

Assessing Implementation of the 2020 US-Taliban Peace Accord

March 2021



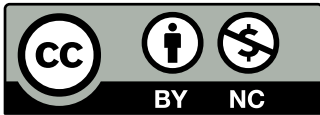
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About This Report

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Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the current implementation status of the agreement negotiated between the Taliban and the United States signed on February 29, 2020. The assessment was completed prior to the US government's recent release of a plan for accelerating the peace process through 1) a power-sharing arrangement, 2) terms of a ceasefire and its enforcement, 3) protection of the rights of women, children, and minorities, and 4) a truth and reconciliation commission.¹

The Doha Agreement is divided into three parts containing 14 specific provisions or commitments. Of these 14 provisions, 11 are relevant for current analysis. Using the Peace Accords Matrix (PAM)—a methodology for monitoring and assessing implementation of comprehensive peace agreements developed by the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies—experts measured the level of compliance with the Doha Agreement. At the one-year mark, the Doha Agreement's overall implementation stands at 57.58%, with the highest rate of compliance in part one of the agreement, which contains US commitments. While there are doubts about the peace process in Afghanistan, this report indicates that progress has been achieved so far in the US-Taliban dialogue. It also offers comparative insights that might be useful for understanding the current state of the implementation process. The report concludes by identifying four specific recommendations for sustaining the intra-Afghan negotiation process and improving the potential to build a lasting and inclusive peace in Afghanistan.

The Doha Agreement

The Doha Agreement commits the United States to a phased, conditions-based withdrawal of US and NATO military forces by May 2021, in exchange for the Taliban agreeing to prevent any group or individual from using Afghan territory to threaten the US and its allies. The agreement was intended to provide a basis for intra-Afghan negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The agreement has a number of complexities:

- 1.** While third-party countries often support [non-state actors in intrastate armed conflicts](#),² the Doha Agreement was negotiated between a non-state actor and a third-party state. In this way, it is unlike any other intrastate armed conflict peace agreement.
- 2.** The agreement seeks implementation compliance not only from the Taliban and the US but also from the Afghan state and the United Nations Security Council. Although the Afghan state is not mentioned, the agreement implies compliance from the Afghan state with respect to the release of prisoners.
- 3.** The agreement is intended to serve as a foundation for a full-fledged intra-Afghan dialogue between the Afghan state and the Taliban.

The stakeholders in this process have high expectations for the implementation of the Doha Agreement, although it is only a partial accord and a potential prelude to a comprehensive peace agreement. In other intrastate peace negotiation processes, the implementation of a partial peace agreement is an initial step that allows the negotiation process to continue and that can, in some cases, lead to a comprehensive peace agreement.

