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Degree of Master of International Studies

(International Area Studies)

**Toward a Negotiated Settlement in Afghanistan;
“Challenges and Lessons from history”**

August, 2016

Development Cooperation Policy Program

Graduate School of International Studies

Seoul National University

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Toward a Negotiated Settlement in Afghanistan; “Challenges and Lessons from history”

A thesis presented

by

HAMID ABDULHAI FORMULI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of International Studies

**Graduate School of International Studies
Seoul National University
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Abstract

Toward a Negotiated Settlement in Afghanistan; Challenges and Lessons from history

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Since the end of WWII, insurgency became the most affluent form of armed conflict. According to existent data; almost half of Insurgency cases have been ended through a negotiated settlement. Considering Challenging political and security transitions as well as unstable economic conditions, the Afghan government and its partners reached to a conclusion that a political settlement offers the best solution to end the conflict in Afghanistan. While a negotiated settlement becomes more and more desirable, prospects of achieving it, gets more doubtful.

This paper assess multiple challenges facing Afghan peace process and drawing lesson learned from history that could inform the way out of conflict in Afghanistan with particular focus on problems such as: conflict ripeness, spoilers problem, in addition to that, the role of Pakistan and other regional countries in success or failure of such a process. It will study historical cases of

insurgency and a series of steps that brought about a negotiated settlement and further examine application of those steps in context of Afghan conflict and draw on implications that it would offer.

This paper argues that in Afghanistan, a military stalemate has been already reached with prospects of military prevalence further diluted. To reach next steps in negotiation process, engaging the region with a view of achieving concerted regional efforts for peace and addressing insurgency's safe haven, are pillars for success. Increasing convergence of interests among countries of the region on achieving mid to long term stability in Afghanistan offers signs of hope, but success much depends on government's ability to direct this convergence in framework of a regional task force for peace.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Peace Process, Military Stalemate, Regional engagement

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Abbreviations:

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
UNMOT	United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan
UTO	United Tajik Opposition
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
HIG	Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmattyar
IRP	Islamic renaissance party
CNR	Council of National Reconciliation
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
USIP	United States Institute for Peace
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building measures in Asia
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

I. INTRODUCTION

1 Background

Starting from the end of Second World War, insurgency came to surface as most affluent form of armed conflict and has been subject of fierce debates by theorists, scholars and observers. While those who fight the counterinsurgency missions focus on how to win, historical records shows that unambiguous outright military victory by one of the sides is often not the case. According to existent data almost half of Insurgency cases have been ended through a negotiated solution. (Clarke & Colin P.; 2014)

In Afghanistan, however there were many achievements, deepening international involvement was accompanied by rise in violence. Accelerated North Atlantic Treaty Organization “NATO” counter-insurgency mission, unquestionably taken lives and territory from insurgents and made their outright victory unlikely. Despite this Insurgents demonstrated strength and adaptability. They pose a constant challenge by cutting from south and expanding their reach to southeast, east and north. (Nixon & Hartzell; 2011)

The year 2014, was critical for Afghanistan. Parallel to transfer of security responsibilities, Afghanistan faced a challenging political transition. Meanwhile economic conditions got more unstable, since output decreased by one third and this added up to complexities of declining security and international aid delivery. Such conditions on ground support the conclusion, already recognized by Afghan government and its partners that a political arrangement offers the best solution to put an end to this vicious conflict. Nixon & Hartzell (2011) talks of already nascent moves by parties and writes that

“Afghan government has pursued both private and public outreach to neighboring countries and insurgent groups centered on a seventy member High Peace Council appointed in late 2010. Nevertheless, the United States, the Taliban, and more recently the Haqqani network have all claimed participation in preliminary talks, while contact between Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami and Kabul has long been quite open”.

While a negotiated settlement becomes more and more desirable, prospects of achieving it gets more doubtful. Because, neither the Afghan government shown effective leadership in chasing this goal, nor insurgents shown clear interest and most challenging is the regional context. Just as every conflict is unique, so too are any peace processes undertaken in an effort to terminate each conflict, as well as the settlements that mark its end. Peace cannot be built through the use of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ process or formula. Individuals interested and involved in efforts to help foster a durable peace in Afghanistan are aware of this reality. This does not mean, however, that knowledge regarding the strategies and arrangements that have been employed in other conflict contexts is of little value to actors interested in the Afghan case.(Hartzell;2014)

This paper within its capacity tries to pay attention to multiple challenges that seriously undermines the advancement of peace talks; different perceptions of conflict ripeness, influence of spoilers and more importantly the vital role of Regional countries. There is wide involvement in Afghan conflict. On top of Afghan government and insurgents, it involves Afghanistan’s neighbors, countries beyond immediate neighborhood, The United States and NATO. Therefore in an attempt to examine the contribution of these multiple

actors in escalation or alleviation of the On-going Conflict it examines the central role of Pakistan, the first ring regional countries; Iran, China, Russia, India, and the second ring of stakeholders Turkey, Saudi Arabia.

The paper then highlights lessons drawn from theories of conflict management and research on peace processes in similar historical cases that could help to inform an Afghan peace process. Following this pursuit, Historical cases which has the potential to offer a number of lessons to Afghanistan, particularly Conflict in Tajikistan (1992-1997) will be reviewed. Few papers or reports on negotiations in Afghanistan draw on lessons from peace processes in other countries, or on insights from comparative analysis. As this paper argues, by helping to draw peacemakers' attention to factors that have helped to secure the peace in some contexts, and failed to do so in others, a comparative approach can inform thinking about future shape of the process, understanding what has been done, what needs to be done and which of those future steps would be highly challenging.

2 Statement of the problem

Despite broad Understanding that war should end through a political process, there stand multiple challenges, Taliban themselves are uninterested in negotiating; many internal and external spoilers exist. Meanwhile, it is urged by some, that the necessary condition of conflict ripeness for resolution, which is deemed to be a mutually Hurting stalemate has not reached yet. Reasonably true, an Afghan peace process needs to be supported by a well-designed regional framework to stabilize Afghanistan, since it is historically very clear that countries of region can drag the country to flames of conflict or help stabilize it.

What is vital is overcoming existing regional mistrust and enable a coordinated regional engagement even at minimal levels. (Jarvenpaa; 2011)

The failure to design a peace process based on best practices of historical cases, and utilizing the knowledge offered by theories and studies of similar cases is noticeable in Afghanistan. There exist the problem of lacking comparative case studies while it is a popular belief that history can serve as a guide on what steps and arrangements has brought about a peaceful settlement and where it achieved to fulfil this end. It is therefore against these backdrops that this research intends to investigate the experience of Tajikistan in dealing with conflict as a case study. The research intends to draw lessons and steps that can be later applied to afghan conflict. In the course of this research, the following specific questions will be addressed:

1. Is it the time now? Is the conflict in Afghanistan ripe for resolution?
2. Is it possible to vanquish the existing mistrust in search of a coordinated regional engagement?
3. What steps and in what sequence brought about negotiated settlement in Counter-insurgency cases? Can history serve as a guide to inform on what should be done in Afghanistan toward a negotiated peace?

3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study is to assess the multiple challenges facing Afghan peace process and drawing lesson learned from history that could inform the way out of conflict in Afghanistan with particular focus on problems such as: conflict ripeness, spoilers problem, in addition to that, the role of Pakistan and other regional countries in success or failure of such a process. It will study

historical cases of insurgency and a series of steps that brought about a negotiated settlement and further examine application of those steps in context of Afghan conflict and draw on implications that it would offer.

4 Significance of the study

However a number of researches touched upon Peace process in Afghanistan in more informative way by elaborating opinions and views on such process and necessity of initiating one, there are few researches that carried out a comparative analysis or historical case study of the conflicts. This research seeks to fill that void by distilling key elements and steps of designing peace processes from historical case studies, meanwhile looking at the unique domestic and regional challenges and opportunities facing a vital peace process in Afghanistan.

Besides, as observed during preliminary works on this research, there exist lack of more recent analysis that cover more recent developments of the peace process. I hope that this study will contribute to improve decision making and inform peace makers and policy lords of lessons that guide their decisions.

5 Scope of the Study

The study covers the period of 2005-2014. This is a significant period in peace talks in Afghanistan. 2005 is the year Taliban resurged, besides this period mark several milestones achieved; the recognition of need for talks with Insurgents, in the first nascent moves of Consultative peace Loya Jirga (Grand Council) (2010), establishment of Afghan High Peace Council (2010), international support for an Afghan led Peace process in Lisbon Summit (2010),

pre-talks in Saudi Arabia and UAE, the turning point of opening a Taliban Office in Qatar (2013), Political and Military transition in 2014 and recent efforts by Ghani administration. The period was eventful and critical for peace process in Afghanistan, as it allows for an assessment on what has been done and what needs to be done.

6 Research Design

The design of the study is a Qualitative analysis. This paper uses case study analysis and strategic narrative. “Strategic narrative is a useful frame for the history-theory relationship in qualitative, historical research and suggests that some stories and ways of constructing stories will promote theory building more than others, enabling researchers to cumulate knowledge more effectively”. (Stryker; 1996) As such by master narrative, I mean a simple series of ideal steps that show historical progress of a certain kind of event, in a less or more accurate manner.

7 Area of the Study

This research work carried out analysis on Peace Process in Afghanistan, The peace talks between Afghan Government and insurgents particularly to name; the Taliban Movement and other sub-groups affiliated with them.

8 Method of Data Collection

Data collected from secondary sources from Books, Articles, Journals, Websites of some Organizations and existing research, largely through the use of electronic medium. It is to declare that this was the most challenging part of

the work, affecting the quality of present research due to lack of access to field research and Primary data.

9 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected will be analysed using intense investigation process to determine the challenges facing the success of a negotiated settlement. And through case studies, the steps and factors of success and failure in ending Insurgencies will be determined and their implications in for the case of Afghanistan will be examined.

