An Assessment of Whether or Not the United States Should Negotiate with the Taliban to End the War in Afghanistan

Ryan Thomas Trapani

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Thesis directed by

Stephen Biddle
Professor of Political Science and International Affairs

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Dedication

The author wishes to dedicate this project to his wife and his daughter.

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Introduction

The United States has fought an expensive war in Afghanistan with little progress to show for it. Since 2001, the U.S. has lost 2,357 troops and spent $753 billion in Afghanistan.[1] Despite this significant investment in blood and treasure, the U.S. is not close to victory let alone achieving a tolerable outcome to America's longest war. As American involvement in Afghanistan comes to an end, it is worthy to reflect on why the U.S. committed so many resources to Afghanistan and moreover what options the U.S. has left to improve the situation. U.S. victory is not likely nor is it necessary to achieve a tolerable outcome in Afghanistan. The U.S. can take steps now that will improve the outcome of the war. These steps should not be made frivolously in an attempt to save face or defend prior decisions to invest so much in Afghanistan; rather these steps should concentrate on leaving Afghanistan with a chance for succeeding at peace. Peace in Afghanistan will preserve U.S. vital interests. For the purpose of this paper U.S. vital interests are defined as: 1) the Taliban renounces violence, 2) the Taliban breaks ties with Al-Qaeda and any other terrorist organization, and 3) the Taliban accepts something similar to today's Afghan constitution. I will argue that protecting these interests will help to promote stability and peace in Afghanistan. An unstable Afghanistan attracts international terrorist organizations, such as ISIL, and it threatens regional neighbors that possess nuclear material/weapons. Preventing instability in Afghanistan will contribute to meaningful progress in Central Asia.

Whether or not to negotiate a settlement has become a major issue in the debate over how best to end the war in Afghanistan. The prominent arguments against

[1] iCasualties. *Coalition Military Fatalities By Year (Operation Enduring Freedom).* iCasualties. Accessed at. http://icasualties.org/oef/ and National Priorities Project. *War Costs to Date.* National Priorities Project. May 28, 2015. Accessed at. https://www.nationalpriorities.org/cost-of/notes-sources/.

negotiation help explain the controversy associated with this debate. For example, some critics of negotiation consider other alternatives superior to negotiation, such as an Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) victory over the Taliban. Others do not think negotiations can succeed because the Taliban would prefer to wait out the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Lastly, some argue that negotiations should not be allowed to succeed because the result would be morally reprehensible. Critics supporting this last argument are concerned that marginalized citizens, such as women and children, will be worse off after negotiations. The impending U.S. withdrawal in Afghanistan has created a resurgence of interest over this debate as well as the larger policy debate concerning recommendations for ending the war in Afghanistan. I will discuss all the existing prominent arguments for and against negotiations and demonstrate whether or not the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban to end the war in Afghanistan.

In this study I will review the debate for negotiating a settlement and recommend a position. The U.S. will have less leverage in the negotiation process once its withdrawal is complete. Therefore, time is running out for the Obama administration to make meaningful strides towards negotiating a tolerable end to America's longest war. The U.S. must consider its limited alternatives for ending the war and how current policy affects these decisions. U.S. troop withdrawal indicates that the Obama administration is pursuing options for ending the war that do not involve U.S. combat operations. For example, the Obama Administration has publicly made it clear that the responsibility for Afghanistan's security lies with Kabul. According to State Department Spokeswoman Jen Psaki, "The U.S. is committed to enabling progress of an Afghan-led and Afghan-

owned reconciliation process which can lead to a stable and secure Afghanistan."[2] However, Kabul will fail without a negotiated settlement because ANSF cannot win the war. Unsustainable ANSF casualty rates and new Taliban territory gains are two indicators of ANSF's inability to win the war.[3] It should be noted that I will analyze this claim and provide supporting evidence of my analysis later in this paper. The battlefield reality is the most compelling reason for why the U.S. should pursue a negotiated settlement. Many of the arguments against negotiation implicitly assume that ANSF can win the war in absence of negotiations; however, that is no longer likely. Kabul's best chance for promoting a safe and secure Afghanistan is an amicable negotiation process. Negotiating a settlement is the superior and least costly option for achieving a tolerable outcome in Afghanistan. In this study I will argue that the current prognosis for an ANSF victory does not look good, and if ANSF cannot win the war, then U.S. vital interests will be compromised. I seek to demonstrate that if the U.S. negotiates with the Taliban then it can still achieve meaningful progress in Afghanistan, despite losing the war.

Methodology

Next, I will discuss the methodology I used for adjudicating my findings. Paramount to this analysis is considering whether or not negotiating is the best option for preserving U.S. vital interests in Afghanistan. To demonstrate this I will first identify and discuss all existing substantive arguments for and against negotiation. As mentioned earlier, much has changed in Afghanistan since 2001 and some arguments are not current. However, my analysis does not seek to simply identify existing arguments and see which

[2] Nathan Hodge. *Taliban, Afghan Officials Meet for Peace Talks.* The Wall Street Journal. February 19, 2015. March 24, 2015. Accessed at. http://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-afghan-officials-to-meet-for-peace-talks-1424335356.
[3] Jim Michaels. *Afghan Forces Sustain Unsustainable Casualty Rates.* November 5, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/11/05/afghanistan-taliban-anderson-isaf-/18549665/ and Azam Ahmed. *Taliban are Rising Again in Afghanistan's North.* The New York Times. October 22, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/23/world/asia/taliban-rise-again-in-afghanistans-north.html?_r=0.

fits best for today's circumstances but rather seeks to advance this debate with new and current policy recommendations. The current battlefield realties are a significant factor for why the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban. If the war continues on a similar trajectory as today and nothing changes, the U.S. will have missed an opportunity to engage in meaningful negotiations and thus lose the war at a much greater cost. The debate over how to end America's longest war is contentious and the options are limited. In this study I will demonstrate why policymakers should pursue negotiations with the Taliban. The next section provides a roadmap for how I reached my recommendation.

The first step in my adjudication process is to define negotiation, which for the purpose of this paper is defined as the process aimed at reaching a peaceful reconciliation to the war in Afghanistan.[4] Reconciliation and settlement are used interchangeable in this paper and both refer to "the process between conflicting groups [the U.S. and the Taliban] to understand core grievances and identify mutually satisfying solutions with the goals of ending fighting…" and preserving one's vital interests.[5] Next, I will discuss and analyze the prominent arguments supporting negotiation. For the purpose of this paper all substantive arguments supporting negotiations with the Taliban are organized into two larger categories: 1) the alternative to negotiating with the Taliban is much worse than negotiating and 2) negotiating with the Taliban can succeed in preserving U.S. vital interests. A similar methodology is utilized to organize all arguments against negotiations into three larger categories: 1) negotiations with the Taliban cannot succeed, 2) an alternative to negotiating is possible, and 3) if the U.S. negotiates with the Taliban the

[4] Lisa Schirch. *Designing a Comprehensive Peace Process for Afghanistan.* Unites States Institute of Peace. 2011. (4). Accessed at. http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Designing_a_Comprehensive_Peace_Process_for_Afghanistan.pdf.
[5] Ibid. (6).

result will be morally reprehensible. Lastly, I will use current evidence to adjudicate each argument.

Why does Afghanistan Matter and Why Should the U.S Negotiate with the Taliban?

Instability in Afghanistan threatens U.S. national security and negotiating a settlement will help promote a more stable and peaceful Afghanistan. An unstable Afghanistan encourages terrorist organizations to promote illicit transnational activity within Afghanistan's borders and it threatens regional neighbors that posses nuclear weapons/material. The U.S. has limited alternatives for ending the war, but a tolerable outcome is still possible. The prominent arguments against negotiation contribute to this debate's controversy but the current battlefield reality undermines a critical assumption that many critics of negotiation make: ANSF can win the war. ANSF cannot win the war therefore this is not a viable alternative for promoting a more stable Afghanistan. The debate concerning whether or not to negotiate with the Taliban is also politically contentious and many politicians voice the same concerns as critics to negotiation. However, policymakers must consider how a Taliban victory will impact Afghanistan and how this may threaten U.S. national security.

Afghanistan's current security situation does not look promising as the Taliban is gaining new territory and inflicting significant casualties. This should concern U.S. policymakers. According to Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson, Chief of ISAF's (International Security Assistance Force) Joint Command prior to ending U.S. combat operations in December 2014, "more than 8,900 Afghan security forces were killed in action during the past two years [2013 and 2014] as Afghan forces have taken the lead in

combat operations."[6] According to Franz-Stefan Gady, Senior Fellow with the EastWest Institute, this trend is worsening; "in the first 15 weeks of 2015, government casualties have increased by 70 percent compared to the same period last year…"[7] In addition to unsustainable casualty rates, ANSF faces new security challenges. Earlier this year ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) claimed responsibility for a suicide attack in Kabul that killed 34 people and injured 125.[8] ISIL is an emerging threat in Afghanistan and the extent of their influence and presence is still not certain. However, what is certain is that ANSF and the ANP (Afghan National Police) are not winning the fight against the Taliban and additional security threats, such as ISIL, will exacerbate this situation. In addition to ANSF and ANP casualties, the civilian casualty rate is an indication of an unstable Afghanistan. Civilians are dying at an increasing rate; according to UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan), "civilian deaths are once again rising, [with a] seven percent increase in 2013."[9] Additionally, the inability of Kabul to fund ANSF is a leading cause for the lack of progress on the battlefield. According to William Byrd, Senior Expert on Afghanistan at the United States Institute of Peace, the "targeted future size of the ANSF is 228,500 members, with an estimated annual cost of $4.1 billion" which is 17% of Afghanistan's nominal annual GDP, excluding opium.[10] These statistics are an indicator that 1) ANSF is not winning the war and 2) Afghanistan cannot afford its current security force much less a security force that could defeat the

[6] Jim Michaels. *Afghan Forces Sustain Unsustainable Casualty Rates.* November 5, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/11/05/afghanistan-taliban-anderson-isaf-/18549665/.
[7] Franz-Stefan Gady. *Afghan Forces are Suffering Record Losses.* The Diplomat. May 5, 2015. Accessed at. http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/afghan-forces-are-suffering-record-losses/.
[8] Sudarasan Raghavan. *The Islamic State Claims Bombing in Afghanistan that Kills Dozens.* April 18, 2015. The Washington Post. Accessed at. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/dozens-killed-in-suicide-bomber-attack-outside-an-afghanistan-bank/2015/04/18/3849f572-e59f-11e4-b510-962fcfabc310_story.html.
[9] Center for Security Governance. *The Afghan National Security Forces Beyond 2014: Will They Be Ready?* Center for Security Governance. February 2014. Accessed at. http://www.ssrresourcecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/eSeminar-Primer-No.-2.pdf
[10] William A. Byrd. *Who Will Pay for Afghan Security Forces?* Foreign Policy. June 12, 2014. Accessed at. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/12/who-will-pay-for-afghan-security-forces/.

Taliban. If the Taliban defeats ANSF, Afghanistan will likely devolve into something similar to the Taliban regime rule in the 1990s. ISIL's presence indicates the ease of which international terrorist organizations continue to establish training compounds and potentially promote attacks abroad from Afghanistan. In addition to potentially harboring terrorism, the current security situation in Afghanistan threatens its neighbors, specifically Pakistan, which possess nuclear weapons/material. If such nuclear material and weapons should land in the hands of terrorists this could pose a significant threat to U.S. national security. U.S. policymakers should recognize this and acknowledge that it is not too late to achieve a tolerable outcome to the war. A tolerable outcome to the war would achieve the following: an end to violence, break the Taliban's ties to international terrorist organizations, and preserve something similar to today's Afghan constitution.

