



# Afghanistan Analysts Network

شبکه تحلیلگران افغانستان  
د افغانستان د تحلیلگرانو شبکه

INDEPENDENT NON-PROFIT RESEARCH ORGANISATION



## AAN Thematic Dossiers



### Thematic Dossier X: Peace talks and reconciliation

Author: **AAN Team** Date: 4 August 2015



The flurry of recent ‘peace-related’ events – talks about talks, actual talks, denials of talks, re-definitions of peace, attacks and key figures dying – has compelled AAN to take another look at the whole body of our work on the subject. This “Peace Talks and Reconciliation Thematic Dossier” brings you all related AAN analyses in one place and provides a much needed historical perspective on current goings-on.

Pieces describe what happened at meetings between Taleban and Afghan government or pro-government figures in France, Germany, Qatar and Pakistan, documenting the various peace strategies and recurrent outbursts of hope, disappointment and anger that have followed the different initiatives. Discussion of reconciliation has been going on for a long, long time: already in 2010, AAN’s Thomas Ruttig was writing about “Talks about Talks – Again.” So we have also looked at what would make a breakthrough possible. There are also assessments of the military capability of an insurgency, which has kept stepping up the fight, while at the same time, occasionally, appearing to show an interest in making peace. Other

pieces introduce the different currents within the Taliban and provide biographies of the main players involved, including Mullah Omar, Akhtar Mansur, Mullah Zaker, the Haqqanis, Mullah Baradar and Tayeb Agha and the others at the Taliban's political office in Qatar. Afghan government, American, Pakistani and British perspectives and agendas are also delved into. We also look at how the earliest opportunities for reconciliation were squandered, going right back to the aftermath of the Taliban's defeat in 2001.

The coverage is arranged in reverse chronological order, starting with our most recent pieces considering the death of Mullah Omar and his successors' wobbly stance towards peace with the Afghan government and its western backers.

### **The Murree Process: Divisive peace talks further complicated by Mullah Omar's death**

Author: Borhan Osman    Date: 5 August 2015

News of Mullah Omar's death was leaked just a day before a second meeting between Taliban and Afghan government representatives was supposed to have taken place. The first meeting on 7 July near Islamabad, in Murree, initiated the so-called Murree Process. The revelation of Mullah Omar's death and subsequent struggle for succession in the Taliban leadership has thrown the whole process into uncertainty. However, AAN's Borhan Osman argues it was murky from the beginning. Although the 7 July meeting was celebrated widely as a major breakthrough, it seems the Taliban were not there through choice but after intimidation from Pakistan. Osman warns that, even before the Taliban leadership crisis, Kabul's choice of having Pakistan bring the Taliban to the table had already risked closing the doors to talks.

### **From Mullah Omar to Mansur: Change at the Taliban's top leadership**

Author: Thomas Ruttig    Date: 31 July 2015

After almost two days of silence, the Taliban have finally admitted that their supreme leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar Mujahed, as they call him, has died. On 31 July 2015, they also announced the appointment of Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur, previously Omar's deputy, as their new leader. Reportedly, this also includes the key title of amir ul-momenin – commander of the faithful – in an attempt to transfer the dead leader's religious legitimacy to the new man at the top. AAN's Thomas Ruttig (with input from Borhan Osman) begins his report on the death of Mullah Omar and its immediate aftermath with some recollections from Kandahar, October 2000, before looking at how news of the death unfolded and what the new leadership looks like.

### **Pushing Open the Door to Peace? Pugwash organises next round of Taliban talks in Qatar**

Author: Thomas Ruttig    Date: 31 May 2015

Preparations are on-going for what are labelled "non-official" talks between Afghans of "different parties." Organised by the non-governmental academic network, the Pugwash Conference, this will be a follow up

to a first round of such talks held in Qatar on 2 and 3 May 2015 which brought members of the two biggest insurgent organisations – the Taleban and Hezb-e Islami – as well as political and civil society figures from inside Afghanistan and some internationals, mainly from the United Nations, to one table. All had been invited in their individual capacities. It was not the first time an Afghanistan-related gathering was organised by the Pugwash Conference. However, it was the first time that a final statement was released. This document contains some surprising elements of consensus, writes AAN's senior analyst Thomas Ruttig. He also asks whether this consensus can kick start, and then sustain, negotiations for a political settlement in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, a recent meeting between Afghan government and Taleban representatives in China signals a possible edging (in deeds, not in words) of the Taleban towards direct talks with the government and has given new momentum to these developments.