II. Literature Review

This part of the paper, examines the notable researches and existing literature around three core aforementioned research questions, outlining their strengths and caveats where diagnosed and pointing areas that need to be further explored. Literature on Afghan peace process is rare in existence, short at length and at times controversial. The issue is not deeply discussed among academia; the publications are short, mostly in form of news articles, journal essays and only few Reports or Academic research papers. Many papers are written well before recent developments have been made. Therefore the major materials that this literature review is based on are articles and policy papers published in international reviews and journals by known Think Tanks, most notably those authored by James Shin and James Dobbins, Paul Collins and P. Clarke of RAND corporation, Lakhdar Brahimi and Thomas Pickering of the Century Foundation, Matt Waldman of USIP together with Mathew Wright of Chattam House, Caroline Hartzell, Thomas Ruttig of AAN and likewise. The first and foremost issue that drew their attention is the possibility and acceptability of a political settlement with Taliban. However differences in stands exist, the majority of them view perusing a political end to the conflict as inevitable.

Regarding the chronology of discussions on peace process, Shin & Dobbins points to early 2010 when “the very concept of talking to the enemy was controversial in official circles and little discussed beyond them. Then-after the objective of a negotiated peace been firmly embraced by government, supported by United States, the NATO and endorsed by most of Afghanistan’s neighbors. Taliban intermediaries on occasions hold talks on different issues”. Expressing optimism for a political settlement they refer to basis of conflict,

stating that unlike long history of conflict between Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs or Kurds, Sunni, and Shia Arabs in Iraq, in Afghanistan ethnically based hostilities only go back to a few decades. There is no ethnic cleansing underway and majority accepts their country as a multilingual, multi-ethnic. Meanwhile “all feel entitled to a bigger share in its governance (and in the patronage that flows from it) than others are prepared to recognize. Thus the conflict is over power sharing, not national identity, and therefore, in principle, it is more susceptible to compromise”. (Shin & Dobbins; 2011, p8)

On inevitability of a political compromise, Brahimi & Pickering (2011) argues that “The resurgence of the Taliban across different parts of Afghanistan shows that they are undeniably a force in Afghan society and which their exclusion incur a very high cost”. They add that “Afghans as well as international community reach the strategic conclusion that this war must end in a compromise peace, and serious negotiations that will be required to achieve it must be started”. Pointing the inconclusiveness of military approaches despite intensification of fighting in Afghanistan, they urge that international community recognized that “war in Afghanistan will have a political solution. Neither side can expect to eliminate the other militarily in the foreseeable future. This growing sense of stalemate helps to set the stage for the beginning of a political phase to conclude the conflict”. (Brahimi & Pickering; 2011)

Taking similar stance in support of a political settlement Waldman outlines “a degree of convergence among insurgents and wider Afghan and international interests. Considering that and the constraints of counterinsurgency and transition strategies as well as the deteriorating security situation”, he suggests that “Afghan-international coalition should seek to

engage in direct or indirect exploratory talks with the Taliban”. (Waldman; 2010, p1)

On popularity of a negotiated peace, based on their first hand research and extensive access to influential interviewees and other resources Shins & Dobbins write of strong support throughout Afghan society. Meanwhile of Taliban leadership interest in negotiations and willingness to engaged in such a process referring to findings of studies done by a number of experts, including; Ahmed Rashid, Barnett Rubin, and Michael Semple. (Shin & Dobbins; 2011, pp. 6-7) Waldman refers to “some interviewees, such as former Taliban deputy minister Hotak, suggesting that a number of Taliban leaders support the idea of talks and, ultimately, some form of settlement. Taliban leaders may also recognize the powerful yearning for peace among the population”. (Waldman; 2010, p7)

Most of the researches reviewed above base their analysis on withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and draw on possible scenarios thereafter. While that most waited 2014 already arrived and Afghanistan went through two critical transitions -Political and military- the need for updated researches is highly evident. There are much of recent developments, events, shifts not only in positions, policies and opinions but, in real situation on the ground that has to be examined when analyzing the prospects and progress of peace process. This paper has been preemptively motivated by considerations of such necessities. Besides inspired by William Zartman’s concept of conflict ripeness as a necessary condition for negotiated settlement, the issue of a mutually hurting stalemate and controversy over it needed to be examined. Such an issue has not been addressed well in existing literature.

The Second issue, central to this paper is the challenges facing the current nascent political efforts. Here relevant researches that support or touch upon the matter will be reviewed. Most Analysts admit that negotiations would be an arduous and challenging process; it faces many obstacles and may take years until there is a result. (Shin & Dobbins; 2011, p2) In his findings from a research study Wijeyaratne offers an answer to two critical questions: “why a systematic peace process hasn’t emerged? And what more is needed to support more coordinated peace efforts? He suggest that certain prerequisites are still lacking, namely cohesion and capacity within the Afghan government and parliament to carry out a more structured process” and further recommend, International Community’s support for the process. (Surendrini Wijeyaratne; 2008, p2)

The vital importance of international and regional support in bringing a negotiated settlement, as well as perpetuity of conflict in case such element is absent, can be noticed in existing researches. Shin and Dobbins argue that “Getting the Afghan parties together is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a meaningful peace process. Afghanistan is a weak country surrounded by stronger neighbors”. These authors outline that historically Afghanistan “has been at peace when its neighbors perceive a common interest in keeping that peace but at war—civil war—when one or more of those neighbors sees some advantage therein”. Supporting the stance of this paper, analysts recall the antagonistic role of Pakistan. Waldman writes that “Pakistan sees Taliban as allowing them to maintain strategic influence, and thus, according to almost all interviewees, they provide them with sanctuary and significant support”. (Waldman; 2010; p12)

Literature supports the notion of regional engagement as a necessary clause. Put by Matt Waldman “Any negotiations process must involve consultation and engagement with other states in the region—not least India, Iran, Russia, and China—who are maneuvering to protect their interests in anticipation of U.S. withdrawal.”(Waldman; 2010, p12) There won’t be peace in Afghanistan if these countries don’t feel having a common interest in it. In their research paper titled “Who wants what?”, Matt Waldman and Mathew Wright (2014) urges “that principal parties to conflict, whether domestic or foreign, have a range of political, geo-strategic, economic, social-cultural, reputational and other interests in Afghanistan. An understanding of these interests, should inform any future efforts to resolve or mitigate the conflict”.

However Gareth Price, writes of lack of capacity or will of most of the countries in region to mediate a political process in Afghanistan because of their opposition to infringing the sovereignty of other countries, or doubts over their position as honest brokers. (Gareth Price; 2015) other analysts such as Waldman and Wright believe that, there is some hope for convergence of interests in favor of stability in Afghanistan. (Waldman & Wright; 2014)

Yet another challenge outlined by this research and similar works discussing a negotiation peace is managing spoilers on all sides. (Waldman; 2010, p1) In their paper titled “Peace offerings” Waldman and Ruttig warns that “Afghanistan has no shortage of Spoilers. Any party to conflict can become a potential spoiler”. (Waldman & Ruttig; 2011) Thus, this paper suggests that Strategies for dealing with spoilers must be developed.

Analysts also outline the needs for effective mediation, facilitation and measures of trust and confidences building by both internal and external

stakeholders. Waldman Argue that, considering the level of “enmity and mistrust, the choice of mediator will be critical. Insurgents widely regard the United Nations as pursuing a U.S. agenda, and some insurgents suggested mediation could be undertaken instead by an Islamic state, such as Saudi Arabia, which hosted initial talks in 2008. Other options could be mediation by Turkey, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), or the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), perhaps in conjunction with the United Nations”. (Waldman; 2010 pp10-11) this paper agree with his point of view but adds one other potential mediator and Guarantor which has recently emerged; and that is the Role that could be played by China considering its recent expressions of willingness to engage in ongoing peace talks. Meanwhile it believes that UN can still be a valid actor.

So far the challenges facing the process as touched by other researchers have been reviewed. For its part, this paper will focus on some major challenges that impede progress, including; insurgency’s safe haven, antagonistic role of Pakistan and other prospectus domestic and external spoilers, engaging regional powers under one uniformed agenda and achieving coordinated regional efforts in favor of peace. This paper concentrates on a notable solution; which is mobilizing the partial convergence of interests to engage regional and external actors through a well-designed platform and manipulate their leverage to pressure Pakistan and Taliban, as well as pursuing regional concerted effort for crafting peace. Such solution can be decisive as it was in the case of political settlement in Tajikistan that will be later explored as model case for this paper.

Most central to the purpose of this paper is learning from history about steps that lead to reaching a negotiated settlement. The literature on comparative practices and learning from history in case of Afghanistan, at its best is scarce. In a briefing paper of eight pages length, titled “A comparative perspective on an Afghan peace process” Caroline A. Hartzell draws on few experiences of peace building in other countries and lessons they offer for Afghanistan. She briefly mentions condition of lacking prospects for military prevalence in case of El Salvador and occurrence of a non-related event like tsunami in case of Insurgency in Aceh, Indonesia which brought the ripeness situation necessary for negotiated settlement. She compares it to Afghanistan referring to withdrawal of ISAF troops that may be beneficial for creating such a sense of mutually hurting stalemate. Besides, she points to some non-military factors and costs of conflict that may create such sense of hurting stalemate such as state failure as a result of economic collapse. She argues that the desire to avoid high costs incurred by such situations can bring the parties to the table. She refers to economic sanctions posed on minority government in South Africa to negotiate with the opposition African National Congress and recommends manipulating the Afghan government’s high dependency on foreign funding by international community, as a tool to pressure the actors to negotiate for a settlement. (Hartzell; 2014, pp. 2-3)

A notable research that inspires the current research is a Paper by Colin P. Clarke and Christopher Paul titled “From stalemate to settlement”. It builds on former studies to find out how insurgencies end, and create a seven step narrative. They examine it in case of insurgency in Northern Ireland which followed exact same sequence of steps and later in reference to a number of

other insurgencies occurred and settled across different countries with partial adherence to the narrative. Later it examines the case of Afghanistan.

While they put principle efforts on proving the utility of the narrative, The current paper deviates from the aforementioned research by searching a case that could serve not only as a proof of utility of the narrative but better model case for Afghanistan. Furthermore, this paper attempts to update the analysis regarding conflict ripeness which in the former research based on some imaginations of events which had already occurred by now. Additionally this paper intends to enrich the former research by adding new dimensions to it, notably the analysis of prospects for constructive regional engagement and an account of insurgency's safe haven and searching ways to deal with it. Such contributions can upgrade the research and further the chances that current paper will serve as a valuable source of guidance for Policy makers and a more comprehensive piece of work on peace process worthy of attention to all who have an interest in this issue.