Background on the Negotiation Process

Unsuccessful efforts have been made in the past to negotiate with the Taliban but these failures are not indicative of today's chances for successful negotiations. The new Afghan administration and the Taliban's willingness to publically acknowledge the potential for peace are indicators that negotiations can succeed. Much has changed in Afghanistan over the past 14 years and this prolonged conflict has been bloody for everyone involved. Previous attempts to organize formal negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban have stalled for various reasons. As an example, in 2013 the Taliban opened a political office in Qatar, which was the first step in conducting formal peace talks with the U.S. However, this office was later closed after "President Karzai broke off bilateral talks with the Americans" over political friction (the Taliban raised the Islamic

Emirate of Afghanistan flag at its Qatar office).[11] This example illustrates how the U.S. was caught in the middle of political tensions between President Karzai representing the GIRoA (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) and the Taliban. Karzai is no longer in office and it is too early to determine whether or not President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani can successfully navigate GIRoA-Taliban tensions, despite his efforts to engage with the Taliban. Ghani offered three ministerial posts to Taliban leaders and although the Taliban rejected this offer it demonstrated "that Ashraf Ghani is a very different kind of president than his predecessor Hamid Karzai - willing to make bold and controversial gestures to secure change."[12] Although the Taliban leaders did not accept the positions, this gesture signaled that the Taliban is willing to discuss the possibility of holding legitimate political offices, which is a critical piece to the negotiation process. Also, the Taliban responded to President Ghani's offer with some potential terms for pursuing a settlement, such as the withdrawal of all foreign troops and the release of all Taliban detainees.[13] Discussing settlement terms demonstrates progress on the negotiation front and it is an important indicator that negotiations are tractable. Identification of the Taliban's terms of negotiations and the potential impact to U.S. national security is an important factor to consider. According to Stephen Biddle, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, The George Washington University and Adjunct Senior Fellow for Defense Policy, Council on Foreign Relations, in addition to demanding all foreign troop withdrawal, a deal that preserves Taliban vital interests may also include "status as a political party, [and] set-asides of offices or

[11] Aljazeera. *Taliban Shuts Doha HQ Over 'Broken Promises'.* Aljazeera. July 9, 2013. Accessed at http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/201379221645539703.html.
[12] David Loyn. *Taliban Reject Offer of Afghan Government Posts.* BBC. January 9, 2015. Accessed at. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30737664.
[13] Karen DeYoung. *U.S. to Launch Peace Talks with Taliban.* The Washington Post. June 18, 2013. Accessed at. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-to-relaunch-peace-talks-with-taliban/2013/06/18/bd8c7f38-d81e-11e2-a016-92547bf094cc_story.html.

parliamentary seats."[14] These terms are an example of common ground that both the Taliban and the U.S. could live with. Despite the Taliban's recent rejection of ministerial posts, political appointments are a path towards reconciliation because they represent mutual interests. This is an example of negotiating terms that would help develop a tractable negotiation process and promote peace in Afghanistan.

Although negotiations have failed in the past, negotiations can succeed now and in the future. During the course of negotiations, both parties, the U.S. and the Taliban, must consider each party's respective vital interests and work towards a viable and sustainable model for peace. For the purpose of this paper Taliban vital interests are defined as 1) all foreign troops leave Afghanistan, 2) the Taliban is recognized as a legitimate political party, and 3) the Taliban receives parliamentary set-asides. Ultimately, not much has changed in terms of respective interests for either party since the failed attempt to formalize peace talks in Qatar. Despite the standstill in negotiations many factors in Afghanistan have changed and past failed negotiations should not be viewed as an indicator for the possibility of success now. I agree with Biddle, "in principle, a bargain could be reached that preserved all parties' vital interests even if no one's ideal aims were achieved."[15] Further, I believe that this is still the case today and both parties have taken steps to demonstrate their willingness to compromise. For example, Taliban fighters released Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl in exchange for five Afghan inmates held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba in June of 2014."[16] Although this bargain was politically controversial, it demonstrated the willingness of the Obama administration to

[14] Stephen Biddle. *Ending the War in Afghanistan: How to Avoid Failure on the Installment Plan.* Foreign Affairs. SEP/OCT 2013. (54). Accessed at. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139644/stephen-biddle/ending-the-war-in-afghanistan.
[15] Ibid. (54).
[16] Ernesto Londoño. *Taliban-held U.S. Soldier Released in Exchange for Afghan Detainees.* The Washington Post. June 1, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/taliban-held-us-soldier-released-in-exchange-for-afghan-detainees/2014/05/31/8b764dac-e8db-11e3-a86b-362fd5443d19_story.html.

develop traction on the negotiation front and work towards a peaceful resolution to the war. Similarly, the Taliban have taken steps to demonstrate their willingness to compromise. For example, Christopher Kolenda, adjunct senior fellow at the Center for New American Security, argues that the Taliban are willing to engage in serious negotiations, he cites the "Taliban's website dated November 19, 2014 and titled *The Afghan People Want Peace; Their Enemy War*, [which] offered a prospective way forward on a peace process with no demand for a Taliban return to power."[17] In addition to evidence supporting the Taliban's desire to engage in serious negotiations, Michael Semple, fellow at the Carr Center for Human rights, argues that the Taliban are willing to consider ending violence. Semple conducted an interview with four senior Taliban interlocutors in 2012 and described them as being *"*open to negotiating a ceasefire as part of a general settlement."[18] Paramount to my analysis and the goal of this paper is to demonstrate that negotiations are tractable and have the potential to end violence, break the Taliban's ties with Al-Qaeda, and preserve today's Afghan constitution. I will analyze the most recent state of affairs in Afghanistan and seek to demonstrate why the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban. The poor prognosis of an ANSF victory, undermines many arguments against negotiations. ANSF victory over the Taliban may have been possible at one point, but not today. This paper argues that the battlefield reality should encourage the U.S. to pursue negotiations with the Taliban; if an ANSF victory is not possible than the U.S. cannot preserve their vital interests in Afghanistan.

[17] Christopher D. Kolenda. *"A Signal or Noise? The Afghan Taliban's Interest in Peace*. Foreign Policy. December 16, 2014. Accessed at. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/16/a-signal-or-noise-the-afghan-talibans-interest-in-peace/.
[18] Michael Semple et al. *Taliban Perspectives on Reconciliation.* Royal United Services Institute. September 2012. Accessed at. https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Taliban_Perspectives_on_Reconciliation.pdf.

Central Argument and Organization

I argue that the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban, beginning as soon as possible, to end the war in Afghanistan. The U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban because if they do not negotiate their chances of promoting stability in Afghanistan will be compromised. U.S. involvement in Afghanistan is at a critical juncture and U.S. policymakers need to make difficult decisions regarding the best path to preserving U.S. vital interests in Afghanistan. These decisions directly affect U.S. national security and deciding whether or not to negotiate with the Taliban is essential to the next step in this process. The U.S. has ended combat operations and it has publicly announced its timeframe for withdrawal. I agree with Biddle that negotiating is the least bad option for the U.S. to pursue for ending the war.[19] The U.S. has lost the war in Afghanistan but it is not too late to salvage a tolerable outcome.

It is unlikely that the U.S. can promote stability and peace in Afghanistan without negotiating with the Taliban. Paramount to this argument is that ANSF cannot win the war and if they cannot defeat the Taliban then negotiation is Afghanistan's best chance for peace. The Taliban is gaining new territory and inflicting unsustainable casualties, which indicates it is winning the ground war. In addition to these battlefield realities, Afghanistan cannot afford its current security forces let alone a security force capable of defeating the Taliban. I will argue that the U.S. should pursue negotiations with the Taliban because the alternatives to negotiating are worse. I will make this case in four steps. First, I will present the arguments in today's debate in favor of negotiating. Second, I will present the arguments against negotiating. Third, I will adjudicate these arguments.

[19] Stephen Biddle. *Ending the War in Afghanistan: How to Avoid Failure on the Installment Plan.* Foreign Affairs. SEP/OCT 2013. (57). Accessed at. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139644/stephen-biddle/ending-the-war-in-afghanistan.

Lastly, I will present conclusions and policy implications for my recommendation.

Arguments in Support of Negotiations

First, I will discuss and analyze all existing arguments that support negotiation. As previously mentioned all arguments supporting negotiation are organized into two larger categories. This section addresses these two categories supporting negotiations. It is important to note that many of the existing arguments are multi-faceted and each has its own nuances. These categories are used to organize the existing literature and they are not intended to be all encompassing, rather they serve the purpose of grouping arguments that address similar themes. This allows for a more logical adjudication process.

The Alternative to Negotiating is Much Worse

The following are prominent arguments that support negotiation and fall into the first of the two larger categories in support of negotiation: the alternative to negotiating with the Taliban is much worse than negotiating. This section addresses the salient points of each argument pertaining to today's reality in Afghanistan. The perspective gained from this process will be valuable later in the adjudication section.

Argument #1

The first argument in this category demonstrates that negotiating is the best alternative to fighting with the Taliban because fighting does not look promising. Biddle argues that "since outlasting the Taliban is unlikely, the only realistic alternative to eventual defeat is a negotiated settlement."[20] Critical to assessing this argument is

[20] Stephen Biddle. *Ending the War in Afghanistan: How to Avoid Failure on the Installment Plan.* Foreign Affairs. SEP/OCT 2013. (52). Accessed at. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139644/stephen-biddle/ending-the-war-in-afghanistan.

evaluating the battlefield reality ANSF faces today. Further analysis into the military prognosis for the ANSF will be discussed later in this paper.

Argument #2

Another prominent argument in favor of negotiations is that the U.S. must find an alternative to fighting since the U.S. cannot afford prolonged conflict and it cannot afford to financially support ANSF indefinitely.[21] According to Sarah Chayes, senior associate in the Democracy and Rule of Law Program and the South Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment, "there are dozens of examples of wasted U.S. funding in Afghanistan. Out of the $63 billion dollars the U.S. has spent on reconstruction since 2003 some dubious examples of wasted funds include: an unfinished courthouse in the province of Parwan, millions of dollars in unaccountable fuel purchases by the Afghan National Security Forces, and poorly constructed schools.[22] This example of waste illustrates two points: first, funding the war in Afghanistan is not sustainable and second, the mishandling of funds in Afghanistan leaves U.S. policymakers hesitant to approve additional funding.

Argument #3

Another prominent argument to discuss is if the U.S. does not negotiate then other parties may dictate the outcome of negotiations and use Afghanistan as a proxy state to advance their own interests.[23] This argument considers the possibility that if the U.S. does not engage in negotiations then other parties will influence the future of the Afghan government, which will jeopardize Afghanistan's prospects for peace. The largest concerns of outside influence are regional neighbors such as Pakistan, Iran, and China.

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[21] Fotini Christia and Michael Semple. *Flipping the Taliban: How to Win in Afghanistan*. Foreign Affairs. Jul/Aug 2009. Accessed at. http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/20699620.pdf?acceptTC=true.
[22] Sarah Chayes. *The Money Pit.* Politico.com. March/April 2014. Accessed at. http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/02/afghanistan-the-money-pit-103880.html#.VJiWVswVB.
[23] David Rohde. *It's Time for America to Negotiate with the Taliban.* The Atlantic. January 13, 2012. Accessed at. http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/01/its-time-for-america-to-negotiate-with-the-taliban/251354/2/.

Jane Perlez, chief diplomatic correspondent for the New York Times, explained in her 2010 article that Pakistan's overt willingness to broker a peace deal between the U.S. and Afghanistan could backfire and that Pakistan will maintain significant influence in Afghanistan if they are instrumental in the peace process.[24] While influential regional neighbors may take part in the negotiation process the U.S. must first decide whether or not to negotiate. Once the policy decision is made the next step is to analyze the best strategy for successful negotiations. The conduct of executing negotiations is not in the scope of this study.

Argument #4

The next argument in support of negotiation argues that if the U.S. does not initiate negotiations then they will never find out if there is a moderate faction of Taliban that are serious about negotiations. David Rohde, columnist and reporter for Reuters, argues, "negotiations represent a chance to split more moderate Taliban from hard-core supporters of Al Qaeda."[25] Rohde also argues that protecting Afghan moderates should be American negotiators' number one concern.[26] This argument considers negotiations valuable to the long-term peace prognosis in Afghanistan. Peace talks may isolate the more extreme Taliban from those willing to engage in meaningful talks and promote peace. Identifying Taliban that are willing to work towards achieving good governance and that are low-risk choices for political appointments are critical pieces to the negotiation process. However, there is a concern that if low-level Taliban are the only faction that is willing to come to the negotiation table they could be at risk for

[24] Jane Perlez. *Pakistan is said to Pursue Role in U.S.-Afghan Talks.* The New York Times. February 9, 2010. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/10/world/asia/10pstan.html.
[25] David Rohde. *It's Time for America to Negotiate with the Taliban.* The Atlantic. January 13, 2012. Accessed at. http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/01/its-time-for-america-to-negotiate-with-the-taliban/251354/2/.
[26] Ibid.

retribution.[27] This risk can be mitigated if Taliban leadership is included instead of bypassed in the negotiation process.

