

## **Taliban Reconciliation: The Afghan Perspective**

**John Richardson**

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## **Background**

As Operation Enduring Freedom enters its eleventh year, a political settlement with the Taliban is increasingly being viewed by US officials as an integral component to ending the war in Afghanistan. However, much debate continues as to what such a settlement will entail and its likelihood for success. Although reconciliation is popular with the US government, what do Afghans and the Taliban think about it? This paper explores Afghans' opinions on a peace deal with the Taliban, multiple directions such a deal may take, and the feasibility of implementing such a settlement.

Negotiations are a dynamic process and changes to the “reality on the ground” affect their prospects for success and failure. It is therefore necessary to understand the current situation in Afghanistan in context in order to evaluate the likelihood of a peaceful settlement prevailing. Afghanistan presents an especially complex environment that is the result of a country which has essentially been at war for the last 34 years. There are multiple ways in which this time period can be broken up for further evaluation; however, I find it most useful to look at this period of Afghanistan's history as four main periods: 1978-1989, 1989-1996, 1996-2001, and 2001 onwards.

The relative peace Afghanistan enjoyed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century ended in 1978 in a coup by members of the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The PDPA killed

Daud Khan, then ruler of Afghanistan, and instituted a socialist regime.<sup>1</sup> Internal dissent nearly led to the PDPA's collapse, prompting the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1979. This began a 10 year war of Soviet and PDPA forces battling against Islamist-led mujahideen (holy warrior) factions.<sup>2</sup> The United States and Saudi Arabia supplied the Afghan mujahideen with weapons, supplies, and finances while Pakistan offered logistical support and a sanctuary from which to train, re-arm, and re-group. The mujahideen resistance against the Soviet occupation continued to grow until Soviet troops were withdrawn in 1989 marking the end of the first period.

The PDPA government under President Najibullah, which was generally viewed as illegitimate, took an enormous hit with the departure of the Soviets in 1989 but managed to maintain its hold on Kabul for several years. The PDPA dissolved itself in April 1992 but Najibullah remained in Kabul until 1996. With the PDPA dissolved, rival mujahideen leaders turned against one another in an extension of the ongoing civil war. Each leader controlled a region of the country, but none were powerful enough to dominate the others.<sup>3</sup> Southern Afghanistan was especially chaotic. Out of this chaos, a political-religious movement called the Taliban ("students" in Pashto) formed around Mullah Omar in one of the principal cities of southern Afghanistan, Kandahar. The Taliban gained the support of Pakistan and rapidly

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 170-171.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 171.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 171.

expanded its influence through southern Afghanistan, eventually seizing control of Kabul in 1996.

The Taliban founded the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and their rule dominated the period from 1996 to 2001. By 1999, the Taliban controlled all of Afghanistan except for the northeast.<sup>4</sup> While the PDPA had been a radical departure from Afghanistan's past, the Taliban swung heavily in the opposite direction by enforcing an exceptionally strict interpretation of Islamic law. Their repression of women and ethnic minorities is well documented, particularly their brutality towards those who wished to work, attend school, or leave their home. The Taliban never had much success in gaining international recognition. By 2000, Pakistan; Saudi Arabia; and the U.A.E. were the only countries to officially recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. The Taliban found an ally in Osama bin Laden, who they accepted into the country, allowed to build training bases for al Qaeda, and refused to hand over to Saudi Arabia or the United States. Hosting bin Laden proved costly for the Taliban following the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks.

Operation Enduring Freedom began on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001 with aerial bombardments of Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. This was followed by a ground campaign by Afghan forces opposed to the Taliban, supported by US forces, which captured Mazar-e-Sharif (November 9<sup>th</sup>), then Kabul (November 13<sup>th</sup>), and finally Kandahar (December). Most of the Taliban fled to

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 171.

Pakistan where they regrouped. Fighting in Afghanistan did not rise dramatically until 2006 when a reinvigorated Taliban began to push into the south and the east. Since that time, the number of foreign troops in Afghanistan has risen dramatically in an effort to fight the Taliban insurgency, secure territory, and allow reconstruction and governance projects to move forward.

### **Insurgencies**

In evaluating the likelihood of the current insurgency in Afghanistan to end in a negotiated settlement, it is beneficial to examine past insurgencies for factors that are identified with various outcomes. Examining past insurgencies also sheds light on the likelihood of either side winning an outright victory in Afghanistan, which in turn affects the willingness of either side to negotiate. A substantial amount of literature has been written on the subject of insurgencies, especially in the past 10 years. In evaluating past insurgencies, I find it most useful to classify them into the same four categories used by RAND in the monograph *How Insurgencies End* which details the outcomes of 89 insurgencies: government wins, government loses, mixed outcome (a stalemate or a negotiated peace), and those that are inconclusive or ongoing.<sup>5</sup> There are several aspects of the current insurgency in Afghanistan that are considered to be important factors in insurgencies more generally and can be examined in past cases: terrain, outside intervention (on behalf of the counterinsurgent and on behalf of the insurgent), sanctuary, and an anocratic host government.

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 13.

## Terrain

The terrain in Afghanistan is an especially important factor because it is relevant for both the public opinion of Afghans and in the ability of counterinsurgents to carry out counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. In his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, David Galula considers favorable geography as one of the four conditions for a successful insurgency.<sup>6</sup> However, geography must be broken down into smaller factors. He begins with *location*; a country isolated by natural barriers or bordered by countries opposed to the insurgency favors the counterinsurgent. The larger the country is, the more difficult it is for government forces to secure it. A country that is easy to compartmentalize, such as an archipelago, is favorable for the counterinsurgent. Lengthy international borders, especially with countries sympathetic to the insurgency, are favorable to the insurgent while long coastlines that are easier to patrol favor the counterinsurgent. Rugged and difficult terrain (such as mountains, forests, deserts, or swamps) is advantageous to insurgents. Harsh climates generally favor the counterinsurgent (e.g. severe winters). The larger the size of the population, the more difficult it is for the counterinsurgent to control them. Finally, when examining the country's economy, underdeveloped country is generally more open to guerilla warfare.<sup>7</sup>

Nearly every aspect of geography that Galula considers to be important is favorable to the insurgency when it comes to Afghanistan. In terms of location, Afghanistan is a landlocked

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<sup>6</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport CT: Praeger, PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era, 2006), 28.

<sup>7</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport CT: Praeger, PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era, 2006), 23-24.

country with few natural barriers to its six bordering countries (Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China). There are some mountainous regions along the border, but there are many passes and cross-border traffic is very common. In terms of size, Afghanistan is a large country covering an area of 652,230 sq. km. (roughly one and a half times the size of Iraq).<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan's mountainous terrain favors the insurgency as it makes spotting insurgents and traveling to them more difficult for counterinsurgents but is not so mountainous as to restrict movement around the country. Its mountainous terrain is also ideal for asymmetric warfare because many roads that counterinsurgents must use run through valleys bordered by mountains which create chokepoints into and out of the valley that are ideal for ambushes. Afghanistan's climate is the only attribute of geography that can be considered favorable to the counterinsurgent. Afghanistan encounters sufficiently harsh winters that insurgent activity drops dramatically during the winter months before picking up again for the "spring fighting season".

No matter which indicator is used, Afghanistan is a very underdeveloped country. The United Nations Development Programme's 2011 Human Development Report, which creates a Human Development Index (HDI) to rank countries as *developed*, *developing*, or *under-developed*, ranks Afghanistan on the low end of "under-developed" at #172 out of 187.<sup>9</sup> The CIA World Factbook estimates Afghanistan's GDP per capita as \$1,000 which places it at #212

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<sup>8</sup> CIA World Factbook. *CIA*. Accessed March 4, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

<sup>9</sup> *Human Development Report 2011* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2011), 126.

of 225 countries.<sup>10</sup> The International Monetary Fund comes to roughly the same estimation of \$966 per person.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the metric used, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world despite billions of dollars in foreign aid. This lack of development has direct implications for the insurgency in two ways. First, underdeveloped infrastructure (such as few paved roads) makes counterinsurgent operations more difficult or more reliant on helicopters. Second, and perhaps more importantly, such populations are generally more autarchic.<sup>12</sup>

It is difficult to estimate the population of Afghanistan. The last official census was conducted in 1979 by the Soviets and was not completed prior to their withdrawal from the country. Since then, several agencies have made their own estimates of the Afghan population (e.g. the United Nations World Food Programme). The Afghan Central Statistics Office is the Afghan approximation to the US Census Bureau and is charged with providing updated estimations of the population. The Afghan CSO released its latest update in 1389 on the Islamic calendar (2010-2011 on the Gregorian calendar) in which it estimates the population of Afghanistan to be approximately 24.5 million.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> CIA World Factbook. CIA. Accessed March 4, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

<sup>11</sup> World Economic Outlook Database 2011, *International Monetary Fund*

<sup>12</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport CT: Praeger, PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era, 2006), 24.