### **Talks with the Taleban, Again: This time for real?**

Author: Thomas Ruttig    Date: 17 March 2015

Over the past weeks, Kabul buzzed with rumours that talks with the Taleban would begin soon, specifically, in the first week of March. That particular week is now past and nothing has happened. But this does not mean that rumours were completely false or that no movement is being made towards new talks with the Taleban or, importantly, that direct talks between them and the Afghan government might be possible. AAN co-director Thomas Ruttig looks at recent events, Pakistan's and China's roles and how these countries are perceived by different Afghan players. He also assesses latest developments within the Taleban and how these might nudge the movement away from its position of not talking with Kabul. He concludes that Kabul's push for direct talks with the Taleban reflects the president's philosophy: to achieve peace in order to kick-start the country's economy. But that is easier thought out than done.

### **Taleban for the Ghani Cabinet? A look at a BBC report**

Author: Thomas Ruttig    Date: 11 January 2015

It sounded like 'breaking news' from Kabul: "The Taliban have been offered posts in the new Afghan government, but have turned them down, the BBC understands. The offer came from new President Ashraf Ghani in a bid to end the insurgency that threatens the recovery of the country." The BBC report, that came just before the terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine office in Paris, was soon overshadowed by those events, although it received a number of quick reactions on social media. AAN's Thomas Ruttig looks at the likelihood that such an offer was made, of what it might have hoped to achieve and also briefly looks at recent ideas on how to start a process with the goal of a political solution of the Afghan conflict.

### **The prospect of peace talks after the Bergdahl deal: A Taleban perspective**

Author: Borhan Osman    Date: 30 June 2014

Bowe Bergdahl, now back in America, and the five Taleban ex-Guantanamo detainees, in Qatar, will all be

trying to get used to life after detention. Beyond the personal, what political consequences might the deal have? After years of efforts, it was wrapped up unexpectedly fast and, in the end, was a stand-alone deal, not part of a peace process, conducted in total secrecy, with both Congress and President Karzai informed only after it was complete. The Obama administration cast the swap as necessary to get America's one 'POW' home and hinted only vaguely that it might also open the door to wider Afghan efforts for peace. From a Taliban perspective, however, says AAN's Borhan Osman, the nature of the deal – its timing, speed and limitations – looks different. After speaking to sources in the Taliban's political office in Qatar, he offers a fresh perspective on how the Bergdahl deal might actually spur on a peace process.

### **Bergdahl and the 'Guantanamo Five': The long-awaited US-Taliban prisoner swap**

Author: Kate Clark    Date 4 June 2014

The prisoner swap negotiated between the Taliban and United States has seen the release of the captured US soldier, Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, in return for five Taliban held at Guantanamo Bay, including one of the movement's founders, Khairullah Khairkhwa, and the former chief of the army staff, Mullah Fazl. Much of the reporting on the five has been inaccurate, so AAN has updated research on their backgrounds carried out in 2012 by senior analyst Kate Clark. She also looks at the relevance of the deal (which had been in the cards since 2011 and was enacted secretly through the mediation of Qatar) for any broader negotiations with the Taliban.

### **Can the Taliban outwrestle the government? An assessment of the insurgency's military capability**

Author: Borhan Osman    Date: 25 March 2014

The Taliban are poised to bounce back and threaten the Afghan state once foreign troops withdraw – this is the kind of doomsday scenario one hears these days as foreign troops prepare to depart. Recent statistics have shown that 2013 was at least as violent as 2011, the previous record year for attacks and casualties. However, as AAN's Borhan Osman argues, the insurgency does not (yet) look to be showing any signs of winning – whether in the fight on the battlefield or the one for minds. Indeed, he argues that the Taliban can win on the battlefield only if the future government loses legitimacy in the eyes of the people.\*