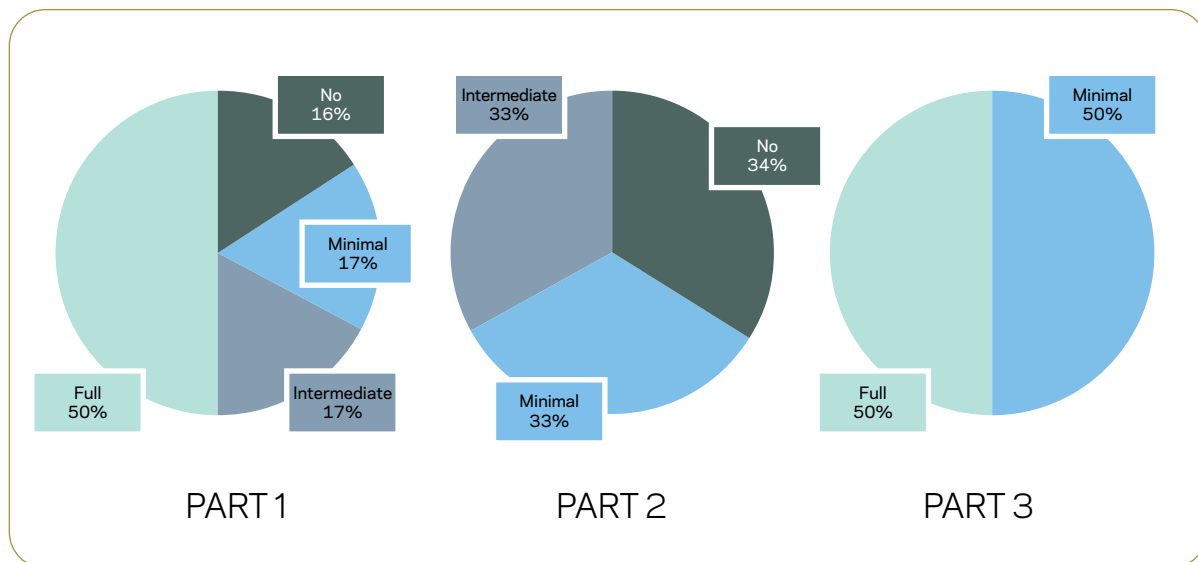
Methodology and findings

The Doha Agreement is organized into three parts with 14 specific provisions. The first part of the agreement has six provisions relating to US action, the second part contains five provisions specifying Taliban action, and the third part contains three provisions, including engagement with the UN Security Council. For the purpose of this report, a provision is defined as a measurable commitment by the signatories. Implementation of the provisions is ascertained through the verification of events reported in publicly available information. This report provides implementation summaries for 11 out of 14 specific provisions. Three of the provisions either cannot be discerned or are not relevant at this stage of the process.

This report relies on an analysis of all relevant implementation events since the signing of the agreement in February 2020. The sources include news reports, public statements, social media postings, and reports from US agencies and international organizations on issues related to prisoner release, bilateral and multilateral meetings involving high-level Afghan officials and high-ranking Taliban leaders, and negotiating team activities in Doha.

Based on the PAM methodology for tracking the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements, 11 provisions in the Doha Agreement were assessed for their level of compliance. They were coded on an ordinal scale: full implementation (3), intermediate implementation (2), minimum implementation (1), and no implementation (0).³ Of 11 provisions, four are fully implemented (36%), two have an intermediate implementation status (18%), three are at minimum implementation status (27%), and two provisions are yet to be implemented (18%). Figure 1 provides an overview of 11 provisions falling into the implementation categories for each part of the Doha Agreement. Provisions in part one have the most implementation-related activities. The appendix provides an overview of all provisions with implementation narratives and coding.

figure 1 State of implementation of the Doha Agreement after Year One



Note: Part one of the Doha Agreement contains six provisions; part two contains five provisions, of which two are excluded; and part three contains three provisions of which one is deemed irrelevant for this analysis. See the appendix.

The Doha Agreement's aggregate implementation score currently stands at 57.58%. The score is generated by summing the implementation levels for each provision and dividing by the sum of the highest possible implementation score for each provision. The resulting value is then multiplied by 100 to get the percentage. The agreement's overall implementation value currently stands at 19 (four provisions with full implementation, two provisions with intermediate, three provisions with minimal, and two provisions with no implementation). The highest possible implementation value for the Doha Agreement is 33 (11 x 3). This yields an aggregate implementation rate of 57.58% $[(19/33) \times 100]$.

One of the promising outcomes of the Doha Agreement implementation process is the evidence of progress toward compliance from both the Taliban and the United States, although both sides are demanding more. The Taliban is seeking compliance with the military drawdown plan. The United States is demanding a reduction in Taliban violence and a stronger Taliban commitment to severing its ties and collaboration with other terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida. Of the many political considerations related to the implementation process so far, several are noteworthy.

First, Taliban leaders are in control of their forces. In compliance with the agreement, Taliban attacks on US troops and the troops from its allies decreased significantly according to the [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data](#)⁴ and the latest Lead Inspector General [report](#)⁵ submitted to the US Congress. There were earlier doubts whether Taliban political and military leaders would be able to maintain the chain of command. Their ability to control their forces is key for a successful peace process.

Second, Taliban violence against [Afghan state forces as well as civilians](#) did not abate with the initiation of intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha.⁶ The Doha Agreement does not include a Taliban commitment to reduce such attacks, but US officials claim that such assurances were made. Sustained violence at pre-negotiation levels once negotiations begin is not common. In other intrastate armed conflict situations, both combat and non-combat violence mostly ceased with the initiation of a peace negotiation process.⁷ The continuing violence in Afghanistan did not stop the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha, but it underscores the pressures that the Afghan state is facing for this peace process to work.



Third, regardless of ongoing violence, there has been a significant increase in the Taliban's diplomatic engagement. The Taliban leadership and negotiating team has had a considerable number of meetings with international organizations and third-party states other than the United States.⁸ This indicates the Taliban's effort to gain regional and international legitimacy. It also indicates the significance of the multilateral approach for the success of the Afghan peace process.