Lack of comparative studies and learning from history offers a rationale for this paper to explore similar cases of insurgency, the steps that brought a settlement and build on their implication for Afghanistan. Last but not least it is necessary to remind that, the literature on peace process is dominantly coming from external observers, analysts and policy tanks. However their competency can't be contested still there are caveats and gaps that need to be filled. Most of them offer external views, sometimes indifferent to indigenous sentiments and mostly recommend policies for external actors such as United States. This paper is an attempt to incorporate indigenous analysis and enrich at its best competence the domestic literature on the issue critical to destiny of the

Country and its people. Besides it seeks to bring the issue out of policy Tanks dominance, well into Academic sphere.

III. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

A Master narrative developed by RAND¹ researchers will guide the case study and determines what steps in what sequence brought a negotiated settlement in dealing with insurgency. Researchers in RAND developed a strategic narrative based on extensive research on 59 appropriate cases of insurgency that started and concluded globally in the period between end of Second World War and year 2010, to find out the factors of success in counterinsurgency. Of these 29 was resolved through negotiated settlement among which 13 cases identified to have mixed outcome. The cases with mixed outcome are subject to main emphasis, because cases where one side unambiguously prevailed tend to have different nature even if it ended in negotiations. However it is yet to be determined that there could a political solution for ongoing conflict, it is a likely scenario. This is important; because as things stand today, it is reasonably true that any outcome would be mixed with all sides make fair big concessions for a deal to be inked.

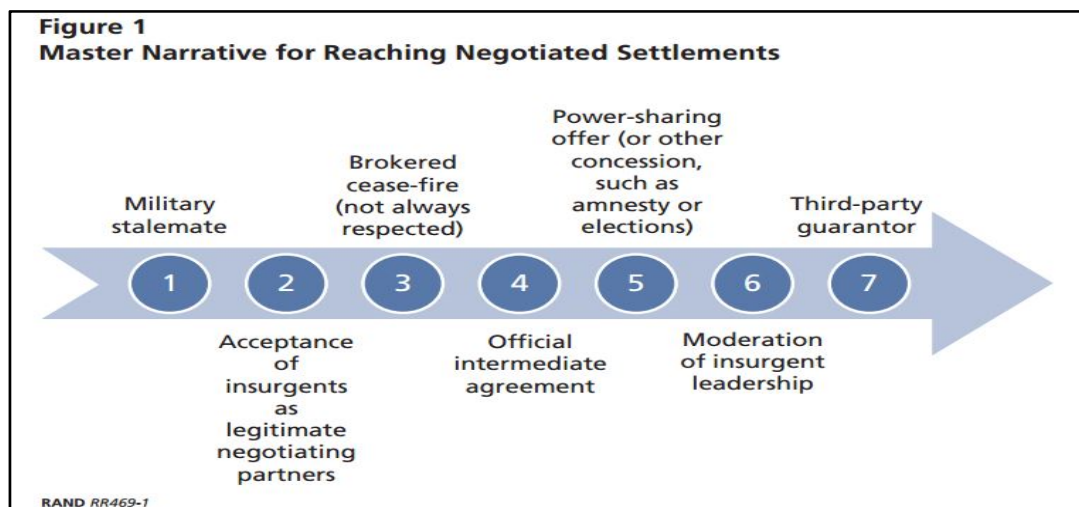
1 The Notion of a Master Narrative

According to its developers in RAND Corporation (Clarke & Paul; 2014) the master narrative elaborated in Figure 1 “summarizes the progress from conflict to negotiated settlement. The master narrative tells the story of many insurgencies without telling the precise story of any specific insurgency. The master narrative used for this research is not intended to describe any specific progress toward negotiated settlement, but it does seek to capture the essential

¹ The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis.

ingredients and sequence characteristic to most of them. however not all of the cases unfold exactly according to this sequence, many cases unfolds in a manner close enough to this narrative that it is a useful comparative tool for understanding how to reach to negotiated settlements”.

In describing the rationale for pursuing this master narrative, C. P. Clarke & C. Paul (2014) argues that: “while there is considerable studies on the causes of negotiated settlements, post-conflict and peace-building ramifications, and strategies chosen by governments seeking to terminate a conflict through settlement, there has been little research on the step-by-step process of reaching a negotiated settlement and even less on a sequence, or master narrative, to explain how such agreements are reached”.



The master narrative for reaching negotiated settlement consists of below-mentioned seven steps:

First, years after military confrontation the adversaries increasingly become war weary and the conflict set into a mutually hurting stalemate. As William Zartman (1995) puts it, they both sides get “locked in a state from which they are unable to escalate to victory, and the situation is painful to both of them however, not necessarily in an equal degree or for the same reason”. As adversaries gets increasingly war-weary, they become more interested in searching alternative solutions to move out of conflict situation including among others, consideration of entering into negotiations.

In the Second step, once adversaries locked in stalemate, they come to realize that it is not in their interest to escalate the conflict further, thus to enable negotiations, insurgents are given the status of legitimate negotiation partners. However such an action involves huge risks, this step is a necessary evil in reaching a negotiated settlement. If government doesn't accept the legitimacy of insurgents as negotiating partners, the outcome would be most likely the continuation of bloodshed and a frozen conflict. As a pre step between second and third steps in process, external stakeholders must have accept and have empathy for such process. In case an external actor involved, push for further continuance of conflict, achieving success across steps 2 to 3 would be hard if not impossible. This exactly makes the study of different states involved and their behavior toward Afghan conflict highly relevant, since it plays a decisive in progress toward a negotiated settlement.

If this second step reached, next the parties can start negotiating a cease-fire, however not always respected. Achieving this stage in the process can be seen as an incremental success, as it brings a temporary halt in violence. This can provide space for political maneuver and enable parties to make reach to

their constituents. If external actors avoid spoiling the process, a shift to fourth step in master narrative can be achieved official intermediate agreements can be reached. In words of Clarke & Paul (2014) “such agreements provide a show of good faith, create goodwill, foster credibility, and serve as building blocks to later negotiations. Intermediate agreements do not always include the actual belligerents to the conflict, relying instead on the acquiescence of external actors”.

In the fifth step, power-sharing offers further seduce and encourage the adversaries to prefer politics to military confrontation. Power-sharing offers can take different shapes “including elections, guaranteed ministry seats, cabinet posts in a future government, the integration of military forces, or written agreements to grant and observe territorial autonomy”.² In Sixth stage as Clarke & Paul (2014) writes “once the insurgents accept a power-sharing offer, the insurgency’s leadership becomes more moderate. Talks can change the opinions of constituents while strengthening more moderate elements of an insurgency, increasing the chances of successful negotiation”.

Seventh, in the Final step, “third-party guarantors help guide the process to a close, acting as impartial observers or providers of security, economic and development aid, and other forms of assistance”. (Clarke & Paul; 2014) As James Shinn and James Dobbins put it, “unless there is an impartial third party that is trusted by both sides and capable of overseeing implementation, the lack of mutual confidence between formerly warring parties often causes agreements

² Michael G. Findley, “Bargaining and the Interdependent States of Civil War Resolution,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 57, No. 5, October 2013.

to falter and conflict to be renewed”.³ What needs to be pointed at outset, is that right choice of third party guarantor is a fully case and context dependent matter.

2 Sequences in the Individual Cases

Three points needed to be made clear: First, as it is common with approaches such as master narratives, it only describes few cases in a perfect manner. Second, in most cases all master narrative steps are present and most likely in line with the order specified. However, it happens that in some cases many steps occur at once or close to simultaneous. Third important point that is important for understanding of the series of steps is the time horizons issue. It happens that parties start to negotiate at early stages of conflict but, achieving a final settlement may take years or even decades.

³ James Shinn and James Dobbins, *Afghan Peace Talks: A Primer*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1131-RC, 2011.

IV. NARRATIVE IN ACTION; HOW A SETTLEMENT REACHED

This part of the paper will examine the conceptual framework in action. It will offer first, a summary account of insurgencies ended through negotiation in total or partial conformity with the narrative put forward by RAND Corporation. Second a relatively detailed account of the conflict in Tajikistan and step by step progression toward an agreement that ended the bloodshed and brought stability and national reconciliation. The case of Tajikistan serves not only as a record of utility of the narrative but, an inspiring model that can hold lessons for Afghanistan considering the factors that will be discussed later in this part. It is necessary to declare once again that all insurgencies won't follow the same sequence of steps. It is very likely that order of steps would differ, multiple steps reached at same point of time or a certain step would be absent. Among the thirteen cases of insurgency settled through negotiations with a mixed outcome, studied by RAND researchers, only the Northern Ireland follow the exact same order of steps as narrative suggests.

Table 1* – Conflict in Northern Ireland, 1969–1999

Step	Narrative
1	British COIN forces launched Operation Motorman to breakup no-go zones in predominantly Catholic neighborhoods where the insurgents held sway. After 1972, the conflict settled into a stalemate—the insurgents, paramilitaries, and COIN forces could not escalate to gain a military advantage.
2	Backchannel talks between the British government and the upper echelons of the insurgent leadership signaled the willingness to accept the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) as a legitimate negotiating partner, although an actual agreement would take decades.
3	A cease-fire was agreed to toward the end of 1974, although it collapsed amid insurgent accusations that the British were never serious about discussing “structures of disengagement” that could lead to a COIN force withdrawal. Paramilitary violence also contributed to the end of the armistice.
4	The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement was an official intermediate agreement that, while not able to bring the conflict to an end, did succeed in persuading the insurgents to engage politically.
5	The Downing Street Declaration of 1993 enshrined important principles of a power-sharing arrangement and brought the insurgents even closer to renouncing violence.
6	By the mid-1990s, the insurgent leadership made a conscious effort to shift resources away from its armed wing and toward its political arm, Sinn Fein. When violence ebbed, Sinn Fein prospered at the polls. Electoral success had a moderating effect on PIRA leadership.
7	Under the stewardship of George Mitchell, the United States played a major role as a third-party guarantor, helping craft the framework that led to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the end of the 30-year insurgency.