<sup>13</sup> “Estimated Population of Afghanistan: 2010/11” *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization* (Kabul: 2010).

Perhaps more important than the sheer number of Afghans is how they're dispersed. The Afghan CSO estimates that roughly 77% of Afghans live in rural areas, while only 23% live in urban ones.<sup>14</sup> RAND's study of 89 insurgencies found that when urbanization was 40% or higher, the government (counterinsurgent) held a win/loss record of roughly 3:1.<sup>15</sup> However, when less than 40% of the population lives in an urban area the government lost to the insurgency approximately 75% of the time.<sup>16</sup> Urbanization in Afghanistan is nearly twice that low at only 23% of the population, which historically has not boded well for the government. Furthermore, the Afghan insurgency has been predominately rural one taking place in the Pashtun south and east.<sup>17</sup>

Related to geography is the issue of sanctuaries. The Taliban are most active in the Afghan provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Oruzgan, Zabol, and Paktia.<sup>18</sup> The Taliban enjoys a major sanctuary in neighboring Pakistan,<sup>19</sup> primarily in the Baluchistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) regions.<sup>20</sup> These regions are also home to most of Pakistan's Pashtun population, who since 1893 have been officially separated from their Pashto Afghan brethren by the Durand Line.

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<sup>14</sup> "Estimated Population of Afghanistan: 2010/11" *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization* (Kabul: 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 88-89.

<sup>16</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 88.

<sup>17</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44.

<sup>18</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 38, 58, 62.

<sup>19</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44.

<sup>20</sup> "Taliban's Sanctuary Bases in Pakistan Must Be Eliminated" *RAND*, June 9, 2009, accessed March 4, 2012, <http://www.rand.org/news/press/2008/06/09.html>



A British team of surveyors, led by Sir Mortimer Durand, drew the Durand line to separate colonial British India and Afghanistan. Although the line generally follows the contours of geographic features, it effectively cleaves the Pashto nation in half.<sup>21</sup> This line has always been viewed with contempt by Pashtuns on either side of the border and has never been seen as legitimate. As a result, no Afghan government (royalist, republican, socialist, Islamist, or democratic) has ever officially accepted the border between Afghanistan and the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> Pakistan's tribal areas stretch for 500 miles along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border<sup>23</sup> and the local population crosses it regularly to trade, pray at

<sup>21</sup> Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason. "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier." *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 68.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 48.

<sup>23</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 44.

mosques, and visit relatives.<sup>24</sup> In reality, this border is unenforced<sup>25</sup> and largely irrelevant for militant groups wishing to cross.

## Sanctuary

Most COIN theorists agree on the importance of an insurgent sanctuary to a successful insurgency. In *Insurgency & Terrorism*, Bard O’Neill notes the importance Mao ascribes to “freedom of action” for an army to operate. He then takes this concept a step further by arguing that freedom of action can also apply to insurgent sanctuaries outside of the target country. If the insurgents find it difficult to operate in the target country, then that sanctuary becomes their last fallback position.<sup>26</sup> RAND’s 2010 monograph generally agrees with COIN theorists and finds that insurgent sanctuary is positively correlated with insurgent victory. Insurgents who enjoy a sanctuary have won nearly half of their conflicts, while only 3 out of 22 insurgencies without sanctuary were able to win theirs.<sup>27</sup>

The importance of a sanctuary is apparent in many past insurgencies: Afghanistan (1979-1989), Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Mozambique, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.<sup>28</sup> The Vietnam War was an extreme case where all three states bordering South Vietnam contained bases used

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<sup>24</sup> “Transitioning to Afghan-Led Counterinsurgency” testimony by Seth G. Jones before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, May 10, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 234.

<sup>26</sup> Bard O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 107-108.

<sup>27</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 35.

<sup>28</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 39.

by the Vietcong for training, stockpiling arms, operational planning, and recuperation.<sup>29</sup> These sanctuaries were instrumental for the Vietcong both in conducting widespread guerrilla attacks and in escalating to conventional frontal assaults. The logistics of either form of fighting required nearby bases to sustain operations, which is among the reasons that sanctuaries in adjacent states are ideal.<sup>30</sup> In that respect, they are very similar to the sanctuary currently enjoyed by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Bases in Pakistan provide the Taliban with a logistical hub to supply forces in Afghanistan, as well as a location to recruit and train new forces and plan operations.

While insurgent theorists generally agree on the importance of sanctuaries, their value should not be overstated. Insurgencies have succeeded without sanctuaries and their contribution to the overall campaign varies from case to case.<sup>31</sup> The Cuban insurgency against the Batista government was overwhelmingly successful without a sanctuary. However, that is an imperfect comparison to Afghanistan because the Batista government was so weak it collapsed when faced with low-level guerrilla warfare.<sup>32</sup> While beneficial, a sanctuary doesn't provide the explanation of why an insurgency prevailed or lost in all cases. In Oman, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO) maintained a sanctuary in neighboring Yemen, but the impact of the

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<sup>29</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 145-146.

<sup>30</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 146-147.

<sup>31</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 146.

<sup>32</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 146.

change in leadership after the 1970 palace coup proved a far greater disadvantage to the PFLO than the benefit of the sanctuary.<sup>33</sup>

The Vietcong sanctuaries in Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam represent the ideal case for insurgents and were beyond what is currently enjoyed by the Taliban in Pakistan. On the other end of the spectrum are states that do not allow fixed bases but permit small camps sufficient to continue a terrorist campaign.<sup>34</sup> There are numerous degrees in between, and the case of Iraqi insurgents in Syria presents an interesting middle ground. For the first few years of the Iraq War, Syria allowed former Iraqi Ba'ath party leaders and nationalist groups into Syria and permitted logistical operations across their border.<sup>35</sup> Syria was not providing active support in the form of money or weapons nor did they allow fixed bases, but they did allow their territory to be used to move foreign fighters and supplies into Iraq. Syria's level of assistance seems to have been less than that currently enjoyed by the Taliban but was still enough to help AQI operate in Anbar province for 3-4 years.<sup>36</sup>

## Outside Intervention

Much like sanctuaries, outside intervention is widely regarded as an important variable by insurgent theorists. Outside intervention can be either direct (e.g. deploying troops or aiding in

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<sup>33</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 146.

<sup>34</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 147.

<sup>35</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 40.

<sup>36</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 42.

battle via air support) or indirect (e.g. money or logistics). Outside intervention may aid the insurgency, the counterinsurgent, or both.

Afghanistan is a case of outside intervention on behalf of both the counterinsurgent (the Afghan government) and the insurgency. Supporting the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) is the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a coalition of forces fighting in Afghanistan in support of the Afghan government. Initially designed as a stabilization force by the UN Security Council to secure Kabul, ISAF is now under NATO command and control. As of January 2012, 50 nations were contributing troops to ISAF.<sup>37</sup> However, like most coalitions, the heavy lifting is done by a few members. Only 10 of these countries contribute 1,000 troops or more.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, many contributing nations have implemented “national caveats” that dictate how and when their forces can be used. In essence, these caveats mean that their forces may not take part in active patrols to seek out insurgents, among other restrictions.<sup>39</sup> Of ISAF’s roughly 130,000 strong force, 90,000 come from the United States.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures” *International Security Assistance Force* (Kabul: 2012), 2.

<sup>38</sup> “International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures” *International Security Assistance Force* (Kabul: 2012), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 105.

<sup>40</sup> “International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures” *International Security Assistance Force* (Kabul: 2012), 2.