Argument #5

Afghanistan faces many challenges in their pursuit of promoting good governance and establishing a functioning government. Some argue that negotiations are the first step in achieving this goal. For example, Antonio Giustozzi, Research Fellow at the Crisis States Research Centre at the London School of Economics, argues that acknowledging the Taliban's legitimacy and subsequently dropping its terrorist label is a precondition for successful negotiations.[28] The Taliban may be less inclined to fight if negotiations lead to better political representation that provides a legitimate venue, other than fighting, to advocate for its interests. I think it is reasonable to assume that the Taliban would be willing to pursue less bloody means of preserving its vital interests. Negotiations will likely lead to political appointments and establish legitimate Taliban political representation.

Argument #6

Preserving something similar to today's Afghan constitution should be a critical factor in considering whether or not to negotiate with the Taliban. As mentioned earlier, the Taliban recognizing something similar to today's Afghan constitution is a U.S. vital interest because it supports equal rights for men and women. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton echoed this point in 2011 stating, "they [the Taliban] must renounce violence; they must abandon their alliance with Al-Qaeda, and they must abide by the Constitution

[27] Stephen Biddle. *Is There a Middle Way?* New Republic Vol. 240 Issue 20. November 4, 2009. (30).
[28] Antonio Giustozzi. *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects.* Tcf.org. The Century Foundation: 2010. (24). Accessed at. http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-Giustozzi.pdf.

of Afghanistan."[29] However, as Barnett R. Rubin, Senior Fellow, Center on International Cooperation, New York University, explains Pashtun cultural identity, which relies on a centuries old system of self-government, would be very difficult to change.[30] While others argue that although change is possible, if the U.S. does not negotiate then Afghanistan will not likely sustain a reasonable constitution.[31] Trade-offs must be made during negotiations and this argument defends the possibility that the Taliban would be willing to compromise and accept something similar to today's Afghan constitution. However, if the Taliban accept the current constitution the U.S. should expect the Taliban to ask for concessions in return, such as prisoner releases and political appointments. Trade-offs are inevitable in the negotiation process and the potential benefits of negotiating must be weighed with the potential costs.

Argument #7

The next argument in this debate claims that if the U.S. does not negotiate then the chances of establishing a representative Afghan government are not good. According to John Richardson, public opinion researcher at D^3 Systems, Inc. "support for negotiations is highest amongst Pashtuns, but the majority of every major ethnicity favors reconciliation."[32] In addition to the type of support Richardson describes, James Dobbins, Senior Fellow at RAND Corporation and formerly U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, argues that a very diverse delegation should lead negotiations; which "include[s] Tajik, Uzbek, Hazzara, and women leaders."[33] Richardson and

[29] Hillary Rodham Clinton, *"Remarks at the Launch of the Asia Society's Series of Richard C. Holbrooke Memorial Addresses,"* February 18, 2011. Accessed at. http://m.state.gov/md156815.htm.
[30] Barnett R. Rubin. *Crafting a Constitution for Afghanistan.* Journal of Democracy Vol. 15 Issue 3. May 19, 2004. (9). Accessed at. http://muse.jhu.edu.proxygw.wrlc.org/journals/journal_of_democracy/v015/15.3rubin.html.
[31] Discussions with thesis advisor, Dr. Stephen Biddle. February 10, 2015.
[32] John Richardson. *Prospects for Taliban Reconciliation in Afghanistan.* May 2014. http://acsor-surveys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/D3-AAPOR-2014_Afghan-Perspectives-on-Taliban-Reconciliation.pdf.
[33] James Dobbins. *Negotiating with the Taliban.* The International Herald Tribune. May 12, 2010.

Dobbins make two points that echo the basis for this argument supporting negotiation: first, the majority of Afghans support reconciliation and second, the inclusion of diverse parties in the negotiation process may lead to a more representative government, specifically a more ethnically and gender diverse government.

Argument #8

This argument seeks to demonstrate that it is not necessary to eradicate government corruption before pursuing negotiations. Some argue that a precondition for successful negotiations is a less corrupt government. However, Afghanistan will likely struggle with government corruption regardless of whether or not the U.S. pursues negotiations with the Taliban. The alternative to negotiating could be much worse than negotiating. Continued fighting will jeopardize lives and Afghanistan's stability, while negotiations could help to improve governance. Biddle comments, "but at least they [the Taliban] are seen as incorruptible, whereas Karzai's government is deeply corrupt, exclusionary, and getting worse."[34] Although Biddle was talking about Karzai's government, it is still likely that today Kabul is seen as more corrupt than the Taliban. The Taliban may have an opportunity to employ its trustworthiness in the political arena if negotiations result in parliament set-asides. However, regardless of the potential effect the Taliban would have on government corruption, not negotiating is a much riskier position than pursuing reconciliation.

[34] Stephen Biddle. *Ending the War in Afghanistan: How to Avoid Failure on the Installment Plan.* Foreign Affairs. SEP/OCT 2013. (56).Accessed at. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139644/stephen-biddle/ending-the-war-in-afghanistan.

Negotiating with the Taliban Can Succeed in Preserving U.S. Vital Interests

Argument #9

The first argument in this category claims that the Taliban is willing to engage in serious negotiations that promote peace. Kolenda notes an article on the "Taliban's website dated November 19, 2014 and titled *The Afghan People Want Peace; Their Enemy War*, offered a prospective way forward on a peace process with no demand for a Taliban return to power."[35] Kolenda argues that this could be a legitimate sign that the Taliban are willing to engage in serious negotiations. Also, Semple et. al. argue that the "Taliban would be open to negotiating a ceasefire as part of a general settlement…"[36] Kolenda's and Semple's perspectives demonstrate the possibility that the Taliban may be serious about promoting peace during negotiations. This outlook suggests negotiations are tractable and that they can succeed.

Argument #10

The next argument claims that the chances for successful negotiations will increase if major regional parties support this process. Ahmed Rashid, Pakistani reporter and best-selling author, comments that for "the first-time the United States, Europe, the Arab states, Pakistan, the Afghan government, and the Taliban all appear to want peace talks."[37] Regional support would be preferable to regional opposition but I would argue that regional support is not necessary for successful negotiations. Nevertheless, Rashid argues that opening the Taliban office in Qatar in 2013 supported his claim that major parties were supportive of negotiations. I would argue that the Qatar office represented a

[35] Christopher D. Kolenda. *"A Signal or Noise? The Afghan Taliban's Interest in Peace"*. Foreign Policy. December 16, 2014 Accessed at. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/16/a-signal-or-noise-the-afghan-talibans-interest-in-peace/.
[36] Michael Semple et al. *Taliban Perspectives on Reconciliation.* Royal United Services Institute. September 2012. Accessed at. (3). https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Taliban_Perspectives_on_Reconciliation.pdf.
[37] Ahmed Rashid. *Afghanistan after the War: Is Peace Possible?* The New Republic. March 2013. Accessed at. http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112680/afghanistan-after-war.

neutral stance in regards to negotiation rather than overt support. Rashid also argues that establishing an office in Qatar pressured the Taliban to come out of the shadows and develop a negotiation strategy.[38] Although, previous political tensions resulted in the closure of the Qatar office, regional neighbors will likely play a role in future negotiations; if not in direct support than in a neutral capacity that would hopefully benefit the negotiation process.

Argument #11

This argument seeks to demonstrate that negotiations can succeed because the Taliban has an incentive to pursue reconciliation. The most obvious reason is to stop the bloodshed of its people but another incentive for the Taliban to negotiate is popular support for settlement. According to James Shinn et. al., former Secretary of Defense for Asia and Pacific Security Affairs, "opinion polling shows both overwhelming support within Afghan society for negotiated settlement and a willingness to bring the Taliban back into the fold in something short of a dominant position."[39] The majority of Afghans want peace and they are willing to accept some type of Taliban representation in the government. Reconciliation will lead to less killing, which benefits all Afghans. Also, the Taliban could benefit politically from supporting reconciliation. Acknowledging and supporting the desires of the majority would help the Taliban develop political legitimacy and potentially popularity within the government. In addition to fostering support from the majority of Afghans, support is high among the Taliban's own ethnic group: Pashtuns. According to Richardson the "support for negotiations is highest among

[38] Ahmed Rashid. *Afghanistan after the War: Is Peace Possible?* The New Republic. March 2013. Accessed at. http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112680/afghanistan-after-war.
[39] James Shinn et al. *Afghan Peace Talks: A Primer.* RAND Corporation. 2011. Accessed at. (ix). http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1131.pdf.

Pashtuns, but the majority of every major ethnicity favors reconciliation."[40] Counter to many critics' belief, the Taliban does have an incentive to negotiate and pursue peace.

Argument #12

This argument encourages an Afghan led negotiation process that promotes historical and ethnic reconciliation traditions. Rubin recommends that the U.S. should negotiate with insurgents and he argues that Afghan style negotiations (negotiations conducted using local governor representation at shuras) are tractable.[41] This is a reasonable approach towards negotiation that puts the onus on Kabul instead of the U.S. Negotiations are likely to gain more traction if they are conducted according to Afghan tradition rather than a western approach which may appear overly influenced by the U.S. Rubin also supports negotiation because he says it sends a statement that the U.S. cares about internal security not just "weakening Islamic political forces for its own sake."[42] Afghanistan is struggling to promote good governance but pursuing policy that supports an Afghan led negotiation process will support this pursuit and in doing so promote peace.

Argument #13

The next argument seeks to demonstrate that talks between the U.S. and Taliban will weaken the insurgency and encourage an end to violence. Stephen Hadley, former U.S. Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and John Podesta, White House Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton, claim that "outreach efforts by the U.S. and Afghan governments may themselves weaken the insurgency. Recent reports

[40] John Richardson. *Prospects for Taliban Reconciliation in Afghanistan.* May 2014. http://acsor-surveys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/D3-AAPOR-2014_Afghan-Perspectives-on-Taliban-Reconciliation.pdf
[41] Barnett Rubin. Afghan Dilemmas: *Defining Commitments.* American Interest. May 2008. avail at. http://www.the-american-interest.com/2008/05/01/afghan-dilemmas-defining-commitments/.
[42] Ibid.

suggests that the Taliban's discussions with the U.S. have lowered morale and generated confusion and conflict within insurgency's ranks."[43] This argument is outdated because the Taliban's morale is probably very high right now. The U.S. is withdrawing all troops by the end of 2016 and the Taliban is beating ANSF. The Taliban is gaining new territories and inflicting unsustainable casualties on ANSF and ANP. The Taliban has momentum on its side, which is strengthening the insurgency. However, Hadley and Podesta demonstrate why pursuing negotiations is a good idea. For example, they suggest that if the U.S. achieves more progress on the negotiation front then the insurgency would likely weaken. The alternative to negotiating with the Taliban will likely result in continued fighting and more Taliban victories. These victories will strengthen the insurgency and continue to increase morale.

Argument #14

This argument claims that the Taliban is willing to entertain other concessions that promote U.S. vital interests, such as negotiating a cease-fire. Semple et. al. argue that the "Taliban is open to negotiating a ceasefire as part of a general settlement" and that the "Taliban are willing to accept a long-term U.S. military presence in Afghanistan as long as that does not impinge on our independence or religion."[44] Semple highlights the Taliban's willingness to seriously discuss concessions and work towards a tractable negotiation process. Although a long-term U.S. military presence is no longer a desirable end-state for either party, I think a negotiated ceasefire is. A ceasefire is desirable because it would end fighting (a U.S. vital interest) and it would result in less bloodshed. A cease-fire is a possible end-state of negotiations and it would promote peace and

[43] Stephen Hadley et al. *The Right Way Out of Afghanistan: Leaving Behind a State that can be Governed.* Foreign Affairs Vol. 91 Issue 4. July/August 2012. Accessed at. https://www.foreignaffairs.org/articles/afghanistan/2012-07-01/right-way-out-afghanistan.
[44] Michael Semple et. al. *Taliban Perspectives on Reconciliation.* Royal United Services Institute. September 2012. (12). Accessed at. https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Taliban_Perspectives_on_Reconciliation.pdf.

stability in Afghanistan. Negotiations require compromise and finding common ground, such as a cease-fire, that will develop trust and improve the prospects for tractable negotiations.

