Talking while fighting: conditions and modalities
Friday 10 – Sunday 12 December 2010 | WP 1087

Programme
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During 2010, the potential role of political reconciliation in helping to end the conflict in Afghanistan became an increasingly prominent issue, and in early October President Hamid Karzai opened the first meeting of the High Peace Council he established to start a dialogue with the Taliban. This conference will look at the role of political reconciliation processes in ending internal conflict, focusing in particular on belligerent perspectives. It will assess general lessons from a broad range of case studies, and how those lessons might apply to other situations, in particular the evolving political process in Afghanistan.

Bringing together policymakers, civilian and military practitioners, civil society representatives, and academic experts from "host countries" that have or are still experiencing internal armed conflict as well as those from the international community, the conference will make a significant contribution to the further development of conceptual thinking regarding the modalities of political reconciliation processes. Conference participants from or who work on Afghanistan will be able to consider how these generalised lessons can help inform thinking about the conflict there.

With support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the UK Counterinsurgency Centre

Friday 10 December

1500

Welcome to conference and introduction to Wilton Park

Robert Grant
Programme Director, Wilton Park, Steyning

1515-1645

1. Political reconciliation processes in theory and practice

How central are political processes to the ending of internal armed conflict? Is the integrated provision of better security, governance, and economic development likely to end internal conflict in the absence of political dialogue between belligerents? Is a "Sri Lankan model" of ending internal conflict likely to be widely applicable? Have globalisation and evolving norms made it more difficult to end internal conflict through military victory in the two decades since the end of the Cold War? Are there certain conditions, such as "mutually hurting stalemates", that tend most fundamentally to underpin the willingness of belligerents to enter into political processes and that determine the success or failure of those processes? What other considerations can lead to a willingness to compromise? How important is strong leadership for positive outcomes?

Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah
Mediator-in-Residence, Department of Political Affairs, United Nations, New York

Mark Sedwill (via video link)
Senior Civilian Representative for Afghanistan, NATO, Kabul

1645-1730	Conference Photograph followed by tea/coffee

1730-1900	## 2. Iraq: from insurgency and sectarian conflict to uncertain political reconciliation

What was the initial framework for political reconciliation in post-Baathist Iraq, and why did it fail? What factors led to the emergence of the Sunni Awakening Movement? In what ways did the fragmentation of both Sunni and Shia insurgencies affect the design and management of political reconciliation processes in Iraq? What was the interaction between Shia militia ceasefires and fragmentation? What roles did military operations play in bringing insurgent groups to the negotiating table? How have the roles played by the Government of Iraq and Multi-National Force – Iraq differed in dealing with Sunni and Shia insurgents? Why have both Sunni and Shia insurgents enjoyed substantial success in national elections? What does the 2010 government formation process say about the state of political reconciliation in Iraq, and what does this assessment mean for future political stability?

Safaa Rasul Hussein
Acting National Security Adviser, National Security Council, Baghdad

Emma Sky
Former Political Advisor to the Commanding General, United States Forces – Iraq, Baghdad

1930	Reception followed by dinner

Saturday 11 December

0800-0900	Breakfast

0900-1030	## 3. Designing, launching and managing political processes

How do belligerent parties perceive the opportunities and risks of engaging in political reconciliation processes? In what ways do they try to shape the environment in order to minimise risks and maximise opportunities? What conditions are most conducive to the launching of political processes? What are the different ways in which belligerents try to launch, design and manage them? When belligerents are fragmented on one or both sides of a conflict, how does it affect the design and management of political processes? In what conditions are secret back channels most useful, and how can their integrity be maintained? How do belligerents move beyond pre-conditions for conducting formal talks?

Chair: Ashok Mehta
Security Risk Analyst; and convenor of track II processes, India/Nepal and India/Pakistan, Noida

Nepal
Ram Sharan Mahat
Former Foreign Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kathmandu

Nagaland (Northeast India)
Jaideep Saikia
Senior Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation, Delhi

1030-1100	Tea/coffee

1100-1300	**4. The interplay between military operations and political processes**

How can belligerents develop relationships, build trust, and sustain political processes while fighting continues, especially if military escalation is being used to exert greater pressure? What role can different forms of military de-escalation without a full ceasefire play in support of political processes? Are failed ceasefires better than no ceasefires? How can the abuse of ceasefires be discouraged or prevented? How closely linked are perceived military position and willingness to negotiate as well as negotiating demands? To what extent do negotiations and negotiating outcomes reflect belligerent perceptions of their "battlefield" positions? If parties that are excluded, or choose to be excluded, from a political process respond with an escalation of violence, how can that be countered without undermining the process?

Chair: John Heathershaw
Lecturer in International Relations, Exeter University

Nagaland (Northeast India)
Subir Bhaumik
BBC Bureau chief for East and Northeast India

Tajikistan
Mukkhidin Kabiri
Chairman, Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, Dushanbe

1300-1500	Lunch

1500-1630	**5. The role of civil society in political processes?**

How have belligerent parties viewed the participation of civil society in political reconciliation processes? In what ways do belligerents try to make use of civil society for their own ends? In what ways can civil society influence political processes? Can external mediation help create the dynamics to enable civil society to make a positive contribution to political processes?

Darfur
Theo Murphy
Project Manager, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva

1630-1700	Tea/coffee

1700-1830	**6. The impact on political processes of external intervention and support**

How decisively has the provision or withdrawal of external material support or the availability to insurgent groups of sanctuaries in neighbouring states affected belligerent views and positions regarding political processes? What are the range of calculations that condition the attitudes and roles of regional powers towards political processes in neighbouring conflict states? In conflict environments where external powers are either amongst the direct belligerents or are deeply engaged with one or more of the belligerent parties, how do the dynamics of political reconciliation processes differ from those in which all belligerents are internal to the conflict state? How does the fragmentation in the conflict environment created by external actors affect political processes? What types of relationships and respective roles develop between host country belligerents and their external supporters during the unfolding of these processes?

El Salvador
Blanca Antonini
Visiting Professor, Torcuato Di Tella University, Buenos Aires

Afghanistan in the 1980s
William Maley
Foundation Director, Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, The Australian National University, Canberra

1900	Reception followed by Conference Dinner

Sunday 12 December

0800-0900	Breakfast

0900-1030	### 7. The role of third party mediation

Are there certain conditions that best define when third parties can most effectively assist in the design, launching and management of political processes? Does belligerent fragmentation increase the need for and value of external mediation? What are the advantages and drawbacks of third party mediation from a belligerent standpoint? In what ways can outside players help to maintain the integrity of the political process? How critical to the success or failure of political processes is the involvement of third parties in monitoring, verification, and provision of security guarantees? If there is no third party able to provide independent monitoring, verification, and security guarantees, are there any arrangements between the belligerent parties that can help play similar confidence-building roles?

Tajikistan
Randa Slim
Political Analyst

1030-1100	Tea/coffee

1100-1300	### 8. What generalised lessons from the case study sessions seem most relevant to an evolving political process in Afghanistan?

Shahmahmood Miakhel
Country Director, United States Institute of Peace, Kabul

Waliullah Rahmani
Director, Kabul Centre for Strategic Studies, Kabul

1300	Lunch

1415	Participants depart