government may not be willing to negotiate with the Taliban in the follow-up intra-Afghan talks. Nevertheless the consensus on who would form the interim government is not present. The ethnic divisions of the Afghan people would lead the decision to be long, likely

²⁷⁵ Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponte, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., *"US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure"*, (2019), Atlantic Council

²⁷⁶ Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponte, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., *"US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure"*, (2019), Atlantic Council

even longer than the delay of the election. With regards to the need for the newly elected president to discuss with the Taliban in order to make needed institutional changes, they could be pressed to make a clear statement by which they affirm that they accept negotiations as part of changes in the Afghan constitution in order to reach permanent and stable peace.²⁷⁷

It is moreover fundamental that the Afghan state has a government able to control the country and fight while the negotiation process is ongoing and if negotiations fail, especially because the Taliban have vaguely stated that a reduction of violence will target Americans but not the Afghan government, and the Islamic State is still very much present. A strong central government authority may only help the Afghan military in accomplishing its duty, and avoid breaking apart over what it is fighting for.²⁷⁸

These diplomatic officials are not however suggesting that the United States must continue negotiations as is or continue the conflict with the same number of forces units peace is achieved, especially because of the loss of lives and increasing costs. What these diplomatic officials are supporting is the theory that not all troops must return to the United States before peace is reached. Conditions, not dates, should determine the withdrawal of foreign troops. President Trump had understood this in his first policy declaration in August 2017, and he should not change this approach. Furthermore, the values of respecting human rights and women's rights in a democratic environment must be promoted. Although there are critics that may affirm that this is a concealed way to continue with the conflict. However, these diplomatic officials state that this is not the case because the current involvement is not a major war for the United States anymore as it is the Afghan military who is doing most of the fighting.²⁷⁹

If a peace agreement is reached, there will be the need for continued support to make sure that the peace lasts and is able to lead ultimately to a stable governance. Hence the United States must monitor the compliance to the agreement, and furnish aid for economic growth and good governance. This monitoring would also be useful in making sure that the Taliban and the Afghan government maintain fundamental common interests, such as avoiding civil war, maintaining international economic assistance, defeating the Islamic State, and responding to the widespread

²⁷⁷ Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponte, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., *“US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure”*, (2019), Atlantic Council

²⁷⁸ Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponte, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., *“US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure”*, (2019), Atlantic Council

²⁷⁹ Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponte, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., *“US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure”*, (2019), Atlantic Council

war fatigue among the Afghan people, which would all serve in successful intra-Afghan negotiations and effective implementation of the eventual agreement.²⁸⁰

Overall then, these diplomatic officials are in support of a partial withdrawal of troops, set not on dates but on conditions, support for Afghan people and the liberty to have elections on September 28th of this year, offer aid and assistance to the Afghan government after a peace deal is reached, and make sure that the values of human rights are respected.²⁸¹

4.5 A Controversial Issue.

Critics nevertheless accuse the negotiations with the Taliban in ending the Afghanistan war, but not resolving the problem. The sole consequence of the peace agreement if signed is the withdrawal of foreign troops, leaving Pakistan as the real winner of the war. The core of the agreement drafted United States Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is that the United States withdraws all its troops in exchange that the Taliban do not associate themselves with other terrorist organisations, and impede Afghanistan to be a territory used as a safe haven for these groups. Although there is a belief that the only way to end wars is through diplomacy, there have been agreements signed with the Taliban before the September 11th, 2001 attacks by the Clinton administration, and such attacks have not only proved that the Taliban do not maintain promises, but especially that the diplomatic strategy did not work. This strategy, repeated by the Trump administration, involves desperation for a deal that substitutes bringing leverage to bear and credibly convince opponents that a failure to compromise will mean for them a far worse fate.²⁸²

A larger issue about the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban is Pakistan, according to critics. Pakistan furnishes the support that the Taliban must have to survive as an organisation. Although United States officials are concerned with peace in Afghan territory and make sure that it is not a territory in which terrorists may thrive and plan attacks, the Taliban negotiators were based in Qatar and followed leadership in Quetta. This leadership follows orders

²⁸⁰ Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponte, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., *“US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure”*, (2019), Atlantic Council

²⁸¹ Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponte, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., *“US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure”*, (2019), Atlantic Council

²⁸² Rubin, M., *“The Afghanistan War Is Over and Pakistan Has Won National Interest”*, (2019), National Interest

from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. As such, many members of the Taliban that are negotiating peace are controlled by groups based in Pakistan.²⁸³

In addition, critics involve the problem of legitimacy in framing their argument. The Taliban have always claimed that the organisation is the true, legitimate ruler of the country, and not the Afghan government. Conceding to not including the government in the talks, Khalilzad furnished the Taliban too much leverage. In addition, the Taliban know that in Afghan elections, they would never win, hence a reason for them to continue using violence to gain power, proving that they are not the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan. The American government fails to recognise that Afghanistan is made of many ethnic groups, and most of these groups view the Taliban as Pashtun supremacists and racists willing to rape and murder other minorities.²⁸⁴

Although the war costs around 30 billion dollars annually, what President Trump fails to comprehend is that he has only two choices: continue to spend that number for the years to come, or spend zero dollars. However, in spending zero dollars, the result will be a complete United States troop withdrawal, but no guarantee of safety for Afghanistan and ultimately for the United States, which will in the long-run cause the United States to spend much more than 30 billion dollars per year. The Taliban will likely increase in numbers and gain more power, and a possible new civil war would create a refugee flow that will destabilise neighbouring countries and exacerbate human suffering. Furthermore, there is no international consensus on the definition of terrorism, creating loopholes which the Taliban will continue attacks.²⁸⁵

Hence a Taliban and Pakistani coalition high on victory may well decide to increase their power internationally. Finally, the lesson learned from these negotiations is that other terrorist groups should augment their violent actions so that they may negotiate with the United States and obtain what they want.²⁸⁶

