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# Introduction

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A number of recent studies have made the case for a negotiated peace in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Both of us participated in one such inquiry, conducted under the auspices of The Century Foundation, whose results were published in March 2011.<sup>2</sup> In the course of that effort, we joined with a number of other American and international experts in visiting Kabul, Islamabad, and several other relevant capitals to hear firsthand from various potential participants in an Afghan peace process how they viewed the prospects, objectives, and possible outcomes. That study concluded that there was a sufficient confluence of interest on the part of the major parties to the war in Afghanistan to make a negotiated settlement feasible and worth pursuing. The Afghan government and, more recently, American officials have come to a similar conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

This monograph focuses somewhat less on whether and more on how a peace process for Afghanistan could be organized. We begin by

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, The Century Foundation International Task Force on Afghanistan in Its Regional and Multilateral Dimensions, *Afghanistan, Negotiating Peace*, Washington, D.C.: 2011; Minna Järvenpää, *Making Peace in Afghanistan: The Missing Political Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, Special Report No. 267, 2011; Thomas Ruttig, *The Battle for Afghanistan: Negotiations with the Taliban*, Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, May 23, 2011; Michael Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2009; and Matt Waldman, *Dangerous Liaisons with the Afghan Taliban: The Feasibility and Risks of Negotiations*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, Special Report No. 256, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The Century Foundation, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> In a February 18, 2011, speech to the Asia Society, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton extended an explicit and unpreconditioned offer to negotiate a peace settlement in Afghanistan.

closely examining the political and military context in which negotiations could take place. We then review the interests and attitudes of each of the possible parties to a peace process, including the two main Afghan protagonists and the most interested external actors. Next, we set out a possible path from talks about talks to actual negotiations to implementation of an agreement. We then lay out the likely terms of any resultant accord and conclude with recommendations for American policy.

Throughout the monograph, our assessments of the various stakeholders' interests and objectives are based largely on our prior experience in dealing with these governments over the years and on recent conversations with active and former officials, representatives, and expert observers affiliated with each of the actors. Unless otherwise noted, our assessments should be considered the product of our experience and conversations.

Both authors have worked on Afghanistan in the past, one as the George W. Bush administration's first special envoy to that country in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the other as an assistant secretary of defense responsible for this theater of war during the second term of that administration. We are thus very mindful that any negotiating strategy must consider practical decisionmaking constraints, shifting objectives, and disagreements internal to each of the parties (and between them), as well as dissimulation, duplicity, and efforts by spoilers to derail a peace process.

As former practitioners, we recognize that Afghanistan is not the only "game in town" for most of the outside parties involved and that apparently unrelated considerations or random events will sometimes shape these parties' policies toward a peace accord. As the monograph makes clear, we are quite aware of the many obstacles to an agreement, and we believe the process will probably require years of talking. During this time, fighting will likely continue and may even intensify. Negotiation does not represent an easy or early path out of Afghanistan for the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies, but it is the only way in which this war is likely to end in a long-term peace.