Fourth, the Biden administration is under pressure to extend the deadline for the withdrawal of remaining US troops. The deadline was based on expectations of commensurate progress in the intra-Afghan dialogue, but this has not occurred, and there is no expectation of a significant breakthrough in intra-Afghan negotiation between now and May. There is also no assurance of a sustainable negotiation process once the US and its allies withdraw their troops from Afghanistan.⁹

Concluding recommendations

Based on research on comparative peace processes and the current state of implementation of the Doha Agreement, it is evident that the stakeholders involved in this peace process need to adopt new approaches that speak to Afghanistan's context. This report offers the following recommendations:

1. Negotiators should pursue a formal regional approach.

The Afghan conflict involves [as many as 20 terrorist groups](#), and the Doha Agreement asks the Taliban to prevent these groups from threatening the US and its allies.¹⁰ The Taliban does not control all of these groups, and it considers one of them, the local Islamic State affiliate ISIS-K, an [enemy](#).¹¹ Many of the terrorist groups are operating from neighboring countries, including Pakistan, and cooperation from these countries is key for a successful peace process in Afghanistan. The US and its allies know this reality and are engaging with Afghanistan's neighbors to urge support for Afghanistan's ongoing peace process. This engagement needs to be formalized by negotiating an agreement that involves the Taliban, the Afghan state, and its neighboring countries. A regional approach to conflict resolution was adopted successfully in the 1990s in Central American countries, leading to a successful peace process in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

2. A decline in the level of violence is key, but a formal ceasefire agreement is not necessary.

One of the developments emerging from the Doha Agreement and its implementation process was the de facto recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate political actor with ambition to return to political power. By exerting control over its fighters, the Taliban reduced attacks against US and NATO troops, although violence continued against the Afghan state and civilians. The call for a comprehensive ceasefire agreement seems logical, but experience shows that a ceasefire agreement is neither necessary nor sufficient as a pre-condition for negotiating a successful comprehensive peace agreement. In Colombia, the government

and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) negotiated a ceasefire agreement at the end of the negotiation process. In the Philippines, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine government did not negotiate a formal ceasefire agreement. Both the MILF and the FARC ceased violence without formally committing to a new ceasefire agreement.

3. A framework agreement with an agreed-upon negotiating agenda is necessary.

At this stage in the intra-Afghan negotiation process, the rules and procedures for the next round of talks are finalized but talks have stalled. The lack of an agreed-upon negotiating agenda is the main reason for this stalemate. Both sides need to identify substantive issues that include women's rights, a political transition of the Taliban and the future status of Taliban fighters, interim security measures to support the transition, and necessary constitutional and institutional reforms. As a roadmap, both sides could negotiate a framework agreement similar to those in Colombia and Bangsamoro. The framework agreement helps to eliminate uncertainty both for the public and the negotiating teams. It helps open up space for generating popular participation in the ongoing negotiation process.

4. The peace process in Afghanistan requires patience.

In Afghanistan, expectations for the peace process are very high. The ongoing violence and stalemate in negotiations have made many stakeholders impatient. Regardless of substantive progress, it is still a significant achievement in a peace process when the negotiating teams are meeting. It helps build mutual trust and reciprocity, which is key for sustaining the negotiation process. The intra-Afghan negotiation process might be protracted, but sustaining the process is the only pathway forward to achieving a comprehensive peace deal. It took more than four years of constant negotiations in Colombia before the signing of the 2016 peace agreement. It took more than three years in the Philippines and many failed past talks before the signing of the 2014 peace agreement. The stakeholders in Afghanistan might want to focus on making the ongoing peace process more inclusive instead of expecting a quick process.