However, although these arguments are valid, they fundamentally miss the point of negotiations. Surely, these are possible outcomes if talks are handled improperly. This is the exact reason why it is vital to discuss the different diplomatic strategies that exist, such as United States diplomatic officials have explained in their letter *How to Avoid Rushing to Failure*. Moreover, as amply demonstrated in the first chapter of the thesis, negotiations historically and statistically have successfully resolved conflicts. The question is how to conduct negotiations with a terrorist

²⁸³ Rubin, M., "*The Afghanistan War Is Over and Pakistan Has Won National Interest*", (2019), National Interest

²⁸⁴ Rubin, M., "*The Afghanistan War Is Over and Pakistan Has Won National Interest*", (2019), National Interest

²⁸⁵ Rubin, M., "*The Afghanistan War Is Over and Pakistan Has Won National Interest*", (2019), National Interest

²⁸⁶ Rubin, M., "*The Afghanistan War Is Over and Pakistan Has Won National Interest*", (2019), National Interest

organisation, and whether Khalilzad efforts could plausibly lead to a permanent and stable peace in Afghanistan.²⁸⁷

A violent conflict would be problematic to resolve diplomatically through negotiations if a country lacked governance and institutions. A conflict resolution involves not only conflicts that are long-lasting and rooted in societies, but also conflicts that include essential resources and issues that are impossible to be compromised. Because conflicts that lead to conflict resolutions are not simply settled by delivering the requests of the parties involved, there must be an understanding of which causal factors and sources led to the conflict. These factors are often due to the institutional structure of the country's society. Another kind of situation which is solved through negotiations is conflict settlement. It is fundamental to distinguish between conflict resolution and conflict settlement as it may allow for a more effective and swift reconciliation process.²⁸⁸

There are myriads of conflicts that have not been negotiated effectively. Internal conflicts, especially, due to the fact that they are deeply-rooted in society, endure for years without any resolution. There are also parties in a negotiation that exploit certain conditions, thus increasing the chances of failure to reach a permanent and stable peace agreement.²⁸⁹

Negotiations with the Taliban have occurred on and off since the beginning of the Afghan war, beginning with the creation of the National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission which was intended to resolve inter-group armed conflicts, internal governmental issues, and attempt to avoid a return to civil war.²⁹⁰ This commission was formed as a result of an acceptance by the Afghan government that the conflict was not feasibly resolvable militarily as the Taliban would have not given up fighting. In 2001, as soon as the war broke out, the Afghan government had offered the Taliban leaders to be part of the newly established democratic government.²⁹¹ This request was declined and other internal negotiations between the government and the terrorist organisation did not have a positive outcome.

²⁸⁷ Rubin, M., *"The Afghanistan War Is Over and Pakistan Has Won National Interest"*, (2019), National Interest

²⁸⁸ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

²⁸⁹ Walter, B. F., *"Committing to Peace"*, (2001), Princeton University Press

²⁹⁰ *"Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Programme Tahkim Sukh"*, (2015), ANIPRC

²⁹¹ Hussain, H., *"The Prospect of Peace Talks with the Taliban"*, (2012), CPCS Peace Practitioner's Research Conference

4.6 Spoilers.

A major obstacle that deviates negotiations are internal or external spoiler effects. Newman and Richmond have defined spoiler effects as individuals or groups of individuals who disagree with the negotiation process, hence resort to violence in order to halt the process. These individuals or groups of individuals are the spoilers, and they may be part of the negotiation process or not, but their actions usually deviate, distract, suspend, or even stop altogether the peace talks. If they are part of a party in negotiations, thus internally, they use the talks to gain time, legitimacy, recognition, and significant concessions. If the actors are geographically peripheral to the conflict, thus external, they resort to violence because they have interests in the conflict such as supporting internal spoilers.²⁹² An example of an external spoiler in the Afghan war has been Pakistan, especially to avoid India's increase of soft power internationally.

Having a deep knowledge of the conflict, and organising a strategy for negotiations is the most complex part of the process. Deciding who to include and exclude as interlocutors and choosing the order of the issues that need to be discussed is vital. People, relationships, legitimacy, interests, commitment, and communication are the elements that will determine the success of negotiations. The structural approach, the behavioural approach, and the strategic approach take into account these elements, and it is important to use them in the context of the United States and Taliban negotiations. It is as important in the context of the United States and Taliban negotiations to avoid the use of the processual approach and the integrative approach. With regards to the processual approach, it should be avoided as government concessions increase the intensity of violence, especially from terrorist organisations. Only the moderate faction of an organisation accepts concessions, and in no way does it influence the radical faction of the group. The radical faction would have a much more difficult time having confidence that the other party is committed to withhold the group's concessions.²⁹³ With regards to the integrative approach, it should not be considered as an effective strategy in this case as it used as a model for concluding successful negotiations.

²⁹² Newman, E., Richmond, O., *“Challenges to Peace-Building: Managing Spoilers During Conflict Resolution”*, (2006), Tokyo: United Nations University Press

²⁹³ Bueno de Mesquita, E., *“Conciliation, Counterterrorism, and Patterns of Terrorist Violence”*, (2005), International Organisation 15