Outside intervention on behalf of GIRoA goes far beyond troop levels though. Afghanistan is the recipient of billions of dollars in international aid every year, \$15.7 billion in 2011 alone.<sup>41</sup> This aid goes to everything from basic services to reconstruction and development projects aimed at improving Afghanistan's low level of infrastructure. Other programs are aimed at improving governance, at all levels, as well as improving courts and the rule of law. Afghanistan's own security forces are paid for with foreign aid as well. Afghanistan's reliance on foreign aid has become a concern for its long-term security. The World Bank estimates that Afghanistan will require \$7 billion a year over the next decade to cover security and basic services.<sup>42</sup>

In looking at past insurgencies, outside intervention is a difficult variable to analyze due to the varying levels of intervention and various reasons for outside powers to intervene. RAND's analysis of past insurgencies has some counterintuitive conclusions about interventions. They found that beleaguered governments who receive outside assistance do not have any better of a win/loss record against insurgents than governments that receive no outside assistance.<sup>43</sup> However, outside intervention is correlated with a higher likelihood of a settlement.<sup>44</sup> This may be because while many beleaguered governments have been unable to stamp out an insurgency, even with additional resources, the benefit of outside assistance is sufficient to keep the

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<sup>41</sup> Joshua Partlow, "Afghanistan to need billions in aid for years, World Bank says," *The Washington Post*, November 22, 2011. Accessed March 7, 2012.  
[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/afghanistan-to-need-billions-in-aid-for-years-world-bank-says/2011/11/22/gIQA14zOIN\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghanistan-to-need-billions-in-aid-for-years-world-bank-says/2011/11/22/gIQA14zOIN_story.html)

<sup>42</sup> "Transition in Afghanistan: Looking Beyond 2014" *The World Bank*. 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 49.

<sup>44</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 49.

government from losing to the insurgent. Over time, this can wear down both sides until they are willing to reach an agreement in light of their inability to win a decisive victory.

It is somewhat surprising that governments that are provided outside assistance do not have a better record against insurgents. Governments already possess many advantages over the insurgent group. It then seems reasonable that the addition of more resources should be sufficient to tip the balance in the counterinsurgent's favor. RAND finds several reasons why interventions are not more decisive, many of which are applicable to Afghanistan. To begin with, the right balance of help must be found; too much aid can create a weak state that is dependent on assistance, while too little help risks outright failure.<sup>45</sup> Afghanistan's reliance on international financial aid seems certain for the foreseeable future, but more important than financial aid is its reliance on foreign troops to combat the insurgency. Training remains underway to bring total Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) troop levels to the goal of 352,000 by 2012.<sup>46</sup> Until recently, ISAF was primarily focused on providing security in Afghanistan. However, an important change was made in late 2011 as the primary US and ISAF mission shifted from supplying security to training the ANSF. The difference is that previously, brigade commanders in Afghanistan were primarily responsible for providing security in their area of operations. Whether security was achieved via Afghan or foreign troops was not the primary metric of their success and thus they had an incentive to rely heavily on better trained

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<sup>45</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 50.

<sup>46</sup> "Afghan military: Army's troop strength is on track to take lead in security next year" *The Washington Post* (April 18, 2012, Accessed April 18, 2012. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/afghan-military-armys-troop-strength-is-on-track-to-take-lead-in-security-next-year/2012/04/18/gIQAG0ZEQT\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghan-military-armys-troop-strength-is-on-track-to-take-lead-in-security-next-year/2012/04/18/gIQAG0ZEQT_story.html)

foreign forces. This new directive means commanders will be graded on how well the Afghans improve, which is likely to get them greater exposure to actual combat and begin taking more responsibility.

RAND's study also finds that the behavior of the intervening troops themselves can help or hurt the host government; if the population takes issue with their behavior, the intervening troops may actually escalate the conflict.<sup>47</sup> This is of particular relevance to Afghanistan today. Most recently American Staff Sergeant Robert Bales<sup>48</sup> allegedly killed 17 civilians in the Panjwai district of Kandahar province sparking protests throughout the country.<sup>49</sup> This follows the news of US soldiers burning the Quran at Bagram Air Base which incited days of protests and riots across the country that left dozens dead. Only weeks earlier, the release of a video showing US soldiers urinating on the body of a dead Taliban soldier generated anger on a much smaller scale. Concerns over civilian casualties, particularly from airstrikes, plagued the ISAF mission in Afghanistan for years. It took a long time, but commanders took that to heart. Although total civilian casualties were at their highest in 2011 since the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) began tracking them in 2006, the number caused by pro-government forces (Afghan

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<sup>47</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 50.

<sup>48</sup> Myers, Laura and Ryan, Missy. "Afghan massacre suspect identified, arrives at Kansas base" *Reuters*, March 17, 2012. Accessed March 17, 2012. [http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/17/us-usa-afghanistan-identity-idUSBRE82F1C420120317?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+reuters%2FtopNews+%28News+%2F+US+%2F+Top+News%29&utm\\_content=Google+Feedfetcher](http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/17/us-usa-afghanistan-identity-idUSBRE82F1C420120317?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+reuters%2FtopNews+%28News+%2F+US+%2F+Top+News%29&utm_content=Google+Feedfetcher)

<sup>49</sup> Sidner, Sara. "U.S. soldier accused of Afghan killing spree" *CNN*, March 12, 2012. Accessed March 12, 2012. [http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/11/world/asia/afghanistan-us-service-member/index.html?hpt=hp\\_t3](http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/11/world/asia/afghanistan-us-service-member/index.html?hpt=hp_t3)

and NATO/ISAF troops) was at its lowest at 410.<sup>50</sup> However, night raids by Coalition forces remain a point of contention with the general population.

The withdrawal of outside support can spell defeat for the host government just as it can for an insurgency. Inopportune withdrawal of support for the government generally leads to the government's defeat or a mixed settlement.<sup>51</sup> Outside support by a democratic power further complicates matters as the government is responsible to its people. If popular support for assistance wanes, they may be forced to withdraw.<sup>52</sup> Afghans are worried this may be the case today and for good reason. An ABC News/*Washington Post* survey of the American public conducted in March 2012 found that most Americans (54%) believe the United States should withdraw from Afghanistan without completing its current effort to train Afghan security forces.<sup>53</sup>

### **Outside Intervention on Behalf of the Insurgent**

Outside intervention on behalf of *insurgents* is just as important, if not more so, than on behalf of governments. Insurgencies with the support of a state power have won more than half

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<sup>50</sup> Simon Rogers and Ami Sedghi "Afghanistan civilian casualties: year by year, month by month" *The Guardian*, March 12, 2012, Accessed April 18, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/aug/10/afghanistan-civilian-casualties-statistics>

<sup>51</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 50.

<sup>52</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 50.

<sup>53</sup> Langer, Gary. "Six in 10 Criticize War in Afghanistan; Most Favor Abandoning Training Mission" *ABC News*, March 11, 2012. Accessed March 11, 2012. <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/03/six-in-10-criticize-war-in-afghanistan-most-favor-abandoning-training-mission/>

of their conflicts,<sup>54</sup> especially impressive given that most insurgencies fail. In RAND's study of 89 insurgencies, those without any outside support only won 3 out of 18 conflicts.<sup>55</sup> David Galula recognized the importance of outside support and considered it one of the four categories necessary for a successful insurgency.<sup>56</sup> He sub-divided it into five categories: moral, political, technical, financial, and military<sup>57</sup> which can help determine the effect the outside support will have on the conflict. As Bard O'Neill notes, unless the government is exceptionally weak, insurgents must normally gain outside assistance in order to defeat the counterinsurgents.<sup>58</sup>

In determining the end state, the type of support given and the commitment behind it are both critical factors. Sustained support that can be counted on by the insurgency is critical in most cases to overcome the government.<sup>59</sup> This imposes somewhat of a time burden on the insurgent, as they must reach a tipping point prior to their benefactor withdrawing support. As Bard O'Neill notes, few states engage in open-ended assistance for altruistic reasons; the intervening state does so because it is in their interest. As those interests change, it is not unusual for a state to cease its support or even to switch sides.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 62.

<sup>55</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 62.

<sup>56</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport CT: Praeger, PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era, 2006), 28.

<sup>57</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport CT: Praeger, PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era, 2006), 25-26.

<sup>58</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 139.

<sup>59</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 67.

<sup>60</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 148.

