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Peace offerings

Theories of conflict resolution and their applicability to Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Theories of conflict resolution, based on empirical research, provide insights into measures that could help to alleviate, contain or even resolve the Afghan conflict. Such theories or strategies are not panacean. Rather, they help to understand the conflict and point towards practical steps that can help to improve the prospects for peace. As abstractions they must necessarily be adapted to circumstances. In Afghanistan, given the implausibility of outright military defeat of the insurgents, policymakers should devote more attention to non-violent means of reducing or even ending the violence, some of which we explore in this paper.

The current paper discusses seven theories of conflict resolution. Each of the theories contains insights that are relevant to the Afghan conflict, which can be briefly summarised as follows. *Ripeness theory* suggests that efforts of the US-led coalition to achieve a position of strength are not conducive to negotiations, as these are usually facilitated by a perceived 'mutually hurting stalemate', in which none of the parties believes it can escalate to victory. *Theories of mediation* suggest that a limited number of high-calibre mediators are required, using a range of skills and tactics, supplemented by various diplomatic tracks. Mediation interventions may not necessarily seek to resolve the conflict, but form part of a limited or incremental approach that seeks to

mitigate or contain the violence. *Theories of reconciliation* suggest that there should be long term efforts to promote sustained dialogue, improved relationships and trust between Afghan groups at all levels – and not just between the principal adversaries.

Power-sharing theories suggest that an inclusive, national political process should seek to establish robust institutions to share or divide state power, as this increases the prospects of an enduring peace. *Credible commitment theory* suggests that such a political process requires the involvement of trusted third parties that are willing to provide political and security guarantees. Theoretical *analysis of spoilers* suggests that certain parties, or elements of the warring parties, will seek to disrupt negotiations: strategies will be required to 'induce' or integrate some and marginalize, coerce or contain certain others.

Finally, there is currently no coherent, national strategy to promote *local peace-building* in Afghanistan but theory suggests that efforts should be made to strengthen community capacities to resolve disputes peacefully, develop trust and social cohesion within and between communities and promote inter-ethnic and inter-group dialogue.

Despite the worsening conflict, many of these insights or initiatives have been neglected or understudied in Afghanistan. A greater willingness to draw lessons from theories of conflict resolution, based on rigorous empirical analysis, could help to lay the groundwork for peace.

INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the recent deployment of more troops and greater military resources to Afghanistan by the US-led Western coalition, there has been no abatement in the insurgency, which is increasing in lethality, territorial scope and mobilisation beyond the Pashtun ethnic group. This confirms widespread doubts about the efficacy of conventional war-fighting, counter-insurgency and transition strategies and increasing consideration of alternative means of managing or mitigating the conflict. The most widely discussed is 'reconciliation'. However, the term is often used as a euphemistic label for efforts to fragment or co-opt elements of the insurgency, or to achieve a narrow political accommodation between two of the parties: the Afghan government (perhaps including or involving its foreign allies) and the Taliban leadership, without addressing the root causes of the insurgency.

This paper explores to what extent theories of conflict resolution can help to inform efforts to achieve peace, defined as both an end to the core conflict and a more tolerant, congruent and stable society. It discusses seven major theories on, or approaches to the resolution of civil conflict that have relevance to Afghanistan and explores their applicability. These theories are: ripeness theory of negotiations; mediation; reconciliation; power-sharing; credible commitment theory; management of spoilers; and local peace-building.¹ They are not necessarily mutually exclusive and many aspects overlap and are interrelated, but they each emphasise different elements of conflict transformation.

Theories are by definition non-specific and the conflict in Afghanistan is multifarious and complex, with significant variation between one area and another, such as in local actors, causation, intensity, impact and dynamics. It encompasses multiple sub-conflicts and power-struggles. But the theories considered below are themselves derived from inductive analysis of conflicts that are highly varied. Thus, while acknowledging the limits of generalised theories, they offer insights that point the way towards a resolution of the Afghan conflict.

¹ Other theories of conflict resolution have not been considered due to constraints of space and their limited applicability.