### **The Future of Peace Talks: What would make a breakthrough possible?**

Author: Borhan Osman    Date: 23 January 2014

Attempts last year to reconcile the Taliban ended where they had started a year before – stuck in stalemate. Two major developments this year, however, could affect the peace process. The departure of President Hamid Karzai and accession of a new leader in the spring provides an opportunity for rebooting the peace process. At best, this could be a game-changer. The withdrawal of foreign troops, however, could potentially cut both ways. It might trigger an attempt by the insurgents to deliver a knockout blow to the government, thereby intensifying the conflict or it might strip the Taliban of their stated *raison d'être* for

fighting – the presence of ‘infidels’ on Afghan soil – forcing them to at least rethink how they sell their call to endless war. AAN’s Borhan Osman examines the current state of the peace efforts with a look back at the last year and also offers thoughts on the prospects for peace in 2014 and beyond.

### **Meeting Mullah Baradar... or Maybe Not: Confusion over Taliban Talks**

Author: Kate Clark Date: 3 December 2013

Yet again there is the impression of something being afoot on the matter of talks with the Taliban, at least as far as Afghan government aspirations go. During the visit of Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, to Kabul on 30 November 2013, both leaders had nice words to say about the peace process, with Sharif promising to “extend all possible facilitation.” There were also reports, albeit unconvincing, that an Afghan delegation visiting Pakistan had finally been allowed to see the former Taliban deputy leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, recently ‘released’ from ISI custody. Yet hopes that Islamabad would use its influence on the Taliban to stop the fighting in Afghanistan have been stirred – and dashed – in Kabul before. AAN Senior Analyst, Kate Clark (with input from Thomas Ruttig) asks if, this time, there is anything of real substance to be hopeful about.

### **The Release of Mullah Baradar: What’s next for negotiations?**

Author: Kate Clark Date: 21 September 2013

It has been reported that Pakistan has released the most senior Taliban it had in its custody, Mullah Abdul-Ghani Baradar. At the time of his arrest in Karachi in 2010, Baradar was the effective number two in the movement and de facto operational chief of the insurgency. Both the Pakistani and Afghan governments have said they believe his release will help reconciliation. AAN Senior Analyst Kate Clark looks at who Baradar is and what he might contribute to finding a negotiated end to the conflict, with input from Thomas Ruttig and Martine van Bijlert.

### **What came out of the Peace Talks in Islamabad? An Afghan and a Pakistani take**

Author: Reza Rumi and Borhan Osman Date: 28 August 2013

Did the Afghan-Pakistani peace talks in Islamabad over the past two days yield results to speak of? There were surprisingly positive moments – moments that justified the hope pinned on this trip. Then again, listening in closer to the concluding statements of the Pakistani Prime Minister and the Afghan President, both leaders seemed to be “on different pages.” AAN has asked a Pakistani and an Afghan analyst to cast an eye at the meeting in Islamabad and read between the lines about both countries’ interests and future relations. Raza Rumi, an analyst and journalist from Islamabad, looks at it from the Pakistani perspective and explains the new Prime Minister’s approach to Afghanistan. AAN’s Borhan Osman and Christine Roehrs ponder if Afghanistan’s expectations were met.

### **Déjà Vu All Over Again: The Af-Pak roller coaster and a possible new Taliban office**

Authors: Borhan Osman Date: 25 August 2013

Tomorrow, 26 August, President Hamed Karzai is visiting Islamabad; it will be the first visit since February 2012. At the top of the agenda: peace talks – again. In the lead-up to this visit, officials of the two countries spoke of alternatives to the Taliban's Qatar office. AAN's Borhan Osman (with input by Thomas Ruttig) ponders how much hope to pin on Pakistan, now under new leadership, and how promising the alternatives to the "Qatar process" are. He concludes that Kabul's attempts at wooing Islamabad to open talks with the Taliban have been a diplomatic roller coaster, rendering chances for serious cooperation dim. He also finds that the Saudi Arabia and Turkey options, as opposed to Qatar, will be ineffective as long as the Taliban are not consulted.

