Peace Talks between the Taliban and the US, Afghan, and Pakistani governments – An Investigation of the Obstacles to Improved Relations, and of the Prospects for Peace?

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Contents

Abstract 1
Introduction 5
Chapter 1: Background 7
Chapter 2: US attitudes towards the peace talks 12
Chapter 3: Islamabad and the Taliban 17
Chapter 4: Kabul and the Afghan Taliban 25
Chapter 5: The Taliban’s factions and structure 31
Chapter 6: Success and Challenges In Relations to the Peace Talks 35
Conclusion 38
Bibliography 43
日本語概要 49
Thesis Topic: “Peace Talks between the Taliban and the US, Afghan, and Pakistani governments – An Investigation of the Obstacles to Improved Relations, and of the Prospects for Peace?”

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Abstract

This thesis will investigate the obstacles to improved relations between the Taliban and the US, Afghan, and Pakistani governments, and as well as the prospects for peace between these groups. The research starts from the 21st of May 2012 until the present day. The research starts from the date of the Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan, when the NATO Heads of State and Government of Afghanistan and Nations set out a plan called the “Transformation Decade beyond 2014” for Afghanistan. This plan remarked that the transition of powers in Afghanistan would end at the end of 2014. This thesis will attempt to address the question of why Afghanistan and Pakistan have failed to agree on a peace treaty with the Taliban. Firstly, this thesis will discuss

the origins of the Taliban and refer to the background to the present situation, where peace talks have come to a deadlock due to the lack of an agreed blueprint for the resolution of their disagreements. Next, this research will investigate four key factors, which play a vital role in influencing peace talks with the Taliban. These factors include a) US attitudes towards the peace process, b) the relationship between Islamabad and the Pakistani Taliban (‘Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan’ (TTP)), c) political conflict and tensions between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban, and d) the existence of factions inside the Taliban. The research will examine the successes and the challenges of peace talks until the present day. The research will use a variety of sources, for example primary and secondary sources such as diplomatic documents, documents from international organizations and governments, journal articles, textbooks, and news articles, in order to analyse the influence of each factor. Following this, the thesis will, based on the research’s findings, investigate whether there is a possibility of reaching a peace agreement or a ceasefire in the region, and discuss proposals for peaceful relations.
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Map 1

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Introduction

The thesis consists of seven chapters. In Chapter One, the thesis will discuss the historical background with regards to the Taliban, the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This chapter will describe why peace talks with the Taliban came about. In Chapter Two, this research will examine what is arguably the most important factor in negotiations between the Taliban and Afghanistan and Pakistan i.e. the role of the US and its support for the peace process. Then, in Chapter Three, Pakistan’s role will be investigated because the country’s territory includes a key tribal area (the Federally Administered Tribal Area) and a Taliban powerbase, which Islamabad has struggled to control. Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and foreign countries such as the US in relation to the Taliban have also often been quite difficult. Chapter Four will examine relations between the Afghan Taliban\(^5\) and Kabul as well as the public opinion in Afghanistan. It compares each argument made by the Taliban and the government in terms of the legitimacy of future governance in the country. In 2016 the US will withdraw from Afghanistan, and the future of the country is still unclear. Thus, this chapter will analyse the present situation. Also Chapter Five will examine the various factions within the Taliban. Every faction has each own goals despite being part of a large organization, and this chapter will examine whether the Taliban is fragmented or not. The relationship between these factions and the progress of the peace process will be investigated. After that, Chapter Six will summarize the successes and challenges of

\(^{5}\) This research will discuss the differences between the Afghan Taliban and other groups in Chapter 1.
the peace talks with the Taliban. Let us examine the possibility of an agreement with the Taliban, and, what the obstacles to peace are. In Chapter Seven, in the conclusion, following these analyses, this chapter will investigate the possibility of a peaceful relationship with the Taliban. The thesis will look at the ways that the Afghan, Pakistani, and the US governments, as well as the international community, might be able to improve relations with the Taliban. Examples might include strategies for advancing the peace talks between and within the relevant groups, or at least coordinating their activities in ways least likely to create conflict.
Chapter 1: Background

Who are the Taliban?

The word ‘Taliban’ is used in different contexts in many different sources but each definition is ambiguous, so in this research, it will define and distinguish between the ‘Afghan Taliban’ and ‘Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan (TTP).’ The Afghan Taliban is the main stream of the Taliban that is an enemy of the Afghan government, and foreign troops in Afghanistan, and emerged in 1994 from earlier conflicts. The TTP, which is officially an enemy of the Pakistani government, emerged from a Pakistani Taliban movement, which first developed around 2004, when Islamabad first discovered the presence of terrorist groups inside Pakistan. The TTP emerged in Pakistan in December 2007 and was led by Baitullah Mehsud, who headed a loosely connected militant group known as the Pakistani Taliban from 2007 until his death by a US drone strike in August 2009. After Baitullah’s death, the TTP was led by Hakimullah Mehsud, who became the leader of the Pakistani Taliban from August 2009 until his death by a US drone strike on November 1st 2013. The TTP has grown stronger in recent years.