RIPENESS THEORY

This theory, expounded by William Zartman, centres on the concept of a 'mutually hurting stalemate'. It contends that when warring parties are locked into a conflict that is mutually painful and both believe that they cannot escalate to victory, the prospects for a negotiated outcome improve significantly. 'Negotiations take place where both parties lose faith in their chances of winning and see an opportunity for cutting losses and achieving satisfaction through accommodation.'² The theory posits that such an outcome is especially likely when there is an impending or recently avoided catastrophe, such as a civil war. It also posits that a 'mutually enticing opportunity' can arise during the course of negotiations, which mediators can help to create, where an attractive formula for settlement is perceived and pursued by all parties.³

To assess whether or not a 'mutually hurting stalemate' exists in Afghanistan we must first consider the conflict conditions and then the parties' perception of those conditions.

Due to constraints of space we consider only the two principal parties to the conflict: the US-led coalition and the Taliban. Arguably, they are in stalemate. Although insurgents have made steady gains since 2005, with the surge of US forces backed by more Afghan forces, they are unlikely to achieve any major strategic gains, such as seizing control of major urban centres. On the other hand, despite significant tactical gains in certain areas, international and Afghan forces have not been able to contain the insurgents' territorial expansion. Neither have they been able to staunch the insurgents' increasing appeal beyond their traditional Pashtun constituency, due, amongst other factors, to a growing aversion to perceived foreign dominance of Afghan affairs and misgivings about the designs of the West.

A stalemate could be said to exist, but is it 'mutually hurting'? International military casualties have escalated: there were 711 coalition deaths in 2010,

² I. William Zartman (ed), *Elusive Peace, Negotiating an End to Civil Wars* (Washington DC, The Brookings Institution, 1995), 18.

³ I. William Zartman, *Negotiation and Conflict Management – Essays on Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008); and 'The Timing of Peace Initiatives; Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments', in John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (eds), *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 22.

up by 36 per cent on the same period for 2009.⁴ And the war is increasingly costly, at an average of \$8.75 billion per month in 2010 for the US alone (which equates to \$12 million an hour).⁵ Greater numbers of insurgents are being killed; according to the Afghan government over 5,000 were killed in 2010.⁶ (Correspondingly, General Petraeus' more aggressive approach is causing more civilian casualties.)⁷

Some Western governments believe it will be politically difficult to sustain current military casualty rates over the medium–long term. They are thus already looking to transfer security responsibilities to the Afghan government and commence withdrawal. The insurgents, on the other hand, appear able to absorb higher casualty levels. They have been hardened by the experience of years of armed conflict, have high levels of commitment and draw on a large demographic of potential recruits. Nevertheless, both sides could be said to be 'mutually hurting', as the theory requires.

Arguably, there is also an impending catastrophe: a new round of civil war could break out after a withdrawal of Western troops or the reconfiguring of its mission from 'combat' to 'training/mentoring', which would reduce the prospects of western intervention to prevent factional fighting. This is clearly shaping the views of Afghanistan's future amongst a significant part of its population, including its political class.

But according to ripeness theory it is the parties' perception of stalemate that matters. Regardless of objective conditions, if the adversaries do not believe that they are in an impasse and believe that they can escalate to a position of strength or even victory – which arguably characterises both insurgents and counter-insurgents in Afghanistan – then a mutually hurting stalemate does not exist.⁸

⁴ Figure derived from iCasualties.org.

⁵ US Congressional Research Service, 'Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy', 64.

⁶ 'Over 10,000 died in Afghan violence in 2010', *Agence France-Presse*, 2 January 2010. According to the coalition, over the three months to 11 November some 370 Taliban commanders were killed or captured and 970 fighters were killed. 'Viewpoint: Karzai turns against Western allies', *BBC Online*, 20 November 2010.

⁷ David S. Cloud, 'Afghan civilian deaths caused by allied forces rise', *The Los Angeles Times*, 1 November 2010.

⁸ Zartman, *Negotiation and Conflict Management*, 233 [see FN 4].

The theory does not suggest what some Western officials apparently believe: that negotiations can only be attempted after a successful military surge to achieve a position of strength. In fact, a 'position of strength' implies the existence of conditions of asymmetry that are not consistent with the theory's central proposition. The theory does acknowledge that some escalations can produce a stalemate.⁹ But presently escalation by both sides in Afghanistan only appears to be intensifying the conflict and increasing mistrust and enmity between the parties, thus reducing the prospects for a negotiated outcome.