This is especially relevant to Afghanistan where the Taliban and other insurgent groups receive aid from Pakistan. In fact, every successful insurgency in Afghanistan since 1979 has enjoyed a sanctuary in Pakistan and has generally received aid from parts of the Pakistani government, such as its intelligence agency the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI).<sup>61</sup> This remains the case today as the leadership of most insurgent groups (the Taliban, Hezb-i-Islami, and the Haqqani network) are all based in Pakistan. So long as the Taliban retains its sanctuary in Pakistan, they can survive a tactical defeat in Afghanistan, retreat to their sanctuary in Pakistan, and wait until the conditions in Afghanistan are favorable for their return.<sup>62</sup> The Taliban have already done this when they withdrew into Pakistan following the 2001 invasion, reorganized, returned, and by 2006 had control of whole districts in southern Afghanistan.<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, Pakistani assistance has gone beyond providing a sanctuary. Insurgent groups (the Taliban and the Haqqani network at a minimum) receive support directly from elements of the Pakistani government, most notably the ISI.<sup>64</sup> Other reports have indicated that the Pakistani government provided the Taliban with financial and logistical support in 2009, despite having their own army fighting engaged against the Taliban in small battles.<sup>65</sup> Pakistan is not the first to engage in seemingly incongruous behavior. At one time, India allowed its southern state of

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<sup>61</sup> Transitioning to Afghan-Led Counterinsurgency” *testimony by Seth G. Jones before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, May 10, 2011.

<sup>62</sup> David J. Kilcullen, “Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings on Afghanistan” July 27, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 47.

<sup>64</sup> Transitioning to Afghan-Led Counterinsurgency” *testimony by Seth G. Jones before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, May 10, 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 47.

Tamil Nadu to provide support to Tamil secessionists in Sri Lanka despite the Indian central government's opposition to the goal of Tamil secession. It wasn't until the prospect of Tamil success in Sri Lanka outweighed the benefit of placating their own Tamil Nadu minority that the Indian government stopped allowing the sanctuary and actually deployed peacekeepers to conduct counterinsurgency operations.<sup>66</sup> However, the Pakistani government shows no indication of having reached a similar consensus concerning their harboring of the Taliban.

Afghanistan is clearly a case in which both the insurgents and counterinsurgents are receiving assistance from outside the country. In some respects, the situation in Afghanistan resembles that of El Salvador in the 1980s. The conflict between the military-led government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) began in earnest in 1980. Similar to Afghanistan, the Salvadoran government faced a multi-pronged insurgency with the FMLN essentially an umbrella organization of 5 separate leftist guerilla groups. The United States intervened on behalf of the Salvadoran government while the FMLN found support from Cuba and communist organizations. Without US-backing, the viability of the Salvadoran government was dubious in the 1980s.<sup>67</sup> However, with outside assistance they were able to mount a sustained COIN campaign.<sup>68</sup> Neither side was able to achieve an outright military victory, and in 1992 both sides came to a peace agreement.

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<sup>66</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 150.

<sup>67</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 139.

<sup>68</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse, 2nd Edition Revised* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 139.

## Afghan Opinion

The majority of attention surrounding Taliban reconciliation has been focused on whether the Taliban is willing and able to reach a settlement with the Afghan government. However, little emphasis has been placed on what the general Afghan population thinks about making peace with the insurgents. This bears examining for two reasons. The first is to ensure that the population is willing to make peace with the Taliban. If there are too many divisions within the Afghan population or if a substantial segment of the population is opposed to talks, reconciliation may actually serve to divorce the Afghan people from the central government. As Seth Jones warned in his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last year:

*“a peace settlement with the Taliban runs the risk of escalating conflict with Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, and anti-Taliban Pashtuns in Afghanistan...Such a settlement could trigger a military build-up among northern commanders, such as Atta Mohammad Nur, Abdul Rashid Dostum, and Mohammad Fahim, causing the war’s center of gravity to shift north. Indeed, reports indicate that northern commanders are already discussing a military build-up if there is a settlement with the Taliban.”*<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “Transitioning to Afghan-Led Counterinsurgency” testimony by Seth G. Jones before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, May 10, 2011.

Similarly, David Kilcullen warns in *The Accidental Guerrilla*:<sup>70</sup>

*“The Taliban, in other words, are highly unlikely to overthrow the government by force of arms. A much more likely failure mechanism might occur if northern ethnic groups – Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazaras – should, in frustration at lack of progress, withdraw their support for the Pashtun-dominated Kabul government and take matters into their own hands in fighting the Pashtun Taliban. This would lead to an ethnic civil war...”*

Considering the subjugation ethnic minorities, especially Hazaras, experienced under the previous Taliban regime, such a division is not unthinkable. The second reason for examining Afghans’ opinion on the matter is that it may inform decision makers of potential red lines that various segments of the population would take issue with. It may very well be possible that the positions taken by the US and Afghan governments are not shared by the majority of the population.

Many high level Afghan government officials have been outspokenly critical of the reconciliation process in recent months. Last month, Afghan MP and former Speaker of the House of the People (Wolesi Jirga) Yonus Qanooni stated, “A peace that will destroy national unity and territorial integrity of Afghanistan is no peace. It is only a conspiracy and a disaster

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<sup>70</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

which will make Afghan people suffer.”<sup>71</sup> Former head of Afghanistan’s internal intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Amrullah Saleh has also been outspoken against the Qatar process and believes the establishment of a Taliban political office there undermines Afghans’ trust in their government.<sup>72</sup> Also last month, the Afghan House of Elders (Meshrano Jirga) convened to criticize the High Peace Council, charged with implementing the reconciliation program.<sup>73</sup> Does the general Afghan population share their leaders’ skeptical view of peace talks?

Looking at Afghans’ views on reconciling with the Taliban does not appear to bear out the concerns over ethnic divisions shared by Jones and Kilcullen. When asked whether the Afghan central government should negotiate a settlement with the Taliban or continue fighting the Taliban and not negotiate, a recent national survey of Afghanistan found that roughly three-quarters (74%) of Afghans favor negotiating with the Taliban.<sup>74</sup> This is in line with previous studies, such as a series of polls sponsored by ABC News which found that the number of Afghans favoring reconciliation had risen from 60% in 2007 to 73% in 2009.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, a 2011

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<sup>71</sup> “A Peace that Destroys National Unity, not a Peace: Qanooni” *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 6, 2012. Accessed February 6, 2012.

[http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/news?post\\_id=3315](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/news?post_id=3315)

<sup>72</sup> “Talks with Taliban without Afghan Input Would Fail: Saleh” *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 19, 2012. Accessed February 19, 2012.

[http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/news?post\\_id=3426](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/news?post_id=3426)

<sup>73</sup> “Senators Blast High Peace Council’s Performance” *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 20, 2012. Accessed February 20, 2012.

[http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/news?post\\_id=3440](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/news?post_id=3440)

<sup>74</sup> Afghan Futures Wave 2, *D3 Systems, Inc.*, [www.d3systems.com](http://www.d3systems.com)

<sup>75</sup> Gary Langer, Julie Phelan, and David Tully, “Afghanistan: Where Things Stand” *ABC News*, November 30, 2010, Accessed April 18, 2012. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Afghanistan/afghanistan-poll-things-stand-2010/story?id=12277743#.T49xFqtrPh4>

survey by the Asia Foundation found that the vast majority of the Afghan population (82%) approved of the central government's efforts to negotiate with armed opposition groups.<sup>76</sup> More recently, the majority of Afghans (66%) believe that the opening of the Taliban's political office in Qatar is good for Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup>

In analyzing Afghanistan, a nationwide picture is not sufficient to gauge sentiment on most issues due to the significant ethnic and regional differences among the population. Breaking up the data by various demographics yields important results, but does not change the overall narrative that Afghans favor reconciliation. Considering the significant limitations placed upon women under the previous Taliban government, it would not be surprising to see their opinions diverge from those of men. Indeed, the percentage of men favoring reconciliation (77%) is higher than that for women (70%) as shown in Figure 1.