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6 The word ‘Taliban’ means ‘students’ in Arabic. According to Antony Best, ‘The term was used to originally refer to the fundamentalist Muslim militia of Pashtun Afghans and Pakistanis that overthrew the Afghan ethnic coalition government of Ahmad Shah Masood in 1998.’ (Best ed. et al. 2008, p. 467)
Historical background (1979 - 2001)

From 1979 to 1989, the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan in order to support a communist government. Shortly after the Soviet invasion in December 1979, a “proxy war”9 began in the context of the Cold War and lasted from December 1979 until February 1989. This conflict broke out between the Soviet forces and the mujahedeen.10 The US, China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia supported the mujahedeen. According to Peter Calvocoressi,11 despite ‘the UN issued annual pleas for a ceasefire’ from 1982,

“*Pakistan and the United States were unco-operative so long as the mujaheddin appeared to have a good chance of overthrowing the communist regime in Kabul, and the Reagan administration was also reluctant to forgo the advantages of exploiting the discomfiture which Moscow had brought upon itself by invading.*”12

After the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988-89, a civil war broke out between various militant groups in the period from 1989 until 1996.13 During the civil war, the Taliban14 seized control of Kabul in 1996 and remained in power until December 2001. December 2001 was the time that US-led forces invaded the country in response to the Taliban’s links to the terrorists, al-Qaeda, which carried out the September 11th 2001 (‘9/11’) attacks in the US. The Taliban government sheltered and

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9 ‘Proxy war’ is ‘a war instigated by a major power which does not itself becomes involved.’ (Oxford Dictionaries).
In this context, the US and the Soviet Union were ‘major powers’ and the proxy war was over Afghanistan.
11 Peter Calvocoressi is a distinguished figure in the field of International Relations. During the Second World War he worked in Ultra intelligence at Bletchley Park and later attended the Nuremberg trials.
12 Calvocoressi (2008), p. 497
13 Almost all of the militant groups emerged from the mujahedeen in the Afghan war.
14 In this chapter, ‘Taliban’ means ‘the Afghan Taliban.’ As the TTP (the Pakistani Taliban) is a faction of the Taliban, it will discuss this in Chapters 3 and 5.
supported al-Qaeda inside Afghanistan and the border tribal areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan (in particular the FATA region). After 9/11, with the co-operation of the government in Islamabad, Pakistan was regarded by the Bush administration (in office from January 20th 2001 until January 20th 2009) as being on the frontline in the ‘war on terror’. As a result, the US and Pakistani governments co-operated in searching for terrorist groups in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Pakistani government, however, maintains close links with the Taliban in order to keep open the energy and trade routes to neighbouring countries to the west of Pakistan instead of India, which is the largest market in South Asia. The Pakistani intelligence organization, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has had a secret link with the Taliban since they emerged in the 1990s. Pakistan thought that the foreign policy had to be changed from supporting the Taliban to co-operating with the US because it was better to co-operate with international forces than to support the suspected terrorists: the Taliban. If Islamabad refused a request from the US President Bush after 9/11 in 2001, Pakistan would be condemned as a state sponsor of terrorism. However, the Pakistani army had not started to attack the FATA area, which is a base for the terrorist groups, until March 2004. After 9/11, inside the Pakistani government there was a struggle between pro-western groups and groups that opposed the war on terror. Consequently,

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15 The ‘war on terror’ is a term used to describe the American-led global counterterrorism campaign launched in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001.
16 This thesis will refer to the details about the “secret link” between the ISI and the Taliban in Chapter 3.
Islamabad and the Taliban had been friendly until 9/11, then they officially became an enemies of one another.

The Taliban today (after the US-led invasion in 2001)

On October 7th, 2001, US-led military forces invaded Afghanistan. By the first week of December 2001, the Taliban regime had collapsed. The US major combat operation in Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban regime and al-Qaeda began on October 7th, 2001. It continued until May 1st, 2003, when then-Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld announced an end to “major combat operations.” The George W. Bush administration considered that they should not repeat a past failure in Afghanistan i.e. when the US departure from the region after the 1989 Soviet withdrawal caused “chaos” in Afghanistan. However, the US has been constrained by insurgents until December 2014, because Taliban members are thought to be taking refuge in Pakistan, from where they reorganized the Taliban. As a result, US efforts to reduce the number of Taliban attacks have been very difficult. High-profile attacks still occur, for example, the presidential election in 2009 and parliamentary polls in 2010 were marred by Taliban violence. Most notably, a relative of President Karzai Ahmad Wali Karzai, who was the governor of Kandahar, was killed during the Taliban campaign against prominent figures in July 2011. The worst attack on civilians was in January 2014, when 21 civilians (including

18 BBC News (01/11/2013), ‘Who are the Taliban?’.
13 foreigners) were killed in a Taliban suicide squad attack on a restaurant in Kabul’s diplomatic quarter. Foreign troops and the Afghan National Army are still attacked by roadside bombs. As the US and foreign countries would not like to continue this war or to increase the foreign death toll, they 1) have to talk to establish a ceasefire with the Taliban, which is the most influential opponent, and 2) have to withdraw from Afghanistan. The latter, the plan of withdrawal, is in progress. NATO-led ISAF completed its operations at the end of 2014 and the US will commence ‘a full-scale withdrawal’ at the end of 2016. However, the former objective, peace talks with the Taliban, is still inconclusive.