Furthermore, the US surge has closed down possibilities for political engagement with the Taliban, which existed in 2007-08 after internal Taliban misgivings about the high number of civilian casualties they were causing, particularly due to the wave of suicide attacks organised by late Mullah Dadullah.¹⁰ The surge, however, was perceived by the Taliban as a declaration of war; voices of reason were silenced and insurgent hardliners regained the upper hand.

Currently, both sides think they can win or do substantially better. Talks are only a secondary option for the US-led coalition, which practically tries to crush the insurgency. With the 2014 transition looming, many Talibs assume they can outwait the coalition and then attempt to re-establish their Emirate without the need to compromise.

From one angle, analysis points to overlapping interests of most involved or interested parties, suggesting that there may be a 'mutually enticing opportunity'. Western governments, neighbouring countries, a majority of the Afghan population, the insurgents and possibly also parts of the Afghan government all ultimately want to see the withdrawal of foreign troops. But there are significant differences of opinion with regard to the timeframe and mode of the withdrawal, presence of long-term US bases and the subsequent political landscape. Moreover, as indicated above, the conflict's central adversaries are not, by their own measure, experiencing a 'mutually hurting stalemate' and are apparently unmindful of the potential consequences of escalation.

⁹ Zartman, *Negotiation and Conflict Management*, 204-207 [see FN 4].

¹⁰ Established through interviews conducted by Thomas Ruttig with individuals familiar with the insurgency.

MEDIATION

Many theorists and practitioners, such as Jacob Bercovitch, Chester Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, Pamela Aall and William Zartman, have argued that effective mediation can play a critical role in conflict resolution.¹¹ Mediators can have considerable influence through promoting and facilitating dialogue, building trust and confidence, setting agendas, exploring possibilities, proposing solutions and using leverage. Some theorists emphasise the value of a multi-track process: track I, entailing official diplomacy; track II, involving unofficial mediators; and what is sometimes known as ‘track III’: indigenous actors who directly or indirectly support the process.

Some analysts argue that partial or biased mediators can also be effective, but that ‘partiality or mediator bias is an effective or desirable trait only if the mediator is willing to exercise its leverage by delivering the party to the negotiating table [and] coaxing or forcing it to make concessions’.¹² Pakistan’s intelligence and military chiefs have indicated a willingness to ‘mediate’ in the Afghan conflict and they certainly have leverage, although its exact extent is unclear. But it is by no means certain they would choose to exercise such leverage and some observers would consider Pakistan to be, in effect, a party to the conflict.

The UN tends to be regarded as biased towards the US, especially by insurgents. Its leverage is limited, but its presence, remit and authority derived from the UN Security Council means it is likely to have a role in mediation efforts. There may be a role for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, that have both hosted *ad hoc* government-Taliban talks, or perhaps Turkey. Islamic, Arabic or regional organisations could also support the process, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), or the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Notably, the Afghan High Peace Council, which is mandated to lead the peace process, has asked the OIC for support and an OIC representative will soon be stationed in Kabul.¹³

¹¹ See footnotes below for examples of the works of these theorists.

¹² Chester Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (eds), *Grasping the Nettle – Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 2007), 379.

¹³ Report of the UN Secretary General, ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, 10 December 2010, para 23.

Whilst it may be desirable for a range of countries or organisations to support and encourage the peace process, specialists in conflict resolution warn against too many mediators with competing agendas, which can complicate and hamper negotiations. The current approach to ‘reconciliation’ by the US-led coalition, perceiving it as an adjunct to an aggressive counter-insurgency strategy and as a tool of fragmentation and co-option, appears to have generated a multitude of shadowy intermediaries (some reliable, some not) rather than genuine mediators. As such, this undermines rather than reinforces serious negotiating efforts.

Theorists underscore the importance of the calibre of mediators: ‘poor or weak statecraft by third-party interveners has the potential to exacerbate the problem and further deepen an intractable conflict.’¹⁴ The intractability of the Afghan conflict suggests that all acknowledged mediation tactics will be required, especially in building trust. Mediators are likely to have an important role in determining which parties and groups are represented and as Zartman observes: ‘The most important tactical judgment concerns the size of the excluded segments.’¹⁵ Consideration must be given to which, if any, insurgent or other factions should be excluded from Afghan talks (discussed further below).