Those who at first accept taking part in the negotiation process are generally the moderate factions of a terrorist group, whereas the radical factions are more firm in their ideology, thus they have a more difficult time accepting sitting at a table with an opponent it has always wanted to eliminate. This is because terrorist organisations have various internal factions and levels of power with interests and goals that may well differentiate.²⁹⁴ When taking into consideration the Taliban, it is useful to denote the organisation composed of Tier I Taliban and Tier II Taliban. The first is composed by members who are firm in their ideology and fanaticism. The second is composed by members who are greedy for money and are disillusioned by local institutions. As stated in the article *Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan*, “bargains are blue-penciled with up and comers, notwithstanding their political significance or competence to clout results.”²⁹⁵ President Ghani has demanded, when first elected, that his political opponents engage in negotiations with the Taliban as he was apprehensive of possible conflicts due to the ethnic divisions in Afghanistan.²⁹⁶ During the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, the Mujahedeen leaders were not in agreement on the deadline to set for the withdrawal of the foreign troops. The leader of the seven-party alliance based in Peshawar, Burhanuddin Rabbani, had formed an interim government that would take power after the Soviets withdrew their troops. The leader of the eight-party alliance based in Iran, Karim Khalil, did not accept the interim government as he claimed it was not inclusive and did not accurately represent Afghanistan.²⁹⁷ For this reason, in the late 1980s a policy of national reconciliation was enacted in order to form an all-inclusive government of all ethnic factions and political parties. Najibullah, who ideated this policy of national reconciliation, in various trips throughout European countries affirmed that there could be a civil war between the different Mujahedeen factions in Afghanistan. However, as the Mujahedeen believed that Najibullah was a Soviet puppet, they completely ignored him.²⁹⁸ In addition, an agreement encountered three issues when the Soviet Union had encouraged Najibullah to begin diplomatic talks with Islamic parties. The first problem was an opposition that was the consequence of a lack of proper social conditions in Afghanistan. The second issue was that the policy of national reconciliation supported by the Soviet Union met strong opposition from the Afghan government. The third problem was the

²⁹⁴ Maloney, S. M., “*Can We Negotiate With the Taliban?*”, (2010), Research Gate

²⁹⁵ “*Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan*”, (2012), International Crisis Group

²⁹⁶ “*Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan*”, (2012), International Crisis Group

²⁹⁷ “*Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan*”, (2012), International Crisis Group

²⁹⁸ Hussain, H., “*The Prospect of Peace Talks with the Taliban*”, (2012), CPCS Peace Practitioner’s Research Conference

fact that the Afghan National Army could not efficiently fight off rebel groups.²⁹⁹ These three reasons led to a weakening of the government in Afghanistan as it was unable to manage the conflict.

Although a diplomatic strategy to resolve conflicts has therefore neither been efficiently implemented nor enforced and such strategy has not been preconceived and predetermined with the Taliban, it ended up being implemented as the military strategy was not bringing any concrete success.³⁰⁰ When the Afghan war began, for many negotiating with a terrorist organisation was inconceivable. Soon, however, it was a politically accepted idea and it became a legitimate strategy to undertake.³⁰¹ Strategy is a “method, plan, and sequence of maneuvers in achieving specific goals,” as defined through the strategic approach.³⁰² The role of ends is the determinant of what the result of the talks will be. Actors thus, in order to reach their goals, choose potential movements.³⁰³ There is a prevalent viewpoint claiming that historically in Afghanistan, negotiations have not been successful as no true strategy had been followed. Not having a strategic approach to peace talks was due to the fact that advocates of negotiations with the Taliban had different opinions and were not convinced themselves that they should enact negotiations. Generally, these advocates either intended to take away all power from the terrorist organisation, or they intend to allow them to obtain a certain amount of power in the Afghan government. Not only were these goals different, but they were also without any clear strategy. Some had attempted to put the Taliban one against the other, were as others attempted to favour the moderate members of the Taliban in spite of the radical ones.³⁰⁴

During the book launch in June of 2010 of “Reconciliation in Afghanistan”, the former Interior Minister of Afghanistan Ali Jalali had discussed the cause of negotiation failures with the Taliban:

In any negotiation unless you create the strategic context of it, it will be fragmented and ineffective, therefore there is no plan, unless you have a major plan and integrate it into the overall counter- insurgency strategy it is not going to work because all rebellions in Afghanistan had one common strategy. The time for a grand deal is gone, it is very difficult

²⁹⁹ Clarke, C. P., *“From Stalemate to Settlement: Lessons for Afghanistan from Historical Insurgencies That Have Been Resolved Through Negotiations”*, (2014), RAND Corporation

³⁰⁰ Pandey, S., *“US-Taliban Talks: Leveraging Violence to Negotiate Peace?”*, (2019), Observer Research Foundation

³⁰¹ Rubin, B. R., *“Everyone Wants a Peace of Afghanistan”*, (2019), Foreign Policy

³⁰² Alfredson, T., Cungu, A., *“Negotiation Theory and Practice”*, (2008), FAO

³⁰³ Alfredson, T., Cungu, A., *“Negotiation Theory and Practice”*, (2008), FAO

³⁰⁴ Giustozzi, A., *“The Resilient Oligopoly: A Political-Economy of Northern Afghanistan 2001 and Onwards”*, (2012), Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit

because there is no one group, there is no possibility unless Afghanistan, Pakistan all can work together.³⁰⁵

There are similarities with the Afghan talks with the Soviet Union. In that case the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was not viewed to be a legitimate party to rule the government. In addition, the Mujahedeen were at that time in control of the majority of the Afghan state.

Furthermore, the Mujahedeen refused to negotiate before the Soviet Union had withdrawn its troops from Afghan territory. Hence as a Soviet official had stated:

The counter-revolution [the insurgency]...continues its course for putting an end to the regime by military means ... is aware of the strategic decision of the Soviet leadership to withdraw the Soviet troops from the DRA ... The counter-revolution will not be satisfied with partial power today, knowing that tomorrow it can have it all.³⁰⁶

This statement has relevance even nowadays with the current negotiations between the United States and the Taliban. In this case the Afghan government fears that the Taliban are not serious and committed to implementing a peace agreement. They will take the partial power today, and when they will also have military advantage as foreign troops will have withdrawn completely will attempt to take over power.³⁰⁷