### **Who Played Havoc with the Qatar Talks? Five possible scenarios to explain the mess**

Author: Borhan Osman and Kate Clark Date: 9 July 2013

The bizarre turn of events following the opening of the Taliban office in Doha has led many to wonder whether the affair could have been deliberately sabotaged. Was it possible it had just been badly handled? So rapidly did the optimism about potential talks give way to bewilderment at their suspension, and the Taliban's re-appearance under a blaze of international media coverage end in their re-disappearance. It was an embarrassing setback for the US, the Taliban and the host nation, Qatar, although the Afghan government, which had never been keen on the Qatar option in the first place, was more likely to have been quietly pleased. Borhan Osman and Kate Clark have been piecing together the sequence of events and have come up with five possible scenarios of how exactly it all went so badly wrong.

### **Talking to the Taliban: A British perspective**

Author: Kate Clark Date: 3 July 2013

The deputy commander of ISAF and most senior British soldier in Afghanistan, General Nick Carter, has told The Guardian that, 'the west should have tried talking to the Taliban a decade ago, after they had just been toppled from power'. AAN Senior Analyst, Kate Clark, who witnessed many of the events of that time, not just the fall of the Taliban but the first stirrings of uprising, says the problem was not that the Taliban were excluded from the Bonn Conference in 2001, or from subsequent discussions on the future of the country, but that they were actively persecuted. Clark also looks at General Carter's assessment for the post-2014 years: the Taliban will not be able to 'threaten' central government, but will control parts of the country and the war is set to continue.

### **The Taliban in Qatar (2): Biographies – core and constellation**

Author: Kate Clark Date: 24 June 2013

The very public cutting of a red ribbon marking the opening of the Taliban office in Qatar on 18 June 2013 and the videoed raising of their flag allowed the world to see, for the first time in many years, a public face



for the clandestine insurgent group. It has also allowed an initial assessment of who is in the Taleban's Qatar office and what their credentials as negotiators on behalf of the movement might be. One of the new spokesmen, Dr Muhammad Naeem, said there were 6 major figures in the office; AAN counted 13 Afghans at the flag raising ceremony. On 24 June, AAN senior analyst, Kate Clark (with input from Claudio Franco, Gran Hewad, Borhan Osman and guest blogger, Anand Gopal) published biographies of the men who may be about to start talks with the Americans and the Afghan government. Since then, AAN's Borhan Osman has gathered further material. Here we re-post our piece with new details added and a few corrections (which are footnoted).

### **The Taleban in Qatar (1): Head of office Tayyeb Agha**

Author: Anand Gopal    Date: 23 June 2013

The opening of the Taleban's political office in Doha brought the slither of a clandestine insurgent movement into the public eye. But just who is in the office, about to negotiate with the US and the Afghan government – if, that is, all sides can sort out protocols and procedures? The first of three pieces on the 'Qatari Taleban' is a re-posting of a biography of the head of the newly opened office, Muhammad Tayyeb Agha. The piece was written by guest writer and Taleban expert, Anand Gopal in July 2011 when it was revealed that Tayyeb Agha had been speaking to US officials in Germany. As Gopal reports, Tayyeb Agha, who speaks English and Arabic, operated at the heart of the Taleban government as Mullah Omar's press secretary and translator. Since 2001, he is believed to be one of the very few people to have maintained a direct line to the Taliban leader.

### **The Opening of the Taleban Office in Qatar: A propaganda coup and an angry government**

Author: Kate Clark    Date: 19 June 2013

The long awaited Taleban office in Qatar has opened on 18 June 2013 with a press conference in which two spokesmen presented their movement as a government in waiting. With the old Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan flag behind them, Sohail Shaheen, in English and Mullah Naeem, in Pashto managed to portray an insurgency, whose main victims, after all, are Afghan civilians, as a 'jihad to put an end to the occupation, and form an independent Islamic system... utilis[ing] every lawful means.' It was a propaganda coup. The US, meanwhile, has been briefing optimistically, calling it an Afghan-led process and, in the words of President Obama, an 'important first step toward reconciliation'. There was an ominous silence from the Afghan government, followed, this morning, by the announcement that President Karzai had suspended talks with the Americans over the post-2014 Bilateral Security and Defence Agreement. AAN Senior Analyst, Kate Clark reports (with input from Martine van Bijlert and Gran Hewad).