Arguments Against Negotiation

This section discusses all the existing arguments against negotiations that have been made throughout the course of the war. Each argument is grouped into one of the following three categories: 1) negotiations cannot succeed, 2) alternatives to negotiating are possible, and 3) if the U.S. negotiates the result will be morally reprehensible. Much has changed in 14 years and some arguments may not be relevant for today. This section seeks to summarize each argument and highlight important context useful for further analysis of the current situation in Afghanistan. Following this section, I will adjudicate my findings and provide an in depth analysis of whether or not the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban.

Negotiations Cannot Succeed

Argument #15

This argument seeks to demonstrate that negotiations cannot succeed because Afghanistan's government and judiciary systems are corrupt. Giustozzi explains that integrating the Taliban into the national armed forces will create a power-sharing struggle.[45] This is a reasonable observation but it is unclear how much worse the power-struggle would get and how this would affect Afghanistan's stability and security. In contrast, the war's impact on Afghanistan's stability is clear and it is devastating. Also,

[45] Antonio Giustozzi. *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects.* The Century Foundation: 2010. Accessed at. (25). http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-Giustozzi.pdf.

negotiating and fixing corruption are not mutually exclusive. Clearly, Afghanistan would benefit from good governance but without peace, progress is impossible. Peace promotes good governance and negotiations provide the best chance for peace and stability. Ahmad Nader Nadery, Commissioner on transitional justice with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, suggests that the residual effect of past government human rights violations is a roadblock to successful negotiations; he argues that negotiations will not gain traction unless these atrocities are addressed first.[46] Similar to minimizing government corruption, judiciary corruption can be addressed while negotiations take place. The alternative to negotiating could be much worse and lead to more human rights violations. The Taliban is winning the war and if it returns to power most Afghans will likely face a more oppressive life and increased human rights violations.

Argument #16

This argument claims that negotiations cannot succeed because the Taliban will either choose not to engage in negotiations or if it does, it will not be sincere. Proponents of this argument suggest that negotiations will not achieve a tolerable outcome to the war but rather buy the Taliban time to wait out the U.S. withdrawal. Semple explains that the Taliban has no credible strategy to end the conflict with Western forces and Afghan government.[47] Semple claims that the Taliban is more interested in promoting anti-western rhetoric than it is in developing a credible strategy to end the war.[48] Also, it is possible that the Taliban prefer conflict to a credible reconciliation process at this moment because they are winning the war. Nevertheless, it is likely that the Taliban

[46] Ahmad Nader Nadery. *Peace or Justice? Transitional Justice in Afghanistan.* The International Journal of Transitional Justice, Vol. 1, 2007, Oxford University Press. (175).
[47] Michael Semple. *Soldierless Jihad.* Foreign Affairs. July 26, 2013. Accessed at. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139606/michael-semple/soldierless-jihad.
[48] Ibid.

would prefer a less bloody rise to power. A path towards legitimate political representation through negotiating, could replace the Taliban's current, more violent pursuit of power. Both parties, the U.S. and the Taliban, could benefit from negotiating. The Taliban is winning the war but victory will be costly and a more peaceful rise to power may be more appealing.

Argument #17

The next argument attempts to show that negotiations cannot succeed because the U.S. Congress will defund ASNF before negotiations are completed, which will encourage the Taliban to fight rather than negotiate. The anticipated cost to grow ANSF to 228,500 soldiers is $4.1 billion and Afghanistan cannot afford this bill without U.S. funding.[49] According to Rashid, "recently congressmen and senators from both sides of the aisle have told [him] that their voters will not tolerate a single dime more to go to Afghanistan after 2014."[50] ANSF is losing the war and decreased funding will likely exacerbate this issue. Surely the Taliban recognizes that decreased funding is contributing to ANSF's battlefield struggles and increasing its chances for victory. Pursuing negotiations is a much less expensive option for the U.S. than supporting ANSF at levels necessary to win the war. For example, U.S. politicians may be amicable to fund ANSF during negotiations at levels required to prevent further Taliban advances. Although, this probably will not result in an ANSF victory it will prevent a Taliban victory and improve the chances for successful negotiations. The scope of this paper does not address how to conduct negotiations, but rather whether or not the U.S. should negotiate. The alternative to negotiating does not look good and while the conduct of negotiations may include a

[49] William A. Byrd. *Who Will Pay for Afghan Security Forces?* Foreign Policy. June 12, 2014. Accessed at. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/12/who-will-pay-for-afghan-security-forces/.
[50] Ahmed Rashid. *Afghanistan after the War: Is Peace Possible?* The New Republic. March 2013. Accessed at. http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112680/afghanistan-after-war.

necessary component of continued ANSF funding; if the U.S. does not negotiate it is likely that the Taliban will continue to fight and eventually win the war.

Argument #18

This argument claims that negotiations cannot succeed because the U.S. has lost negotiation leverage and that the U.S. has limited ways to reach a compromise with the Taliban and promote peace in Afghanistan. The first part of this argument focuses on the U.S. troop withdrawal and the effect this will have on the negotiation process. Kitfield, senior fellow at the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress, quotes Ryan Evans (the assistant director at the Center for the National Interest) in saying that the "U.S. has lost its leverage in negotiating with the Taliban because the U.S. announced their timeline for troop withdrawal. If the U.S. pursues negotiations it will be from a position of weakness."[51] Announcing a timeframe for troop withdrawal does little to improve the U.S. position at the negotiating table. If the Taliban is indeed waiting-out the U.S. presence in Afghanistan it now knows exactly how long the wait will be. The second part of this argument claims that even if the U.S. chooses to negotiate it cannot reach agreeable terms with the Taliban. Frud Bezhan, Journalist, Correspondent at Radio Free Europe, covering Afghanistan, explains that the "timing [of negotiation process] is awful, [the U.S.] is running short on carrots and sticks; things we can offer the Taliban and things we can use to intimidate the Taliban into a deal."[52] This argument seeks to demonstrate that the scope of U.S. vital interests is limited and therefore compromise is unlikely. Negotiations will be difficult but the alternative to pursuing negotiations: a Taliban controlled Afghanistan, is worse.

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[51] James Kitfield. *Here's Why Taliban Talks will Fail.* Defense One. July 19, 2013. Accessed at. http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2013/07/heres-why-taliban-talks-will-fail/67052/.
[52] Frud Bezhan. *Why is it so Hard to Negotiate with the Taliban?* The Atlantic. June 29, 2013. Accessed at. http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/why-is-it-so-hard-to-negotiate-with-the-taliban/277353/.

Argument #19

This argument seeks to demonstrate that negotiations cannot succeed because the Taliban have time on its side and it is not interested in compromising. This argument also claims that negotiations will not promote peace, but rather negotiations will buy the Taliban time until the U.S. completes its troop withdrawal. The Taliban may be willing to wait out the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, but this option will not end the fighting. An alternative to protracted bloodshed such as negotiation, may be more appealing for the Taliban. Nevertheless, in 2011 Marvin Weinbaum, former analyst for Pakistan and Afghanistan, U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, stated that the Taliban believe it has "God and time on their side" and that the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani (former Afghan president) severed any chance of the Afghan conflict ending in reconciliation.[53] Weinbaum points out that Professor Rabbani was the head of the High Peace Council under President Karzai and his assassination devastatingly impacted the chances for reconciliation during the Karzai Administration.[54] However, much has changed in Afghanistan since 2011, including the Afghan administration. The war has been bloody for both sides and the majority of Afghans support reconciliation. Recently, as Kolenda highlighted, the Taliban has made public statements that suggests a willingness to discuss negotiation terms that would promote peace.[55] A negotiation process does not guarantee success in preserving U.S. interests but it does provide a path towards peace and stability in Afghanistan.

[53] Marvin G. Weinbaum. *The Death of Reconciliation in Afghanistan.* The National Interest. September 22, 2011. Accessed at. http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/death-reconciliation-afghanistan-5921.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Christopher D. Kolenda. *"A Signal or Noise? The Afghan Taliban's Interest in Peace".* Foreign Policy. December 16, 2014 Accessed at. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/16/a-signal-or-noise-the-afghan-talibans-interest-in-peace/.

Argument #20

This argument attempts to show that negotiations cannot succeed because there are too many parties involved and therefore compromise is impossible. Shinn and Dobbins explain that the challenge facing negotiations is one a kin to herding cats; it is difficult to get "the respective parties…to decide what they want and what they are willing to trade for it."[56] Bezhan echoes these sentiments by describing the complexity of negotiating a settlement in Afghanistan as, " "too many cooks in the kitchen", referring to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Britain, and the United States."[57] Regional parties and the NATO coalition will most likely play a role in negotiations, which could complicate the process. Although the conduct of negotiations is outside the scope of this paper, a complicated negotiation process should not sway the decision of whether or not to negotiate. The prospects of promoting peace and stability should be paramount in this decision. Negotiating settlement is never easy but the alternative is less likely to promote U.S. vital interests in Afghanistan.

Argument #21

This argument claims that negotiations cannot succeed because negotiations will sell out Northern Afghans' interests and lead to civil war. According to the Economist, the following is an example of how negotiations are straining the U.S.-Northern Alliance relationship: "an anti-Taliban constituency [made up of mostly non-Pashtun Northerners] organized 10,000 people to protest "deal-making" with the Taliban."[58] This was written in 2011 but more recent studies, such as Richardson's May 2014 poll, indicate that

[56]James Shinn et. al. *Afghan Peace Talks: A Primer.* RAND Corporation. 2011. (xii). Accessed at. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1131.pdf
[57] Frud Bezhan. *Why is it so Hard to Negotiate with the Taliban?* The Atlantic. June 29, 2013. Accessed at. http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/why-is-it-so-hard-to-negotiate-with-the-taliban/277353/.
[58] The Economist (author not listed). *Afghanistan: Glimmers of Hope.* The Economist. May 2011. Accessed at. http://www.economist.com/node/18681871.

Northern populations as well as "the majority of every major ethnicity favors reconciliation."[59] Perhaps four additional years of bloodshed and a likely Taliban victory have swayed the sentiments of Northerners. Frederick Kagan, scholar-in-residence at American Enterprise Institute, warns that a "premature U.S. and international withdrawal" will not lead to a peaceful conclusion to the war and that "Afghanistan's northern minorities—the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras—are already considering their options…and possibly beginning to re-arm in preparation for renewed inter-ethnic conflict."[60] However, Kagan formed this opinion in 2010 and one year later Shinn noted that "opinion polling shows both overwhelming support with Afghan society for negotiated settlement and a willingness to bring the Taliban back into the fold in something short of a dominant position."[61] The overwhelming support for reconciliation indicates that most Afghans feel they will be worse off without a negotiated settlement.

Argument #22

This argument attempts to show how negotiating cannot succeed because if the U.S. negotiates it will appear weak and inspire more fighting. This argument claims that negotiating will lead to more fighting and therefore jeopardize Afghanistan's prospects for peace. Although, it is uncertain whether or not negotiations will successfully end the conflict the alternative to negotiating is a much bloodier option. The Taliban is winning the war and without a negotiation process it has little incentive to end the fight. In 2010 Mark Landler, White House correspondent for The New York Times, acknowledges Vanda Felbab-Brown's, senior fellow for the 21st Century Security and Intelligence in the

[59] John Richardson. *Prospects for Taliban Reconciliation in Afghanistan.* May 2014. http://acsor-surveys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/D3-AAPOR-2014_Afghan-Perspectives-on-Taliban-Reconciliation.pdf.
[60] Frederick W. Kagan et. al. *Defining Success in Afghanistan.* American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War 2011. (4). Accessed at. http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/DefiningSuccessinAfghanistanElectronicVersion.pdf.
[61] James Shinn et. al. *Afghan Peace Talks: A Primer.* RAND Corporation. 2011. (x) Accessed at. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1131.pdf.