The relation continues as it highlights the historical complexity of Afghanistan, a state made of myriads of different ethnicities and factions, along with influence of external actors that do not allow negotiations to be simply between two parties. In addition, one side is not that much more powerful than the other as if the Afghan government has the support of the international community headed by the United States, the Taliban are backed by other external actors such as al-Qaeda. Hence the attempt during current negotiations between the United States and the Taliban to use other actors in the respective favours such as the United States request for the Taliban to cut all ties with al-Qaeda.³⁰⁸

In the past years of the Afghan War, Pakistan, through its military and Inter-Service Intelligence, attempted to gain influence in Afghanistan as it faced significant issues with India from its separation. The government in Pakistan was further worried that India would form an alliance with Afghanistan in order to enhance its soft power internationally. The factors that increased these

³⁰⁵ Jalali, A., *"Negotiating with the Taliban: Reconciliation in Afghanistan and Pakistan?"*, (2010), United States Institute of Peace

³⁰⁶ Majidiyar, A. K., *"Negotiating with the Taliban: Lessons from History"*, (2014), American Enterprise Institute

³⁰⁷ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

³⁰⁸ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

worries were the contention regarding the Durand Line along with the Balochistan border being the centre for insurgencies.³⁰⁹ Therefore, the Taliban have been used by external actors to increase their soft power strategically. Pakistan allowed its territory to become a safe-haven for terrorists because of this. As such, the country has a dual function. In the majority of cases it has been a spoiler, but in certain cases it facilitated peace talks.³¹⁰

Spoilers threaten the possibility of reaching a peace settlement. They engage in action when they believe that negotiations may change the current status quo, a status quo where they enjoy a strong position, have strong interests, and enjoy a significant amount of power. Hence the resort to violence in order to derail negotiations and peace. There are times when violent actions occur simply because there are parties who are not included in the negotiations.³¹¹ These are named external spoilers. One example with regards to the Afghan War was Pakistan, which has helped the Taliban in the past, such as in 2010 when the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence arrested the second-ranking commander of the Taliban Mullah Baradar along with 23 members of the Quetta Shura as the Pakistani government accused them of conducting secret negotiations with the Afghan government without including Pakistan.³¹² It is therefore fundamental when there are ongoing negotiations that the parties involved are in control or are helped by the international community to control the regions involved so as to avoid allowing spoilers to resort to violence.³¹³

Although spoilers have significant similarities with insurgents, the core difference is that spoilers act only when there are ongoing peace talks.³¹⁴ There are different types of spoilers depending on what their objectives are. There are spoilers that have specific aims, and there are spoilers that intend to achieve complete power. In addition, there are spoilers that carefully plan out a cost and benefit analysis before resorting to violence, while other spoilers tend to act instinctively. Peace would in both cases go against their interests. This occurs also when parties involved in a conflict agree that peace is necessary, but disagree on the exact terms of a settlement.³¹⁵

³⁰⁹ Waldman, M., *“TOUGH TALKING: THE CASE FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE TALIBAN”*, (2010), The RUSI Journal

³¹⁰ Waldman, M., *“TOUGH TALKING: THE CASE FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE TALIBAN”*, (2010), The RUSI Journal

³¹¹ Stedman, S. J., *“Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”*, (1997), International Security

³¹² Filkins, D., *“Pakistanis Tell of Motive in Taliban Leader’s Arrest”*, (2010), The New York Times

³¹³ Stedman, S. J., *“Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”*, (1997), International Security

³¹⁴ Stedman, S. J., *“Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”*, (1997), International Security

³¹⁵ Stedman, S. J., *“Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”*, (1997), International Security

Reaching a peace agreement that also achieves stability in Afghanistan is incredibly complex, especially due to the nature of the Afghan war. Negotiating with terrorist organisations adds to the precariousness and fragility of talks. What is fundamental is that the Taliban comprehend that their best option is to respect a possible peace agreement with the United States, and one later with the Afghan government whether it be with the Ghani administration or another one.³¹⁶ The United States government has made it clear that if a signed settlement is solely utilised by the Taliban to gain time, and further organising their plans to take over power once all foreign troops are removed, these troops will return and the conflict would continue in all its violence. It is further vital that negotiations, if the Trump administration decided to sit again at a table with the Taliban as expected, are not conducted vaguely but rather systematically, are not fixated with preconditions, and do not accept a complete and immediate withdrawal of foreign troops as there must be monitoring of the plausible power-sharing agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. This in order to make sure that the terrorist organisation does not take advantage of having a certain amount of power to completely take over the Afghan government, and to make sure that no other state takes advantage of Afghanistan's natural resources by aiding the state of Afghanistan. The outcome of the Afghan war must be full independence and self-sufficiency of the country. Obscuring the interests of the country will only lead to failed negotiations.³¹⁷ What will be of significant help is the continued training by foreign troops of the Afghan National Army and Afghan police force. By obtaining fundamental resources, education, and skills, Afghanistan will be more secure and there will be less public discontent regarding the lack of safety after the Taliban lost power. Moreover, Pakistan still plays an important role in contributing to the future of Afghanistan. The turn that the new Pakistani administration is seemingly taking in favour of the United States may furnish a aid in reaching a peaceful and diplomatic solution, thus weakening the "once supported" Taliban, and consequently not behaving as a spoiler effect in the conflict resolution. However, a vital support of international organisations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is necessary to obtaining stable and permanent peace in Afghanistan. These international organisation have greatly increased their influence in recent years, especially due to the evolvment and augmentation of risk from terrorism. Through their actions of sanctions and suspensions of aid and membership, these organisations combat states that have become a safe-haven for terrorist groups.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