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<sup>76</sup> "A Survey of the Afghan People" *The Asia Foundation*, November 15, 2011, Accessed April 18, 2012.  
<http://asiafoundation.org/country/afghanistan/2011-poll.php>

<sup>77</sup> Afghan Futures Wave 2, *D3 Systems, Inc.*, [www.d3systems.com](http://www.d3systems.com)

*“Do you think the government in Kabul should negotiate a settlement with Afghan Taliban in which they are allowed to hold political offices if they stop fighting, or do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?”*

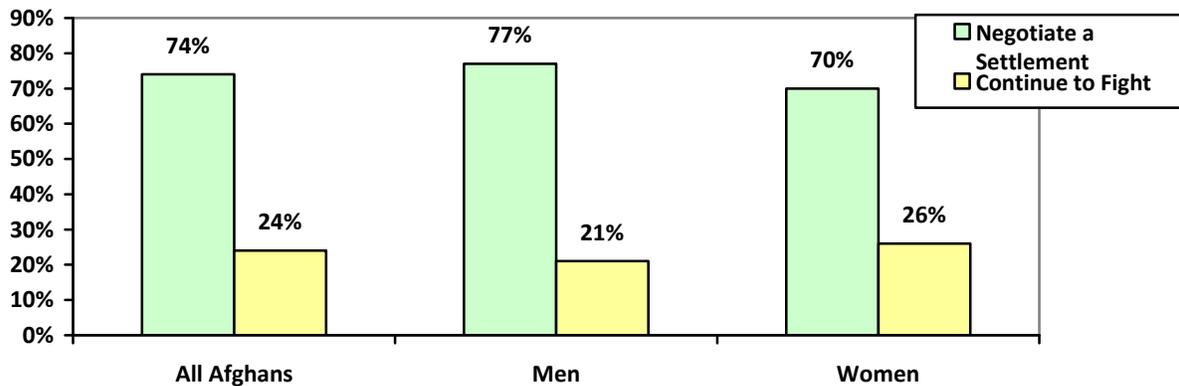


Figure 1

There are also differences across the key ethnic groups, in particular between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Pashtuns, the primary members of the Taliban, are the most likely to be in favor of reaching a settlement at 77%. Hazaras, who were arguably the most subjugated ethnicity during the previous Taliban era, are the least likely to favor a settlement, but still a majority of 63% prefer negotiating to continued fighting. Similarly, there are differences across region which correlates strongly with ethnicity. Although differences exist between the genders and between ethnicities, the majority of all demographic groups remain in favor of a settlement as shown in Figure 2.

*"Do you think the government in Kabul should negotiate a settlement with Afghan Taliban in which they are allowed to hold political offices if they stop fighting, or do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?"*

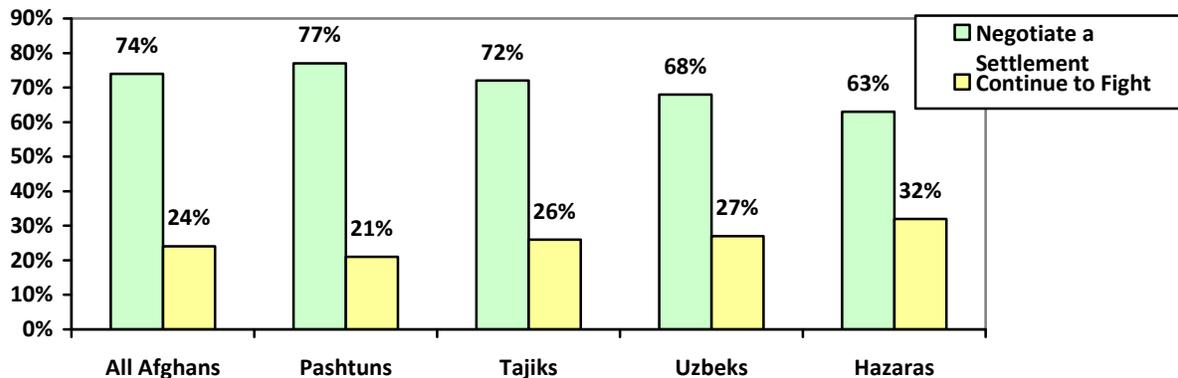


Figure 2

Knowing that the Afghan populace favors reconciliation, it is helpful to further examine their views about the possible forms such a settlement may take. Presumably any peace settlement would involve the Taliban taking part in political offices. The majority of Afghans are willing to accept an agreement where the Taliban are allowed to hold national (56% willing), provincial (57% willing), or local (57% willing) political offices. As before, there are differences between genders with men generally 7-8% more likely to be “very willing” to accept such an agreement than women. There are differences among the various ethnicities as well. Pashtuns remain the most likely to accept the Taliban holding political office as part of a peace deal, while Hazaras are the least likely. However, the majority of all ethnicities, except Hazaras, are willing to accept the Taliban holding political office. Hazaras are fairly evenly split but appear somewhat less concerned with local political offices than they do with provincial and national offices, which

may be due to most Hazaras living in homogenous pockets which would preclude the Taliban from being elected in their local area.

Aside from holding political office, Afghans were asked about a number of possible outcomes of negotiations. A potentially controversial outcome would be to allow the Taliban to integrate into the existing Afghan National Security Forces (e.g. ANA, ANP, ANBP, or ALP). Surprisingly, the vast majority (76%) of Afghans believed the central government should be willing to accept this in a settlement rather than continue fighting. The greatest divisions on this question were along ethnic lines. Pashtuns remain the most likely in favor of negotiating a settlement at 80% as shown in Figure 3. Uzbeks and Hazaras are somewhat less enthusiastic with 68% and 69% believing the central government should negotiate such a deal respectively. Tajiks fell in between with 73% favoring such a negotiation. Afghan males are 6% more likely to favor negotiations than women. As before, despite the variation across ethnicities and regions, the majority of all groups favor negotiating.

*“What if an agreement to stop the fighting allowed the Taliban to join the Afghan National Security Forces (ANA, ANP, ANSF, ANBP, or ALP) - do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?”*

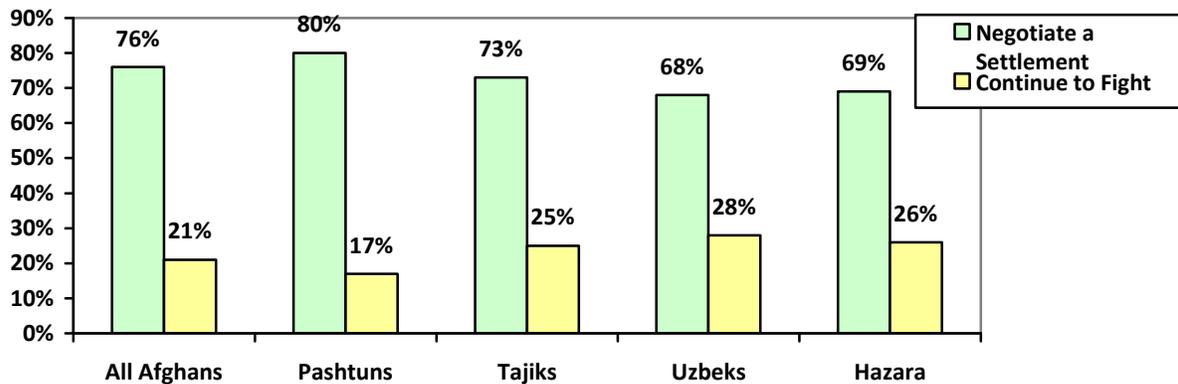


Figure 3

An even more controversial decision would be to cede control of some provinces to the Taliban as part of a negotiation. Some analysts believe the Taliban is primarily interested in the Pashtun belt in the south and east rather than taking Kabul or the rest of Afghanistan.<sup>78</sup> While less popular than the previous proposals, the majority of Afghans (64%) would rather the central government negotiate a settlement in which the Taliban gain control of some provinces rather than continue fighting. There is significant variance by region with a high of 94% in favor of such a negotiation in RC Southwest to a low of 51%. Again, despite the variance by region, a majority of Afghans in each demographic segment favor negotiating.

<sup>78</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50.