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21 Afghan National Army is a name of Afghanistan forces under the Ministry of Defence and General Staff. See also ‘Afghanistan National Army (ANA)’. [http://www.understandingwar.org/afghanistan-national-army-ana#Organization](http://www.understandingwar.org/afghanistan-national-army-ana#Organization)

Chapter 2: US attitudes towards the peace talks

Before discussing US attitudes towards the peace talks, this section will identify US national interests vis-à-vis Afghanistan. According to Stephan D. Biddle, the US has two vital strategic interests in Afghanistan: the first is ‘that Afghanistan not become a base for militants to attack the West’ and the second is ‘that it not become a base for destabilizing the country’s neighbours.’ The first interest means the US should attempt to reduce the threat of terrorist attacks and prevent Afghanistan from becoming a “safe haven” that could enhance a terrorist group’s abilities to attack, such as Al-Qaeda. The second interest is to stabilize the country and to prevent radical extremists from becoming more powerful in Central Asia and the Middle East. According to a Gallup poll, in terms of public opinion in the US, 93 per cent of the population justified and supported the US military intervention in Afghanistan in 2002, not long after the September 11th attacks in 2001. The number of supporters, however, has declined since then, and as of February 2014, only 49 per cent approve of the US presence in Afghanistan. The US public therefore seeks the withdrawal of US forces as

23 Stephen D. Biddle is adjunct senior fellow for defence policy at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University.
soon as possible.\textsuperscript{27} The reason for this change in opinion is that the Afghan war (since the October 2001 US-led invasion)\textsuperscript{28} has become a protracted war. The shift in US public opinion also follows in the wake of bad news from the battlefield, including news about American troops who have killed Afghan civilians or about the number of US military deaths.\textsuperscript{29} US citizens were somewhat satisfied with the result of the US attack on and killing of Osama Bin Laden, the head of al-Qaeda, in May 2011, and that the US had also succeeded in wiping out al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. However, US troops are still stationed in Afghanistan and have taken heavy casualties. Their presence has also cost the US a huge amount of money. In terms of US foreign policy towards terrorist groups including al-Qaeda and the Taliban, public opinion has slightly changed due to changes within the US government. In this situation, the Obama administration (in office from January 20\textsuperscript{th} 2009 until the present day) follows the central goals of US foreign and defence policy: to try and secure the safety and prosperity of the American people, and to set a timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan. Moreover, to ensure peace in Central Asia, the US keeps their troops in Afghanistan to train the Afghan army in order to deter other forces.\textsuperscript{30} Therefore it is clear that there are two vital

\textsuperscript{27} This article also referred to 60\% of American thought that Afghan war is ‘not worth fighting’ in April 2012. Washington Post (21/03/2012), ‘Afghan people once supported war, but do they now?’: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/behind-the-numbers/post/afghan-people-once-supported-war-but-do-they-now/2012/03/07/gfOAf9gQ5S_blog.html (Accessed on 20/12/2014)
interests in Afghanistan: to reduce the threat of successful terrorist attacks and to prevent the conflict from spreading in Central Asia.\(^{31}\)

**US diplomatic policy towards Pakistan**

Next, in order to examine US attitudes towards peace talks with the Taliban, it is important to look at the US approach to another influential actor: Pakistan. Pakistan has an interest in Afghanistan and a problem related to Taliban groups inside Pakistan territory.\(^{32}\) The Pakistani government and US share a common interest in maintaining peace and stability in South Asia, but the two countries often experience strained relations\(^{33}\) because of accidents which often relate to the killing of Pakistan soldiers.

One accident was when NATO aircraft killed 25 soldiers in air strikes,\(^{34}\) or suspicion of interference in investigations about terrorist activities.\(^{35}\) These incidents often relate to a US drone strikes, which aimed to attack the Taliban or al-Qaeda members but accidentally bombed civilians in Pakistan. Amnesty International have expressed concern about US drone strikes that have killed many civilians.\(^{36}\) Also, Pakistan

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31 Ibid, p.4.
32 More details about Pakistan will be explained in Chapter 3.
resented the US intrusion into its territory when an American assault team carried out the assassination of Osama bin Laden. A suspected link between terrorist groups and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) also affects the strained relations between the US and the Pakistani governments. ISI does not always share intelligence with the US and it sheltered Osama Bin-Laden, and besides, the ISI is alleged to be using the Taliban as a militant group against the US in Afghanistan in order to construct a Pakistan-friendly state. Accordingly, the US and Pakistan are in a struggle to improve bilateral relations and these difficulties have become an obstacle for the US in maintaining peace in Central Asia and in discussing peace talks with the Taliban.

Progress, from 2001 to the present day

Lastly, this section examines the progress of US efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. Following the Bush administration’s “war on terror” policy, the US decided to try to dismantle local security structures and to try to build a strong, democratic Afghan central government and to develop the Afghan economy. The United Nations, international institutions, and US partners supported this effort. In late 2009, the Obama administration’s strategy review declared that the US was sending 30,000 additional US

forces to “reverse the Taliban’s momentum”\textsuperscript{41} and to strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan’s security forces and government. However, the US could not defeat the Taliban completely in Afghanistan. As the example in Chapter 1 showed, attacks by Taliban groups are continuing to the present day. This may indicate that there are the limits to the ‘war on terror.’ The terrorist groups can continue radical activities if they have funding, human resources, and the will to do so. The American armed responses alone cannot terminate the seemingly endless war with the Taliban. Due to the limitations of armed attacks, which only bring about more conflict, and the need to reform Afghan society by compromising with radical groups, the US decided to talk with the Taliban and to plan the withdrawal of US military forces. For example, the US and the Taliban agreed to open a direct negotiation office in Qatar in January 2012,\textsuperscript{42} and an office in Doha, Qatar’s capital was opened on 18 June, 2013.\textsuperscript{43} However, the office was closed only a month later because in the opening ceremony, the Taliban declared the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” during the raising of the Taliban flag. It was the previous name of Afghanistan during the period of Taliban rule. Karzai and the Taliban members clashed over the issue and the talks were stopped without any solution. To date, the US has promoted the process of military withdrawal but without any substantive progress in peace talks with the Taliban.