³¹⁷ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

³¹⁸ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

The war in Afghanistan has not been successfully resolved in over eighteen years of violent conflict militarily. The Taliban have neither been eradicated, neither have they been defeated. Hence a serious attempt to entail diplomatic negotiations is the most realistic option in order to find a peaceful solution. An almost analogous situation occurred at the end of the 1980s with the withdrawal of Soviet troops in Afghan territory after the invasion of the Soviet Union in the country.³¹⁹ After having comprehended that the Afghan insurgents could not be defeated militarily, the Soviet Union decided to resolve the situation diplomatically. A policy of reconciliation was enacted with these insurgents after the Soviet Union did not manage to win over to their side the moderate factions of Afghani ethnic groups. It is important nevertheless to take into account what occurred then and not make the same mistake as the Soviet Union who diminished efforts on the reconciliation policy in 1987. Past negotiations with the Taliban did not have a clear counter-insurgency strategy and combined with a lack of significant military success, no conflict resolution was able to occur.³²⁰ The Taliban in the past had stronger support from other organisations such as al-Qaeda. Furthermore, they also obtained financial aid from states such as Pakistan that have acted as spoilers in the past negotiations because Pakistan did not want India to increase its soft power at Pakistan's expense. The failure in the talks was due to the use of the structural approach, which focuses on the relationships between the various parties involved in the negotiations along with their objectives they hope to achieve from the talks. As each party, who were both internal and external actors, had different objectives that were firm and not reconcilable, the environment that had been formed led to a situation where reaching an agreement was not plausible.³²¹

4.7 Conclusion.

Therefore, the United States must take on a multi-step approach beginning from the behavioural approach with the Taliban. This approach highlights the characteristics of the single individuals involved in the talks. Focusing on the individual allows for a building of confidence and trust, which lacked completely in the previous negotiations. Because the Taliban is an organisation made

³¹⁹ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

³²⁰ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

³²¹ Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

up of diversified rebels, the behavioural approach may contribute to finding a solution more so than taking on a structural approach.³²²

The United States depends on the various agencies because the Department of State has different viewpoints than the Pentagon which continues to advise for an increase in United States troops in Afghanistan and not a withdrawal as the Department of State advances. There is also the issue of increasing financial expenses to keep a violent conflict alive thousands of miles away in a different continent. In addition, president Trump's electoral cycle contributes to determine the choices of the president of the United States. If President Trump is advised to change his foreign policy in Afghanistan due to a change of beliefs in his electoral base that may determine his win in the 2020 presidential elections, then negotiations may be suspended for an infinite amount of time and the conflict will continue. However currently President Trump intends to avoid possible future terrorist attacks, and combined with the fact that the United States government intends to leave Afghanistan in a better state than when the war began, the suspended negotiations will likely soon resume.

The Taliban, on their side, have understood that the United States would have never abandoned the conflict if the Taliban continued attempting to achieve their objective of taking over completely the government in Afghanistan. Hence they realised that a power-sharing agreement is a better solution than either continuing with a war that they will likely will never win due to the might of the United States military and economy, and due to the fact that there may be external states that once aided them that are slowly changing their foreign policy such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. These are the reasons for which two of the most bitter enemies have decided to sit around a table together.

³²² Qarqeen, F., *"Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban"*, (2015), American University of Central Asia

Conclusion

My research had the purpose to deeply discuss negotiations with terrorist organisation, analysing the case of the Afghan war talks. I have decided to explore this subject because the world diplomacy has been a passion of mine, and a negotiation process with terrorist groups is a relatively new solution that should be examined in order to resolve conflicts. Moreover, the case of negotiations between the United States and the Taliban is arguably one of the most important possible conflict resolution of the geopolitical world situation. Furthermore, it is an ongoing process with continuous changes. The objective of this research has been to support the strategy of negotiations with the Taliban, albeit with certain reservation in order to make the diplomatic route more effective. Interestingly, at the end of the research it is clear that the United States still has to fully learn Henry Kissinger's lessons from the past negotiations, not behave too hastily, and also allow civilians in Afghanistan to have a true voice in the future of their country. In order to develop the argument, I have structured my dissertation into four chapters, each discussing a different aspect of "The Taliban: From Insurgency to Negotiation."

The first chapter of the thesis deeply analysed whether a state should negotiate with a terrorist organisation or not. At the beginning of the chapter, I furnished the definition of negotiation in the context of diplomacy and the differences with the military strategy. After, I took into account the pros and cons of negotiating, analysing the ethical perspective of negotiations and the problem solving perspective of negotiations. There are two opposing views on the ways terrorists are viewed, each supported by their own model: the strategic interaction model which views terrorists as rational actors, and the sociodynamic model, which views terrorists as enacting violence because of their experiences that detached them from reality. To profoundly understand the pros and cons of negotiating, I described the game-theoretic model. Furthermore, I listed the phases of negotiations along with a variety of theories, such as the consequentialist and deontological theories, that explain different negotiating strategies, showcasing which theory is more effective in which case. No theory is the most effective and may be used in all cases as every case is fundamentally different. Each terrorist group, is fundamentally different. I concluded the first chapter by introducing the foreign policy history of the United States.

The second chapter of the dissertation provides a historical overview of Afghanistan, furnishing the reasons why a terrorist organisation named the Taliban rose to power. Afghanistan has always had a history of instability as there were constant tensions amongst the various ethnic factions present. I

then discussed the cons of negotiating with the Taliban, and later the pros that counter the reasons for not solving the war in Afghanistan diplomatically. Those who are against the diplomatic strategy and favour a return to counterinsurgency operations firmly believe that the Taliban are convinced that they are able to militarily win the war, hence negotiations would not be fruitful. In addition, the claim that the great majority of Afghan civilians hope that the Taliban will be defeated militarily. Therefore they are ideologically against talking to a terrorist organisation. Those who support the diplomatic strategy over the military strategy include saving lives, cut down costs of operations, and the opening of Taliban leaders to negotiations as their intention nowadays is a power-sharing agreement. Thus they favour pragmatism over ideology and accept sitting at a table with a terrorist group. I concluded the chapter by introducing the talks at Doha between the United States and the Taliban.