*“What if an agreement to stop the fighting ceded control over certain provinces to the Taliban - do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?”*

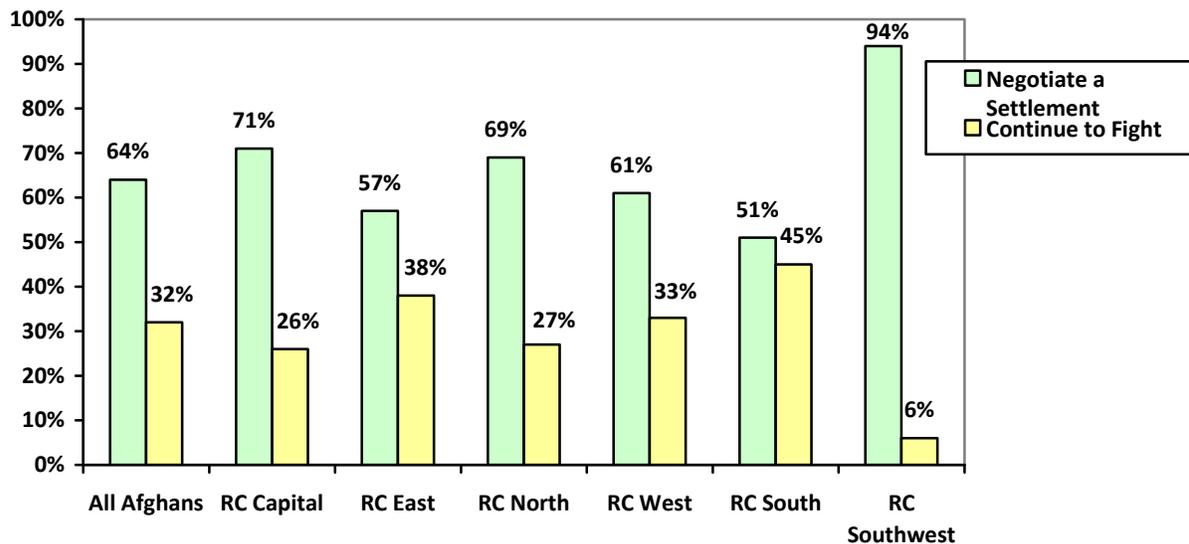


Figure 4

Among the concerns of the Afghan and US governments about reconciling with the Taliban is that the progress made in women’s rights over the last 11 years would be sacrificed. In the same survey, Afghans were asked whether they would be willing to accept the loss of several rights for women that have been gained since the Taliban were overthrown. Of these, a majority of Afghans (56%) reported that they would be willing to accept women not being allowed outside of their home unescorted as part of an agreement with the Taliban. However, the majority of Afghans would *not* accept women being banned from attending school (59%), women no longer voting (58%), women not being able to work (56%), or women no longer being able to hold political office (51%).

Beyond traditional demographic comparisons, a far larger indicator of opinion on reconciliation is whether Afghans believe the Taliban have become more moderate than when they ruled Afghanistan. Nationally, Afghans are split on this issue with 48% of the population believing the Taliban is more moderate now than when they previously governed and 46% believing they are the same. There is significant variation among ethnicities on whether the Taliban have become more moderate from a high of 58% for Pashtuns to a low of 34% for Hazaras. Those that believe the Taliban has become more moderate are 25% more likely (86% vs. 61%) to favor negotiating a settlement in general rather than continuing to fight as shown in Figure 5. Similarly, those that believe the Taliban are more moderate are 26% more likely to favor a negotiation that allows the Taliban to join the ANSF and 27% more likely to favor a negotiation in which they gain control of some provinces.

*“Do you think the government in Kabul should negotiate a settlement with Afghan Taliban in which they are allowed to hold political offices if they stop fighting, or do you think the government in Kabul should continue to fight the Taliban and not negotiate a settlement?”*

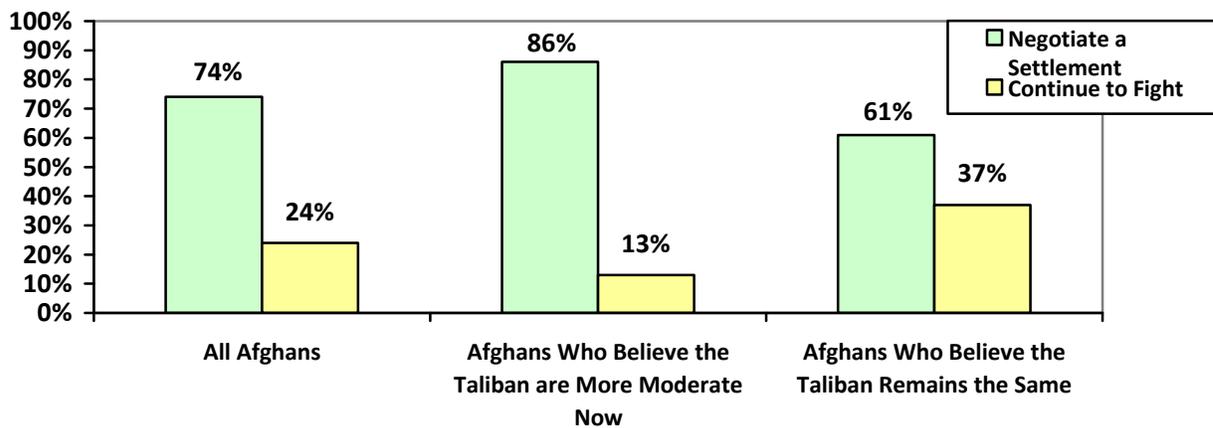


Figure 5

## The Taliban

The United States and Afghan governments are clearly interested in pursuing a negotiated settlement with the Taliban. The intentions of the Taliban are far less clear, as is their capacity to follow through on any deal that might be reached. To determine whether the Taliban may be a part of a negotiated settlement it is necessary to examine two hypotheses. The first is that the Taliban are not willing to make peace with the Afghan government. The second is that the Taliban is not a cohesive enough group to be capable of making peace and keeping its various parts from continuing violence.

Before the Taliban's aims and capabilities can be evaluated it is necessary to determine who the Taliban are. The insurgency facing the Afghan government today is comprised of many groups, often conflated into the umbrella term of "Taliban" despite being unique, separate entities. Among the organizations often grouped under the aggregate "Taliban" banner are: Hezb-i-Islami (HIG), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM), the Haqqani network, foreign fighters, local tribes, criminal organizations, and the Taliban itself.<sup>7980</sup> Rather than a united coalition of insurgent groups, these organizations represent a loose series of shifting alliances of convenience<sup>81</sup> who simply share the goals of expelling foreign forces from Afghanistan and overturning the Afghan central government under Hamid Karzai.

No one group is active across the entire country. The insurgency can be roughly broken out into three loose fronts along the border with Pakistan.<sup>82</sup> The primary insurgent group in the northeast (Nuristan, Kunar, Laghman, and Nangarhar provinces) is Hezb-i-Islami, which is led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. There is also some activity in the north from Lashkar-e-Taiba and Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-Mohammadi, all of whom operate across the border in Pakistan as well.<sup>83</sup> The Haqqani network is most active in the central front, which is predominantly comprised of Paktia, Paktika, and Khost provinces in Afghanistan with some activity in Ghazni

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<sup>79</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>80</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) xi.

<sup>81</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>82</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 39.

<sup>83</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 38.

and Wardak provinces along with the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan.<sup>84</sup> Foreign fighters, predominantly Central Asians and Arabs, have also been active in the central front.<sup>85</sup> The Taliban are predominantly active in the southern front (Helmand, Kandahar, Oruzgan, Zabul, and Paktika), as well as across the border in Pakistan's Baluchistan province and the FATA.<sup>86</sup> In addition to the Taliban, criminal organizations based on narcotics trafficking and some tribal groups have been active along the southern front.<sup>87</sup>

The insurgency lacks cohesion. Insurgent groups rarely coordinate across these fronts and often don't coordinate within a single front. There is no arbiter among the insurgent groups. Agreements are temporary and are based upon mutually beneficial relationships. As a result, it is unlikely that the Afghan government would be able to negotiate with the insurgency as a whole to reach a grand bargain. Negotiations will have to be conducted with each insurgent group independently. However, because the fate of any one group affects the level of resources available to GIRoA to combat the others, and insurgents know this, it is necessary to consider the implications for the other insurgent groups when negotiating with any one group. While the reconciliation and reintegration programs underway by the Afghan High Peace Council are aimed at insurgents more broadly, the Qatar process has predominantly focused on the Taliban.

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<sup>84</sup> "Haqqani Network" *Institute for the Study of War*. Accessed March 10, 2012.

<http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/haqqani-network>

<sup>85</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 38.

<sup>86</sup> "Haqqani Network" *Institute for the Study of War*. Accessed March 10, 2012.

<http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/haqqani-network>

<sup>87</sup> "Haqqani Network" *Institute for the Study of War*. Accessed March 10, 2012.