\textsuperscript{41} ibid, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{42} New York Times (28/01/2012), ‘Former Taliban Officials Say U.S. Talks Started’.
\textsuperscript{43} The content of the Doha office talks will be discussed in Chapter 4.
Chapter 3: Islamabad and the Taliban

Chapter 3 will discuss the Taliban’s relations with Pakistan as one of the obstacles to peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan is a neighbouring country of Afghanistan (to its east) and it has strong interests in Afghanistan as referred to above: in order to keep open the energy and trade routes to neighbouring countries to the west of Pakistan while minimising the power of India in the area, which has increased its influence in Afghanistan recently. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is a key factor in relations with the Afghan Taliban.

The Taliban emerged in 1994 after the Soviet occupation (1979-1989) and the Cold War era in Afghanistan. There were many tribes and ethnic groups and mistrust between each group increased as a result of the war. The Taliban consists of Pashtun tribes, and was supported by the ISI during the war period until 1989. From 1994 to 2001, when there was a period of struggle in which the Taliban fought to be in power in Kabul, ISI supported them with money, weapons, and advisers in order to win the war inside Afghanistan and to increase the influence of Pakistan in the region.

Throughout this period, the Taliban and the Pakistan government co-operation based on nationalism was conducted.

After the September 11 attacks, Pakistan became a coalition partner in the US’s

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46 ibid. p. 49.
‘war on terror’, but the ISI continued supporting the militant group. In June 2006, NATO, the Afghan executive, and US made a joint report about ISI – Taliban relations. As the report stated, ‘ISI operatives reportedly pay a significant number of Taliban living/operating in both Pakistan and Afghanistan to fight. […] A large number of those fighting are doing so under duress as a result of pressure from ISI […]’ 47 However, Pakistan’s so-called “double game” 48 has continued. In 2012, a NATO report concluded that ISI provided sanctuary, training camps, expertise and help with funding to the Taliban. 49 Although ISI could control the Afghan Taliban, the Afghan Taliban provides some assistance to, and is allied with the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), who attacks the Pakistani government. 50 According to Naeem Ahmed, who is an Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, at the University of Karachi in Pakistan, the Pakistan’s Military categorizes many insurgent groups as two types: “good” / “bad” Taliban. 51 The TTP is categorized “bad Taliban”, however, the Afghan Taliban is “good Taliban.” 52 The “bad Taliban” groups commit terrorism inside Pakistan towards the government or civilians, and then the “good Taliban” groups help to protect ‘Pakistan’s geo-strategic interests in Afghanistan and India.’ 53 The Pakistani government divides the Taliban into two types, and launched military operations only

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47 Special Security Initiative of the Policy Action Group (as cited in Hanni and Hegi, 2013, p. 8).
50 ibid.
52 ibid, p. 6.
53 ibid, p. 6.
against “bad Taliban” despite helping the “good Taliban” as a means to achieve its foreign policy objectives. In fact, thus Pakistan faces a contradictory situation: on the one hand the Pakistani government support the Taliban group for the purposes of Pakistan’s foreign interest, and on the other hand the rise of the Taliban could threaten the stability of Pakistan.

However, there has been a positive sign development with in Pakistan politics. In February 2013, the Afghan and Pakistani governments agreed to work together for peace talks in Afghan after being persuaded to do so by the British government. This is a starting point of slowly improving relations between the Afghan and Pakistani governments in terms of a peace process in Afghanistan, after the High Peace Council (HPC) issued the Peace Process Road Map to 2015 in December 2012. Pakistani foreign policy changed towards the Afghan peace process. As stated by Frederic Grare, Pakistan has promoted a bilateral reconciliation process aimed at forging a ‘power-sharing’ agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. By proceeding to these peace talks, the Pakistani government will be able to attain the

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56 The High Peace Council (HPC) is the Afghan government body set up to lead peace efforts with the Taliban. Former President Hamid Karzai appointed HPC. Refer to BBC News (19/07/2014), ‘Afghan President Karzai to boycott talks with Taliban’, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22973111 (Accessed on 08/12/2014)
following an objective: promote a relatively ‘friendly government in Kabul in order to diminish Indian influence there’.\(^{59}\) On 25 June 2014, the Government of Pakistan issued a statement entitled the “Strategic Vision of Pakistan’s Foreign Policy.” This statement said that

The first important foreign policy objective is to safeguard Pakistan’s security and eliminate the growing culture of extremism, intolerance and violence from the \([sic]\) society through concerted political and military strategies and a policy of non-interference in the affairs of other countries. Henceforth, [the] top priority will be accorded to [the] country’s own security rather than the agendas and priorities of other countries.\(^{60}\)

The Pakistani government will try to eliminate extremism and abandon the Taliban’s militarily win in Afghanistan because Islamabad is aimed at increasing the influence of the Taliban in Afghanistan politics in order to achieve Pakistani interests. Even if Pakistan does not directly support the Taliban’s military action in Afghan, nevertheless, the extent to which could control influence insurgent groups remains a problem.

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\(^{59}\) ibid, p. 3.

Domestic problems

Pakistan has a problem of domestic terrorism. The Afghan Taliban was originally supported by Pakistan to increase leverage in the region. As mentioned above, however, the Afghan Taliban supports the Pakistani Taliban, and the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) is becoming a threat to the Pakistani government. National military operations against the domestic militant groups inside Pakistan are not completely finished because these groups have reorganized themselves in a safe area in the FATA, and the government cannot enter there to carry out military actions. Not only does the TTP exist, there are also other kinds of terrorist groups in Pakistan. According to Asley J, Tellis, who is a senior associate at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in a January 2008 Congressional testimony, numerous Pakistan-related terrorist groups could be categorized into five types: ‘Sectarian’, ‘Anti-Indian’, ‘Afghan Taliban’, ‘Al-Qaeda’ and its affiliates, and the ‘Pakistani Taliban’. The Pakistani Taliban is ‘a coalition of extremist groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).’ The group aims at replacing Pakistan with an Islamic state. In order to achieve this goal, the TTP declared ‘jihad against the Pakistani state, seeks to control territory, enforces [sic] sharia, and fights [sic] NATO forces in Afghanistan.’ They blew up Islamabad’s Marriot Hotel in September 2008 and Peshawar’s Continental Hotel in 2009, and a total of at least seventy people died in these incidents. According to the Council on Foreign

61 See Map 2, p. 4
63 ibid.
Relations, ‘In a September 2011 congressional testimony, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen referred to the Haqqani network (one of the Pakistani militant groups) as a “strategic arm of Pakistani’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency.”’