*Source: Colin P. Clarke, Christopher Paul, “From stalemate to settlement”; 2014; RAND Corp., page 17

Table 2 shows which of the seven steps of the master narrative each of the 13 cases passed through and in what order.

* **Table 2 - The Master Narrative for Reaching Negotiated Settlements in 13 Cases and Order of Steps							
Case	Stalemate	Insurgents Accepted as Political Partner	Cease-Fires	Official Intermediate Agreements	Power-Sharing Offers	Moderation of Insurgent Leadership	Third-Party Guarantor
Northern Ireland 1969-1999	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Yemen 1962-1970	1	3	-	2	4	4	4
Philippines (MNLF) 1971-1996	1	2	3	3	6	5	-
Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990	1	4	2	3	7	6	5
Western Sahara 1975-1991	1	4	2	4	-	3	6
Mozambique(RENAMO) 1976-1995	1	3	4	2	6	5	7
Indonesia (Aceh), 1976-2005	1	2	3	5	6	4	7
Kampuchea 1978-1992	1	2	3	-	4	5	6
Bosnia 1992-1995	1	4	2	2	4	-	6
Tajikistan 1992-1997	1	2	4	3	5	5	7
Burundi 1993-2003	1	2	4	3	5	5	7
Chechnya I 1994-1996	1	3	2	3	5	-	-
D. R. Congo (anti-Kabila) 1998-2003	1	2	2	2	6	5	7
*Where steps occurred nearly simultaneously (as was the case for steps 2, 3, and 4 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), this is denoted by the use of the same sequence number.							
**Source: Colin P. Clarke, Christopher Paul, "From stalemate to settlement"; 2014; RAND Corp., page 17							

TAJIKISTAN CIVIL WAR; THE WAY OUT

1 Introduction

The 1997 peace accord that put an end to conflict in Tajikistan was result of three years long complicated negotiation process. A process that faced many deadlocks and interruptions as parties escalated violence time to time. Despite this the Final agreement was a benchmark event, as it was the first of its kind where a neo-Communist regime had to share power with an Islamist opposition party in Central Asian region. As Conor McAuliffe (2006) rightly points out “The agreement was not an inevitable or organic outgrowth of the negotiation process. There was a great reluctance on the sides of both parties to settle the conflict definitively, even after the prospects of outright military victory had all but vanished”. Most notably The United Nations put efforts to sponsor the talks and it took a period of over two and half years until all necessary internal and external factors for a political settlement got present.

At the outset it is plausible to quote President of Republic of Tajikistan, Imomali Rahmanov’s statement: “... the peace process in Tajikistan is instructive not only for us. It has been emphasized more than once at various international forums....., and by many authoritative scholars that the experience of achieving peace and national harmony in our country can serve as a model for use in other parts of the planet, for both the parties to the conflict and the mediators and peacekeeping forces. Taking into account not only the common linguistic, historical and cultural factors, but also the similarity of many aspects of the current situation in Afghanistan to what we were experiencing a few

years ago, the chances of this experience being useful to our southern neighbor are many times greater”.⁴ With this notion in mind this part of paper provides a case study analysis of Tajik Peace Process; arrangements and steps that led the way out of bloodshed, war and destruction. The following chapter will further examine these and steps and lessons in Afghan context.

2 Reasons to Compare

As Shahrbanou Dtajbakhsh (2008) mentions “since mid-1990s there has been a boom in academic research in terms of evaluations, lessons to be learned and the best practices in field of peacemaking and peace-building efforts at the national and international levels”. The unique success of Tajik peace process makes it a model of conflict resolution and reconciliation. Afghanistan and Tajikistan shares the same language, same religion, also significant portion of history, as well as ethnical and cultural similarities and are geographically closely located. The combined effect of all these factors on nature of conflict and possible resolutions to it cannot be undermined. However in an effort to seek more convincing and valid reasons for comparison, following factors can be further emphasized.

2-1 Ideological Nature of Conflict

However most experts support the idea the conflict in Tajikistan was result of rivalries among local/regional groups rather than ideological confrontation but

⁴ “Lessons of the inter-Tajik settlement for Afghanistan”: Statement by the President of Tajikistan (A/57/203), 2002. Accessed on Sept. 2015 at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/tajikistan/lessons-inter-tajik-settlement-afghanistan-statement-president-republic-tajikistan>

it cannot be denied that meanwhile Ideological differences between a secular conservative neo-Communist government seeking to maintain soviet order state and an Islamist opposition seeking to challenge the status quo and fighting for a democratic state where all ideologies including Islam has a fair voice, was the fueling factors for conflict. Meanwhile the conflict in Afghanistan can be viewed as a clash between government with moderate Islamic ideology and insurgents with a radical fundamentalist interpretation of it. As such the case of Tajikistan can enlighten the peace process in Afghanistan.

2-2 Enjoying by Insurgents of a safe haven.

The insurgency in Tajikistan enjoyed a place to hide, reorganize and get aided in a neighboring country which was Afghanistan. It is exactly the same factor that made the conflict in Afghanistan a long hard fight and the counterinsurgency a puzzling business for the government. The insurgents in Afghanistan enjoy a safe haven in bordering federally administered tribal areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This fact made military prevalence over the insurgent impractical. How the process succeeded in convincing all regional actors to stop support for insurgency and instead involve in bringing them into negotiation table and engaging in a concerted regional effort to end the conflict is definitely inspiring for case of Afghanistan.

2-3 Wide Regional/ External military and non-military engagement

There is one other dimension that seems similar in Tajik and Afghan conflict; wide international and regional military and non-military engagement. At 1992, there was a significant military presence from Russia as well as Uzbekistan

under CIS mission. The United Nation was playing a significant role through its resident mission (UNMOT) and Special representative. Iran and Afghanistan were also involved. Similarly in Afghanistan; there is military presence of Coalition forces leaded by NATO, the United Nation Mission (UNAMA). Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and all central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan has a stake and interest in situation in Afghanistan. It is widely believed that successful settlement in Tajikistan was beside other factors a direct outcome of concerted regional efforts. This dimension of conflict makes this case relevant and enlightening for Afghanistan.

2-4 Greed and grievances, political monopoly and exclusion

Like case of UTO in Tajikistan, the insurgents in Afghanistan has grievances, they were left out all power structures. The subsequent power architecture after Bonn conference excluded all fractions of Taliban and HIG. UTO's emergence in Tajikistan was triggered by monopoly of power by Leninabadi elites, which excluded the southern population of Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan. As such however they were advancing regional economic and political interests and grievances. (McAuliffe; 2006, p2)

3 Caveats of such comparison

This paper chose to focus on factors that pushed each step to the next toward success in achieving a final settlement and seek to examine the utility of the master narrative and draw lessons that it offer. It is to admit that such basic comparison and analysis can be subject criticism for oversimplification.

4 Historical Flashpoint

Tajikistan a Central Asian landlocked country that neighbors Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan has a population of 7.2 million, majority of which are Sunni Muslim (85%). Because of harsh terrain and underdevelopment, the society in Tajikistan is highly fragmented. People determine their “Political identity” based on a mix of factors among which the region of origin is the most significant. As mentioned earlier while parties differentiate themselves ideologically, the conflict at its core was a clash among rival regional identity groups.

Leninabad and Kulyab regions were favored during Soviet era with their elites at core of then Communist party. Once Soviet control eroded, other regional identity groups such as new political movements formed by representatives from regions such as Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan sought to challenge status quo. (McAuliffe; 2006, p2) Among the new movements IRP (Islamic Renaissance Party) pursuing Islamic Ideology and Democratic front comprising of three nationalist secular parties seeking reform and liberalization was the most powerful.

First post-Soviet election saw a coalition of Islamist and democrats challenging the still dominant Communist party. However the alliance representative lost to Rahmon Nabiev of the communist party in an election widely claimed as fraudulent. However Nabiev enjoyed little beyond nominal control of the country and as of spring 1992 divisions along ideological, ethnic and regional identities were deepening and by May, Opposition’s anti-government demonstrations became violent. A full-fledge civil war was halted by intervention of Russian troops stationed there and Nabiev agreed to form a

coalition government with opposition parties. However, the new government couldn't consolidate control over country since it never attracted support of political elites of Leninabad and Kulyab. In the coming six months Tajikistan saw spread of violence, anarchy and clashes between regional militias. Nabiev was forced to resign and parliament dismissed the coalition government, and elected Kulyabi Neo-Communist Imomali Rahmonov as acting head of state. (McAuliffe; 2006, p3)

5. Step by step toward peace

It is to be admitted that in practice it is difficult to distinguish clearly among these steps as it may happen that they overlap or there can be back and forth moves in the process. Yet, the framework provide a more system approach to study and better understand the peace process in Tajikistan, without which it may appear nothing more than a casual series of events.

5-1 Military Stalemate

Supported by two militia groups Rahmonov started a military campaign against opposition to consolidate his power. The opposition however was pushed out of the Dushanbe, created secure bases in mountainous surroundings of capital and more importantly in Taloqan, the neighboring northern province of Afghanistan. This resulted in reaching a stalemate situation by end of year 1992 as opposition turned to waging deadly guerrilla warfare. (McAuliffe; 2006, p3) In July 1993, alarmed by a serious opposition's attack, which left huge casualties to Russian troops, Russian policymakers recognized that relying only on

military means is no longer feasible. Thus initiating a peace process to end the conflict became inevitable.⁵ (Jonson; 1998, p9) This change in Russian policy stimulated the launch of negotiations. Russia and UN made efforts to bring the adversaries and also interested regional countries to initiate a comprehensive peace process.

