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Why the Political Peace Process Failed Between the Afghanistan Central Government and the Taliban and How Using Negotiation Could Help Resolve The Conflict

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WHY THE POLITICAL PEACE PROCESS FAILED BETWEEN THE AFGHANISTAN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND THE TALIBAN AND HOW USING NEGOTIATION COULD HELP RESOLVE THE CONFLICT

I. WHY THE PEACE PROCESS FAILED

The central government of Afghanistan and the Taliban reached a deadly stalemate, taking around one hundred lives a day from each side between 2018 and 2021.¹ Their failure to reach a peace agreement may be due to the United States' involvement and conflicting interests between the different Afghan groups.

The U.S. presence in Afghanistan was intended to counteract terrorism. As a result, the Afghanistan government continuously presented its peace plans as a counterterrorism strategy.² Overtime, the U.S. changed their stance and decided to withdraw from Afghanistan and make an agreement with the Taliban.³ In 2020, the U.S. and the Taliban signed the Doha agreement. The agreement called for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in return for the Taliban agreeing to prevent any group or individual from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the U.S. The parties also pledged to engage in intra-Afghan negotiations.⁴ The Taliban encouraged the U.S. to pressure the Afghanistan government into giving in without preconditions to get the negotiations in motion.⁵ This led to Afghan authorities releasing more than 5,000 Taliban detainees in 2020 in return for one fifth that number of their own prisoners.⁶ President Biden withdrew U.S. troops, which resulted in the Taliban seizing an opportunity to take Afghanistan's

¹ Aref Dostyar & Zmarai Farahi, *Why the Afghan Peace Process Failed, and What Could Come Next?*, MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE (Aug. 18, 2022), <https://www.mei.edu/publications/why-afghan-peace-process-failed-and-what-could-come-next> [<https://perma.cc/JR68-SBAG>].

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *U.S. Relations With Afghanistan*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (Aug. 15, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-afghanistan/> [<https://perma.cc/25PB-C279>].

⁵ *Supra*, note 1.

⁶ *Id.*

capital, Kabul.⁷ Against their pledge, the prisoners returned to the battlefield with more vengeance and were rewarded by Taliban leadership for their jailtime by appointing them as field commanders.⁸

In trying to come to a peace agreement, there were disagreements about how non-Taliban groups could negotiate with the Taliban. President Ghani wanted a two-sided table—the government and the Taliban—to portray a united Islamic Republic.⁹ Political opponents of the president advocated for multi-party talks in which each side, the government, the Taliban, political parties, and civil society, could bargain based on its own interests.¹⁰

II. HOW NEGOTIATION CAN FACILITATE AN AGREEMENT

Despite the failure of the peace process up to this point, there is still a chance that the conflict can be resolved through negotiation. Conflict negotiation is the process of resolving a dispute or a conflict by providing for each sides' needs.¹¹ The first step to a successful negotiation is including all parties who having something to benefit or lose, in this case: civil society organizations, political parties, armed opposition groups, women, and young people.¹² The U.S. should use its leverage with the Taliban more strategically to encourage the start of a political process.¹³ Leverage, also known as negotiation power, relates to two factors: how much each party needs a deal relative to the other, and the relative value of each party's best alternative

⁷ *Scalise and Ellzey: Remembering Biden's Afghanistan Failure One Year Later*, CONGRESSMAN STEVE SCALISE (Aug. 15, 2022), <https://scalise.house.gov/media/press-releases/scalise-and-ellzey-remembering-biden-s-afghanistan-failure-one-year-later> [<https://perma.cc/KYB6-PCSU>]

⁸ *Supra* note 1.

⁹ *Supra* note 1.

¹⁰ *Supra* note 1.

¹¹ *What is Conflict Negotiation?*, PROGRAM ON NEGOTIATION HARVARD LAW SCHOOL, <https://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/conflict-negotiation/> [<https://perma.cc/4U8H-XGHD>].

¹² *Supra* note 1.

¹³ *Supra* note 1.

to the deal.¹⁴ The U.S. should make the unfreezing of Afghanistan's assets conditional on progress in a legitimate political process.¹⁵ Conditions may include developing a list of popular demands for Afghan actors and the Taliban to negotiate and timeframes for the delivery of these demands.¹⁶

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF NEGOTIATING AND COMING TO AN AGREEMENT

The Taliban and the Afghanistan government should negotiate to gain international recognition and prevent security challenges. The lack of international recognition, the suspension of development and military aid, and continuing counterterrorism sanctions limit the Taliban from running a viable economy.¹⁷ Additionally, decades of violence has created a universal desire for peace. Afghanistan confronts many security challenges such as active terrorist groups, potential for armed resistance to the Taliban government, and thousands of former Afghan army and police forces.¹⁸ The Taliban and the Afghanistan government coming to a peace agreement through negotiation will solve many prevalent issues faced today by both parties.

¹⁴ *What is Leverage? 14 Rules for Using it Well*, EXPERT NEGOTIATOR, <https://www.expertnegotiator.com/blog/what-is-leverage-10-rules-for-using-it-well/> [https://perma.cc/R9EG-RR7D].

¹⁵ *Supra* note 1.

¹⁶ *Supra* note 1.

¹⁷ *Afghanistan Peace Efforts: International Engagement*, UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE, <https://www.usip.org/afghanistan-peace-efforts-international-engagement> [https://perma.cc/V56F-LBGM].

¹⁸ *Afghanistan Peace Efforts: Security Challenges*, UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE, <https://www.usip.org/afghanistan-peace-efforts-security-challenges> [https://perma.cc/VD9W-8CP7].