Therefore, Pakistan still has an influence in the Afghan peace talks with the Taliban. Pakistan works as the group’s back supporter in order to protect Pakistani interests. Although Pakistan will use the militant groups as means of achieving their foreign policy, the government will confront the problem of to what extent they are able to control terrorist activities.

In this section, it will investigate the public opinion in Pakistan about the present situation, especially, increasing domestic terrorism and Islamabad’s policy towards eliminating extremism in Pakistan. According to Pew Research, in 2013, 98% of citizens felt threatened by terrorism; on the other hand, the number of people who feel threatened by Indian influence in Afghanistan (this is one of the most important foreign interests for the Pakistani government in relation to Afghanistan) was 59%.

Public opinion in Pakistan supports the government’s policy, and they are more fearful of domestic terrorism than foreign policy issues. The public did also not support the Taliban generally, but there are some ethnic groups who support the Taliban: for example the Pashtun tribe. 20% of them support radical activities because the citizens...

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64 ibid.
66 Of course, there is a gap between the regions. The area near the Kashmir region has a high rate of concerns about India.
misinterpret the Taliban due to the same ethnicity.\textsuperscript{67} Almost all of the Taliban members are from the Pashtun tribes and the majority of Pashtun mainly live in FATA, so the Taliban remain active in FATA. These Pashtun people feel bonds based on Pashtun ethnicity and have shared characteristics with the Taliban, however, the Taliban (TTP) has attacked Pakistani people even if they are Pashtun people, and they recruit largely from Pashtun.\textsuperscript{68} The Pashtun tribes are victims of domestic terrorism as much as other ethnic groups in Pakistan. The Taliban (TTP and Afghan Taliban) and other radical groups could use the FATA, as a powerbase because the conservative-minded residents there trust these groups and think that the Pakistani government is helpless in the FATA region. The Pakistani government’s legal system does not hold in FATA and the area is still governed by law codes that date from the British Raj.\textsuperscript{69}

The Pakistani government has attempted to eliminate extremism from the state, and has started to co-operate with Afghanistan in order to progress peace talks between the Kabul and the Afghan Taliban. However, there is no effective treatment against the rise of domestic terrorism under the present conditions. The rise of domestic terrorism was caused by the military attacks in the tribal areas in order to meet the demand of ‘war on terror’ by the US since 9/11. Thus, the Pakistani government should cease fire against the tribal areas with stop the US drone strikes. Since there is a bond between the radical


\textsuperscript{68} ibid, pp. 19-20.

\textsuperscript{69} ibid, p. 28.
group and Pashtun groups, the further military operations against tribal areas by the troops, the more hostility against Islamabad and Western countries from the insurgent groups. As well as the ceasefire against domestic insurgents, the ISI should stop funding towards the Afghan Taliban. The Afghan and Pakistani governments aim confidence building with the same goal that eliminates extremism from the regions.
Chapter 4: Kabul and the Afghan Taliban

The Afghan Taliban and Afghan government are still in a struggle against one another. In this section, it summarizes the points of each side’s argument and examines the progress of the talks. First, the Taliban argues in favour of constructing a state based on Sharia law, and of excluding foreign forces from their territory. The Afghan government, this means Karzai (Hamid Karzai had been in office December 7th 2004 until September 29th 2014) government, adopted a Western-backed policy. It relies on Western troops to secure domestic stability and to fight against terrorism. He never hoped to return to the days of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The government tried to start secret peace talks with the Taliban from 2008 to 2011, and Karzai set up a council for peace talks with the Taliban in 2010. The formation of the High Peace Council (HPC) seemed to become a first step in the peace talks. Nevertheless it could not lead to any significant agreement. Though the US also had met the Taliban to start peace talks before the Doha office opened in 2013, it has had no significant achievement. Under the present conditions, it is difficult to find an agreement in the peace talks between the Taliban and the US, Afghan, and Pakistani governments. However, the Afghan and Pakistani governments agreed to work together in peace talks in 2013. This agreement could be regard as a positive sign for the peace process in Afghanistan. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Pakistan seeks to increase their influence in Afghanistan, so they desire to participate in peace talks. In addition, the Taliban became willing to talk since the
declaration of the withdrawal plan of foreign forces in 2012. They started to reveal a change in attitude towards the talks, but still Kabul and the Taliban were not able to talk about a ceasefire and their future. On September 21st, 2014, the political battle over the next leader of Afghanistan showed signs of resolution. Two candidates agreed to share power and to sign a bilateral security agreement with the US, which allowed American troops to remain in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of foreign troops at the end of 2014. Since the beginning of this presidential election (April 5, 2014), the Taliban have continued bombing attacks repeatedly on foreign forces and on Kabul forces in order to interrupt the election. The Afghan government and its citizens are fearful of the threat posed by this group.