The identity of the individuals involved in mediation efforts will be highly significant, especially given the vicissitudes of events in Afghanistan since 2001 and history of antagonism or mistrust between certain key figures. It may therefore be wise to involve mediators that have not previously worked in Afghanistan, such as top-ranking political or diplomatic figures from emerging economies or mediators with proven track records in other conflicts. However, in order to limit the possibility of misunderstandings or diplomatic missteps, it will clearly be necessary for some of the mediators to have an in-depth knowledge of the conflict and for the process to be supported by experienced and well-informed personnel drawn from the UN or countries not directly involved in the conflict.

Theorists Louis Kriesberg and Jacob Bercovitch warn that the type of mediated intervention should be adjusted to the particular circumstances and dynamics of the conflict. The intervention may not even aim to resolve, but rather alleviate or contain

¹⁴ Crocker, Osler Hampson and Aall (eds) *Grasping the Nettle*, 381 [see FN 13].

¹⁵ Zartman, *Elusive Peace*, 22 [see FN 3].

the violence.¹⁶ Certainly, in Afghanistan there is a strong case for mediation of this kind, which could help to ensure greater humanitarian access to the population, reduce harm to Afghan civilians and reduce the prospects of a new civil war.

Track II and III diplomacy could support various forms of consultations and negotiations in Afghanistan. Given the professed religious motivation and commitment of Afghan insurgents, it may be that eminent Afghan or foreign *ulema* and institutions that have Islamic prestige could have an important role in this respect. Further research is required to ascertain which individuals or institutions are respected by insurgents and could be willing to urge them to engage in a peace process. Track II and III diplomacy could also be supported by figures from key Afghan social groups or families that are not regarded as partial, including from the diaspora, such as businessmen, members of the former royal family and the old tribal aristocracy, figures from the cultural realm, the media or peace-building organisations.

RECONCILIATION

This approach, most prominently expounded by the theorist and practitioner John Paul Lederach, contends that the key to conflict resolution is long-term peace-building and conciliation efforts.¹⁷ It suggests that mediators should promote sustained dialogue, improved relationships and trust between relevant parties. Critics have voiced scepticism about the feasibility of achieving reconciliation where there is entrenched animosity between groups. However, proponents of this approach argue that the right techniques can ultimately yield results; and that rather than attempting to seize 'ripe' moments in negotiations, the goal should be to support a process of change over a longer period.¹⁸

According to Lederach, reconciliation is central to conflict resolution in deeply divided societies and

¹⁶ Louis Kriesberg, 'Nature, Dynamics and Phases of Intractability' and Jacob Bercovitch, 'Mediation in the Most Resistant Cases', in Crocker, Osler Hampson and Aall (eds) *Grasping the Nettle*, 65-122 [see FN 13].

¹⁷ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ 'Cultivating Peace: A Practitioner's View of Deadly Conflict and Negotiation', in John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (eds), *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 36-45.

should be understood as a process of relationship-building between antagonists. He argues that people with leadership positions in society, but outside of formal authority, have the greatest potential for long term transformation of the conflict, especially through the establishment of teams, networks and institutions that promote conciliation.¹⁹

In Afghanistan, more than three decades of war, disorder and upheaval have brought about a fractured, factionalised society. The conflict between the government and its foreign allies, on the one hand, and the insurgents, on the other, is not the only dimension of the Afghan conflict. At many levels, various factions or groups are engaged in protracted conflicts over access to resources or power. Many groups and individuals have suffered from war crimes or gross violations of human rights. Yet the rule of law is practically non-existent. Impunity for major war crimes has been enshrined in law and acknowledged perpetrators have been rewarded by inclusion in state institutions. The corruption and partiality of the central government and the predatory and exclusionary behaviour of many of its sub-national representatives adds yet another dimension to the conflict.

