

Is it time to negotiate with the Taliban?

By [Global Research](#)

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Global Research Editor's Note

After five years of fighting "Islamic terrorists" and their "state sponsors", the Bush administration now wants to bring the Taliban into their puppet Afghan government. (See CNN Report below).

On September 12, 2001, the Bush Administration declared war on Afghanistan and accused the Taliban government of harboring al Qaeda.

Senator Bill Frist, a Republican, has recently called for bringing "people who call themselves Taliban into a larger, more representative government."

This news should come as no surprise: The Taliban were installed by the US in the seat of political power in 1996. Without US military aid, channelled through Pakistan, they would never have been able to form a government. The Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, who was installed as head of State by the international community, collaborated with the Taliban from 1990 to 1996.

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, 12 October 2006

Is it time to negotiate with the Taliban?

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KABUL, Afghanistan (CNN) — Backed by 400 years of history, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, a former Afghan finance minister, told an audience at the Royal Institute of National Affairs in London this week: "Afghanistan is not a place that can be pacified by force."

It is unsurprising then that on a tour of Afghanistan on Monday, U.S. Senator Bill Frist said the war would never be won through military means. But what was surprising — particular coming from a Republican — was his support for efforts to bring "people who call themselves Taliban into a larger, more representative government."

Senator Mel Martinez, also on the trip, told The Associated Press that negotiating with the Taliban was not "out of the question" but that fighters who refused to join the political process would have to be defeated.

The Democrat vs. Republican debate that has erupted over these comments is proof of how sensitive talks with guerrilla groups — let alone discussions with a regime as brutal and hated as the Taliban — can be.

According to Dan Smith, Secretary-General for International Alert, a conflict resolution NGO, governments like to give off the impression they are not negotiating with guerrillas so as to appear “morally clean” when oftentimes it can be the only way to bring about peace.

He says discussions range from secret talks that are “deniable and informal” to the more obvious — take Norway acting as intermediaries between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers.

While the situation in Afghanistan is unique, it is drastically declining due to — according to NATO generals — a dangerous cocktail of government corruption, religious insurgents, major opium trafficking and a poor population growing increasingly desperate.

NATO has officially taken control of operations, as of Thursday, with 33,000 soldiers now based in the country. But with fears of a new Iraq developing, the suggestion of talks with the Taliban might not be as radical as it sounds.

Efforts to engage politically with the Taliban are not new — the Afghan government has made repeated amnesty offers since 2002. Four former Talibs were elected to the parliament in 2005. Two former Talibs are in the Senate. Maulavi Abdul Hakim Munib, the Governor of Uruzgan province, is a former senior Taliban official.

Meanwhile, the Program Tahkm-e Sohl, or PTS, established to encourage insurgents back into mainstream Afghan society, has resulted in about 1,100 people surrendering.

Military negotiations have found some success in Afghanistan. NATO recently confirmed that British commanders reached a cease-fire agreement with the Taliban via the local shura in the town of Musa Qala in Helmand, a province fraught with numerous military and civilian deaths.

And in early September, Pakistan signed a controversial — and in some circles worrying — peace treaty with pro-Taliban tribesman in North Waziristan. Under the agreement, the government will stop operations in the area in exchange for militants agreeing to stop attacks in the border region.

Yet Dr. Ghani appeared doubtful about negotiating with the Taliban, particularly when they are part of a criminal network that is making hundreds of millions of dollars in illegal activities, and their agenda is not clear.

“Nothing is off the table. The president [Karzai] has leant backwards — continuously — in terms of reaching out,” he said. “But what is it that group that goes under the name Taliban is proposing? What is their agenda? What do they want to be part of the solution, rather than the problem?”

Analyst Joanna Nathan, from the International Crisis Group in Afghanistan, is equally skeptical about suggestions of Taliban negotiations. “It’s more about reaching out to the people,” she says.

She cites the example of a recent NATO offensive, in which about 1,000 are believed to have died. “Most of those recruits were disillusioned and disaffected people ... they are the ones that need to be reached out to so they don’t join with other insurgent forces.”

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