<http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/haqqani-network>

From a structural standpoint, the Taliban today is a far different organization than the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan that was removed from power in 2001. The Taliban Quetta Shura, so-called because it is believed to be based in the city of Quetta within the Baluchistan province of Pakistan, is generally considered to be the central leadership of the Taliban.<sup>88</sup> The Quetta Shura consists of Mullah Omar and his senior lieutenants, who together represent the top tier of the Taliban.<sup>89</sup> Below them are the local commanders and the guerrillas they command.

It is very difficult to estimate how large of a force the Taliban represents. As part of the insurgency, fighters are actively hiding from authorities. Further complicating matters is that some fighters take part in the insurgency full-time while others do not. The majority of the Taliban are actually local, part-time guerrillas who only take part in operations on an ad hoc basis.<sup>90</sup> These men are primarily from rural villages and conduct low-level operations such as setting up improvised explosive devices (IEDs), launching rockets and mortars at Coalition forces, or picking up a gun for harassing fire against Coalition forces.<sup>91</sup> Insurgent groups often pay locals two to three times the daily pay of Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) units to conduct such low-level operations, suggesting that many may be primarily motivated by economic rather than ideological reasons.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>89</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 40.

<sup>90</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>91</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 41.

<sup>92</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 42.

The distinction between the full-time and part-time Taliban is important because of its implications for the success of reconciliation. ISAF's 2008 estimate placed the insurgency at 7,000 to 11,000 of whom only 5% (or 350 to 550) were "Tier One Taliban" who would never reconcile.<sup>93</sup> In 2008, Seth Jones estimated the Taliban at 5,000 to 10,000 full-time Taliban fighters<sup>94</sup> while David Kilcullen estimated the total Taliban force at 32,000 to 40,000, of which 8,000 to 10,000 were full-time fighters.<sup>95</sup> A minority of the Taliban, perhaps 10% or 3,000 to 4,000,<sup>96</sup> are believed to be hard-core fanatics motivated by a radical interpretation of Islam who cannot be reconciled with. In Kilcullen's view, the other 90% are potentially co-optable.<sup>97</sup> Jones seems to agree, noting that most Taliban soldiers are not motivated by a deep commitment to jihad but by issues such as high unemployment, the lack of change since 2001, and anger over civilian casualties.<sup>98</sup> This bodes well for reconciliation with the majority of insurgents at the lower tier.

At the upper tier, it is doubtful that the Taliban leadership is willing to seriously negotiate with the Afghan government and accept a settlement that is in the Afghan and US governments' favor. While there have been some signs that the Taliban is willing to talk after the

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<sup>93</sup> James Ferguson, *Taliban*. London: Bantam Press, 2010), 160-161.

<sup>94</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 39.

<sup>95</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>96</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>97</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>98</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 41.

establishment of their political office in Qatar,<sup>99</sup> these do not outweigh the reasons to doubt the Taliban's intentions. At a fundamental level, the ideological vision of the Taliban's leaders, which is an extreme interpretation of Deobandi Islam, is incompatible with that of the Afghan central government under the current Afghan constitution.<sup>100</sup> As a result, the Taliban have pursued a strategy of sidelining the Afghan government, which they do not recognize, in attempts to negotiate directly with the United States.<sup>101</sup> This strategy was repeated, albeit indirectly, when the agreement to transfer prisoners from Guantanamo Bay to Qatar collapsed due to the Taliban's refusal to include GIRoA in its discussions with the United States.<sup>102</sup> In light of their beliefs and this behavior, it is unlikely that the Taliban would be willing to join the Afghan government unless they believed their position on the battlefield must be abandoned.

Unfortunately, the current strategic environment in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not such that it requires the Taliban to abandon their aims through violence. On the bright side, Lieutenant General Barno made a valid point in his November 2011 testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the addition of 70,000 additional US troops in Afghanistan has enabled Coalition forces to reverse the momentum of the war and take away the Taliban's de facto control of large sections of southern Afghanistan in Helmand and Kandahar. He went on to suggest that the rise

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<sup>99</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *Transition in the Afghanistan-Pakistan War: How Does This War End?* (Washington: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2012), 32-33.

<sup>100</sup> "Transitioning to Afghan-Led Counterinsurgency" *testimony by Seth G. Jones before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, May 10, 2011.

<sup>101</sup> Nic Robertson, "Taliban reveals political strategy for first time" *CNN*, February 14, 2012. Accessed February 14, 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/14/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-qa/index.html>

<sup>102</sup> "Afghanistan's Taliban suspend peace talks with US" *BBC News*, March 15, 2012. Accessed March 15, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17379163>

in “kinetic operations” against the Taliban leadership has created leverage to bring them to the negotiating table.<sup>103</sup> However, while that increased pressure may bring the Taliban to the negotiating table, it is far less clear what they will bring with them. The Taliban retain their sanctuary in Pakistan, which enables them to recruit, train, and equip fresh insurgents to take the place of those killed by the Coalitions kinetic activities. These operations may be sufficient to convince some insurgents at the lower tier to discontinue fighting, but they are not sufficient to force the leadership from retreating into Pakistan to regroup and rearm. An analysis of the reconciliation program to date bears this reasoning out. In the first few months of the program, 700 insurgents have reconciled;<sup>104</sup> however, these are predominantly low-level insurgents rather than mid or senior level leaders and some Afghan MPs suggest many aren’t even Taliban.<sup>105</sup>

Rather than making peace with the Afghan government, it is more likely that the Taliban will use negotiations as a means to wait out international forces’ patience. This would play well into their overall strategy, which is not one of Maoist protracted warfare but rather an exhaustion strategy aimed at keeping parts of Afghanistan ungovernable long enough that international forces withdraw and the Afghan government collapses under its own weaknesses.<sup>106</sup> So long as the Taliban has reason to believe it can outlast the US and ISAF, it should not be surprising if

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<sup>103</sup> “2014 and Beyond: U.S. Policy Towards Afghanistan and Paksitan” *testimony by Lieutenant General David W. Barno*, November 3, 2011.

<sup>104</sup> “Hearing to Receive Testimony on the Situation in Afghanistan” *testimony by General David Petraeus before the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services*, March 15, 2011.

<sup>105</sup> “Senators Blast High Peace Council’s Performance” *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 20, 2012. Accessed February 20, 2012.

<sup>106</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

they merely seek to use negotiations to their own advantage and will violate any deal when it is convenient for them, much as they did with the British in Helmand province.<sup>107</sup> It is likely that the Taliban may simply seek meetings with the US in order to extract concessions, such as the transfer of detainees from Guantanamo Bay to Qatar, but never follow through on an agreement.

Should the Taliban leadership agree to a settlement, it is necessary to examine the second hypothesis to determine if they are capable of enforcing such an agreement. In short, the Taliban's ability to enforce a ceasefire at the tactical level is unclear and certainly has its limitations. The Taliban operates through a decentralized structure. Commanders provide strategic level guidance, but generally do not exert control in the traditional military sense. At the tactical level, Taliban units have much leeway.<sup>108</sup> As a result, this structure limits the Taliban's ability to control action at lower levels. For example, Mullah Omar has repeatedly issued edicts calling for Taliban commanders and soldiers to limit civilian casualties;<sup>109</sup> however, civilian casualties have risen steadily, particularly those due to insurgent attacks. In fact, civilian casualties hit a record high in the first six months of 2011, 80% of which were due to insurgents. That represents a 28% rise over 2010<sup>110</sup> suggesting Mullah Omar either has limited control over

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<sup>107</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *Transition in the Afghanistan-Pakistan War: How Does This War End?* (Washington: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2012), 33.

<sup>108</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008) 42.

<sup>109</sup> Stephenson, Jon. "Taliban responsible for 77% of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, U.N. says" *McClatchy*, February 4, 2012. Accessed March 10, 2012.

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/02/04/v-print/137894/taliban-responsible-for-77-of.html>

<sup>110</sup> "Shifting Tactics Drive Record High Afghan Civilian Death Toll In First Half of 2011" *UNAMA*, July 14, 2011. Accessed March 10, 2012.