Foreign Policy program at Brookings, observation that talks of negotiations inspire the Taliban to fight because it makes the U.S. appear weak.[62] In 2010 the U.S. was waging a full-scale war and choosing negotiation instead of fighting at that time could definitely have been perceived as a weak position. Now the U.S. is withdrawing troops and it has transitioned the responsibility of fighting the war to Kabul. The U.S. has ended combat operations in Afghanistan and the Taliban is still fighting not because it is inspired by the perceived weakness of the U.S. but because it is winning. Negotiating an end to the war is the best option for the U.S. to end violence, encourage the Taliban to break ties with Al-Qaeda, and preserve the Afghan constitution.

Argument #23

This argument claims that negotiations cannot succeed without Pakistani involvement and that Pakistan will undermine U.S. interests. Specifically, this argument claims that Pakistan will encourage a negotiated settlement that promotes their influence over the Afghan government. Perlez explains that Pakistan's overt willingness to broker a peace deal between the U.S. and Afghanistan could backfire.[63] She argues that Pakistan's involvement is necessary for successful negotiations but that the end result would strengthen Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan.[64] Pakistan is a major regional influencer and it maintains a significant cultural and economic relationship with Afghanistan. However, this argument claims the benefits from this relationship heavily favor Pakistan. Perlez states that Pakistan has influence, but not controlling influence, over the Haqqani

[62] Mark Landler et. al. *U.S. Wrestling with Olive Branch for Taliban.* The New York Times. January 26, 2010. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/27/world/asia/27diplo.html?_r=1&.
[63] Jane Perlez. *Pakistan is said to Pursue Role in U.S.-Afghan Talks.* The New York Times. February 9, 2010. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/10/world/asia/10pstan.html.
[64] Ibid.

Network.[65] This argument seeks to demonstrate that it is unlikely that Pakistan can influence the Haqqani Network to break ties with Al-Qaeda.[66] Although the Pakistan-Haqqani Network relationship may have seemed affable at times, recent terrorist activity in Pakistan, such as the murder of 145 students in Peshawar, has changed this relationship.[67] The Pakistani government has renewed its commitment to combat militancy in the North Waziristan region (a major Haqqani Network stronghold).[68] This commitment to combating terrorism questions the relationship Perlez describes between Pakistan and the Haqqani Network, but this should have little bearing on whether or not the U.S. decides to negotiate with the Taliban. Pakistan involvement in negotiations falls under the conduct of negotiations, which is outside the scope of this paper. The U.S. must consider the current situation in Afghanistan when deciding whether or not to negotiate with the Taliban and pursue the policy that best achieves a tolerable outcome to the war.

Argument #24

This argument seeks to demonstrate that negotiations cannot succeed because if the U.S. engages in negotiations Kabul will appear as a puppet regime and the Taliban will not offer agreeable terms. Semple acknowledges that controversy is expected if the U.S. negotiates with the Taliban.[69] This argument claims that Kabul could potentially be seen as a U.S. puppet regime during the negotiation process. However, Semple argues that successful reconciliation is possible in Afghanistan if lessons learned from previous attempts of reconciliation are employed, such as anticipating controversy and including

[65] Jane Perlez. *Pakistan is said to Pursue Role in U.S.-Afghan Talks.* The New York Times. February 9, 2010. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/10/world/asia/10pstan.html.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Declan Walsh. *Taliban Besiege Pakistan School, Leaving 145 Dead.* The New York Times. December 16, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/17/world/asia/taliban-attack-pakistani-school.html?_r=0.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Michael Semple. *Reconciliation in Afghanistan.* United States Institute of Peace. 2009. (84).

insurgents, tribal leaders, and Kabul representatives in the negotiation process.[70] This type of inclusive interaction will promote Afghan ownership of the negotiation process and help to minimize the perception that the U.S. is controlling the outcome. Rubin encourages a similar Afghan-style negotiation process, which he states will help demonstrate the U.S. commitment to improving Afghanistan's internal security not just "weakening Islamic political forces for its own sake."[71] An Afghan owned negotiation process mitigates the other concern this argument raises: if negotiations fail the U.S. will be blamed. Regardless of the outcome of negotiations the U.S. will likely take some criticism, but if Afghans are leading the process they will be primarily responsible for its success or failure. Although, it is possible Afghans may react poorly to failed negotiations this does not change that the alternative to negotiating is worse. Negotiating creates a path towards peaceful reconciliation while not negotiating ensures continued bloodshed. Before considering the controversy that may arise from the conduct of negotiations the U.S. must first decide if negotiating with the Taliban is the best alternative to ending the war.

Argument #25

This argument claims that negotiations cannot succeed because the U.S. Congress will not approve the Taliban's terms of negotiation. Specifically, this argument attempts to show that Congress will deny any requests for prisoner swaps. Supporters of this argument consider prisoner swaps a Taliban bottom-line (non-negotiable term) and therefore negotiations won't succeed. According to Dominic Tierney, senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Center, negotiations will likely involve prisoner exchanges,

[70] Michael Semple. *Reconciliation in Afghanistan.* United States Institute of Peace. 2009. (84).
[71] Barnett Rubin. *Afghan Dilemmas: Defining Commitments.* American Interest. May 2008. Accessed at. http://www.the-american-interest.com/2008/05/01/afghan-dilemmas-defining-commitments/

which is a divisive issue in Congress.[72] Tierney raises the following question: "How will the United States prevent former captives from rejoining the struggle?"[73] Finding compromise during negotiations will be challenging and I agree that it will be difficult to avoid controversy, but this should not be a reason to forgo negotiations. The U.S. must weigh the risk/reward tradeoff during negotiations. The current reality in Afghanistan forecasts an eventual Taliban victory. Taliban victory could devolve Afghanistan into something similar to the Taliban regime of the 1990s. The alternative to negotiating looks bleak and recently the Taliban has made public statements indicating its willingness to consider U.S. vital interests, such as ending violence.[74] While the outcome of negotiation is uncertain, Taliban victory is certainly a worse alternative.

Alternatives to Negotiation are Possible

Argument #26

This argument claims that Afghanistan no longer poses a security threat to the U.S. and therefore the U.S. should cut its losses and withdraw completely without pursuing negotiations. This argument seeks to demonstrate that negotiating with the Taliban is a waste of time and American efforts/resources should be allocated to address Pakistan. Leon Weiselteir, literary editor of The New Republic, considers complete withdrawal or abandonment of Afghanistan not such a bad idea; he argues that Pakistan is a greater threat to U.S. national security than Afghanistan.[75] According to this argument, negotiating with the Taliban would not preserve U.S. vital interests because Afghanistan is not a U.S. national security concern. However, Afghanistan's stability directly affects

[72] Dominic Tierney. *Fighting while Negotiating in Afghanistan.* Orbis 2013. (178).
[73] Ibid. (180).
[74] Christopher D. Kolenda. *"A Signal or Noise? The Afghan Taliban's Interest in Peace".* Foreign Policy. December 16, 2014 Accessed at. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/16/a-signal-or-noise-the-afghan-talibans-interest-in-peace/.
[75] Leon Weiselteir. *The Deal.* The New Republic. October 20, 2010. Accessed at. http://www.newrepublic.com/article/magazine/78539/washington-diarist-afghanistan.

Pakistan's security. Ignoring threats in Afghanistan will threaten Pakistan's stability. The U.S.-Pakistan relationship is complicated and important to Central Asia's security, but regional security will suffer if the U.S. chooses not to negotiate with Afghanistan.

Argument #27

This argument seeks to demonstrate that ANSF can win the war, therefore the U.S. does not need to negotiate with the Taliban. This argument claims that an ANSF victory is not only possible but that it will lead to peace. In 2012 Felbab-Brown argued that "the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are clearly making progress…and that the ANA [Afghan National Army] Special Forces are the most capable component of the ANSF and are closest to standing on their own."[76] However, Felbab-Brown's optimistic perception of ANSF capabilities is caveated by her explanation that ANSF is dependent on "NATO's assistance for critical assets and capacities…"[77] Today, ANSF's progress is much less hopeful than Felbab-Brown's 2012 description. As NATO troops continue to withdraw, the prognosis of for an ANSF victory is worse than ever. ANSF is losing the war and fighting does not look like a promising alternative for promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The Result of Negotiations will be Morally Reprehensible

Argument #28

This argument intends to show that the U.S. should not negotiate with the Taliban because negotiations will result in morally reprehensible terms. This argument seeks to demonstrate that a premature U.S. withdrawal destroys negotiating leverage and therefore the Taliban will demand unfavorable terms for the U.S. Ronald Neumann, former U.S.

[76] Vanda Felbab-Brown. *Slip-Sliding on a Yellow Brick Road: Stabilization Efforts in Afghanistan.* International Journal of Stability & Development. November 1, 2012. (4). Accessed at. http://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.af/.
[77] Ibid. (5).

Ambassador to Afghanistan, argues "that a rushed U.S. exit will likely result in insurgents refusing to participate in negotiations unless Washington offers them a better deal that is on their [the Taliban] terms, which involves U.S. withdrawal and few protections from the government."[78] This argument implies that if the U.S. wants to make a deal with the Taliban it would have to agree to undesirable terms. According to Neumann, the U.S. is left with 2 options: "presenting a fig leaf for its total abandonment of a country (complete failure of negotiations) and the indefinite engagement of U.S. combat troops."[79] Neither of these scenarios is ideal and the Obama administration has already ruled out option #2. Announcing a timeframe for withdrawal definitely impacts negotiation leverage but the alternative is worse. This paper identifies potential areas of compromise between the U.S. and the Taliban and an end to bloodshed is an amicable compromise for both parties. Further study outside the scope of this paper is needed to analyze the conduct of negotiations and present findings on what impact, if any, the U.S. withdrawal has on reconciliation.

Argument #29

This argument seeks to demonstrate that the U.S. should not negotiate with the Taliban because negotiations will do more harm than good. This argument claims that the Taliban will seek violent retribution for those engaging in low-level reconciliation talks. Biddle acknowledges that convincing Taliban troops to engage in low-level talks would not be easy.[80] According to Biddle, it would be extremely dangerous for low-level troops to engage in talks without reassurance of government protection.[81] Retribution is a

[78] Ronald E. Neumann et. al. *Afghan Endgame: How to Help Kabul Stand on its Own.* Foreign Affairs Vol. 96 Issue 6, 2012. Accessed at. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2012-10-31/afghan-endgame.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Stephen Biddle. *Is There a Middle Way?* New Republic. November 4, 2009. (30).
[81] Ibid. (30).

reasonable concern but as Biddle states, "this is not to say that negotiation is unwise, or that low-level reconciliation is impossible. If an improved Western military effort persuaded key factions that the payoff to fighting is lower and the cost higher than they think now, then deals might be possible."[82] The Western military effort in Afghanistan is ending but negotiations may offer a similar incentive for the Taliban. For example, ending the bloodshed and parliament set-asides could entice the Taliban to pursue negotiations. Low-level negotiations could endanger those involved but engaging in low-level talks is a strategy for negotiation, which is outside the scope of this paper. It is reasonable to acknowledge the potential danger in conducting low-level negotiations but U.S. policymakers should frame their decision-making in the context of whether or not negotiating with the Taliban will promote stability in Afghanistan. An unstable Afghanistan attracts international terrorist organizations, such as ISIL, and it threatens regional neighbors that possess nuclear material/weapons. The negotiating process will be challenging but the alternative to negotiating is worse.