### **The Qatar Office Conundrum: Karzai's quest for control over Taleban talks**

Author: Thomas Ruttig    Date: 5 April 2013

During President Karzai's recent visit to Qatar, discussions about a possible Taleban office were high on

the agenda, and the visit had been charged with expectations in advance. Surprisingly, not much has been officially publicised about its outcome after the president returned home. AAN's Senior Analyst Thomas Ruttig tries to make sense of the trip and thinks that while it was just an episode, it is part of a wider strategy, to neutralise third parties' potential communication channels with the Taliban. Since the beginning of the year, Kabul has made some progress on this but also suffered some setbacks. The major setback was that Pakistan did not become more cooperative – the bilateral relations have hit rock bottom, again, and the Afghan-Pakistani road map to peace shelved.

### **Afghanistan's vain attempts at wooing Pakistani Islamists for peace**

Author: Borhan Osman    Date: 7 March 2013

The recent assertion by Pakistan's chief cleric, Tahir Ashrafi, about the permissibility of Taliban's suicide attacks was completely the opposite of what Afghanistan had been looking for. Indeed, Kabul has had difficulties in mobilising religious leaders to speak against suicide attacks. A long sought conference of ulama from Afghanistan and Pakistan aimed at delegitimising militancy has never happened due to disagreements between Afghan and Pakistani clerics. Pakistan's support is at the heart of Kabul's intended roadmap for peace, but assertions such as that of Tahir Ashrafi clearly go against the Kabul plan. So who is Ashrafi and how much can Afghanistan hope to secure Pakistan's support when it comes to religious backing? Borhan Osman has talked to Ashrafi and the leaders of two main Pakistani religious parties to gauge the opinion of these key religious-political actors regarding war and peace in Afghanistan. He concludes that Afghanistan is hopelessly trying to use the Taliban's longstanding friends against the Taliban.

### **Qatar, Islamabad, Chantilly, Ashgabad: Taliban Talks Season Again?**

Author: Thomas Ruttig    Date: 31 December 2012

There has again been movement in the positions marking the landscape of 'reconciliation' or, more precisely, of contacts and possible negotiations with the Taliban seem to be moving again. A track II meeting, labelled as 'intra-Afghan' talks, was held in France and, before that, the so-called 'HPC roadmap' leaked, indicating a more active role of the Afghan government, mainly through the High Peace Council, in conjunction with Pakistani involvement. Media and western diplomats, meanwhile have been insisting that Pakistan has given up its destructive, pro-Taliban position. AAN's Thomas Ruttig tries to make sense of it all and concludes that much of it still is 'talks about talks', combined with wishful thinking designed to make the US/NATO withdrawal 2014 more palatable – basically, he says, it is too early, still, to open the Champagne bottles. (With input by Said Reza Kazemi, Borhan Osman and Gran Hewad.)

### **Just about over the First Hill: Pakistan's Release of Afghan Taliban**

Author: Thomas Ruttig    Date: 15 November 2012

The release of a number of Afghan Taliban by Pakistan, as announced on 14 November, may prove



crucial for an urgently needed breakthrough on a political settlement in Afghanistan. It is also the first big personal success for Rabbani Junior at the helm of the Afghan High Peace Council. But too much optimism would be inappropriate. The possible integration of some released leaders into a Taliban negotiation team is only the first of many hills to be overcome on the long run towards meaningful negotiations. First and foremost, the Taliban leadership is yet to be persuaded to enter into direct talks with the Afghan government. AAN's Thomas Ruttig looks at this and other open questions.

### **The Haqqani Network Blacklisted: From US Asset to Special Foe**

Author: Thomas Ruttig Date: 20 September 2012

Earlier this month, the US government blacklisted the Haqqani network, labelling it a 'foreign terrorist organisation'. Leaving aside the pros and cons of this decision, which have been fairly widely discussed, AAN co-director Thomas Ruttig looks at other questions: why did the blacklisting happen so late and why is the network singled out from the Taliban movement to which it belongs? He sketches the relationship of the Haqqani network with the Taliban movement and how it turned from being an US ally into one of its 'most formidable adversaries' (Financial Times)

### **Back to Qatar? Talks about talks, again**

Author: Thomas Ruttig Date: 27 August 2012

This summer has brought news that indicated that talks between the US and the Taliban (or even the Afghan government and the Taliban) might possibly be rekindled. It all started rather sensationally with a member of the Taliban leadership publicly attending an (academic) conference, moving on to speculations about Pakistan allowing Kabul access to an incarcerated Taliban leader and to new US thoughts about transferring key Taliban prisoners out of Guantanamo. AAN's Thomas Ruttig summarises what has happened, before arguing that what looks like a lot of movement has not yet resulted in practical progress. However, he says that Mulla Omar's latest Eid message has made the Taliban's vision of a post-withdrawal Afghanistan much clearer than any previous statement.