5-2 Accepting “insurgents as legitimate negotiating partners”

This second step was the result of successful track II diplomacy initiatives that were later sponsored by United States and Russia. (Clarke & Paul; 2014) Meeting among Russian senior intelligence Authorities and Tajik Opposition leaders was particularly effective, as Russians assured their legitimacy in return of accepting continued Russian presence. Led by new representative Piriz-Ballon UN mission accelerated its mediation efforts and in early months of 1994 declared parties' basic interest in a UN observed negotiation process. (UNSG 1994a) Around March deputy prime minister of Russia paid visits to Dushanbe and Tehran where he met both sides to assure their commitment and succeeded in clearing remaining obstacles facing the practical starting of negotiations including issues such as venue and observers. Besides, agreed with Iranian authorities to cooperate in favor of reaching a political settlement. (BBC 1994) Soon other major obstacle to negotiations vanished as all opposition parties came together under umbrella of UTO (United Tajik Opposition), functioning as one negotiating partner to government. (Tetsuro; 2010, p4)

⁵ Jonson, Lena. 1998. The Tajik War: A Challenge to Russian Policy. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs.

5-3 Cease-fires

Formal negotiations first started on April 1994 in Moscow. As IJI Tetsuro (2008, p6) describes “The UN sponsored the successive negotiations. Representatives from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan, as well as the OSCE and the OIC also attended as observers and in turns as hosts to successive rounds of talks. Their presence worked to internationalize and legitimize the negotiation process”.

During first and second rounds of negotiations, parties started discussing terms of a cease-fire but couldn't succeed because of disagreements on timing and similar issues. The process stalled and parties escalated further military actions. Nonetheless, heightened violence and UN pressure brought parties back to negotiating process held on mid-September in Tehran. In the final day of meeting parties agreed on a cease-fire to be observed by UN. This achievement was for a big part result of concerted efforts and push by two main external stakeholders; Russia and Iran. (Tetsuro; 2010, p7) third round only resulted in extension of Cease-fire up to month February of 1995.

The process was characterized by Breaches of cease-fire (UNSC 1994) and multiple setbacks. Nevertheless, renewed waves of violence and successful pressure by UN brought the parties back to table. Weeks long high level consultations resulted in extension of cease-fire and a remarkable event; first face to face summit meeting between Rahmonov and Nuri, facilitated by Afghan President, Rabbani, convened in Kabul on May 1995. Up to this stage of process, the two sides agreed on placing power-sharing issue on agenda, but couldn't agree on a practical formula for it. Instead the agenda

was dominated by issues of achieving and maintaining cease-fires. (Tetsuro; 2010, p8)

5-4 Official Intermediary agreements

A number of intermediary Agreements aiming at building trust and addressing peripheral issues reached among parties. An instance can be agreement reached during Tehran (3rd round), on the issue of releasing prisoners of war and other political prisoners. (UNSG 1994d) Meanwhile as reported by UN secretary general (UNSG 1995c), during 4th round held in Almaty “facilitated by the UN envoy Piriz-Ballon and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, among others, the parties managed to produce a set of piecemeal agreements on lesser issues, such as the exchange of detainees and prisoners of war”.

5-5 Power sharing

Parties started more substantial talks by involving the issue of power-sharing during fourth round. UTO proposed a Transitional national council “Council of National Accord” with both executive and legislative power comprised of 40% government and UTO share and 20% for other ethnic minorities, but it was strongly resisted by Government delegation. When the delegates were slow to make progress, for the Second time Rahmonov and Nuri stepped in and agreed on establishment of Consultative Forum of People of Tajikistan for national reconciliation. Later they separately signed a protocol on modality of Inter-Tajik Talks made possible by UN office Mediation. Subsequent fifth round (Ashgabat) failed to bring any tangible results.

In course of year 1996, increasing Pressure from outside and instability in home, as well as capture of Kabul by Taliban, created sense of urgency and helped inject new energy to already stalled process. Parties showed remarkable compromise while negotiating principles for settlement and establishment of CNR. Rahmonov and Nuri personally stepped in to drive the negotiation forward. Both leaders initialed the text of an agreement drafted, in a meeting mediated by Afghan president Rabbani held on Dec. 1996 in northern Afghanistan. In following rounds of meetings, representative could only agree on number of seats to be 26. (UNSG 1997a) To overcome the obstacles Rahmonov and Nuri met once again. As read in (Tetsuro; 2010, p14) and reported by UN secretary general (UNSG 1997b) parties “agreed both on composition and structure of CNR; It would consist of equivalent numbers of government and UTO representatives. As for the structure, the CNR would establish four sub-commissions relating to political, military, refugee, and legal issues”. On top of that they agreed on 30 percent share for UTO in all government posts.

Regarding the functions, as Abdullaev & Barnes (2001; pp. 69-70) mentions “together with the President, the CNR would work to implement the agreements, develop proposals for constitutional reform through national referendum and would draft a new electoral law. It would also facilitate the integration of the opposition and its military units into governmental executive and power structures. It would also suggest the timing of parliamentary elections. The CNR would then dissolve after the convening of a new Parliament”. (Tetsuro; 2010, p14)

5-6 Moderation

As 1999 elections were reaching closer both UTO and dominant regime's leaders softened their tone, to portray themselves as capable moderate leaders. (Clarke & Paul; 2014) During the seventh round of negotiations, held late February to early March in Moscow the parties shifted the agenda from merely political coexistence to discussing issues of disarmament of Opposition forces, their demobilization, also their reintegration to existing institutions of the government, meanwhile reform of such institutions. On April the Final and 8th round was convened in Tehran, but soon stalled over disagreement on time of removing the ban on parties of opposition front. Once more Rahmonov-Nuri meeting proved fruitful as, parties signed the "Protocol on Political issues" which solved legalization of opposition movement and parties. (Tetsuro; 2010, p14)

5-7 Third Party Guarantor

Final round of negotiations the Protocol on Guarantees were signed, based on which UN and other observer states assigned a role to monitor proper implementation of any agreement signed during the course of negotiations. (UNSG; 1997c) However both sides agreed on framework of political guarantees, they lacked consensus on how to reinforce those agreement in military terms. The opposition front was in favor of replacing CIS peace-keeping forces with that of United Nations, but government bluntly opposed this, deeming it as an issue not within the jurisdiction of negotiations among Tajik parties. (Tetsuro; 2010, p14) this resulted in continued presence of CIS peace-keepers to provide military stability needed to ensure the implementation of 1997 peace accord. Also, during the period after 1999 elections United

Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan continued to shepherd and look after the peace deal. (Clarke & Paul; 2014)

V. EXAMINING THE STEPS TOWARD PEACE IN AFGHAN CONTEXT; CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FROM HISTORY

This chapter will first examine the seven step narrative in context of Afghan conflict, together with an analysis of what step Afghanistan stands by now. Besides, this part addresses the questions of conflict ripeness and the role of regional countries and important stakeholders in escalation and de-escalation of conflict. Lastly, the paper ends with recommendations and conclusions drawn based on the analysis carried out.

Seven steps to settlement

1 “Military stalemate”

Here we turn back to the question of conflict ripeness, is it the time now, is conflict ready for settlement through negotiations? There are two elements to be focused, namely whether a stalemate condition has reached and if so, whether it is mutually hurting.

1-1 Conflict Ripeness in Afghanistan

For the majority of analysts and observers the answer to the former is yes. The conflict has already settled in to a stalemate, despite drastic escalation of violence the prospects for a military victory for any of the warring parties, is getting further diluted as each day passes off. However insurgents made increasing gains in the period after 2005, because of steady rise in number and skills and of Afghan national security forces and increased support from international community they are less likely to make major strategic gains.

Despite this Afghan and International forces couldn't succeed in full containment of insurgent's territorial expansion. (Waldman & Ruttig; 2011) Nevertheless whether it is "mutually hurting"? A situation defined by William Zartman (1995) as the necessary situation for successful settlement, opinions divide. There are three set of views in this regard that are examined distinctly.

1-1-1 Negative Views: Some researches, mostly those done prior to recent developments, as the analysis done by Waldman and Ruttig⁶ argues that stalemate exist, but questions if it is mutually hurting? He admits that both sides have seen high levels of casualties as well as among civilian population and the war is becoming costlier. However, the insurgents can now absorb higher levels of casualty and are toughened by years of warfare experience, kept high level commitment and still able to recruit by large. Nonetheless, it appear that both sides are "mutually hurting", as suggested by theory. This is the view among significant portion of Afghan population. But he adds that "according to ripeness theory it is the parties' perception of stalemate that matters, if the adversaries do not believe that they are in an impasse and can escalate to a position of strength or even victory – which arguably characterizes both insurgents and counter insurgents in Afghanistan- as such the conflict's central adversaries are not, by their own measure, experiencing a mutually hurting stalemate", so it does not exist.

⁶ Matt Waldman & Thomas Ruttig, 2011 "*Peace offerings: Theories of conflict resolution and their applicability to Afghanistan*". Accessed at: http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/20110128_MW_TR-Peace_offerings.pdf, on Nov. 2015

1-1-2 Positive views: Meanwhile significant number of analysts proposes a view on the contrary. For Lakhdar Brahimi and Thomas Pickering, co-chairs of the task force that wrote the report “Afghanistan: negotiating the peace” the answer to both of those questions is “yes”. Afghanistan, they say, is settling in to stalemate. And they argue that “the best moment to start a political process toward reconciliation is now”. They believe, “while negotiations will involve difficult trade-offs and priority-setting, a substantive agreement that would end the war in a way that is acceptable to all parties concerned is possible. This is true even though the political issues separating the sides are many and complex”. All parties need to stop “resisting temptations to pursue winner-take-all politics”. (Afghanistan: Negotiating Peace p25-26)

Analyzing the conflict ripeness, Clarke & Paul (2014) describes that “negotiating with the Taliban now seems one of a few likely scenarios for bringing the war in Afghanistan to an end”. They suggest that in order to “reach a negotiated settlement, it helps if both sides have faced setbacks, neither side perceives unambiguous military victory as likely, external actors reduce support to both sides, and all external actors press for a negotiated settlement”. On the basis of such criteria there is reasonably good prospects for a political settlement if insurgents won’t prevail militarily, once all coalition troops withdraw and external supporters of insurgency push for settlement instead of continuing conflict. (Clarke & Paul; 2014) Countering all the scenarios of collapse, the survival of the Afghan state despite its various transitions, offers the best hope of persuading the Afghan Taliban to conclude that the time is ripe for dialogue rather than conflict.