Several reasons for the conflict

This part investigates why the Taliban did not agree to develop peace talks, and the reasons for the Taliban feeling hostile towards the present government. There is an ideological conflict between the Taliban and the present Afghan government. The Afghan government seeks to create a pro-western country with assistance from the US and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The government also pursues the creation of a non-religious (secular) state. Although virtually the entire population is Muslim, the separation of religion and politics is adopted, such as the president and parliamentary members being elected by citizens. The recent presidential
The election in 2014 had a high voting turnout (about 50%)\(^70\) when one considers the threat of Taliban attacks.\(^71\) On the one hand, the present Afghan government policies, and on the other, the Taliban pursues strict Islamic law and tries to expel foreign troops. The Taliban is still attempting to topple the present Afghan government and to restore power to control Afghanistan as the Taliban had ruled it before.

Ethnic conflict is also one of the reasons for delayed agreement between the government and the Taliban. Inside the government, there are factions from each ethnic group. They do not hope for the victory of the Taliban group, and each group expects to have their own view accepted as national policy. In Afghanistan, there are many kinds of ethnic groups. The main ethnic groups are Pashtun, 42 per cent, and the Taliban also consist of the Pashtun people. Besides this, there are three other major ethnic groups: Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek. In total, they make up 87 per cent of the population. Not all the factions’ leaders support the president;\(^72\) and there is a risk of divisions within the Afghan government. The new President Ashraf Ghani (in office from September 29\(^{th}\) 2014 until the present day) and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah who shares power in the Afghan government. However, they lack a cabinet because of the conflict between

\(^70\) This is defined as the percentage of the voting age population that actually voted, reported by International IDEA (05/10/2011). ‘Voter turnout data for Afghanistan’. [http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=4](http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=4) (Accessed on 15/10/2014).


them.\textsuperscript{73}

In addition, as well as in Pakistan, some Afghan people (35\%) have sympathy for armed opposition groups, namely, the Taliban.\textsuperscript{74} The Pashtun have the largest following, with those expressing sympathy for this group at 42\%. However, a lot of people have no sympathy for them (71\% in urban areas, and 61\% in rural areas).\textsuperscript{75} One of the reasons for this antipathy is because the armed group has killed many innocent people and people hope to finish the war. However, this survey also shows that only a few number of people felt that the Taliban had bad intention (4\%) or deprive people’s freedom (3\%).\textsuperscript{76} A lot of people (74\%) are aware of the government’s attempts at reconciliation with the Taliban, and agree with this attempt in order to stabilize Afghan security. Insecurity is the biggest problem in the country according to the public opinion polls. Interestingly, according to polls, it does not matter whether it is a secular state or not. They would rather mix politics and religion (by means of consultation with religious leaders) than have a non-religious political system. It is showed higher rate in urban areas (71\% should be mixed) than rural areas (55\%). The Afghan people also recognize the efforts of the government’s policy in terms of development. However, Afghan civilians have more familiarity with the Taliban than the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force). Once the ISAF victimized civilians, support for the ISAF

\textsuperscript{75} ibid, p. 42.  
\textsuperscript{76} ibid, pp. 43--44.
decreased sharply and this was associated with a marked increase in support for the Taliban.\textsuperscript{77} Therefore, the Afghan government and international actors should be careful to deal with residents in order to avoid inadvertently encouraging support for the Taliban.

Kabul seeks find agreement with the Taliban in order to achieve stability. The new president Ashraf Ghani showed his intention to allow insurgents to join the existing political system. According to Scott Smith, who is Director of the Afghanistan and Central Asia Program at the United States Institute of Peace, ‘Ghani’s peace rhetoric is based on protecting the rights enshrined in the current constitution, while accepting that the constitution allows space for the contestation of various political ideas.’\textsuperscript{78} This is different from the previous President Karzai, who often had failed to negotiate with the Taliban. Ghani actively demands that the Taliban change from an armed group to a political actor.

Accordingly, the peace talks have a benefit for both the Afghan government and the public. Afghans hope to finish the war, and the government hopes to promote the reconstruction of the country without interruption by insurgents. However, ideological and ethnic differences remain within the government and the whole country. Moreover, it is need for the government that a strong people’s confidence, in order to avoid

\textsuperscript{77} Lyall, Jason, Blair, Graeme, and Imai, Kosuke (06/01/2014), ‘Afghan civilians are much more tolerant of harm from the Taliban than they are from ISAF’, LSE American Politics and Policy, Blog Entry. \url{http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/58440/} (Accessed on 27/11/2014)

separation from the government and international support. The Taliban could attract public sympathy, unless the people are satisfied with the government’s work. In particular, insecurity, corruption, and unemployment, are the most important interests for civilians. It does not matter for civilians whether the government is secular-state or not, it is the achievements of the government that count most of all.
Chapter 5: The Taliban’s factions and structure

This chapter will examine the various Taliban factions and their objectives. It will assess how the Taliban factions impact on the peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. As stated before, there are two main Taliban groups related to the Afghan peace talks: the Afghan Taliban but the TTP (Pakistani Taliban). The Afghan Taliban is supported by Pakistan, and TTP is a threat to Pakistan.\(^79\) They have different leaders; Mullah Omar who organizes the Afghan Taliban, and Mullah Fazlullah who organizes the TTP (he has been a successor of Hakimullah Mehsud since November 7, 2013). The TTP often seems to be connected to the Afghan Taliban because they both claimed Mullah Omar as a leader.\(^80\) In fact, however, these two groups have different objectives. Moreover, TTP is an umbrella organization with as many as 40 militant groups, based in Pakistan’s tribal area. Both the Afghan Taliban and the TTP use the FATA regions as a base and sanctuary. It is obvious that these groups assist in terms of offering each other as a sanctuary, training base, and funding, even if these groups are active as two distinct groups with different objectives.\(^81\) Although, often many news agencies and scholars have doubt about the nature of the relationship, these groups have a similar objective in terms of establishing an Islamic state after they topple the present...