Argument #30

This argument claims that the U.S. should not negotiate with the Taliban because if negotiations succeed women's rights will not be preserved. Proponents of this position argue that tradeoffs will be made during negotiations that will place women's rights on the chopping block. Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, Senior Fellow for Women and Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, states, "negotiations will likely result in compromises (some elements of the Taliban will likely return to power) that neglect

[82] Stephen Biddle. *Is There a Middle Way?* New Republic. November 4, 2009. (30).

women's right.[83] Negotiations will likely lead to a Taliban presence in the government but the alternative to negotiating is worse for women's rights. The Taliban is winning the war and a Taliban victory would significantly compromise equal rights. Instead of a few Taliban elements returning to power, the country could devolve into a Taliban regime similar to the 1990s. I agree with Biddle that "Washington, of course, would prefer to see Afghanistan−much as it would like to see any country−ruled in accordance with the will of the governed, its people prosperous, and the rights of its minorities and women respected."[84] Biddle notes that U.S. security concerns in Afghanistan are much more narrower than the goals mentioned above.[85] Good governance and preserving civil rights are very important to Afghanistan's future but they can't achieve progress with the Taliban in control. Also, if negotiations preserve some semblance of democracy than women will have a better chance of winning government office than with a Taliban controlled government. Lemmon recommends that women should occupy more seats on the High Peace Council and women's rights should not be seen merely as a human rights issue rather as a security and economic imperative "that is central, not peripheral to securing peace."[86] Also, she claims that Afghan civil society leaders fear that women's rights will be negotiated away in an attempt to craft a workable exit strategy.[87] A negotiated settlement may not immediately launch Afghanistan to the point of protecting all citizens' human rights but the alternative to negotiating presents a worse fate for most

[83] Gayle Tzemach Lemmon. *Looming Threats in Afghanistan.* Council on Foreign Affairs. October 7, 2011. Accessed at. http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/looming-threat-afghan-womens-rights/p26124.
[84] Stephen Biddle et. al. *Defining Success in Afghanistan: What Can the United States Accept?* Foreign Affairs. July/August 2010. Accessed at. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66450/stephen-biddle-fotini-christia-and-j-alexander-thier/defining-success-in-afghanistan.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Gayle Tzemach Lemmon. *Looming Threats in Afghanistan.* Council on Foreign Affairs. October 7, 2011. Accessed at. http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/looming-threat-afghan-womens-rights/p26124.
[87] Gayle Tzemach Lemmon. *Success Despite Injustice: Social Benefit from the Afghan Woman's Resilience.* Harvard International Review Vol. 33 Issue 4. Spring 2012. (16).

Afghans. Negotiating an end to the war is the best option for preserving the Afghan constitution, which protects Afghans' human rights.

Argument #31

This argument seeks to demonstrate that the U.S. should not negotiate with the Taliban because the Taliban will likely demand prisoner exchanges, which threatens U.S. national security. Supporters of this claim argue that prisoner exchanges will likely be a Taliban bottom-line and that the U.S. cannot prevent these prisoners from rejoining the fight. According to Barbara Starr, CNN Pentagon Correspondent, "the U.S. military and intelligence community now suspect that one of the five Taliban detainees released from Guantanamo Bay in return for Sgt. Bowe Berdahl in May of last year [2014] has attempted to return to militant activity from his current location in Qatar by making contact with suspected Taliban associates in Afghanistan."[88] This suspicion is an example of why controversy surrounds prison swaps as part of the negotiation process. Also, as mentioned earlier, Congress will likely reject this concession, potentially derailing negotiations. However, isolated instances of Taliban leadership rejoining the insurgency is a more tolerable outcome than the Taliban winning the war and returning to power. The former preserves the possibility of ending violence while the latter does not.

Argument #32

This argument claims that the U.S. should not negotiate with the Taliban because successful negotiations will recognize the Taliban's legitimacy. Giustozzi argues that acknowledging the Taliban's legitimacy and subsequently dropping the terrorist label is a

[88] Barbara Starr. *Official: Detainee swapped for Bergdahl suspected of militant activities.* CNN. January 30, 2015. Accessed at. http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/29/politics/bergdahl-swap-prisoner-militant-activity/index.html.

precondition for successful negotiations.[89] Although the State Department does not recognize the Taliban as a FTO (Foreign Terrorist Organization), "the Taliban is on the Treasury Department's list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists, a classification that allows their assets to be frozen."[90] This argument seeks to demonstrate that lifting designations (a likely precondition for accepting Taliban legitimacy) such as the Treasury Department's, threatens Afghanistan's prospects for peace. Proponents of this argument claim that the Taliban is likely to reverse course and return to violence and if the Taliban returns to violence it will be harder for the U.S. to respond with appropriate action, such as freezing assets or other targeted sanctions. However, the White House's current designation of the Taliban (armed insurgency) is less restrictive than a FTO designation, which allows room for concessions, such as prisoner swaps.[91] Lifting this label would not significantly change U.S. options for responding to the Taliban, since the designation's scope is limited. In the event the Taliban break negotiation terms, it is likely that the U.S. could quickly reinstitute formal terrorist designations. Although negotiations will likely lead to recognizing the Taliban's legitimacy, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Political legitimacy creates a platform for advancing ones' needs peacefully as opposed to on the battlefield. This alternative paves a path towards reconciliation and establishes a foundation for pursuing good governance.

Argument #33

This argument seeks to demonstrate that the U.S. should not negotiate with the Taliban because if negotiations succeed the Taliban will have more influence and be

[89] Antonio Giustozzi. *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects.* Tcf.org. The Century Foundation. 2010. (24). Accessed at. http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-Giustozzi.pdf.
[90] Jonathan Karl. *Taliban Are Not Terrorists, or So Says the White House.* ABC News. January 29, 2015. Accessed at. http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/taliban-terrorists-white-house/story?id=28588120.
[91] Ibid.

more capable of violence. This argument claims that if negotiations succeed, the Taliban will be integrated into positions of authority within the military and government and use its authority to increase hostilities. Giustozzi explains that integrating the Taliban into the national armed forces will create a power-sharing struggle and that Taliban representation in the government "[does] not appear likely to accept the current Afghan constitution."[92] Supporters of this argument claim that the Taliban will abuse its authority and influence Afghans to support a violent uprising. The Taliban is likely to demand political set-asides during the negotiation process but this is a much more tolerable outcome to the war than a Taliban victory. A limited Taliban presence in the government provides an alternative to fighting for advancing its agenda. Legitimate Taliban political representation is more aligned with pursuing good governance than waging an insurgency to overthrow the government. Negotiations create an opportunity for peaceful reconciliation and stability in Afghanistan.

Analysis

In this section I seek to demonstrate that the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban to end the war in Afghanistan. I will adjudicate all the existing arguments for and against negotiation and show that negotiation is the best option for ending violence, breaking Taliban's ties with Al-Qaeda, and protecting the Afghan constitution. The existing arguments for and against negotiation possess important unifying features, which will allow me to adjudicate their claims. Many of the arguments against negotiation implicitly assume that ANSF can win the war in absence of negotiations; however, that is

[92] Antonio Giustozzi. *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects.* Tcf.org. The Century Foundation. 2010. (24). Accessed at. http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-Giustozzi.pdf.

no longer likely. This finding is paramount to my policy recommendation. The prognosis for an ANSF victory does not look good; and if the U.S. does not negotiate, the Taliban will win the war and jeopardize Afghanistan's prospects for peace. I will use the following four principal findings and one ancillary finding to adjudicate each argument and justify my recommendation: 1) ANSF and ANP casualties are unsustainable, 2) the Taliban is gaining new territory, 3) the Taliban leadership infrastructure is cohesive and functional enough to win the war, 4) U.S. funding for ANSF will not be available indefinitely, and 5) women and other marginalized citizens will be worse off than today if the Taliban wins the war. The U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban to end the war because ASNF cannot win and a Taliban victory threatens Afghanistan's stability. Instability encourages terrorist organizations, such as ISIL, to use Afghanistan as a conduit for illicit transnational activity and it threatens regional neighbors that possess nuclear weapons/material.

ANSF and ANP Casualties are Unsustainable

Each argument for and against negotiation possesses unifying features and I will use my first principal finding to adjudicate the following arguments in support of negotiation and arguments against negotiation: 1, 5, 6, 8, 13 and 16, 22, 23, 26, 27. The unifying theme for arguments 1, 5, 6, 8, and 13 is that the alternative to negotiation is worse and it will lead to more bloodshed. The unifying theme for arguments 16, 22, 23, 26, and 27 is that there are better alternatives to negotiation. However, the Taliban is winning the war and the alternative to negotiating will result in continued bloodshed. ANSF is suffering unsustainable casualties and it cannot change this trend. In the last six months of 2013 "the Taliban killed 1,100 members of the Afghan security

forces….as NATO troops have stepped back and left the local army and police to fight the insurgency."[93] This trend worsened in 2014 and 2015. According to Lt. Gen. Joseph Anderson, "more than 8,900 Afghan security forces were killed in action during the past two years [and ANSF] has sustained about a 6-and-a-half percent increase in casualties this year—4,634 this year versus 4,350 killed in action last year."[94] The increase in ANSF casualty rates coincided with increased NATO troop withdrawal.[95] This indicates that ANSF cannot function autonomously without sustaining significant casualties. If ANSF continues to suffer high casualties it will lose the war. Lt. Gen. Joseph Anderson rightfully described ANSF attrition as "unsustainable" and explained that ANSF "needs to decrease their casualty rate."[96] Anderson, the top U.S. Commander in Afghanistan at the time, painted a bleak picture for an ANSF victory in 2014 and today's prognosis has not changed. According to Jim Michaels, military writer for USA TODAY and former Marine infantry officer, "the number of Afghans in the police and army killed or wounded has increased 70% in the first 15 weeks of 2015, compared to the same period last year…the casualties have averaged about 330 a week."[97] In addition to high troop casualties, other indicators such as high desertion rates and civilian casualties demonstrate ANSF's dysfunction and inability to adequately protect the Afghan people. Juergen Kleiner, Foreign Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (1964-1998), explains that "the size of the Afghan army is negatively affected by a high number of

[93] Nick Hopkins. *Taliban Kill 1,100 Members of Afghan Security Forces in Six Months.* The Guardian. January 23, 2013. Accessed at. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/23/taliban-afghan-security-forces-nato.
[94] Jim Michaels. *Afghan Forces Sustain Unsustainable Casualty Rates.* November 5, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/11/05/afghanistan-taliban-anderson-isaf-/18549665/ and Ben Watson. *As End Looms, US Warns Afghan Troops Taking 'Unsustainable Casualties'.* Defense One. November 5, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2014/11/end-looms-us-warns-afghan-troops-taking-unsustainable-casualties/98297/.
[95] Jim Michaels. *Afghan Forces Sustain Unsustainable Casualty Rates.* November 5, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/11/05/afghanistan-taliban-anderson-isaf-/18549665/.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Jim Michaels. *Afghan security forces suffer record casualties.* USA Today. May, 3, 2015. Accessed at. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/05/03/afghan-security-forces-suffer-record-casualties/26828193/.

soldiers absent without leave; duty rates are only between 69 and 75 percent."[98] High casualty rates exacerbate this problem and seriously inhibit ANSF's ability to fight and win the war. Civilians are suffering a high number of casualties as well, which further indicates ANSF's inability to provide security and stability. Amnesty International reports, "the number of casualties among civilians not involved in hostilities reached 4,853, of which more than 70% were caused by the Taliban and other armed insurgent groups. Of these, 1,564 deaths were recorded and 3,289 people injured."[99] The Taliban is winning the war, and without negotiating there is little incentive for it to cease fighting. ANSF cannot change the trajectory of this war without significant assistance. Therefore, the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban because negotiating is the best option for ending violence in Afghanistan, encouraging the Taliban to break ties with Al-Qaeda, and preserving something similar to today's Afghan constitution.