Appendix

Doha Agreement State of Implementation as of February 24, 2021

Key Provisions in Doha Agreement	Summary	Implementation Status
Part 1		
1 US troop reductions and withdrawal from five military bases in 135 days	This stipulation was fully implemented as of July 14, 2020. According to the US Department of Defense statement , the number of troops was reduced to 8,600, and the five military bases were transferred to the Afghan forces. ¹²	Full
2 The US and its allies are to withdraw in 9.5 months from other remaining bases	As of January 15, 2021, the US acting Defense Secretary noted that the US had fewer than 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, compared to 13,000 troops the year before. ¹³ US allies [NATO] have 7,092 troops in Afghanistan as of February 2021, down from 8,551 troops in February 2020 . ¹⁴ In the recent two-day NATO defense ministerial meeting, ministers reiterated their commitments to Afghanistan and expressed their support for the Afghan peace process. At the current rate of withdrawals, this provision is likely to be completed within the specified timeline.	Intermediate
3 5,000 Taliban and 1,000 state prisoners are released and intra-Afghan dialogue initiated	<p>The releasing of Taliban prisoners held by the Afghan government did not start as specified. The government released 100 prisoners on April 8, 2020, followed by the Taliban release of 20 prisoners on April 10, 2020.¹⁵ For the release of the final group of 400 Taliban prisoners, the Afghan government called for a Loya Jirga meeting.¹⁶ On August 9, the Loya Jirga approved the release of the remaining 400 prisoners.¹⁷</p> <p>For the first time on September 12, the Afghan Government Negotiating Team met with the Taliban Negotiating Team in Doha for direct negotiations.¹⁸ The talks were scheduled to begin after the completion of the prisoners' swap.</p>	Full

3 continued

On December 2, 2020, the Afghan Government Negotiating Team and Taliban Negotiating Team arrived at a three-page agreement codifying [rules and procedures](#) for their negotiations on a political roadmap and a comprehensive ceasefire.¹⁹ The rules and procedures, however, do not provide an agreed-upon framework for negotiations. Violence from both the Taliban and the Afghan forces has continued, with the Afghan government insisting on the need for a comprehensive ceasefire, which the Taliban has opposed. Nevertheless, the Afghan Government Negotiating Team met with the Taliban Negotiating Team in Doha on January 6, 2021, to begin [the second round of intra-Afghan talks](#).²⁰ There are reports of stalemate in negotiation, which is further complicated by the Taliban’s demand for a [transitional government](#).²¹ Regardless of the ongoing stalemate, the Taliban is technically in compliance with this provision as the intra-Afghan dialogue was initiated.

4 Initiate administrative review process to remove sanctions against Taliban by August 2020

This process is yet to begin. There is no publicly available information on the initiation of an administrative process in the US to remove sanctions against the Taliban.

No

5 With start of intra-Afghan negotiation, US initiates diplomatic engagement with other UNSC members to remove Taliban from the UN sanction list

This provision requires the US to initiate a process of removing the Taliban from the UN sanction list. On May 20, 2020, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted a report ([S/2020/415](#))²² on sanctions against the Taliban. The report suggests a continuation of the travel ban exemption for 11 Taliban members to travel for the purpose of peace negotiations, which was extended until June 29, 2020 ([S/2020/415](#)). The report also suggests the importance of seeking a travel ban exemption for personnel joining the Taliban Political Office in Doha if a new member is on the sanction list. While some Taliban members are exempt from the travel ban, they are yet to be removed from the sanction list. This meets only the minimum commitment to initiate diplomatic engagement with other UNSC members.

Minimum

6 The US and its allies refrain from intervening in Afghanistan's internal affairs

There are no reports of interference by the US and its allies in Afghanistan's internal affairs. On September 12, 2020, the US Secretary of State addressed [the inauguration](#) of the intra-Afghan peace negotiation in Doha and made it clear that Afghans want to determine their own affairs free from outside interferences.²³

With [apparent deadlock in Afghan peace talks](#) in October 2020, the US Embassy's *charge d'affaires* in Kabul stated [the US and its allies' position](#) as: "This is up to the parties to decide, we and others stand ready to help, we are not interested in imposing a solution or imposing ourselves in the process, but supporting what the parties at the negotiating table feel they need."²⁴

While there are demands for more information on the ongoing intra-Afghan dialogue, a more inclusive peace process, and the protection and promotion of women's political rights, the [US and its NATO allies](#) have been supporting the negotiation process but refraining from intervening in the direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government.²⁵

Full

Part 2

7 Taliban will not allow its members, other individuals, or groups to use Afghan soil to threaten the US or its allies.

After the Doha agreement, there was a significant decline in [attacks against the US and its allied forces in Afghanistan](#).²⁶ The Lead Inspector General in [the latest report submitted to the US Congress](#) noted that "there have been no US combat-related deaths since the signing of the US-Taliban agreement (page 15)."²⁷ The report also notes no insider attack against the troops of the US and its allies between October and December 2020. The Doha Agreement does not prevent violent activity directed against the Afghan government, the Afghan security forces, and civilians.