1-1-3 Different views: There is meanwhile a third viewpoint, which urges even if the stalemate is not mutually hurting; it is the right time to negotiate. Of those analysts Daniel Serwer thinks that at the moment the argument for negotiations in Afghanistan would be better made on other grounds. We need not wait for ripeness, we often don't. In Afghanistan, he believes there is no military solution and that there will have to be a political resolution. Continued fighting will kill lots of people, including a lot of civilians. It is not certain that efforts can be sustained beyond 2014 by the Afghans, even with ample U.S. assistance. This provides the rationale for negotiations rather than a mutually hurting stalemate, a desire to limit risks to human beings and to the sustainability of the Afghan state. Negotiations if doesn't bring a total settlement, still it may split off at least part of the insurgency and ease the military task. It could also settle some issues and not others, reducing the intensity of the conflict.⁷

A representative from Taliban expressed growing willingness for political settlement as a result of military gains made recently on battle ground and suggested that progress on political front is connected with military achievements. Meanwhile there is one more reason that persuades Taliban to start negotiations and that is recent unanticipated emergence of the threat from ISIS that could increase the risk of splintering across their lines and hinders their strategy of patiently fighting and waiting for full withdrawal of foreign troops.⁸

⁷ Serwer, Daniel. 2011. "Even if Afghanistan is not ripe, negotiations should start" Peacefare.net Blog, March 23. <http://www.peacefare.net/?p=2285>

⁸ Goldstein, Joseph, and Mujib Mashal. 2015, "Taliban leaders are said to meet with afghan officials." New York Times, July 7. accessed Oct. 2015 at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/08/world/asia/taliban-leaders-are-said-to-meet-with-afghan-officials.html?_r=0

Considering all above, a military stalemate situation however not mutually hurting at same degree, has been already reached. With this first step achieved, In Afghanistan as it was the case in Tajikistan, progress toward next stages including inducing both sides to accept each other as “legitimate negotiating partners” require constructive regional and international engagement. Insurgency in Afghanistan has external elements. Pakistan still provide safe haven for insurgents’ leaders and at times blocked efforts to reach a peaceful settlement. Besides, chances of achieving peace will grow strong if countries of region such as; China, India, Iran, Russia and others favor peace over continued conflict.

1-2 Prospects for Regionally Coordinated Peace Efforts

Following the rationale mentioned above, before going to second step, an analysis of insurgency’s safe haven and the significance of the regional powers’ role in conflict and settlement seems inevitable. In Afghan context this element has been widely seen as a prerequisite and necessary condition for any progress towards steps 2 to 4 and beyond in-line with master narrative. Meanwhile it will address the second research question of this paper. This part will begin with examining the paradoxical role of Pakistan both as necessary actor (facilitator) and as a spoiler (by providing a safe haven for insurgents) and how it can be managed. Then the issue will be extended further to the role that, countries of region and stakeholders beyond region can play in bringing pressure on Pakistan, Taliban and government. With a focus on their interests respective to Afghanistan and analyzing prospects of a regional consensus on concerted efforts to bring peace in Afghanistan.

1-2-1 The role of Pakistan

Pakistan's role as a supporter of, or obstacle to, a political settlement with the Taliban will remain crucial. Pakistan provided sanctuary to Taliban, a space where they can hide, rest, rearm and recruit since as early as 2002. This has been admitted even by President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan that he supported Taliban to secure Pakistan's interest and to cut Indian influence.⁹ President Ghani's view that Pakistan has a responsibility to promote peace and do everything it can to prevent the Taliban and Haqqani terrorists from arming and preparing themselves in Pakistan to kill people in Afghanistan deserves enough empathy. There is a great deal that Pakistani authorities can do to disrupt Taliban activities. They can limit their freedom of movement, and curtail their ability to plan and execute suicide bombings across the border in Afghanistan.¹⁰

Pakistan's engagement – at whatever level – with the Afghan Taliban has been predicated on fears of imminent collapse of the Afghan state and on the desire to ensure political leverage inside the country following the Western military withdrawal. With a new president in office in Kabul and the Bilateral Security Agreement between the United States and Afghanistan signed, both of which suggest that Afghan Government is more Resilient than predicted, the situation may now be more conducive for Pakistan to support an Afghan-led dialogue. (Price; 2015)

⁹ Dobbins, James and Carter, Malkasian. 2015. "Time to negotiate in Afghanistan" Foreign Affairs, July/August. Accessed Oct. 2015 at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2015-06-16/time-negotiate-afghanistan>

¹⁰ Interview with James Cunningham, accessed Oct. 2015 at: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/afghan-peace-process-doa>

Recently Pakistan adopted a new line with regard to President Ghani, his government, and Afghanistan repeatedly affirming in public, including very recently, that Pakistan regards the enemies of Afghanistan as its own enemies and will deal with them. They have agreed that there should be no distinction between extremists on either side of the border. The conceptual framework has considerably improved, as has the expressed intent to act on that framework. But action has been uncertain at best. It is safe to say that Afghan observers are looking to see that besides rhetoric action is also taken.¹¹

Although Pakistani leadership is divided on how much they press Taliban, Now it seems they realized that they have a bigger than initially thought, interest in a stable Afghanistan. Lack of plans for political settlement following withdrawal of coalition forces doesn't offer a good end for Pakistan. As if Taliban achieve a higher hand in Afghanistan, the government will seek Indian support. This will leave Pakistan to fight long proxy wars, bringing worst outcome than a neutral Afghanistan. Meanwhile Taliban battlefield successes might intensify extremist's threat as they may collaborate and provide sanctuary to Pakistani extremist groups. December 2014 attack in Peshawar killing 132 school children can be an instance. However it is far from a sure bet that all Pakistan leadership will agree that rapprochement with Afghanistan is the right strategy for securing their country against India.¹²

¹¹ Interview with James Cunningham, accessed Oct. 2015 at: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/afghan-peace-process-doa>

¹² Interview with James Cunningham, accessed Oct. 2015 at: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/afghan-peace-process-doa>

Considering Pakistan's Hippocratic and uncertain behavior, the Afghan government should take other approaches to bring pressure on Pakistan. Possibly through UN by raising the issue in Security Council and besides by working with China and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's closest allies and patrons making use of the convergence of their interest in stability in Afghanistan.

1-2-2 The role of China

China is one regional actor that can use inducements or leverage to make Pakistan a more constructive actor in Afghanistan. As a long-standing ally of Pakistan, China is in a position to encourage the latter to promote engagement between the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan government. China's investments in Pakistan, gives it better position economically than Western countries to exert influence. China shares the West's and India's desire for stability in the country, and now seems to see the necessity of an Afghanistan strategy itself rather than an extension of its foreign policy agenda in respect of Pakistan.

China without doubt has profound interest in stability in Afghanistan, because it will help avoid the spread of extremism in its western region, the Xinjiang province. Not of less importance is Chinese' investments in mineral and energy sector which is vulnerable to instability. Meanwhile as China is gradually elevating to a global power status, it seems interested in playing a significant role in ensuring stability across the region, more and more now that United States is stepping back. The mediatory role of China is important and much needed since, other countries of region are either lacking the capacity and proven unsuccessful in mediating the process or the warring parties are less interested and can't accept their such role. All actors including; Government, Taliban and Pakistan, trust and respect China because of its neutrality.

Additionally, China's Approach which involves advocacy of a regional format for peace and reconciliation has been warmly welcomed by Afghanistan, Pakistan, western countries and is understandable for others, such as India.

China has very clear incentives to involve in such regional efforts to address the major security concerns in the region since; they are well connected to its own national security concerns as China faces constant threat from separatists and extremists. Moreover, Chinese involvement will increase the chance of trilateral cooperation, dragging in the Russian engagement. As a member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Russians are more likely to be supportive of China's proposals. As well as the prospects for cooperation will grow more by involvement of Central Asian states since they also face similar threats from separatist and extremist movements.¹³ (Giustouzzi; 2010)

China has also recently become more directly involved in Afghanistan. While it had been reluctant to take a more overt role, it appears to have decided to become more assertive in response to the political and military transitions of 2014. In July 2014 China appointed a special envoy to Afghanistan. It has also announced that it will provide training for the Afghan police. The decision by Ghani to make China the first country he visited as president suggests an Afghan desire for deeper Chinese engagement which appears to be paying dividends given the reported visit of a Taliban delegation to Beijing in November 2014.

¹³ Brohi, Nasurullah, 2015. "Analyzing China's role in Afghan peace process". Foreign Policy News, Feb 28. accessed Oct. 2015 at: <http://foreignpolicynews.org/2015/02/28/analyzing-chinas-role-in-afghan-peace-process/>

1-2-3 Other Countries of Region

Iran has played a double role in regard to Afghanistan. While it kept strong ties with regime in Kabul, provided financial support to the administration, and acted as a major donor of development aid to Afghanistan, it has increased its links with the Taliban since 2005. Iran's involvement often took the form of offering support to individual commanders of Taliban, in south and mostly in western provinces. At first Iranians were only supplying limited amount of weaponry and medical supplies but, after negotiations with Taliban there was an increase in supplies as well as providing trainings to Taliban groups in Iran. However, Taliban may not trust Iran, because of their troubled relations when they were in power but, certainly they favor receiving logistics and supplies from diverse sources including from Iran. It is also less likely that Iranians will achieve significant influence on Taliban decision-making.¹⁴ However Iran has interests at stake namely withdrawal of US military and presence of a stable Afghanistan governed by a friendly regime, not dominated by Pakistan or its proxies, the nature of its support for a peace process depends on issues not directly related to Afghanistan. Developments in Nuclear talks, contests with states of Gulf and tensions in relation with United States are just some instances. However Iran would be very cautious when it comes to accepting any commitments rising from a political settlement, meanwhile it wouldn't favor being left out any such process. (Shin & Dobbins; 2011)

¹⁴ Giustozzi, Antonio, 2010. "Negotiating with the Taliban; Issues and Prospects" the Century Foundation, accessed at: <http://www.tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-Giustozzi.pdf>, pp. 15-16

Saudi Arabia has leverage over Pakistan and it should be effectively mobilized in pressuring Pakistan to halt its notorious behavior and bringing Taliban to table. The origins of Saudi's interests and influence in Afghanistan affairs return back to their support for anti-Soviet war, as well as, maintenance of friendly relations with Taliban while they were in power. There are modest gains and almost no risks for Saudi Arabia in hosting negotiations toward a settlement. Saudis as Shin and Dobbins (2011) outlines "would likely be willing to exercise its moral suasion and perhaps a limited amount of checkbook diplomacy to nudge Kabul and the Taliban toward signing an agreement".