The Taliban is Gaining New Territory

I will use my second principal finding to adjudicate the following arguments in support of negotiation and argument against negotiation: 7, 10, 11 and 21. The unifying theme of arguments 7, 10, and 11 is that Northern populations are at more risk if a negotiated settlement is not reached and the theme of argument 21 is that negotiations will sell out the interests of Northerners and lead to civil war. The Taliban is threatening Northern populations by capturing new territories, such as the Northern province of Kunduz.[100] The Taliban's new territory gains in the North are indicative of its confidence in defeating ANSF and its ability to conduct coordinated attacks outside of its principal

[98] Juergen Kleiner. *How Many Lives do the Taliban Have.* Diplomacy and Statecraft. November 21, 2014. (721). Accessed at. http://www.tandfonline.com.proxygw.wrlc.org/doi/pdf/10.1080/09592296.2014.967133.
[99] Amnesty International. *Amnesty International Annual Report 2014/15: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.* Amnesty International. 2015. Accessed at. https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/afghanistan/report-afghanistan/.
[100] Azam Ahmed. *Taliban are Rising Again in Afghanistan's North.* The New York Times. October 22, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/23/world/asia/taliban-rise-again-in-afghanistans-north.html?_r=0.

area or control. Azam Ahmed, foreign correspondent for The New York Times, based in Kabul, explains, "the Taliban have found success beyond their traditional strongholds in the rural south and are now dominating territory near crucial highways and cities that surround Kabul, the capital, in strategic provinces like Kapisa and Nangarhar."[101] In June 2015, the Taliban conducted a brazen suicide attack on parliament leaving 7 dead.[102] Although the strategic advantage of this attack was minimal the message it sent was bold: the Taliban is attacking new territories including the capital. However, recent attacks in the North are hardly a new phenomenon. The Taliban's strategic shift to new Northern fronts has been occurring over the past year and there is no indication this expansion will cease anytime soon. According to Ahmed, "On July 9 [2014], the Taliban overran a district center in Ghor Province, a rugged and violent area close to the center of the country…"[103] The argument that Northern populations will revolt if the Taliban is incorporated into the Afghan government may have been legitimate 10 years ago but after 14 years of bloodshed most Afghans support reconciliation, including Northerners. According to Richardson's May 2014 polling, "support for negotiations is highest amongst Pashtuns, but the majority of every major ethnicity favors reconciliation."[104] In regards to incorporating the Taliban into the Afghan government Shinn and Dobbins explain, "opinion polling shows both overwhelming support with Afghan society for negotiated settlement and a willingness to bring the Taliban back into the fold in

[101] Azam Ahmed. *Taliban Making Military Gains in Afghanistan.* The New York Times. July 26, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/world/asia/taliban-making-military-gains-in-afghanistan.html.
[102] Aljazeera. *The Taliban stages deadly attack on Afghan parliament.* Aljazeera. June 22, 2015. Accessed at. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/explosions-gunfire-rock-afghan-parliament-kabul-150622060232229.html.
[103] Azam Ahmed. *Taliban Making Military Gains in Afghanistan.* The New York Times. July 26, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/world/asia/taliban-making-military-gains-in-afghanistan.html.
[104] John Richardson. *Prospects for Taliban Reconciliation in Afghanistan.* May 2014. http://acsor-surveys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/D3-AAPOR-2014_Afghan-Perspectives-on-Taliban-Reconciliation.pdf.

something short of a dominant position."[105] Most Afghans support reconciliation because they are tired of fighting and bloodshed. This popular support of reconciliation is a strong indicator that negotiation is a tractable strategy for ending the war in Afghanistan. New Taliban territory gains indicate that ASNF is losing the war. Therefore, the U.S. should negotiate a settlement because if it does not, the Taliban will continue to gain new territories and eventually win the war.

The Taliban Leadership Infrastructure is Functional Enough to Win the War

I will use my third principal finding to adjudicate the following argument in support of negotiation and arguments against negotiation: 4 and 15, 19. The themes of argument 4 are that if the U.S. negotiates then it is possible to identify a more moderate group of Taliban that supports reconciliation and if it does not negotiate, then the Taliban will win the war because its leadership is cohesive. The theme of argument 15 is that pervasive government corruption must be dealt with before pursuing negotiation. However, the reality is that the Taliban is winning the war and if the U.S. waits for the Afghan government to end corruption before pursuing negotiations then it will be too late to salvage a desirable outcome. The theme for argument 19 is that the Taliban is not interested in conducting sincere negotiations. Although the Taliban may have ulterior motives, it has publicly stated a willingness to engage in serious negotiations and the alternative to negotiating is worse.[106]

Despite the recent announcement of Mullah Mohammad Omar's death, the Taliban's leadership is cohesive enough to win the war. According to the Afghan

[105] James Shinn et. al. *Afghan Peace Talks: A Primer.* RAND Corporation. 2011. (x). Accessed at. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1131.pdf.
[106] Christopher D. Kolenda. *"A Signal or Noise? The Afghan Taliban's Interest in Peace".* Foreign Policy. December 16, 2014 Accessed at. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/16/a-signal-or-noise-the-afghan-talibans-interest-in-peace/.

government, Omar died over two years ago in Pakistan.[107] Over the past two years the Taliban has been making significant progress on the battlefield without the direction of Omar. Omar's successor "[Mullah Mohammad Akhtar] Mansoor has been an " "active director" of the jihad, or holy war, for some years…"[108] The current leadership has been responsible for the recent battlefield successes, not Omar. In addition to Mansoor's election, "Sirajuddin [Haqqani] was elected as the Taliban's deputy to Mansoor — a move possibly aimed at ensuring a cash flow from the Haqqanis' wealthy backers and appeasing hardliners, luring back Taliban fighters who had defected to rival organizations such as the Islamic State group."[109] Sirajuddin (the son of Haqqani Network founder Jalaluddin) is an important ally because of his influence in the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Area). The Haqqani Network is a functioning and dangerous terrorist organization. Under Sirajuddin's leadership it will likely contribute significantly to the Taliban's battlefield successes. The State Department recently increased the reward for information pertaining to Sirajuddin from $5 million to $10 million.[110] According to the State Department, "he has admitted planning the January 2008 attack on Kabul's Serena Hotel that killed U.S. citizen Thor David Hesla and five other people."[111] The Taliban's alliance with the Haqqani Network and its recent battlefield successes, under Mansoor's leadership, are indicative of the Taliban's ability to function cohesive enough to win the war.

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[107] Associated Press. *Taliban name, praise new leader in statement.* USA TODAY. July 31, 2015. Accessed at. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/07/31/taliban-new-leader/30922803/.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Lynne O'Donnell et. al. *New Afghan Taliban leader promises to continue insurgency.* The Washington Post. August, 1, 2015. Accessed at. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/new-afghan-taliban-leader-promises-to-continue-insurgency/2015/08/01/a2230d7e-3835-11e5-ab7b-6416d97c73c2_story.html.
[110] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson. *Rewards for Justice - Reward Offers for Information on Haqqani Network Leaders.* U.S. Department of State. August 20, 2014. Accessed at. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/230778.htm.
[111] Ibid.

In addition to the Taliban leadership's cohesiveness, the Taliban's ideological structure promotes unity within its organization. According to Semple, "one of the reasons for the Taliban's effectiveness as an organization is the focus of the movement's doctrine on internal affairs and in particular on maintaining cohesiveness."[112] Semple also points out the Taliban's cultural emphasis on discipline and structure has contributed to the "movement's ability to sustain its struggle, avoid splits, and deter dissidents or unauthorized peacemakers."[113] The Taliban's cultural discipline and loyalty is by no means a new phenomenon; other Afghan militants forged this over decades of conflict, such as the Mujahideen during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Taliban has a long history of fighting and many years of experience to build upon. For this reason the Taliban remains united and as Semple explains, "the Taliban continue to command the loyalty of thousands of Afghans and to apply resources and men to the pursuit of political objectives…"[114] In summary, the Taliban is capable of winning the war which threatens Afghanistan's prospects for peace.

U.S. Funding for ANSF will not be Available Indefinitely

I will use my fourth principal finding to adjudicate the following arguments in support of negotiation and arguments against negotiation: 2, 3, 9, 12, 14 and 17, 18, 20, 24, 25. The unifying themes for arguments 2, 3, 9, 12, and 14 are that the U.S. Congress will not fund ANSF indefinitely and without substantial funding ANSF will lose the war. The unifying themes for arguments 17, 18, 20, 24, and 25 are that the Taliban is not interested in sincere negotiations and that the Taliban cannot offer agreeable terms of negotiation. Both sets of arguments focus on the political dynamic of negotiating with the

[112] Michael Semple. *Rhetoric, Ideology, and Organizational Structure of the Taliban Movement.* United States Institute of Peace. 2014. (30).
[113] Ibid. (30).
[114] Ibid. (29).

Taliban. If U.S. politicians are not willing to fund ANSF indefinitely they must find an alternative that ends violence, breaks the Taliban's ties with Al-Qaeda, and preserves the Afghan constitution. According to Rashid, "recently congressmen and senators from both sides of the aisle have told [him] that their voters will not tolerate a single dime more to go to Afghanistan after 2014."[115] The U.S. has all ready spent a significant amount of money in Afghanistan with little progress to show for it. According to Matt Waldman, associate fellow at The Royal Institute of International Affairs's Chatham House and co-director of the Opportunity in Crisis project on Afghanistan, "the war in Afghanistan has cost the United States over US $550 billion" and Perlez reports that "financing for the Afghan security forces after 2014 is expected to total about $4.1 billion a year."[116] U.S. defense spending in Afghanistan has been on a steady decline since 2011 and there is little indication that this trend will change. According to statistics prepared by Curt Tarnoff, Specialist in Foreign Affairs at the Congressional Research Service, the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of U.S. funding for Afghan Security Forces Funding from FY11 through FY16 is -19%.[117] Lack of funding exacerbates ANSF's battlefield struggles. According to Waldman, "they [the Taliban] have significant capability deficiencies, high attrition rates (the Taliban kill over 250 a month) and face huge logistical problems; they are also fragmented, financially unsustainable, and contribute to a further militarization of society."[118] ANSF is struggling financially and this challenge is going to get worse as NATO forces continue to withdraw. According to

[115] Ahmed Rashid. *Afghanistan after the War: Is Peace Possible?* The New Republic. March 2013. Accessed at. http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112680/afghanistan-after-war.
[116] Matt Waldman. *System Failure: the underlying causes of US policy making errors in Afghanistan.* International Affairs Vol. 89 Issue 4. July 12, 2013. (842). Accessed at. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12047/epdf and Jane Perlez. *$16 Billion in Civilian Aid pledged to Afghanistan, With Conditions.* The New York Times. July 8, 2012. Accessed at. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/09/world/asia/afghanistan-is-pledged-16-billion-for-civilian-needs.html.
[117] Kenneth Katzman. *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy.* Congressional Research Service. April 27, 2015. (74). Accessed at. https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf.
[118] Matt Waldman. *System Failure: the underlying causes of US policy making errors in Afghanistan.* International Affairs Vol. 89 Issue 4. July 12, 2013. (828). Accessed at. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12047/epdf.

NATO, "The United States will continue to manage the Fund [Afghanistan National Army Trust Fund] until 2017; any extension of this mandate after 2017 will be subject to future decisions."[119] Since the Afghan government cannot adequately fund ANSF the alternative to negotiating with the Taliban will result in a Taliban victory. The risk associated with engaging in unsuccessful negotiations (i.e. negotiations that do not achieve agreeable terms) is minimal compared to a Taliban controlled Afghanistan. The Taliban has publicly recognized a willingness to consider pursuing peace and therefore the U.S. should pursue negotiations with the Taliban to end the war in Afghanistan.[120]

The Alternative to Negotiating will Jeopardize Afghans' Civil Liberties

I will use my ancillary finding (Afghans, specifically women, will be worse off if the U.S. does not negotiate) to adjudicate the following arguments: 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33. The unifying theme of these arguments is that if negotiations succeed the outcome will not be desirable for most Afghans. These arguments seek to demonstrate that negotiations will result in trade-offs that will compromise women's rights and threaten U.S. national security (i.e. Taliban fighters will return to the insurgency after prisoner exchanges). However, my findings indicate that a Taliban regime in Afghanistan is a much worse alternative than negotiating. Negotiating a settlement will preserve the Afghan constitution and promote the protection of Afghan civil liberties. The alternative to negotiating will result in continued bloodshed and a Taliban victory. This potential likelihood threatens Afghans' human rights and the current constitution. I will use the following three findings to adjudicate my assessment: First, a Taliban victory will jeopardize Afghans' civil liberties. Second, the majority of Afghans are better off with

[119] North Atlantic Treaty Organization. *ANA Trust Fund.* NATO. 2015. Accessed at. http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_02/20150227_2015-02-ANA-TF.pdf.
[120] Christopher D. Kolenda. *"A Signal or Noise? The Afghan Taliban's Interest in Peace".* Foreign Policy. December 16, 2014 Accessed at. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/16/a-signal-or-noise-the-afghan-talibans-interest-in-peace/.

the current administration than with a Taliban regime, and third, the Taliban is willing to preserve civil liberties as a negotiation compromise.