### **Another Hit at the High Peace Council: Arsala Rahmani Killed**

Author: Kate Clark Date: 13 May 2012

One of the leading reconciled Taliban, Arsala Rahmani, who was also a senator and, until last month, acting head of the High Peace Council, has been shot dead in Kabul. On 3 May, the Taliban declared they would be targeting High Peace Council members in their 'Spring Offensive', but a spokesman has said they did not kill Rahmani. The dead mawlawi had been a major mujahedin commander in the 1980s, a Supreme Court judge during the mujahedin government of the mid-1990s and deputy minister for higher education during the Taliban regime. From 2002, he actively called for reconciliation. However, his and others' early efforts were rebuffed until after the Taliban insurgency took off. By this time, argues AAN senior analyst, Kate Clark, the opportunity for them to play any major role in reconciliation had been lost.

(With contributions by Thomas Ruttig).

## **A second Rabbani takes the helm at the High Peace Council**

Author: Gran Hewad    Date: 7 April 2012

The competition for a successor to the late former president Burhanuddin Rabbani at the head of Afghanistan's High Peace Council (HPC) is over: Rabbani's eldest son Salahuddin has been appointed by President Karzai. But is this appointment a real attempt to get a peace process on track, or is it instead, simply an alliance-building manoeuvre within the Kabul political establishment – just as with the original appointment of his father? AAN's Gran Hewad looks at the background and possible implications of the decision.

## **The End of the Affair? Taliban Suspend Talks**

Author: Kate Clark    Date: 6 March 2012

The Taliban have announced that they are suspending talks with the Americans, only six weeks after the opening of their political office in Qatar. In a statement, they described the US approach as 'shaky, erratic and vague' and accused the Americans of breaching a memorandum of understanding which had been previously arrived at. This decision does not appear driven by the killing of 16 civilians in Panjwai by a US soldier earlier in the week, but has to do with how the talks were going – particularly the non-release of Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo and Washington's insistence that the Taliban deal with President Karzai – and with internal Taliban politics. Meanwhile, President Karzai, in the wake of the Panjwai killings, has demanded a faster track transition of security from ISAF to Afghan hands. AAN senior analyst, Kate Clark reports.

## **Are the Taliban talking to Karzai (and does it matter)?**

Author: Martine van Bijlert    Date: 18 February 2012

When little is clear, all clues seem relevant. And so it can happen that a handful of fairly vague sentences by the President are taken as proof of a significant new step towards negotiations in Afghanistan. A closer look at these claims of emerging "three-way talks" shows that this reading is rather premature, as is also reflected in the immediate Taliban denial. But there is, if nothing else, at least an acknowledgement that there may be a process and – for the moment – those involved seem careful not to decisively spoil it. This may not last, it may go nowhere, but it does provide a chance.

## **Talks on Two Channels? The Qatar office and Karzai's Saudi option**

Author: Thomas Ruttig    Date: 29 January 2012

The latest reports about developments on reconciliation – or better: talks with insurgent groups, both with

the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami\* – have been rather contradictory. Or haven't they? The main insight from these reports, is that President Karzai has only rhetorically bowed to the unilateral US/German thrust to establish a Taliban liaison office in Qatar, estimates Thomas Ruttig, Senior Analyst at AAN, and that he tries to develop his own channel of talks now, independent of the US, instrumentalising Qatari-Saudi tensions.

### **An Address for the Taliban in Qatar**

Author: Thomas Ruttig Date: 16 December 2011

The much heralded Taliban office in a third country seems finally about to be opened. The news that this will happen in Qatar, broken by an Indian newspaper on Wednesday\* and picked up by Kabul-based Tolo TV a day later, was followed by President Karzai calling back his ambassador in Doha 'for consultations' claiming that he was not consulted again. This will probably settle soon and, if the news is confirmed, there should finally be an address for talks with the Taliban, a major minor step on the long and thorny way towards a political solution in Afghanistan, says Thomas Ruttig, senior analyst at AAN.