Thus, while the term 'reconciliation' is widely used as a synonym for talks with the Taleban, conceptually, this definition is too narrow to answer to the demands of conflict resolution in Afghanistan. In the same way that peace means more than merely an end of fighting, the co-option of, or political accommodation with, insurgents does not equate to 'reconciliation'. Reconciliation requires a broad process that addresses all levels of conflict and contributes to the healing of societal wounds and rehabilitation of relationships damaged over the course of a generation. Engaging with the Taleban and other insurgent groups – ranging from establishing initial contacts and exploratory talks to possible negotiations – is just one part of reconciliation. A short-term political deal could even be antithetical to reconciliation, especially if it is limited to certain armed factions or political cliques, not based on a broad political consensus, or imposed on excluded groups.

As the theory suggests, political representatives and civil society leaders could play an important role in fostering and facilitating reconciliation, supported by figures identified above as potential mediators. Local leaders, such as tribal elders or *ulema*, have

¹⁹ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace – Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: USIP, 2008), 149-152.

traditionally played an important role in resolving disputes and restoring damaged relations between communities, tribes, clans and other groups. However, in an increasingly polarised context and given the destruction of traditional (tribal and other) institutions, few such actors have been able to maintain their neutrality or influence. Regrettably, this is unlikely to change until there is a regeneration of Afghanistan's social capital and those benefiting from impunity, especially government figures, warlords and commanders, are brought within the rule of law. In due course, it is likely that reconciliation will require a process of transitional justice which seeks to ascertain the truth about the nature and extent of past abuses, ensures some form of accountability for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes, and helps Afghans to come to terms with their past.

POWER-SHARING

Certain theorists, such as Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, argue that negotiation with a view to power-sharing is the optimal means of resolving internal conflicts.²⁰ They advocate for negotiations on various grounds, including the fact that the total number of casualties caused by internal conflicts that end by military victory is double that of conflicts resolved by negotiations. They stress the importance of creating power-sharing or 'power-dividing' institutions: 'groups must have a means, other than relying on the use of force, for resolving their disagreements',²¹ in other words, 'governing institutions that both mitigate and channel society competition'.²² Thus, the theory posits that an enduring, negotiated peace is most likely to be achieved where there are effective institutions – preferably designed by the parties to the conflict – that share or divide state military, political, territorial or economic power. Ideally, these institutions give each group some access to state power and a means of checking a rivals' power.

²⁰ Barbara Walter, whose theory is discussed below, takes a pragmatic approach, urging outsiders to: 'encourage negotiating leaders to divvy up important political positions that insulate them from the vagaries of elections ... [and to] include provisions for regional autonomy'. Barbara Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 167.

²¹ Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, *Crafting Peace: Power-Sharing Institutions and the Negotiated Settlement of Civil Wars* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 4 and 8-9.

²² Hartzell and Hoddie, *Crafting Peace*, 11 [see FN 22].

Although Hartzell and Hoddie find that long-lasting wars are more likely to produce settlements that include power-sharing institutions, they also argue that 'lower levels of bloodshed facilitate bargaining success among adversaries by minimizing mutual distrust and animosity'.²³ Despite the considerable span of the Afghan conflict, casualties are escalating and enmity is increasing, which suggests that the prospects of a near-term power-sharing agreement are slim.

In light of the flaws of the post-2001 constitutional process and the political record and orientation of the Taleban, many Afghan groups are opposed to power-sharing. There are fears that it would again lead to the mistreatment or marginalization of minorities, restriction of civil and political rights, the oppression of women, or new forms of political exclusion. It is also not clear that either side is genuinely interested in a negotiated settlement. Beyond all of the rhetoric about reconciliation, many in the kleptocratic elite do not believe that a negotiated settlement is in their interests. They derive huge personal gain, through profits or graft, from what some regard as a 'controlled' conflict which attracts massive external resources. On the other hand, the insurgents do not favour a pluralistic and open society and, as noted above, are expanding their influence and lethality, have strong external support from Pakistan and appear to believe that they can outlast the coalition.

Nevertheless, both sides are subject to various internal and external military and political pressures and include pragmatic leaders or factions that have indicated an interest in talks. This is reinforced by widespread yearning among the Afghan population for an end to the violence.