The third chapter of the thesis begins with an overview of the current life in Afghanistan. I described the situation regarding human rights, especially women's rights, and the ongoing violence that has been affected by the Taliban. Then, I presented the main actors and negotiating parties in the talks at Doha between the United States government and the Taliban, including the reasons for which why certain parties, most importantly the Afghan government, have been excluded from these talks. I later described the reasons for which the United States began negotiations, and what the response from the terrorist organisation had been. After the negotiations began, I analysed what has successfully been negotiated and what still must be discussed, demonstrating that there is still a long way to go before an agreement that furnishes stable and lasting peace is reached. When such peace settlement is achieved, there will need to be follow up negotiations, but this time between the Afghan government and the Taliban. This in order to delineate a possible power-sharing agreement between the two that would potentially rule Afghanistan. After describing this, I presented the involvement of Pakistan in the Afghan war. I analysed the change in Pakistani foreign policy, from aiding the Taliban and functioning as a safe-haven for terrorists, to seemingly serving as an American ally. I concluded the third chapter by examining the progress made in the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban.

The fourth and final chapter of dissertation highlights what the current objectives of the Trump administration are, and how these objective are susceptible to change depending on the internal situation of the United States. I then explained what the latest developments of the conflict are, specifically describing the cancelled meeting at Camp David. I later analysed what the potential outcomes of the conflict could be, along with what I hope could occur. There are still problems that must be resolved, such as fully understanding just how serious the Taliban are in reaching a

settlement that will not allow them to take full control of Afghanistan. Moreover, the possible spoiler effects in the negotiation process must be addressed and avoided. If attacks by spoilers occur, no party must fall in their trap and allow talks to be derailed.

In order to conclude, the best possible outcome of the war in Afghanistan is a peace settlement reached diplomatically through negotiations. It has been clear that after eighteen years, this conflict cannot be resolved militarily. A multi-step approach is needed in order to enact an effective negotiating strategy. A behavioural approach should be the first approach so as to analyse the personalities of opposing party. Then, a strategic approach must be applied to plan out exactly how negotiations should be organised to maximise the possibility of reaching the objectives of peace. A structural approach to negotiations should be considered, but used flexibly as it has caused the failure of past negotiations throughout the period of the war in Afghanistan. Hence the structural approach is helpful in highlighting what went wrong in the past. Generally during the negotiations a pragmatist approach aids in not being firm on ideology, but resolving a conflict thus saving lives with practical solutions. It is vital that no party behaves too hastily. It is vital that no party is fixed upon preconditions. It is vital to allow the Afghan people to voice their opinion. The United States and international coalition must leave Afghan soil, but only once a power-sharing agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban has been reached that makes sure that human rights are being respected, and once the new government is autonomous in order to ensure stable and permanent peace along with further development of institutions. It is vital that ideology, such as ethically not speaking to those that create terror and bloodshed, must not stop from effectively saving lives as we all must make compromises in order to achieve good.

Bibliography

Abrahms, M. “*What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy*”, (2008), International Security

“*Afghanistan Political History*”, (2019), Norwegian Afghanistan Committee

Alfredson, T., Cungu, A., “*Negotiation Theory and Practice*”, (2008), FAO

Browne, J., Dickson, E., “*We don’t Talk to Terrorists: On the Rhetoric and Practice of Secret Negotiations*”, (2010) Sage

Bueno de Mesquita, E., “*Conciliation, Counterterrorism, and Patterns of Terrorist Violence*”, (2005), International Organisation 15

Clarke, C. P., “*From Stalemate to Settlement: Lessons for Afghanistan from Historical Insurgencies That Have Been Resolved Through Negotiations*”, (2014), RAND Corporation

Constable, P., “*Taliban meets with women’s rights activists, others after talks with Afghan officials collapse*”, (2019) The Washington Post

Constable, P., “*In Taliban-controlled areas, Afghan women face restrictions, but some find ways to push back*”, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., “*Even without a Taliban peace deal, progress for Afghan women and democracy seems vulnerable*”, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., “*In male-dominated Afghanistan, justice for women is complicated*”, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., “*In Remarkable Scenes, Taliban Fighters Join Eid Celebrations Across Afghanistan as Cease-Fire Begins*”, (2018), The Washington Post

Constable, P., *"The return of a Taliban government? Afghanistan talks raise one-unthinkable question"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., *"Talks between Afghan leaders and Taliban canceled, in setback to U.S.-led peace process"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., *"Afghan government, shut out of US-Taliban peace talks, running short on options"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., *"Taliban car bomb hits intelligence compound in Afghanistan, killing at least 12 and wounding schoolchildren"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., Hassan, S., *"Afghan vice presidential candidate narrowly escapes attack that killed 20 people"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., *"Uncertainty over election and US Taliban peace talks leaves Afghanistan in limbo"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., *"Afghans voice fears that the US is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Constable, P., Ryan, M., Sonne, P., *"U.S., Taliban move closer to deal on American troop exit"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Cronin, A. K., *"Behind the Curve: Globalisation and International Terrorism"*, (2006), International Security

Cronin, A. K., *"How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns"*, (2009) Princeton University Press

Crowley, M., Jakes, L., Mashal, M., *"Trump Says He's Called Off Negotiations With Taliban After Afghanistan Bombing"* (2019), The New York Times

DeYoung, K., Ryan, M., Gearan, A., Rucker, P., *"Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Dobbins, J., Finn, R. P., Neumann, R. E., Wood, W., Negroponce, J., Wayne, W. E., Crocker, R., Cunningham, J., Llorens, H., *"US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure"*, (2019), Atlantic Council

Filkins, D., *"Pakistanis Tell of Motive in Taliban Leader's Arrest"*, (2010), The New York Times

Gearan, A., Hudson, J., *"Trump claims progress in Afghanistan peace talks, says Pakistan is now helping because of him"*, (2019), The Washington Post

Gentilini, F., *"La Diversa Visione del Tempo tra l'America e i Taleban sulla Via della Pace a Kabul"*, (2019), La Stampa