While there was a decline in violence against the US and its allied forces, the Taliban was not in full compliance with this provision as other groups were present in Taliban-held territories in Afghanistan, and the Taliban has not prevented these groups from threatening the US or its allies.

Intermediate

7 continued

In July 2020, the UN Security Council Committee reported (S/2020/717) that a number of terrorist groups remain active in Afghanistan under the umbrella of the Taliban.²⁸ In February 2021 the UNSC Committee reported (S/2021/68) little evidence of significant change in the Taliban and Al-Qaida relationship.²⁹ The report indicates a presence of 200-500 Al-Qaida members in Taliban-controlled territories.

On February 24, 2021, the Taliban military commission issued a statement [banning foreign fighters](#) from joining the Taliban or giving shelter to them.³⁰ An individual Taliban member involved in such an act was to be immediately dismissed, and the cell involved was to be disbanded and referred to the Taliban military commission for further punishment. It took almost a year for the Taliban to issue such a statement. The statement can be interpreted as the recognition on the part of Taliban that some Taliban members were allowing foreign nationals to join their cells. Nevertheless, the statement indicates the Taliban's willingness to comply with this provision and this is a significant step.

8 Taliban to send a clear message to those who pose a threat to the US and its allies

The February 2021 [UN Report](#) suggests that the Taliban was providing protection and shelter to Al-Qaida and Islamist Jihadist groups involved in terrorist activities.³¹ This is a clear violation of the agreement. Based on the information in the UN report, the Taliban has not sent a clear message to terrorist individuals and organizations who pose a threat to the US and its allies. According to the UN report, these groups continue to operate in Taliban-controlled territories in Afghanistan.

There is no other publicly available information on this matter other than the Taliban military commission [statement](#) on February 24, 2021, banning foreign fighters from joining the Taliban or giving shelter to them. It is the first such statement and falls short of sending a clear signal to other groups or individuals who are not Taliban.³²

Minimum

<p>9 Taliban to prevent any group or individual from threatening the US and its allies, and prevent recruiting, training, and fundraising</p>	<p>The 2021 UN report claims that Taliban members are protecting Al-Qaida members and have received training from them in making bombs.³³ It reports the “killing of several Taliban Al-Qaida commanders in Taliban-controlled territory,” including killings of the Al-Qaida media chief on October 20, 2020, and an AQ deputy for the Indian Subcontinent on November 10 (par. 65). The lack of any evidence of compliance prior to the Taliban military commission statement on February 24, 2021, suggests no compliance with this provision.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>10 Taliban commitment to deal with asylum seekers in accordance to international migration law</p>	<p>No/Not enough information to access the compliance.</p>	<p>Not enough information</p>
<p>11 Taliban will not provide visas, passports, or travel permits to those who pose security threat</p>	<p>No/Not enough information to access the compliance.</p>	<p>Not enough information</p>

Part 3

<p>12 US will seek UNSC endorsement of this agreement</p>	<p>In March 2020, the UN Security Council met and unanimously endorsed the US-Taliban agreement.³⁴</p>	<p>Full</p>
<p>13 US and Taliban will seek positive relations</p>	<p>The Taliban political leadership and US officials have been in constant contact with each other and have had several high-level meetings, including meetings with the US Secretary of State. This stipulation is coded minimum as this positive relationship is supposed to continue during and after the intra-Afghanistan dialogue.</p>	<p>Minimum</p>
<p>14 US to provide with economic reconstruction of Afghanistan</p>	<p>This specific provision is not relevant as parties have yet to agree on comprehensive political solutions through the intra-Afghanistan dialogue process.</p>	<p>Not relevant</p>

Notes

¹Kathy Gannon, “US presents warring Afghan sides with draft peace agreement,” *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2021.

²Uppsala Conflict Data Program at the University of Uppsala.

³For detailed discussion on methodology, see Joshi, Madhav, and John Darby. “Introducing the Peace Accords Matrix (PAM): A database of comprehensive peace agreements and their implementation, 1989–2007.” *Peacebuilding* 1.2 (2013): 256–274; Joshi, Madhav, Jason Michael Quinn, and Patrick M. Regan. “Annualized implementation data on comprehensive intrastate peace accords, 1989–2012.” *Journal of Peace Research* 52.4 (2015): 551–562.