It is hard to envisage functioning power-sharing institutions in Afghanistan, given high levels of enmity between the warring parties, conflicting perspectives and ambitions, and the existence of multifarious local and national power-struggles. But if there is negotiated peace, it is more likely to endure if there are robust power-sharing institutions, rather than an elite pact or series of deals that simply carve up state power.

The 2001 Bonn Agreement was in effect a power-sharing agreement (though excluding the Taleban and certain other groups), which demonstrates that such agreement needs to be genuinely broad-based and inclusive. It is not sufficient to include only armed factions and it is counterproductive to exclude relevant forces. Inclusivity requires that all

²³ Hartzell and Hoddie, *Crafting Peace*, 142 [see FN 22].

relevant political, social and ethnic groups – armed and civilian – are part of any new political arrangement. Indeed, the latest empirical research suggests that the prospects for conflict resolution are enhanced where negotiations are as inclusive as possible.²⁴

By their nature, all-inclusive power-sharing agreements are almost always temporary. Therefore, such arrangements should be understood as part of another transitional period during which the parties attempt to design mechanisms to address the root causes of the conflict and agree on the structure and form of Afghanistan's state and governmental institutions. It is impossible to say what exactly such institutions would look like. They may, for instance, reflect a form of consociationalism, by which various groups have guaranteed representation at certain levels. However, this is a matter that should be considered in negotiations between the warring parties and in a process of genuine consultation and deliberation involving representatives of all parts of Afghan society. This is essential to ensure that the outcome is in the interests of the population and to provide a safeguard against the danger of an oligarchic carve up of resources.

The international community can play the role of guarantor during such a process by helping to ensure there is a 'level playing field' (in other words fair rules, equally applied), broad participation and eventual adherence to the terms of any final agreement. Usefully, there already exists a genuinely Afghan, inclusive decision-making mechanism, the constitutional institution of the Loya Jirga. But another Loya Jirga, like that of 2003, should only be at the end point of an inclusive, thorough and country-wide consultation process, and after the preparatory work of a number of smaller, representative commissions.

Issues that may be considered are: institutional reform to de-concentrate power, given the current over-centralisation of the state; measures to entrench the separation of powers, especially between the executive and judiciary; the creation of more effective constitutional checks and balances, at local and national levels, to guard against the accumulation and abuse of power; and the establishment of powerful supervisory or monitoring bodies to act as safeguards for certain groups, such as women or minorities. To ensure that this and any

other reforms are both relevant and legitimate the terms of such measures should be developed by Afghans, supported but not led by foreigners.

CREDIBLE COMMITMENT THEORY

According to this theory, articulated by Barbara Walter, negotiations are unlikely to succeed unless the parties have confidence that an outside power will ensure that the terms of any power-sharing agreement are respected. According to Walter: 'combatants' concerns about their security after a treaty is signed dominate every decision during the peace process'.²⁵ This underscores the importance of arrangements for the implementation of any agreement. Therefore, the resolution of civil conflicts requires: (1) third party security guarantees regarding the verification or enforcement of disarmament and demobilisation, and (2) power-sharing agreements or pacts, backed by third parties. According to the theory, the greater certainty that combatants have in these conditions, the more likely they are to sign and implement peace agreements.²⁶

In the event of steps towards a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, it is likely that certain social groups and ethnic minorities – who were discriminated against and mistreated under the former Taliban regime – would seek international guarantees regarding their security. It is highly unlikely that Western forces would be trusted by the Taliban to oversee demobilisation; indeed, as noted above, they are arguably one of the drivers of the conflict. But many Afghans believe the presence of foreign troops is necessary to prevent the onset of civil war and efforts should be made to ascertain whether the insurgents would accept some form of Western presence if this was part of an agreed, phased withdrawal. Obviously, the coalition cannot be a party to the conflict and credible guarantor at the same time. But there may be some such role for Western forces if they are acting on behalf of the international community and in accordance with the terms of a negotiated agreement that provides for their withdrawal.

Preferably, such arrangements would be overseen by the UN in conjunction with multilateral Arab, Islamic or regional organisations that could underwrite an agreement and support a process of demobilisation. As noted above, the former is not seen as fully independent and the latter have not yet proven their ability in peace enforcement

²⁴ See for example Lisa Blaydes and Jennifer De Maio, *Spoiling the Peace? Peace Process Exclusivity and Political Violence in North-Central Africa*, *Civil Wars*, Mar-Jun 2010, Vol. 12, Issue 1/2, 3-28.