[http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Press%20Statements/July14\\_%202011\\_UNAMA%20POC\\_Midyear\\_Report\\_Eng.pdf](http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Press%20Statements/July14_%202011_UNAMA%20POC_Midyear_Report_Eng.pdf)

his army or is unconcerned whether his edict is actually being followed. The latter seems unlikely considering that after the UNAMA report was released, Omar issued a new edict banning the use of pressure-plate IEDs and warning insurgents that they will face sharia justice if they negligently kill civilians.<sup>111</sup> This decentralized command structure can also be seen in the political activities of its shadow government, such as in allowing local field commanders to decide on social issues in the areas under their control.<sup>112</sup> Some Taliban edicts have been carried out as smoothly, such as the looting by Taliban soldiers along the roads of Wardak and Logar that became common after their expansion in 2008.<sup>113</sup>

Despite their command and control difficulties, the Taliban likely retains some ability to control its forces. An order to limit civilian casualties is not as clear-cut as one to cease fighting altogether. The former has significant room for interpretation, while the latter is a very clear command that must either be obeyed or refused. Were local commanders and soldiers to ignore the orders from the top, the Quetta Shura retains the ability to exert influence by withdrawing logistical and financial support that guerrillas need to continue fighting. Were such a situation to occur it may result in a split of Taliban forces where some guerrillas simply migrate to another front and find work with another insurgent or criminal group while others lay down their arms

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<sup>111</sup> Boone, Jon. "Mullah Omar warns Taliban against hurting Afghan civilians" *The Guardian*, November 4, 2011. Accessed March 10, 2012.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/04/mullah-omar-warns-taliban-afghan-civilians>

<sup>112</sup> Antonio Giustozzi. *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2010) 17.

<sup>113</sup> Antonio Giustozzi. *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2010) 17.

## Policy Implications

Looking at all of these results together yields several important policy implications for Afghan and US leaders. To begin with, continuing negotiations with the Taliban is not as dangerous as has often been suggested. The results of several public opinions show that the vast majority of Afghans, from every major ethnic group, are in favor of negotiations. While leaders of various non-Pashtun populations are against reconciliation, that view is not shared by most Afghans. This does not preclude the possibility of elites fearing the return of the Taliban, building up arms, and pushing their constituencies towards civil war. However, it does dispel the notion of a popular uprising against negotiations.

The degree to which the Afghan population is in favor of negotiations presents another important result, both for Afghan and US politicians as well as military planners. That the majority of Afghans show a willingness to accept extreme concessions as part of a negotiated settlement suggests that the general population is simply tired of fighting. The vast majority of Afghans do not think well of the Taliban (86% have an unfavorable opinion compared to just 11% that hold a favorable opinion). Despite this negative view, the majority of Afghans would prefer the central government to pursue negotiations in which the Taliban are allowed into the ANSF and even negotiations that give control of some provinces to the Taliban rather than continue fighting. This suggests that the population simply wants to end the violence even at great cost to Afghan society. That has negative implications for recruitment into the ANSF, future desertion rates, and the willingness of the Afghan people to continue fighting.

There are important implications for negotiations themselves. To begin with, there are many reasons to believe that the Taliban will not agree to any negotiated settlement or that they will fail to follow through on any agreement they make. As a result, the US and Afghan governments would be wise not to make any significant concessions to entice the Taliban to maintain negotiations without seeing significant changes in Taliban behavior. Equally important, is the need to make it clear to the Taliban that negotiations will not take place without the Afghan government being a part of them. The Taliban is attempting to negotiate directly with the United States and sideline the Karzai administration. To have any lasting peace, the Taliban must be negotiating *with* the Afghan government while the US plays a supporting role to the host government rather than act as the primary party.

Although the Taliban give many indications that they will not make a settlement with the Afghan government, it is still worth pursuing. The benefits of a peace settlement with the Taliban, even if temporary, are significant for the overall counterinsurgency fight the Afghan government is in. The Taliban are only one of several groups fighting the Afghan government. Making peace with them would enable the ANSF to concentrate more heavily in the east against the Haqqani network, in the northeast against Hezb-i-Islami, and against the many criminal groups operating along the Pakistani border. For the US, it is important to remember that even if the Afghan government makes peace with the Taliban, they will still be embroiled in a counterinsurgency fight along much of the Pakistan border.

Any discussion of Taliban reconciliation must be done with Pakistan in mind. So long as they retain a sanctuary in Pakistan, insurgent groups have reason to believe that they can outlast US and Afghan forces. Public opinion polls within the US show the American public is growing increasingly tired of the war in Afghanistan and the political cost of keeping American forces in Afghanistan is growing for politicians. At the same time, international forces are still needed in Afghanistan (in an advisory capacity at a minimum if not conducting direct operations). Time is running out for a decisive military victory in Afghanistan, which would require Pakistan's cooperation for troops (Afghan, American, or Pakistani) to remove insurgent sanctuaries along the border. However, Pakistan shows no signs of changing course and is more likely to wait out the departure of international troops in order to ratchet up its support to the Taliban.

Assuming Pakistan's continued lack of cooperation, Afghan and American leaders must plan for security with insurgent safe havens intact. If the Taliban prove unwilling to make peace with the Afghan government, they must strengthen Afghan National Security Forces sufficiently to be capable of conducting counterinsurgency operations along the border. Those operations and ANSF recruitment and retention will be more successful if the Afghan public is committed to the fight against the Taliban. Public opinion results show that one of the primary drivers of opinion on this issue is whether Afghans believe the Taliban is becoming more moderate, which they are not. Therefore, should negotiations fail, psychological operations teams (PsyOps) and Military

Information Support Operations (MISO) should focus on messaging that shows the Taliban is not becoming more moderate.

## Survey Methodology

All survey results referenced in this paper are taken from the Afghan Futures Wave 2 survey unless otherwise noted. The Afghan Futures series are a set of surveys commissioned by D3 Systems, Inc. with fieldwork conducted by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR Surveys), a D3 Systems company. The Afghan Futures Wave 2 survey consisted of interviews with 2,018 Afghans between January 24<sup>th</sup> and February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. All interviews were conducted in-person, in Dari or Pashto, by local Afghan interviewers.

The survey methodology created a random, national sample of 2,018 interviews. A total of 264 sampling points were distributed proportional to population size in each of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, stratified by urban/nonurban status. In other words, the sample was allocated based upon the size of the population of each province in order to create a sample that accurately represents the entire country. Sampling points were then distributed to randomly selected districts within provinces, also proportionate to population size; and lastly to randomly selected villages or neighborhoods within those districts, by simple random sampling. Sources for population parameters were population projections from the Afghan Central Statistics Office (CSO).

Due to cultural considerations, ACSOR's staff uses gender-matched interviewing. Male respondents were interviewed only by male interviewers, female respondents only by female interviewers. Half the sampling points were designated for male interviews, half for female

interviews. Residences were selected within each settlement by random route/random interval and respondents were selected within residence by a Kish grid.

In order to reduce the design effect due to clustering, where randomly drawn male/female sampling points fell within close proximity to each other in districts with fewer than 20,000 residents, the number of sampling points was doubled, also by random selection, and the number of interviews per point was halved, from 10 to 5. Of the total of 264 sampling points, 108 were assigned in this manner.

Of the 129 districts initially drawn in the sample, 16 were inaccessible on security grounds and 7 were inaccessible due to transportation reasons. They were randomly replaced with other districts within the same province. At the settlement level, 33 of the 264 selected locales were replaced: (4) couldn't be located or were in the wrong district, (12) were inaccessible on security grounds, and (17) couldn't be reached for weather or other reasons. These were randomly substituted with settlements in the same districts. This represents a customary number of settlement-level replacements for Afghanistan. Also, in a limited number of locations, female interviewers couldn't work. In particular, women couldn't be interviewed anywhere in Paktika, which accounts for 1.7% of the country's total population.

Interviews, which averaged 33 minutes in length, were conducted by 236 interviewers (116 female and 120 male) in 34 supervised teams. All interviewers were trained and 228 of 236 had

experience on previous ACSOR field projects. Four percent of interviews were directly observed by field supervisors and 13 percent were back-checked in person afterwards. Questionnaires were all subjected to logical controls conducted at ACSOR offices in Kabul.

The survey had a contact rate of 80 percent and a cooperation rate of 93 percent for a net response rate of 75 percent using American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) rate calculations. The impact of clustering on the sample produces an estimated design effect of 3.34 with a margin of sampling error of 2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. All differences between groups noted in this paper were found to be statistically significant through a chi-squared test.

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