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government. The Pakistani government would like to cut the relations between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP, but it is difficult without carrying out an appropriate military measure within the FATA.\textsuperscript{82}

Next, this chapter will examine the Afghan Taliban group’s ideology and organization. The Afghan Taliban hopes to construct a state that follows a strict version of Islamic laws. Under the former Taliban regime (1996-2001), Afghanistan experienced a difficult period. The Taliban did not permit human rights, especially women’s rights, which United Nations and NGOs cannot ignore the crime. As an organization, it can be assessed by six components: the final goal, attack objectives, funding, support, human resources, and abilities. The Afghan Taliban’s final goal is to construct an Islamic state in Afghanistan, and they have attacked foreign troops and the Afghan army and police. They have also made huge profits from opium production in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{83} The Afghan Taliban has been offered support by the Pakistani ISI. The Afghan Taliban recruits members within Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. Economic incentives are the most important reason for the youngsters who have joined the Taliban groups because of the high unemployment rate in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{84} The Afghan Taliban has much more arms such as firearms or explosives than other terrorist group in the

\textsuperscript{82} The military operations against TTP, it could not achieve cut off the Taliban network. See Ahmed 2014, p. 10.
These offensive powers are one of the reasons why the Taliban could continue insurgent attacks against the government.

Each component has a different influence on the type of terrorist attacks they carry out and on peace negotiations. Especially, this section deals with the Taliban leadership and the change the attitude of Afghanistan and Pakistani governments towards peace talks with the Taliban. Inside the organization, the leading members have large decision-making powers to engage in radical activities. In particular, the Taliban’s top leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar has an important role in peace negotiations. According to former Taliban executives, peace with the Afghan government needs an endorsement from him. It has been difficult to persuade Mohammad Omar to join the peace talks with the government. However, Pakistan, which is a sponsor of the Afghan Taliban, declared repeatedly that it supports the peace process in Afghanistan. In December 2014, after the tragedy of the Peshawar school attack by the TTP, both Afghan and Pakistani military generals agreed to co-operate against the Taliban. This followed Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s statement that ‘there would be no distinction between “good and bad” Taliban.’ In addition, Afghan President Ghani required that the Taliban should participate in Afghanistan’s present political system.

This intentions may somewhat affect the Afghan Taliban to change their mind towards

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their objectives. Although the Taliban require ‘strong Islamic justification’, obscuring any hint of surrender, the Taliban interviewee claimed that the group have flexibility towards education and health because they admit their mistakes in the past. It is necessary for the Afghan Taliban to keep public support in order to achieve their final goal to establish an Islamic state.

Accordingly, in order to succeed in peace talks, negotiations should involve the Taliban leader (or at least, his declaration of support for the talks), and the Afghan and Pakistani governments should take co-operate drastic measures to prevent terrorism. As the Global Terrorism Index report indicated terrorism correlates with ‘group grievances’ and ‘social hostilities’. The Afghan government should therefore increase political legitimacy and trust from the people. Also, Islamabad should co-operate closely with Kabul rather than inflame the Afghan Taliban’s grievances against the Afghan government.

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89 ibid. p. 13,14.
Chapter 6: Success and Challenges In Relations to the Peace Talks

This chapter summarizes the recent progresses of the peace talks between the Taliban and the US, Afghan, and Pakistani governments. Even though the ideal goal and greatest concern of the Afghan government is to secure the lives of its citizens, in general, the peace talks did not really prove effective as they failed to bring about a cease of the terrorist attacks in the country. Even the latest talks held in Doha with the Taliban reached a deadlock in July 2013 and new attacks ensued. Therefore, rather than as a definite resolution of the conflict, this chapter defines success as an improvement as far as the situation related to the peace talks is concerned.

In this particular circumstance we can decidedly define the change of attitudes of the governments involved as a significant improvement. If until 2009 Kabul, which co-operates with the US, had taken military action and launched strong attacks on the Taliban, as a result of the failure of these policies, ever since then the US has prompted the adoption of a dialogue policy towards the insurgent groups. Following the US strategy, former Afghan President Karzai created the HPC in 2010 in order to start talks with the Taliban. Although the US’s dialogue aimed at ‘exit’ their operation in Afghanistan, Kabul aimed at the reconstruction. These two strategies are similar but have different objectives. After the start of the negotiations in May 2012, NATO

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93 Ibid.
countries agreed to withdraw the ISAF from Afghan soil by the end of 2014. In accord with the US’s changed attitude towards the Taliban, the new Afghanistan President Ghani recognized the political status of the Taliban as well.94 These changes seem to be the result of reflection on the past failures by both the US and Afghan governments. The Pakistani government has formed a co-operation agreement with the Afghan government has recently in order to deal with the extremism. Islamabad came to recognize that the relationship with the insurgent groups caused problems. Since the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban currently share the FATA as a sanctuary, which for Pakistan means that the “good” and “bad” Taliban are joining hands with one another, the relationship between Islamabad and the Afghan Taliban is gradually becoming ‘troublesome.’95 Meanwhile, the Afghan Taliban has started to recognize the negative consequences of some of their most unpopular policies, like banning women’s education and denying their rights. Thus, they have begun to gradually allow girls to have an education. This change of approach, which uses dialogue instead of violent confrontation, has played an important role in creating a change for the better.