Saudi Arabia can play a significant role by convincing Taliban leaders to enter to negotiations with Afghan government and through encouraging its ally, Pakistan to break with Taliban and support peace process. At times, Saudis involved in secret peace talks among some circles in Taliban leadership and government of Afghanistan but so far it couldn't achieve a major breakthrough in the process. However it worth considering that, Saudi has greater challenges closer to home and its credibility is undermined by its ambiguous relationships with Islamist movements and reluctance to crack down on funding of these by their own citizens (G. Price; 2015). As such its engagement should be strictly monitored in order to counter any side effects possibly created by rivalry motivated Saudi involvement.

Russia sees curtailing the ability of radical groups from offering support to separatism or carrying out terrorist attacks within Russia as well as, withdrawal of NATO troops, ending their military presence in Central Asia as its vital interests in respect to peace process. Predicted by Shin and Dobbins (2011), "Russia could be either marginally helpful or marginally obstructive in any

peace negotiations. But, at the end of the day, one of the primary benefits to Moscow of a successful peace process is the exit of American military forces and the reduction of Washington's political influence throughout Central Asia". But scarred by its past involvement in Afghanistan, is reluctant to deepen its engagement in a conflict relatively far from its borders.

India however, skeptical about the peace process and its outcomes, will be interested to be involved if it happens. India has huge interests at stake in Afghan peace process. For India maintenance of regime at its best friendly or least neutral in Afghanistan, that is not under full control and dominance of Pakistan proxies, including Taliban and elimination of international terrorists' sanctuaries as well as, keeping its presence in Afghanistan to assure the former two, are vital interests. (Shin & Dobbins; 2011)

India has been at the forefront of economic engagement, leading measures under the Heart of Asia process and hosting numerous business summits for Afghanistan. But its poor relationship with Pakistan makes India unable to lead a political process in Afghanistan.

Turkey sees many of its interest served if peace talks succeed such as; countering extremism, expansion of its commerce, promotion of its political influence and prestige all over Central Asia and strengthening its leadership role in NATO. It has fairly positive grounds to play a major role in mediating a process toward a settlement. Turkey kept fairly good relations with all potential participants of a political process. It has close relations with Afghan government and various influential leaders. Nonetheless, its fair good relations with Taliban, while they were in power that can manipulate those former personal ties with some circles among Taliban leadership.

The ruling party in Turkey can be served to a great extent, in exchange to greater facilitating role that it could play in bringing a peace accord thus, is a good candidate for hosting and mediating the peace process. However its credibility and influence are compromised by the security breakdown in its own neighborhood. (Price; 2015)

Keeping the region engaged with Afghanistan is imperative for stability in the country and its neighbors. Pessimists see prospects of multilateral regional engagement to solve Afghanistan's internal security challenges generally poor. Most of the countries in the region lack the capacity or the will to mediate a political process in Afghanistan. Many emphasize their opposition to infringing the sovereignty of other countries, and some are ill placed to act as honest brokers. The idea of a multilateral solution to Afghanistan's security challenges is further undermined by the absence of trust between many of the countries concerned. As such this prevents joined-up engagement.

But in a more cautiously optimistic view, there is greater evidence that regional processes can play a positive role in a post-conflict environment. According to Waldman & Wright (2014), there is full convergence of interests among external actors on avoiding civil war or state collapse, while there is significant partial convergence on achieving mid to long term stability in Afghanistan including a process that may result in recognition and inclusion of Taliban seen by most regional states as mean to achieve it. Apart from Pakistan, for most neighbors and outside powers stability, will reduce cross-border contagion, limit opportunities for extremists, reduce the prospects of civil war and improves the prospects for trade and mineral extraction.

China, Russia and India would see clear security and economic benefits in presence of friendly stable regime in Kabul. And if, eventually, Pakistani officials were reassured about the scope and purpose of India's presence in Afghanistan, and felt that a political settlement in Afghanistan could address cross-border concerns without curtailing Pakistan's influence, they might perceive such a settlement as having genuine advantages. Some argue that without a grand vision to build trust among Afghanistan's neighbors; small confidence-building steps will fail to surmount underlying political obstacles. There are calls for some form of political compact under which the countries of the region would pledge to stop using proxies to undermine their neighbors, but this would require a sea change in approaches. (Price; 2015)

Growing signs of convergence of interests among countries of region gives signs of hope for enhanced stability in Afghanistan but, a positive outcome is not guaranteed. Much still depends on the success of the state in Afghanistan in bringing Chinese and Saudis constructive role to pressure Pakistan and directing and materializing this regional interest convergence in framework of a regional task force to reach a political settlement.

2. "Acceptance of Insurgents as Legitimate Negotiating Partners"

Partially, this second step toward settlement has been already reached. Former president Hamid Karzai admitted that Taliban constitutes a significant force in Afghanistan and ignoring them may incur high costs on government. For a short period of time during opening of Taliban office in Qatar both sides got closer to real negotiations. Similarly president Ghani put negotiation with Taliban as his

top priority in office ¹⁵ accepting insurgents as legitimate partners for negotiations, as such, assured the continuity in peace (Clarke & Paul; 2014)

Three decades long conflict, complicated the situation in Afghanistan, but historical records of reaching settlements in countries such as; Bosnia, Burundi also Indonesia, suggest us the fact that the duration of conflict and its intensity doesn't make the conflict unresolvable. The process can be pushed further forward, if the government truly agrees to legitimacy of Insurgents as negotiating partners. In practice, assuring that government truly sees Taliban as a legitimate partner for negotiations is made hard because of the large number of stakeholders involved, all pursuing different interests and agendas. As security expert Vanda Felbab-Brown, outlines "Many Afghan groups fear that a negotiated outcome would be detrimental to their interests and jeopardize their security."¹⁶

One other notable challenge, when governments fight many insurgent groups at the same time is that government may tend to deal with all different groups identically, while goals of some can be different and somewhat acceptable to government than those of other groups on extremes. Very similar was the case of Philippines. Implied by the case of Tajikistan, Track 2 diplomacy and an effective mediation role from countries of region offers some

¹⁵ President Ghani's Inaugural speech, 2014. President's Office, Accessed October 2015 at: <http://president.gov.af/en/news/36954>

¹⁶ Vanda Felbab-Brown, 2013. "Afghanistan in 2012: Limited Progress and Threatening Future," Asian Survey, Vol. 53, No. 1, January–February, p. 27.

prospects for fully achieving this essential step in the process. Countries like; China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, are well positioned to play such role.

3. “Brokered Cease-Fires”

At this stage of conflict the “Fight and Talk” policy has its merits and is the right one. Afghan security forces should keep kill and capture operations up until Insurgents officially admit to a cease-fire and enter into serious negotiations as well as international Resolute Support mission should continue provision of training and equipments to Afghan National Security Forces. Any comprehensive plan should include offensive military operations. Such military action must be present to compliment politics and diplomatic approach. While any peace process faces continued threat from spoiler groups, splinter groups often emerge and their existence is more detrimental to peace process and the military stability resulted from cease-fires. Small splinter groups are particularly dangerous for countries experiencing the transition situation to peace. Since they are small, they are desperate and often take big risk and carry out attacks, mostly violent and indiscriminate. Similar to dealing with spoilers, success and failure in negotiations depends on ability of policy makers to execute plans to counter splinter elements before they are able to destabilize the negotiation process. (Clarke & Paul; 2014)

In conflicts where external actors have the ability to influence the cease-fire, the government must use all possible means to achieve this step. To end the conflict insurgents must be integrated back to Afghan society and their inclusion in future political system. But prior to reaching that stage a cease-fire must be agreed on since, otherwise peace talks during violence will not yield positive results. Rightly pointed out by Shinn and Dobbins (2011), “a cease-fire could

provide the space for a more comprehensive accord or an official intermediate agreement, especially if this agreement were preceded by other confidence-building measures such as prisoner releases or guarantee of safe passage for negotiations”. One major concern is the possibility of violence once foreign troops withdraw. Consequently, finding the right balance between full withdrawal and keeping enough of a presence to counter security challenges and provide trainings to Afghan National security forces would be a major subject for discussion in negotiation process.

4. “Official Intermediate Agreements”

Since as early as 2001, micro level reintegration of insurgents has been proceeding in an on-again and off-again manner. The Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program served as a framework for reintegration efforts. Any intermediary agreement is possible to be reached through this program. The program consists of two tracks; in first or operational level the program focus on reintegration of low and mid-level fighters while, the second or strategic level centers on reconciliation with high-level, leadership circles of insurgents.

However dealing with the leadership of insurgents is the main pillar of success but not less essential is having plans to deal with mid-level commanders. As it is the common case, when the leadership agrees to a peace deal, the ground fighters need a respectable exit. The insurgents’ ground fighters usually accept to end their role as combatants if they believe the benefits of such an action is more than the costs. Thus a well-designed reintegration program is essential to offer them the assurance of their security, provision of alternative means of livelihood and a respectable exit. In this it is necessary to assure that these integration packages are well-tailored to consider the diversity of insurgency. Because

offering cash if seduce some, may not have the same results for others. To achieve success in this regard as Colin P. Clarke and Christopher Paul (2014) pointed out “there is need to study lessons learned from previous demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration programs to discern what has worked and what has been less successful”.

5. “Power-Sharing Offers”

However recent studies, all call for a peace deal, historical records outlines that while success may need negotiations, negotiations by itself does not always equal to success. Power-sharing with insurgent groups like Taliban has many potential dangers. Having organizational skills and ability to intimidate local population as well as, popularity among some parts of country, it is not for from possibility that they could win in some sort of future elections. Equally unattractive that sharing power with insurgents look, as power-sharing theory suggests, in an intra-state war such as case of Afghanistan it is a necessary way to put an end to conflict. Reaching this 5th step form step 4 may take long time. That being said, shift from 4th to this 5th step may take long time. In our case of our model case study Tajikistan, it took years until intensity of conflict and external pressure convinced the ruling government to consider seriously, inclusion of insurgents.