⁴Mehvar, Ameneh. “The US–Taliban Peace Deal: 10 Weeks On.” Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, May 22, 2020.

⁵“Operation Freedom’s Sentinel: Lead Inspector General Report to the United State Congress.” October 1, 2020–December 31, 2020.

⁶Constable, Pamela. “Taliban shows it can launch attack anywhere across Afghanistan, even as peace talks continue.” *The Washington Post*, October 25, 2020.

⁷An exception is Bosnia between 1992 and 1995.

⁸There are many diplomatic activities on the part of the Taliban leadership and negotiating team with bilateral and multilateral meetings. We disaggregated the multilateral meetings into dyads and confirmed a total of 87 meetings between February 1, 2020, and February 22, 2021, that can be verified through publicly available information. Twenty-three of these meetings were held with the government negotiating team or representatives of the Afghan government (26%), 17 meetings were held with the US representatives (20%), and six meetings were held with Intergovernmental Organizations representatives (e.g., NATO, UN, etc.). Most other meetings were held with representatives of countries including Pakistan, Iran, Norway, Germany, China, and Indonesia. Many of these meetings took place in Doha or through virtual means, but Taliban representatives made in-person visits to Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkmenistan.

⁹The closest comparable case here is Angola. After the signing of the July 1988 New York Principles, a ceasefire was in place and South Africa completed its withdrawal by August. For the withdrawal of the Cuban troops, several rounds of multilateral negotiations took place between 1988 and 1991. As part of the process, the Bicesse Accord was reached between the UNITA and the Angolan government on May 31, 1991. A month after, Cuba completed the withdrawal of its troops from Angola. See George, Edward. *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale*. Routledge, 2004.

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¹²"Statement From Chief Pentagon Spokesperson Jonathan Hoffman on 135 Days Since the Signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement." US Department of Defense, July 14, 2020.

¹³"Statement by Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller on Force Levels in Afghanistan." US Department of Defense, January 15, 2021; Clinch, Matt. "US Signs Deal with Taliban to Reduce American Troops in Afghanistan." *CNBC*, February 29, 2020.

¹⁴"Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures." NATO, 2021; and "Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures." NATO, 2020.

¹⁵Office of the National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Twitter, April 8, 2020; and Shaheen, Suhail. Twitter, April 12, 2020.

¹⁶"Afghan Loya Jirga Meeting to Decide on Release of Taliban Prisoners." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 8, 2020.

¹⁷"Afghan President Agrees Taliban Prisoner Release." *Al Jazeera*, August 9, 2020.

¹⁸"Afghanistan's Abdullah: There's no loser in a peaceful settlement." *Al Jazeera English YouTube*, September 17, 2020.

¹⁹Khalilzad, Zalmay. Twitter, December 2, 2020.

²⁰Peace Negotiation Team of the I.R. of Afghanistan. Twitter, January 6, 2021.

²¹Constable, Pamela. "Peace talks are faltering, violence has surged, and U.S. troops are pulling out. Can the Afghan government withstand the pressure?" *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2021.

²²"Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council." *United Nations Security Council*, May 27, 2020.

²³"Remarks by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo at the Inauguration of Afghanistan Peace Negotiations, Doha, Qatar." *US Embassy in Afghanistan*, September 12, 2020.

²⁴Hadid, Dina. "Afghan Peace Talks Stalled Over Rules to Refer to When Sides Reach a Deadlock." NPR, October 6, 2020; and Sheva, Mohammad Arif. "Taliban 'Not Allow' Interference in 'Internal Affairs': Intra-Afghan Negotiations." *The Khaama Press*, October 2, 2020.

²⁵"NATO and Afghanistan." NATO, February 11, 2021.

²⁶See endnote 4.

²⁷See endnote 5.

²⁸"Letter dated 16 July 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011), and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council." United Nations Security Council, July 23, 2020.

²⁹"Letter dated 21 January 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011), and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council." United Nations Security Council, February 3, 2021.

³⁰"Taliban bans foreign fighters from joining their ranks." *ATN News*, February 24, 2021.

³¹See endnote 29.

³²See endnote 30.

³³See endnote 29.

³⁴"Security Council Resolution Endorses Moves Towards Long-sought Afghanistan Peace." UN News, March 10, 2020.

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