- Gerberg, J., *"I just don't want to kill 10 million people: Trump's comments reverberate in Afghanistan"*, (2019), The Washington Post
- Giustozzi, A., *"The Resilient Oligopoly: A Political-Economy of Northern Afghanistan 2001 and Onwards"*, (2012), Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit
- Hussain, H., *"The Prospect of Peace Talks with the Taliban"*, (2012), CPCS Peace Practitioner's Research Conference
- "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Programme Tahkim Suklh"*, (2015), ANIPRC
- Jalali, A., *"Negotiating with the Taliban: Reconciliation in Afghanistan and Pakistan?"*, (2010), United States Institute of Peace
- Kissinger, H. A., *"The Viet Nam Negotiations"*, (1969), Foreign Affairs
- Lamothe, D., Dawsey, J., *"Trump wanted a big cut in troops in Afghanistan. New US military plan falls short"*, (2019), The Washington Post
- Lamothe, D., Hudson, J., Constable, P., *"U.S. preparing to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan in initial deal with Taliban"*, (2019), The Washington Post
- Lieven, A., *"Lessons from my Talks with the Taliban"*, (2012), Financial Times
- Lyall, J., *"5 key lessons from the Taliban's deadly resurgence in Afghanistan"*, (2018), The Washington Post
- Majidiyar, A. K., *"Negotiating with the Taliban: Lessons from History"*, (2014), American Enterprise Institute
- Malhotra, D., *"Without Conditions: The Case for Negotiating With the Enemy"*, (2009), HeinOnline
- Maloney, S. M., *"Can We Negotiate With the Taliban?"*, (2010), Research Gate
- Marcovina, M., *"Negoziare coi Terroristi?"*, (2016), Sicurezza Nazionale
- Mir, A., *"Afghanistan's road to peace won't be an easy one"*, (2018), The Washington Post
- Mohmand, A., *"The United States and the Taliban: Challenges for Effective Negotiations"*, (2013), Jstor
- Newman, E., Richmond, O., *"Challenges to Peace-Building: Managing Spoilers During Conflict Resolution"*, (2006), Tokyo: United Nations University Press
- Neumann, P., *"Negotiating with Terrorists"*, (2007) Foreign Affairs
- Pandey, S., *"US-Taliban Talks: Leveraging Violence to Negotiate Peace?"*, (2019), Observer Research Foundation

- Powell, J., *“Terrorists at the Negotiating Table”*, (2015) Palgrave Macmillan
- Powell, J., *“Talking to terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts”*, (2014) Penguin Random House
- Qarqeen, F., *“Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban”*, (2015), American University of Central Asia
- Recchia, F., Tugnoli, L. *“Hardship and survival - -the daily struggles of internally displaced people”*, (2019), The Washington Post
- Rubin, B. R., *“Everyone Wants a Peace of Afghanistan”*, (2019), Foreign Policy
- Rubin, M., *“The Afghanistan War Is Over and Pakistan Has Won National Interest”*, (2019), National Interest
- Salahuddin, S., *“Taliban threatens to disrupt Afghan elections, dismisses September vote as ploy”*, (2019), The Washington Post
- Serra, G., *“Why not to Negotiate with the Taliban: A Legalistic Perspective”*, (2009), Journal of Peace Studies
- Spector, B., *“Deciding to Negotiate with Villains”*, (1998) Plenum Publishing Corporation
- Stabile, G., *“Afghanistan, l’invitato USA a Doha: “Pronto a firmare l’accordo con i Taleban””*, (2019), La Stampa
- Stedman, S. J., *“Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”*, (1997), International Security
- “Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan”*, (2012), International Crisis Group
- “Talking to the Taliban”*, (2012), Financial Times
- Tellis J., A., *“Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy In Afghanistan”*, (2009), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Thomas, C., *“Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief”*, (2019), Congressional Research Service
- Waldman, M., *“TOUGH TALKING: THE CASE FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE TALIBAN”*, (2010), The RUSI Journal
- Walter, B. F., *“Committing to Peace”*, (2001), Princeton University Press
- Wiseman, G. *“Engaging the Enemy: An Essential Norm for Sustainable US Diplomacy”*

Wright, R., "*Trump's Stunt With The Taliban Was Not About Negotiating Peace*", (2019), The New Yorker

Zartman, I. W., "*Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond, in International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War*", (2000)

Summary

Introduction.

Afghanistan has always been a country that lacked stability to its complex geopolitical situation and as it is made up of a variety of ethnic groups. Because of this root, a series of civil wars occurred that led to the rise of a terrorist organisation named the Taliban. This organisation was able to take power of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. On September 11th, 2001, five different terrorist attacks ideated by the Taliban hit the United States. After the attacks, the United States government responded militarily, beginning the Afghan war which is still active today. As this violent conflict does not seem to have a military resolution, a diplomatic strategy is continuously growing as the preferred solution in order to reach stable and permanent peace.

During the Afghan war, Afghanistan's security was further negatively affected by the tensions between the government and the Taliban leadership. The aid provided by the international community through Operation Enduring Freedom by NATO forces and the U.S.A.-ISAF has been fundamental in helping the government in Afghanistan to develop necessary institution and furnish military and police training in order to put the brakes on this degenerating problem. These forces have also been fighting the Taliban with both ground and air operations for the past eighteen years without being completely successful. This is why there have been intra-Afghan talks that attempted to find a diplomatic solution. The Afghan government, in these past eighteen years, have initiated a variety of negotiations with the Taliban through commissions that ended up in failure due to structural, strategic, and behavioural approaches of the negotiation theory.³²³ Hence the reason to change diplomatic strategy in the talks between the United States and the Taliban, along with the possible follow-up intra-Afghan talks between the government and the terrorist organisation. This thesis will concentrate on the diplomatic negotiations that are occurring in the context of terrorist groups in the context of the war in Afghanistan. Moreover, qualitative research will be analysed, focusing on a variety of secondary sources, and insights from different academic articles. In addition, the case of the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban will include a historical analysis method.