### **Thinking out loud about peace, talks and tensions**

Author: Martine van Bijlert Date: 7 October 2011

In the weeks after Rabbani's death by deceit and in the days after President Karzai's oblique announcement of a new peace strategy, Afghans are trying to make sense of a complicated and murky situation. They are thinking out loud and what they say illustrates the complexity and the confusion, the diverging view points and the internal contradictions. A few longer conversation excerpts give a taste:

### **The government's new peace strategy: Who to talk to?**

Author: Martine van Bijlert Date: 4 October 2011

After the Rabbani assassination, the Afghan government has made it clear that it intends to revise its peace strategy. It has however been very short on the details of what this might look like, other than that it needs to revolve around 'talking to Pakistan'. The change comes in the midst of deteriorating relations with Pakistan and concerns that we may be witnessing the birth of yet another ad hoc approach.

### **The Death of Rabbani**

Author: Kate Clark Date: 20 September 2011

One of the most senior Afghan leaders has been killed in a suicide bombing at his home in Kabul. Burhanuddin Rabbani was a founder and leading activist in the Afghan Islamist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, one of the seven leaders of the (Sunni) mujahedin parties in the 1980s and – at least formally – president for almost a decade. More recently, he has been an MP and chairman of the High Peace

Council, charged with seeking to make peace with the Taleban. AAN senior analyst, Kate Clark assesses Rabbani's life and what his death may mean for the prospects of peace.

### **Guest Blog: Amrullah Saleh's new language on the Taleban**

Author: Ahmad Shuja Date: 19 June 2011

Former NDS chief, Amrullah Saleh, wrote an op-ed article on Bloomberg.com in which he tacitly agreed to the idea of negotiations with the Taleban and called for a truth commission as a way of reconciliation. Saleh, it seems, is rebranding himself outside Afghanistan as a pragmatic opposition leader open to concessions, writes our guest blogger Ahmad Shuja(\*).

### **Taleban Contacts between Smoke and Mirrors: Karzai's 18 June speech**

Author: Thomas Ruttig Date: 19 June 2011

Nothing is what it appears in the T2T drama series. Talking to the Talebs is a cabinet of mirrors. The mirrors make it appear that smoke is rising from one place while the fire is burning at another. And it is not even clear whether this is real smoke and fire, or just Javanese-style shadow play. Karzai's Saturday speech in Kabul 'confirming' US direct contacts with the Taleban, mirrored as a sensation in the international media, is just the latest act of an ongoing performance the direction of which remains opaque, concludes AAN's Senior Analyst Thomas Ruttig.

### **Talking about peace talks; a morass of misunderstandings and abstractions**

Author: Martine van Bijlert Date: 22 March 2011

For a while now I have been feeling uneasy over the direction the debate on 'talking to the Taleban' is taking. The more I listen to conversation about reaching some kind of settlement, the more I feel as if I am wading into a morass of misunderstandings and abstractions, with a potentially dangerous level of superficiality and easy assumptions.

### **Flash to the Past: Missed Opportunities for Reconciliation**

Author: Anand Gopal Date: 15 November 2010

Our guest author Anand Gopal (\*) looks back how chances for integrating Taleban into Afghanistan's post-2001 political system were squandered and how the alienation of leading former commanders in Kandahar became a key motivating factor in sparking the insurgency. Therefore, the original article had the following sub-line: 'The Victor's Hubris and the Failure of Reconciliation'.

### **Splitting the Hagganis with NATO Reconciliation Air?**

Author: Thomas Ruttig Date: 1 November 2010

The initial big wave of reports about talks with the Taliban gathering speed and of a possible short-term 'reconciliation' have given way for a slower but steady trickle of spicy detail. A detail dropped here, some names there, mixed with half-denials like Richard Holbrooke's 'There is less than meets the eye' line keep the shurwa(\*) boiling. The focus seems to be on the Haqqani network for the moment. AAN's Senior Analyst Thomas Ruttig looks back at how the 'talk about talks' developed, what the prospects are and who is flying which 'airline' to the talks.