²⁵ Walter, *Committing to Peace*, 164 [see FN 21].

²⁶ Walter, *Committing to Peace*, 164 [see FN 21].

operations. A hybrid approach would usefully combine the legitimacy of Islamic or regional organisations with the extensive post-conflict experience of the UN.

PEACE-BUILDING FROM BELOW

One branch of conflict resolution theory underscores the importance of local peace-building. This approach argues for long-term bottom-up peacemaking and aims to build civil society's capacity to promote peace and change embedded cultures of violence.²⁷ It aims to strengthen community capacities to resolve disputes peacefully; to develop trust, safety and social cohesion within and between communities; and to promote inter-ethnic and inter-group dialogue.

Local peace-building in Afghanistan has been fragmentary and inchoate, with limited coverage. However, a number of organisations have successfully implemented such programmes, such as Cooperation for Peace and Unity, The Liaison Office and the Sanayee Development Organization, as well as local, tribal and other councils. Their activities have included building the capacity of community institutions, especially *shuras* and *jirgas*, to resolve disputes through mediation, negotiation and conflict resolution; supporting civil-society involvement in peace and development; and promoting peace education. The projects have had a range of positive, often interconnected outcomes, including increased resolution of disputes, lower levels of violence (including domestic violence), greater community cohesion, the expansion of development activity and the successful reintegration of returnees.²⁸ Such organisations also can be helpful in identifying possible mediators for the different stages and levels of negotiation efforts.

Field research indicates that where communities are more cohesive there is stronger resilience to external threats or events. Strongmen or insurgent groups often seek to exploit local disputes and rivalries by offering to back a particular group, community, tribe or sub-clan in return for allegiance.

²⁷ Walter, *Committing to Peace* [see FN 21] and Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (2nd ed, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), 215-230.

²⁸ See, for example Matt Waldman, 'Community Peace-building in Afghanistan' (Kabul: Oxfam International, 2008); International Crisis Group, 'Peacebuilding in Afghanistan', Asia Report No. 64 (Kabul/Brussels: ICG, 2003) and UNDP, 'Afghanistan Human Development Report' (New York: UNDP, 2007).

Thus, while local peace-building will not lead to a resolution of the core conflict it can help to diminish its intensity and scope.

MANAGING SPOILERS

An approach to conflict resolution articulated by Stephen Stedman centres on factors that affect peace implementation. It emphasises the importance of the conflict environment and argues that the prospects of a sustainable peace are significantly affected by, among other things, internal spoilers and hostile neighbours. It observes that spoilers vary in motivation and intent, and can be 'limited' or 'greedy' spoilers, whose demands can be managed, or 'total' spoilers, who have fixed, indivisible goals and will seek to sabotage any political process. Strategies are required to deal with each, as appropriate, such as by inducements, 'socialisation' (meaning outreach, dialogue and other measures which increase a party's willingness to participate in a political process) or coercion.²⁹

Afghanistan has no shortage of potential spoilers – and any party to the conflict can become a spoiler. As noted above, power-holders within or linked to the government benefit from vast resources provided by the international community and fear that negotiations could undermine their influence and opportunities for enrichment. Extreme Islamist elements are likely to consider negotiations with 'infidels' and their proxies as anathema and seek to derail any talks. Al-Qaeda or Pakistani extremist groups are likely to consider negotiations as a betrayal of the jihadist cause and may also seek to scupper talks. In fact, spoilers can join forces and 'extremists often find an ally in the government.'³⁰ As the theory suggests, strategies will be required to induce or integrate certain spoilers, yet marginalize, coerce or contain certain others. Careful consideration should be given to exactly what 'inducements', coercive or other measures might be feasible or appropriate in the Afghan context.

Afghanistan also has neighbouring states that are potentially hostile to an agreement. In particular,

²⁹ Stephen Stedman, 'Peace Processes and the Challenges of Violence', in John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (eds), *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 147-158; and Stephen Stedman, Donald Rothchild, Elizabeth Cousens (eds), *Ending Civil Wars - The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2002).