The Taliban regime in the 1990s provides useful context for analyzing how a Taliban return to power will impact Afghans' civil liberties. To describe the Taliban regime as oppressive is an understatement. The quality of life for women, children, and other marginalized citizens during the 1990s was very poor because the Taliban enforced oppressive laws. For example, "the Taliban authorized its "Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice"… [to] prohibit women from attending school or working outside the home, except in health care, and it publicly executed some women for adultery."[121] This form of control created a barrier for progress for all Afghans. Basic needs such as healthcare and education were not the Taliban's priority. In 1998 the Journal of the American Medical Association provided the following assessment, "the current health and human rights status of women described in this report suggests that the combined effects of war-related trauma and human rights abuses by Taliban officials have had a profound effect on Afghan women's health."[122] This report indicates the Taliban inflicted lasting scars not only from physical trauma but also from mental trauma, reporting that the majority of women interviewed possessed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.[123] This type of oppressive treatment coupled with decades of war creates a humanitarian crisis that cannot be fixed overnight. Women's healthcare is extremely important for Afghan society and for future generations of Afghans. Particularly, maternal healthcare is critical for the early development of children and under the

[121] Kenneth Katzman. *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*. Congressional Research Service. April 27, 2015. (5). Accessed at. https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf.
[122] Zohra Rasekh, MPH et. al. *Women's Health and Human Rights in Afghanistan.* The Journal of the American Medical Association. August 5, 1998. Accessed at. http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=187827.
[123] Ibid.

Taliban, maternal healthcare was deplorable. According to the State Department, "under Taliban rule, women were given only the most rudimentary access to health care and medical care…Afghanistan has the world's second worst rate of maternal death during childbirth. About 16 out of every 100 women die giving birth."[124] These statistics are concerning but conditions have improved under the current Afghan administration. Although the current administration has made progress in improving civil liberties, if the Taliban wins the war this progress will be compromised.

The majority of Afghan women are better off today than they were under the Taliban regime. This is largely in part due to legislation passed by the Afghan government after the defeat of the Taliban. For example, "approved by January 2004 "Constitutional Loya Jirga" (CLJ)… gives men and women equal rights under the law…"[125] Creating a constitution that recognizes equal rights for men and women is a stark contrast from the Taliban's law passed by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice. Also, constitutional recognition of equal rights is important because preserving something similar to the current Afghan constitution is one of the goals of negotiation. Negotiation will help to improve the progress all ready made by the Afghan government and it will help to institutionalize acceptance of equal rights for men and women in Afghan culture. Vincent Icheku, senior lecturer in ethics and law, London South Bank University, describes an example of post-Taliban progress: "Since the defeat of the Taliban, the international community in collaboration with the new Afghan Government has initiated a number of policy measures aimed at improving the employment situation of Afghan women. For example, the Bonn Agreement called for

[124] Bureau or Democracy, and Human Rights and Labor. *The Taliban's War Against Women.* U.S. Department of State. November 17, 2011. Accessed at. http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/6185.htm.
[125] Kenneth Katzman. *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*. Congressional Research Service. April 27, 2015. (9). Accessed at. https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf.

specific attention to the role of women and established a dedicated government structure for this purpose, the Ministry of Women's Affairs."[126] In addition to this government ministry, the Afghan administration has appointed women to positions of leadership within the government. According to Katzman, "the cabinet has four women—more than at any time since the Communist era. Women head the ministries of: Labor, Social Affairs, and Martyred and Disabled Affairs; Counter-Narcotics; Higher Education; and Women's Affairs."[127] The majority of women are better represented under the current administration then they were under the Taliban regime.

Improving access to education is another example of the strides the current Afghan administration has made. Katzman explains that, "among the most notable accomplishments since 2001 is that women are performing jobs that were rarely held by women even before the Taliban came to power in 1996. The civil service is 19% female…women serve in the police force and military, and the first Afghan female pilots arrived for training in the United States in July 2011."[128] Access to education creates better job opportunities for women and as Katzman described, today women are holding more diverse jobs now then under the Taliban regime.[129] Sudarsan Ragahvan, Kabul bureau chief, The Washington Post, recognizes that the constitution is a driving force in improving women's rights, which is evident from the fact that significantly more girls are in school today then during the 1990s.[130] This is an important trend that the U.S. must encourage. The U.S. can promote equal rights in Afghanistan by negotiating with the

[126] Vincent Icheku. *Post-Taliban measure to eliminate gender discrimination in employment.* Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal. United Nations. Vol. 30 Issue 7. June 2011. (563).
[127] Kenneth Katzman. *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy.* Congressional Research Service. April 27, 2015. (11). Accessed at. https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf.
[128] Ibid. (14).
[129] Ibid. (14).
[130] Sudarsan Raghavan. *The Unlikely Life of Afghanistan's First Female Taxi Driver.* The Washington Post. February 26, 2015. Accessed at. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/the-unlikely-life-of-afghanistans-first-female-taxi-driver/2015/02/26/2b030c1a-b092-11e4-bf39-5560f3918d4b_story.html.

Taliban. Most women are better represented under today's constitution and a Taliban victory would diminish that progress. Also, the Taliban has voiced a willingness to consider recognizing something similar to today's constitution during negotiations. According to Ragahvan, "it [the Taliban] said it was willing to accept a government system that "gives the right of education for women and men" and allows "freedom of expression."[131] The U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban because the majority women will be better off under the current administration then under a Taliban regime.

Summary of Analysis

The U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban, starting as soon as possible, because ANSF cannot win the war against the Taliban. A Taliban victory is likely and this outcome will compromise Afghanistan's prospects for peace. My analysis shows that ANSF is losing the war and this finding is paramount to my policy recommendation. I demonstrated this by adjudicating all the existing arguments for and against negotiation using the following four principal findings and one ancillary finding: 1) ANSF and police casualties are unsustainable, 2) the Taliban is gaining new territory, 3) the Taliban leadership infrastructure is cohesive and functional enough to win the war, 4) U.S. funding for ANSF will not be available indefinitely, and 5) women and other marginalized citizens will be worse off than today if the Taliban wins the war. Many of the existing arguments against negotiation implicitly assume that there is a better alternative to negotiation such as fighting. However, I have demonstrated that ANSF is losing the war and therefore fighting is not a viable option for preserving U.S. vital interests in Afghanistan. The Taliban must have a reason to end the conflict. Negotiations

[131] Sudarsan Raghavan. *Taliban open to peace talks but only if all U.S. forces leave Afghanistan.* The Washington Post. May 4, 2015. Accessed at. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/taliban-open-to-peace-talks-but-only-if-all-us-forces-leave-afghanistan/2015/05/04/15ea7d58-f26a-11e4-bca5-21b51bbdf93e_story.html.

will offer a path for the Taliban to establish legitimate political representation, which creates an incentive for the Taliban to cease fighting. Negotiation is the best option for the U.S. to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

America's longest war will end in defeat, but it is still possible to achieve a tolerable outcome to the war in Afghanistan. The United States must decide the best alternative for ending the war and it must decide now. This study analyzes whether or not the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban to end the war in Afghanistan and the implications this decision has on U.S. national security. Paramount to making this decision is considering which option best preserves the following U.S. interests: 1) the Taliban renounces violence, 2) the Taliban breaks ties with Al-Qaeda and any other international terrorist organization, and 3) the Taliban accepts something similar to today's Afghan constitution. Protecting these interests will promote stability and peace in Afghanistan and Central Asia, which is a U.S. national security concern. An unstable Afghanistan attracts international terrorist organizations, such as ISIL, and it threatens regional neighbors that possess nuclear material/weapons. Also, preventing instability in Afghanistan by negotiating will contribute to meaningful progress in Central Asia.

The impending withdrawal of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan has created a resurgence of interest over the debate of whether or not to negotiate with the Taliban to end the war in Afghanistan, as well as the larger policy debate concerning recommendations for ending the war. The U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban, as soon as possible, because the U.S. will lose leverage in the negotiation process once their

withdrawal is complete. U.S. policymakers should recognize the urgency for making progress on the negotiation front because ANSF is losing the war and emerging threats, such as ISIL, are establishing roots within Afghanistan's borders. The potential for this situation to get worse is likely and the impact is grave.

The majority of arguments against negotiation implicitly assume that ANSF can win the war; however that is no longer the case. The following evidence indicates that ANSF is losing the war: ANSF is suffering unsustainable casualties, the Taliban is gaining new territory, the Taliban leadership is cohesive enough to win the war, and Kabul cannot fund ANSF nor will the U.S. fund ANSF at levels necessary to win the war. My findings demonstrate that ANSF cannot win the war, nor is it likely that it can reverse this trend. If ANSF loses the war then Afghanistan will likely devolve into something similar to the 1990s. A Taliban victory will compromise the chances for promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan, which threatens U.S. national security. A Taliban victory will jeopardize the following goals the U.S. set to accomplish in Afghanistan: ending violence, Taliban breaks ties with Al-Qaeda, and preserving the Afghan constitution. A Taliban regime will likely increase instability in Afghanistan and in Central Asia. The U.S. cannot risk Afghanistan becoming increasingly unstable or even worse, becoming a failed state. The U.S. has limited options for preventing this, but negotiating with the Taliban is the best alternative to promoting peace in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

U.S Policy Recommendations and Implications

Policy Recommendations

The U.S. should promote good governance in Afghanistan. I recommend that the U.S. should pursue a strategy of negotiating with the Taliban in order to promote good

governance. The preservation of U.S. vital interests and the encouragement of peace and stability in Afghanistan are the goals of negotiation. A perpetual state of conflict inhibits Afghanistan's ability to promote good governance and increases its role as a conduit for illicit transnational activity in Central Asia. Negotiating with the Taliban promotes good governance in the following ways: 1) ends violence, 2) protects equal rights by preserving the constitution, 3) promotes stability by breaking ties with international terrorist organizations, and 4) develops a more representative government by creating a legitimate role for the Taliban in the government. These goals are critical to pursuing a healthy and functioning government. The alternative to negotiating will not promote stability in Afghanistan, rather it will likely result in continued conflict and eventually a Taliban victory. For this reason the U.S. should negotiate with the Taliban, as soon as possible, to end the war in Afghanistan.

In addition to negotiating with the Taliban, the U.S. should encourage Afghanistan to pursue the following strategies for promoting good governance:

Government

- Promote free and fair elections.
- Reduce government corruption.
- Improve social services, such as access to clean water and electricity.
- Develop and improve infrastructure.

Economy

- Encourage healthy trade relationships.

Education

- Improve access to education.

Military/Security Forces

- Promote stability and security.
- Reduce corruption.
- Develop regional partnerships.

Policy Implications

Negotiating with the Taliban is controversial, which is not likely to change, but it is the best policy for preserving U.S. vital interests in Afghanistan. Many politicians and Americans would rather cut their losses and move on. However, if the U.S. pursues this option the situation in Afghanistan will not improve, it will only get worse. In this study I demonstrate that the Taliban is winning the war and that ANSF is incapable of reversing this trend. A Taliban victory in Afghanistan will increase instability and compromise Afghanistan's prospects for peace. This likely outcome should matter to Congress and to Americans because Afghanistan's stability impacts U.S. national security. An unstable Afghanistan attracts international terrorist organizations, such as ISIL, and it threatens regional neighbors that possess nuclear material/weapons. The U.S has paid a significant investment in blood and treasure with little progress to show for. However, the conclusion to America's longest war can end with a relatively inexpensive (compared to waging a war) and tolerable outcome. Negotiating will not break America's bank nor will it commit thousands of U.S. troops to combat, but it will encourage Afghanistan to take ownership of its path towards good governance. A functioning government relies on sustained stability and ending the conflict in Afghanistan is an essential first step in this process. The reward for negotiating far exceeds the risk.

What Does This Study Imply for the Future of Afghanistan?

This study implies that there is hope for Afghanistan and that Afghanistan should not be forgotten. Emerging threats, such as ISIL, have created a resurgence of interest over the debate regarding how best to end U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. A dangerous assumption is to draw hasty comparisons to other U.S. conflicts, such as Operation Iraqi Freedom, in deciding what the future may hold for Afghanistan. However, looking at the specific situation in Afghanistan, a Taliban victory appears likely and despite ANSF's inability to change this, the U.S. can help Afghanistan achieve a better outcome to the war. The U.S. can make a policy decision today, which will improve Afghanistan's prospects for peace and stability: negotiate with the Taliban, as soon as possible, to end the war in Afghanistan.

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