Heather outlines the bright side of “Allowing insurgents into the political process as, it can be an important tool for accommodating the insurgency’s cause, holding them accountable to their constituents, and bringing them under the legal

strictures of the state.”¹⁷ Also Steve Coll argues that “The lures of legitimacy and political influence may eventually tempt others in the Taliban’s aging leadership”.¹⁸ Because gaining legitimacy and popular recognition are necessary for attaining improved status to previously untouchable political groups like Taliban, this is seen as “necessary evil” in negotiations. (Colin P. Clarke & Christopher Paul; 2014)

There are yet other potential dangers of a power-sharing process. Some elements among insurgents are strongly adhered to strict ideological connotations thus, whether Taliban sees power-sharing a ultimate goal or just a mean to buy time ease sanctions on their group and then return back to military approaches to gain power? Is not clear. Besides, tempted by gaining revenues from narcotics over the past years, they may have changed to a “criminal enterprises” that are more interested in gaining money than politics, as it exactly was the case of “Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia” (FARC), in Colombian conflict? In this regard United States can be helpful, offering its intense intelligence findings on Taliban Leaders to differentiate smugglers from politicians as British did in case of Northern Ireland conflict. One important lesson learnt from Tajikistan, is that power-sharing institutions such as CNR should be established in order to manage the process within an institutional framework.

¹⁷ Heather S. Gregg, 2011. “Setting a Place at the Table: Ending Insurgencies Through the Political Process” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 22, No. 4, October, p. 660

¹⁸ Steve Coll, 2012. “Looking for Mullah Omar,” *New Yorker*, Vol. 87, No. 45, January 23, accessed on Oct. 2015

6. “Moderation in Leadership”

Informed observers suggest that there are some pragmatists in among leadership circle of the group who are amenable to compromise and seek political legitimacy, this offer good news for a negotiated settlement. But certainly within the group there exist radical elements that will cause a rift once negotiations gain momentum. Both spoiling and splintering pose real threats to a prospectus peace deal. Taliban has a number of hardcore fighters inconvincible to put their arms down. Mostly those who want to apply their own interpretation of Sharia and have religious leaders running the government. The degree to which the ideology of Taliban affects negotiation is not very clear. At several occasions Taliban has moderated to an extent. But mainly such acts were only attempts to gain legitimacy and avoid losing some potential supporters.

If serious negotiations commenced, those hardcore ideological elements will act as spoilers. They will possibly align with Haqqani Network, remnants of Al-Qaeda and other regional extremists groups and will come to surface as guaranteed spoilers once a settlement reached or underway. What is needed to mitigate negative outcomes resulted from emergence of such splinter elements meanwhile, spoilers whose interests, power position and vision are threatened by negotiations is a preemptive and proactive carefully designed strategy. If these Spoilers are not managed carefully, they are able to sabotage and distract the whole process. As mentioned earlier Afghanistan has no short of spoilers. A successful policy intervention requires careful diagnosis and distinction of spoilers’ intentions. Those radical elements not ready to accept compromise should be identified, sidelined or even eliminated.

Similar with spoilers attracting insurgent's moderate elements needs to be identified at first stage. However this is not an easy task and it can even impede success since, those moderate leaders face constant threats of elimination by assassination or coup. Observers report of both moderates and hardliners among Taliban leadership.

7. “Third-Party Guarantors”

High levels of mistrust require a role for external actors to guarantee a prospectus peace agreement. As a result of doubts over neutrality of United States because of its involvement in ongoing conflict, it is less likely that it can be accepted as a neutral third party guarantor for peace process and prospectus agreement. It is possible that one other third party guarantor will be found to play this role efficiently and is acceptable to both sides.

UN can play this role. Or possibly, China considering its long-term friendly stand towards Afghanistan and maintaining a neutral position throughout conflicts in Afghanistan can be the best prospectus guarantor. Its credibility is widely admitted among both parties to the conflict domestically and by influential external stakeholders. Recent Chinese engagement in peace process show signals of willingness and hopeful prospects for playing such role. Similarly other credible actors such as Turkey, Qatar or Saudi Arabia, individually or jointly can play this important. (Clarke & Paul; 2014)

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Among many insurgent groups fighting with Afghan government, Taliban are the most important. Entering in to negotiations with insurgents and including those members of Taliban who are willing to stop violence and break ties with international terrorist networks are the much needed steps towards a cease fire and ultimately achieving a negotiated settlement. (Clarke & Paul; 2014)

Today a achieving a political settlement with Taliban seems one of the very few options that can put an end to this decade long conflict. As already pointed out to achieve a settlement it is necessary that both sides settle into a military stalemate and external stakeholders decrease their support to warring parties and push for a political settlement rather than conflict. As such, there are fairly good prospects for a peace deal. By many accounts a stalemate situation has been reached in Afghanistan and pursuing a negotiated settlement should be given a high weight it deserved. Be it on the basis of a mutually hurting military stalemate with prospects of further elevation diluted or; due to unviability of military solutions, the desire to limit risks to human beings or to assure sustainability of the Afghan state.

Stalemate alone is not enough, as it depends on, if the insurgents enjoying a safe haven won't gain military upper-hand once coalition forces leave the country and if external supporters of insurgents favor settlement over continued conflict. (Clarke & Paul; 2014) This line of reasoning outlines multiple challenges facing the peace process in Afghanistan; The perception of parties of their standings relative to each-other, addressing insurgencies safe haven, bringing external actors to push for settlement rather than perpetuating conflict, spoilers problem and more.

Today the majority in Afghanistan are favoring peace. (Shinn and Dobbins; 2011) As the conflict keeps going, more and more civilians lose their lives. Three decades long conflict made Afghans war-weary. Thus, if Taliban proves that they can be basis for stability they may draw notable support from Afghan society. Still there exist many negative factors. Assuring sustainability of already achieved security gains are not guaranteed because of insurgents, enjoying a safe haven and the lacking capacities in Afghan government. Availability of a sanctuary in Pakistan gives insurgents a big advantage especially if their goal would be to wait until full withdrawal of foreign troops and then storming back to take the power militarily. If there is any determination to end the war, on the side of any interested actors, the key is in convincing Pakistan to end its antagonistic behavior toward Afghanistan and wiping out insurgents' safe haven.

So obvious, widely expected and well discussed thus not subject to further explorations in current paper, is the role that United States can play, in order to push Pakistan toward this end. What this paper purports to be an eminent factor in determining the destiny of peace process is the regional element. Keeping the region engaged with Afghanistan serves as an imperative for stability in the country and its neighbors. There is full convergence of interests among external actors on avoiding civil war or state collapse, while there is significant partial convergence on achieving mid to long term stability in Afghanistan including a process that may result in recognition and inclusion of Taliban seen by most regional states as mean to achieve it.

Apart from Pakistan, for most neighbors and outside powers stability, will reduce cross-border contagion, limit opportunities for extremists, reduce

the prospects of civil war and improves the prospects for trade and mineral extraction. China, Russia and India would see clear security and economic benefits in presence of friendly stable regime in Kabul. On the part of Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia should be brought on board to pressure Pakistan for more constructive role. India and Russia should be engaged in a regional consensus/platform, first as their supports bring strength to peace process, specially bolstering Government's position and secondly to get their legitimate concerns in respect to Afghanistan addressed.

Some argue that without a grand vision to build trust among Afghanistan's neighbors; small confidence-building steps will fail to surmount underlying political obstacles. There are calls for some form of political compact under which the countries of the region would pledge to stop using proxies to undermine their neighbors, but this would require a sea change in approaches. (Price; 2015) Growing signs of convergence of interests among countries of region gives signs of hope for enhanced stability in Afghanistan, but a positive outcome is not guaranteed. Much still depends on the success of the government in Afghanistan in bringing Chinese and Saudi constructive role to pressure Pakistan and directing and materializing this regional interest convergence in framework of regional task force working in favor of a political settlement.

There are yet other central issues in designing and implementing a comprehensive peace process. Afghan government is obliged to make real efforts on effective governance front. As Colin P. Clarke and Christopher Paul (2014) pointed out "there is a battle for legitimacy between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Taliban leaders' messages emphasize the

corruption and injustice of the administration while attempting to convince the Afghan population that Taliban rule is a better alternative”.

For an agreement to endure, it must be broadly seen by Afghans not only as inclusive but also just. It must reflect different voices from diverse social and political groups among population. Just as discussed earlier, because of diverse and complex actors so on their interests, any process would have no shortage of spoilers on all sides. Thus, well-designed spoiler management strategies are much needed and must be established. It is required that some elements are included into process such as; leaders of northern alliance or ethnic groups that fear negotiation may decrease their share of pie, civil society, human and women rights activists and provide guarantees. At the same time, it is vitally important to sideline, contain and eliminate certain vicious elements such as; hardliners from Haqqani network, remnants of Al-Qaeda or other regional extremists that will see their foothold vanishing as a result of negotiations.

Meanwhile, considering the complex and diverse actors and interests involved, as well as intense levels of distrust and animosity the process will take long time before an agreement reached. For the same reason any accord reached in Afghanistan definitely require credible third party guarantors to make sure that it is terms and conditions are respected and implemented. (Waldman; 2010) Last but not least, Afghan government needs continued support from international community particularly, targeted towards development and empowerment of Afghan National Security Forces. This important can enhance the standing, negotiating position and leverage of the Afghan government.

As observed throughout the paper any settlement will have a mixed outcome with both parties make fair big concessions. Government have to accept inclusion of Taliban in institutions of state power, Taliban should renounce violence, cut any ties with international terrorist groups, with international military forces particularly US, facing the decision to significantly draw down its presence or fully withdraw. Important issues like; the Utility of Track II diplomacy, Constitutional reforms, Civil Society representative's inclusion, Women's Right, extended studies of disarmament experiences are some of potential topics to be subject for future discussions and further extensive researches.

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