While on hand these changes are reassuring, on the other, there are still many difficulties in reaching an agreement between the US, Afghan, and Pakistani governments and the Taliban. Unchanged policies and inside discords are the main

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94 Recent report stated President Ghani offered the Taliban posts in the new Afghan government, but which was rejected due to his signing of security arrangement with the US and lack of discussion on the constitution and immunity from prosecution. *The Diplomat* (10/01/2015), ‘Taliban Reject Afghan Cabinet Positions’. http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/taliban-reject-afghan-cabinet-positions/?utm_content=bufferf5909&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer (accessed on 10/01/2015)

challenges for the achievement of peace: notwithstanding the decision of the NATO countries to withdraw their ISAF from Afghanistan by 2014, the US army will remain stationed in the country beyond that term, as practical agreements with the Taliban could not be reached until now. This policy is likely to end up in a call for the war against the foreign troops by the insurgent groups. To complicate matters Washington has little capacity and intention to deal with the reconstruction of Afghanistan due to the lack of public support. Moreover, the Afghan government has to deal with an ethnic conflict inside the country. This circumstance is causing a lack of coordination as far as the actions of the government. Most notably, Pakistan’s ISI remains connected to the Afghan Taliban despite the TTP’s harsh attacks in the country: that is why Pakistan has ended up not showing practical efforts in support of the peace talks between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban. As for the Taliban group, at present, there is a lack of direct negotiation itself between the Kabul and the Taliban despite President Ghani’s call for talks.96 Furthermore, in order for the talks to advance and be successful, the top leader of the organization’s intervention is a necessary requisite.

96 *Times of India* (31/10/2014), ‘Afghan president invites Taliban for peace talks’.  
Conclusion

Washington’s strategies aim to prevent terrorism from spreading. In order to achieve this goal, the US army and ISAF have been stationed in Afghanistan to fill the political vacuum in the region and have undertaken the training of the Afghan army and police. However as time went by the US public started losing interest and withdrawing their support to the Afghan war, which became a low-priority operation: consequently, the reconstruction passed from being the final goal of the campaign to only represent a step of the withdrawal process. Moreover, a series of victimization and the inability to hold effective talks with the Taliban made the American lose their motivation to win the ‘war on terror.’ Besides, the death of Osama Bin Laden in 2011 made the US public feel that the mission had been accomplished. Nevertheless, Afghanistan is still facing a serious ideological conflict with the Taliban but, as the government’s ranks include people of many different ethnicities with different opinions, it is difficult for the country to devise effective and coherent strategies against the insurgent attacks and initiate effective peace talks with the Taliban. Moreover, the government also has to deal with citizens’ ingenuous support for the Taliban often mistakenly believed to share their same identity and goals.

To achieve a compromise, ever since 2010 the Afghan government and the US have adopted a policy dialogue, which may actually prove effective in solving the never-ending war in Afghanistan. The switch to a strategy based on dialogue has led
both the Pakistani government and the Afghan Taliban to change their attitude. As far as Pakistan is concerned, the country has had to face domestic terrorism ever since the national army started to assist the US on the ‘war on terror.’ The military attacks against the tribal areas of the country angered the TTP. To try to solve the issue, the Pakistani government has changed its strategy from using radical groups as arms of power to achieve diplomatic goals to exercising stricter control over the extremism with severe military attacks. However the strategy turned out to be a failure. To reach a resolution of the conflict, the US and Afghan government have repeatedly urged Pakistani support the peace talks with the Afghan Taliban. Although in Pakistan a dialogue policy has not yet been taken into consideration to solve the issue with terrorism, achieving an agreement with the Afghan Taliban may improve the conflict in Pakistan.

Arguably, the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban need four components in order to be successful: Kabul’s initiative, the US’s positive participation in the talks, closer co-operation between Kabul and Islamabad and positive support by the Taliban leader. However, arranging an appropriate negotiating table is not an easy task due to a lack of positive and comprehensive approaches from all the stakeholders. Women’s opinions should be taken into consideration as well for the reconstruction in Afghanistan, but for now the top priority is granting the people’s safety, abiding by the principle according to which the right to live should precede any other. At present, it is necessary for the US not to take a strong initiative, but to just
support the peace talks, as it is now fundamental for Afghanistan’s future stability to deal with the issue with its own strength. To the purpose of the issue it should not be forgotten that stopping the Afghan Taliban’s terrorist attacks is way more important for the Afghan reconstruction than for the US’s exit strategy from the area, as the Afghan Taliban’s objective is not to attack the US or other foreign countries but to gain control of Afghanistan. In this light a strong involvement of the Western countries would probably cause the insurgents to feel pressured and cornered, possibly leading to more outbreaks of violence. If President Ghani can settle the arguments inside the government and Islamabad manages to make the ISI support the peace talks in Afghanistan, the talks between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban may achieve an actual agreement. This success would also probably lead to a solution as far as the TTP terrorist attacks are concerned. In this situation the international community has the duty to help the negotiations by reporting correct information on the Taliban’s organization, ideology, and capacity, in order not to lead the insurgents to drop the talks. Of course, under the Afghan government’s initiative, the UN and other foreign countries should co-operate in inflicting sanctions to the Taliban for illegal drug trade and arms trafficking. To achieve a perfect agreement, the peace plan should be reorganized on the basis of ‘the peace process roadmap to 2015’. It should focus on protecting the civilians’ safety as well as women’s rights. For the conflict to reach a settlement, the stakeholders should on one hand try to understand the terrorist groups’ new objectives, and on the
other, be ready to start peace talks with an open-minded and positive attitude.
Thesis Topic: “Peace Talks between the Taliban and the US, Afghan, and Pakistani governments – An Investigation of the Obstacles to Improved Relations, and of the Prospects for Peace?”

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Supervisor: Dr. Senan Fox
Submission Date: __________
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