³⁰ Zartman, *Elusive Peace*, 341 [see FN 3].

Pakistani military leaders have long seen the Taliban as an instrument for achieving influence or 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan. This is largely attributable to Pakistan's enduring rivalry with India and its opposition to an insipient Kabul-New Delhi alliance. Pakistani officials have taken steps to block negotiations through the arrest in early 2010 of Taliban leaders known to be in contact with Afghan officials and may continue to thwart peace talks if they believe the process could jeopardise Pakistan's geopolitical interests.

As the theory suggests, an effective strategy to achieve the cooperation of Pakistan is undoubtedly required. Given Pakistan's influence over the Taliban and their use by Pakistan to achieve 'strategic depth', it would appear necessary to involve Pakistani officials in the process, while at the same time taking measures to address some of the principal causes of their behaviour, especially the persistent, perceived threat from India. Progress towards a resolution of the Afghan conflict does not depend on progress or détente on the Kashmir conflict, but it would undoubtedly be enormously beneficial. Efforts should be made to encourage both countries' – and their neighbours – to realise that their mutual security and geo-political interests can be satisfied by cooperation and that this could bring other benefits in terms of domestic stability; control of drugs or arms trafficking; management of refugee movements; or trade and economic investment. Proactive facilitation by the U.S., accompanied by even-handed pressure and persuasion could play an important role in helping to bring this about.

CONCLUSION

The particular actors, causes, conditions and dynamics of any conflict – and of the sub-and macro-conflicts that take place within or outside the core dispute – are infinitely variable. Thus, panaceas are improbable and a range of remedies is usually required. They may differ in type, strength and combination, according to each particular conflict.

The theories of conflict resolution discussed above and the reflections on their applicability to Afghanistan, suggest the kinds of steps that could improve the prospects of peace, or at least alleviate or contain the conflict. For instance, the theories suggest that military de-escalation, effective mediation, dialogue and confidence-building measures, supported by track II and III diplomacy, could increase the prospects for a negotiated outcome. Peace-building theory suggests the need for a broad, long-term reconciliation process, involving civil society leaders, that addresses all

levels of conflict and seeks to rehabilitate inter-group relations. Power-sharing theories suggest that through negotiations and an inclusive political process there should be consideration of power-sharing arrangements, constitutional reform and the establishment of robust, representative state institutions. Credible commitment theory underscores the need for effective third party political and security guarantees. Other theories suggest that the process should be supplemented by strong support for grassroots peace-building efforts. Spoiler analysis suggests that the entire process should be reinforced by a range of strategies to manage potential spoilers.

In addition to these suggested courses of action – many of which are currently neglected or under-resourced in Afghanistan – the theories also help to inform our understanding of the conflict.

As William Zartman observes, the key to approaching conflict resolution is 'a basic acknowledgement of the legitimacy of internal dissidence, seen as the breakdown of normal politics. This does not mean the insurgents ... are assumed to be right; it only means that they are assumed to have a point and to represent legitimate grievances, even if they do not use legitimate means of pursuing them.'³¹

Arguably, this applies to the Afghan conflict where perceived foreign military aggression, the abuse of power and predatory, exclusionary politics have driven the insurgency. It suggests that outright military defeat of the insurgents will be difficult, if not impossible to achieve and that there may be non-violent means of reducing or even ending violence. Given the suffering experienced by ordinary Afghans and so many others affected by the war, it is incumbent upon policymakers to explore such possibilities and to benefit from the insights of theory. Policymakers should redefine the concept of a 'position of strength' to involve a judgement not just of military, but also moral criteria. By pursuing a political solution and promoting just, inclusive, non-violent approaches to the conflict, the West stands a chance of restoring some of the moral stature it had in 2001, but that is now lost in the eyes of most Afghans.

³¹ Zartman, *Elusive Peace*, 332 [see FN 3].

ABOUT THE AFGHANISTAN ANALYSTS NETWORK (AAN)

The Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) is a non-profit, independent policy research organisation. It aims to bring together the knowledge and experience of a large number of experts to inform policy and increase the understanding of Afghan realities.

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