³²³ Qarqeen, F., "*Afghan Peace Talks: Negotiating with the Taliban*", (2015), American University of Central Asia

Chapter I.

The first chapter of the thesis deeply analysed whether a state should negotiate with a terrorist organisation or not. At the beginning of the chapter, I furnished the definition of negotiation in the context of diplomacy and the differences with the military strategy. After, I took into account the pros and cons of negotiating, analysing the ethical perspective of negotiations and the problem solving perspective of negotiations. There are two opposing views on the ways terrorists are viewed, each supported by their own model: the strategic interaction model which views terrorists as rational actors, and the sociodynamic model, which views terrorists as enacting violence because of their experiences that detached them from reality. To profoundly understand the pros and cons of negotiating, I described the game-theoretic model. Furthermore, I listed the phases of negotiations along with a variety of theories, such as the consequentialist and deontological theories, that explain different negotiating strategies, showcasing which theory is more effective in which case. No theory is the most effective and may be used in all cases as every case is fundamentally different. Each terrorist group, is fundamentally different. I concluded the first chapter by introducing the foreign policy history of the United States.

Chapter II.

The second chapter of the dissertation provides a historical overview of Afghanistan, furnishing the reasons why a terrorist organisation named the Taliban rose to power. Afghanistan has always had a history of instability as there were constant tensions amongst the various ethnic factions present. I then discussed the cons of negotiating with the Taliban, and later the pros that counter the reasons for not solving the war in Afghanistan diplomatically. Those who are against the diplomatic strategy and favour a return to counterinsurgency operations firmly believe that the Taliban are convinced that they are able to militarily win the war, hence negotiations would not be fruitful. In addition, the claim that the great majority of Afghan civilians hope that the Taliban will be defeated militarily. Therefore they are ideologically against talking to a terrorist organisation. Those who support the diplomatic strategy over the military strategy include saving lives, cut down costs of operations, and the opening of Taliban leaders to negotiations as their intention nowadays is a power-sharing agreement. Thus they favour pragmatism over ideology and accept sitting at a table with a terrorist group. I concluded the chapter by introducing the talks at Doha between the United States and the Taliban.

Chapter III.

The third chapter of the thesis begins with an overview of the current life in Afghanistan. I described the situation regarding human rights, especially women's rights, and the ongoing violence that has been affected by the Taliban. Then, I presented the main actors and negotiating parties in the talks at Doha between the United States government and the Taliban, including the reasons for which why certain parties, most importantly the Afghan government, have been excluded from these talks. I later described the reasons for which the United States began negotiations, and what the response from the terrorist organisation had been. After the negotiations began, I analysed what has successfully been negotiated and what still must be discussed, demonstrating that there is still a long way to go before an agreement that furnishes stable and lasting peace is reached. When such peace settlement is achieved, there will need to be follow up negotiations, but this time between the Afghan government and the Taliban. This in order to delineate a possible power-sharing agreement between the two that would potentially rule Afghanistan. After describing this, I presented the involvement of Pakistan in the Afghan war. I analysed the change in Pakistani foreign policy, from aiding the Taliban and functioning as a safe-haven for terrorists, to seemingly serving as an American ally. I concluded the third chapter by examining the progress made in the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban.

Chapter IV.

The fourth and final chapter of dissertation highlights what the current objectives of the Trump administration are, and how these objective are susceptible to change depending on the internal situation of the United States. I then explained what the latest developments of the conflict are, specifically describing the cancelled meeting at Camp David. I later analysed what the potential outcomes of the conflict could be, along with what I hope could occur. There are still problems that must be resolved, such as fully understanding just how serious the Taliban are in reaching a settlement that will not allow them to take full control of Afghanistan. Moreover, the possible spoiler effects in the negotiation process must be addressed and avoided. If attacks by spoilers occur, no party must fall in their trap and allow talks to be derailed.

Conclusion.

My research had the purpose to deeply discuss negotiations with terrorist organisation, analysing the case of the Afghan war talks. The objective of this research has been to support the strategy of negotiations with the Taliban, albeit with certain reservation in order to make the diplomatic route more effective. Interestingly, at the end of the research it is clear that the United States still has to fully learn Henry Kissinger's lessons from the past negotiations, not behave too hastily, and also allow civilians in Afghanistan to have a true voice in the future of their country. In order to develop the argument, I have structured my dissertation into four chapters, each discussing a different aspect of "The Taliban: From Insurgency to Negotiation." The best possible outcome of the war in Afghanistan is a peace settlement reached diplomatically through negotiations. It has been clear that after eighteen years, this conflict cannot be resolved militarily. A multi-step approach is needed in order to enact an effective negotiating strategy. A behavioural approach should be the first approach so as to analyse the personalities of opposing party. Then, a strategic approach must be applied to plan out exactly how negotiations should be organised to maximise the possibility of reaching the objectives of peace. A structural approach to negotiations should be considered, but used flexibly as it has caused the failure of past negotiations throughout the period of the war in Afghanistan. Hence the structural approach is helpful in highlighting what went wrong in the past. Generally during the negotiations a pragmatist approach aids in not being firm on ideology, but resolving a conflict thus saving lives with practical solutions. It is vital that no party behaves too hastily. It is vital that no party is fixed upon preconditions. It is vital to allow the Afghan people to voice their opinion. The United States and international coalition must leave Afghan soil, but only once a power-sharing agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban has been reached that makes sure that human rights are being respected, and once the new government is autonomous in order to ensure stable and permanent peace along with further development of institutions. It is vital that ideology, such as ethically not speaking to those that create terror and bloodshed, must not stop from effectively saving lives as we all must make compromises in order to achieve good.