### **Reconciliation in Afghanistan: Can the UN right some wrongs?**

Author: Horia Mosadiq Date: 31 October 2010

Our guest author Horia Mosadiq(\*) looks at the United Nations' role now and then in Afghanistan, with special attention to its numerous attempts to 'peace deals relying largely on power-sharing'. She sees the latest initiatives for 'reconciliation' as a continuation of this approach and discusses its possible implications for justice, with its inherent differentiation of human rights abusers in 'good' and 'bad' ones.

### **Talking to the Taliban: Who's under pressure now?**

Author: Anand Gopal Date: 22 October 2010

The last US plan – to have a more broad-based reconciliation process only after its military would regain the upper hand on the battlefield – has not worked. The surge has not shifted the momentum. Not the Taliban but in reality the US are under pressure, and fundamental questions open about how and where a 'dialogue' with the Taliban should go, argues our guest author Anand Gopal(\*).

### **Are Talks with the Taliban Snow-Balling?**

Author: Martine van Bijlert Date: 20 October 2010

There has been a lot of excitement lately in the press about the supposedly snow-balling talks with the Taliban leadership and what this could mean for the prospects to end the war. The major news outlets have been trying to outdo each other in terms of talking up details provided by spokespeople and unnamed officials. Most Afghans remain largely underwhelmed. So what to make of all of this?

### **Afghan Reactions to the High Peace Council**

Author: Thomas Ruttig Date: 14 October 2010

The establishment of the High Peace Council (HPC) by President Hamed Karzai on 18 September has created a lot of attention. Finally, the competition about who will chair the body has been decided in favour of 1992-96 Interim President Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani. Also, the still missing members have been

appointed which let the HPC become a 70-member body: Wazhma Frogh and Sheela Samimi from the Afghanistan Women's Network, two of the few civil society members(\*).

### **Who wants peace, needs to get serious about justice**

Author: Nader Nadery Date: 12 October 2010

The current ineffectiveness in Afghanistan's justice sector is a legacy of three decades of war and factionalism but not of an historical absence of a formal system of independent adjudication of disputes through courts of law. That it has not been rebuilt, is less due to an inherent inability but to a lack of political will – because justice was seen as 'counterproductive' for 'stability', argues our guest author Nader Nadery(\*).

### **Talk about Talks Again**

Author: Thomas Ruttig Date: 7 October 2010

'Bazaar du-bara garm shud' – the market has become hot again. That's how many Afghans reacted to the breaking news of 'high-level talks' between Taleban leaders and the Kabul government (and possibly some US actors) as well as about the not-so-secret-anymore talks in the Kabul Serena. But look at the small print: The talks were of a 'preliminary nature' and the sources of the news even 'differ on how specific they [the talks] were', where they took place etc. AAN's Senior Analyst Thomas Ruttig has a few footnotes.

### **Warlords' Peace Council**

Author: Martine van Bijlert Date: 28 September 2010

After a series of announcements that the members of the High Peace Council would soon be announced, and a considerable delay reportedly about who should chair the council – a question that is still open – the names of 68 members were finally released today (with apparently two more still to be added). Looking at the list, AAN's Senior Analysts Martine van Bijlert and Thomas Ruttig find the council's composition no surprise, but a disappointment all the same.

### **General Petraeus about Taleban contacts**

Author: Thomas Ruttig Date: 28 September 2010

Reconciliation – a.k.a. talking to the Taleban – is a hot issue. Anything new is picked up quickly by the media world-wide, in particular when it comes from someone with a political weight like Gen. Petraeus. But please also read the small print.

### **London Conference (2): Peace, Reconciliation and Reintegration**



Author: Martine van Bijlert Date: 2 February 2010

The London Conference and the media chatter around it has put the subject of reintegration and negotiations with the Taliban firmly on the agenda. Although both issues had been repeatedly raised by Afghan government and international officials over the last few years, the media and wider public still seemed to be taken by surprise. A closer look at what was said and some of the implications.

**Tagged with:** [Afghan government](#), [Akhtar Mansur](#), [High Peace Council](#), [Mullah Omar](#), [Pakistan](#), [peace talks](#), [Qatar](#), [reconciliation](#), [Taleban](#), [Taliban](#)

**Thematic Category:**

---

Powered By [The Info Solution](#)