



**Utrecht University**

**There are Two Sides to Every Coin: An analysis of the U.S. – Taliban  
Negotiations (2018-2019)**

A reassessment of William I. Zartman's ripeness theory with the Afghanistan conflict as a  
case study

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## **Abstract**

Negotiation is one of the most commonly employed methods in conflict resolution. In recent decades, scholars, policymakers, or whoever interested in resolving conflicts, have deliberated about the right *timing* for such negotiation efforts. In other words: when is a conflict ‘ripe’ for the initiation of peace negotiations? The existing ripeness theory, made especially popular by William I. Zartman, is crucial in understanding when conflicting parties consider negotiations as preferable to continued fighting. In 2015, Zartman published an article with case studies among which he presented the Afghanistan conflict as a negative case for ripeness, seen from his ripeness theory. Scilicet: the time would not have been ‘ripe’ for peace negotiations. However, since the beginning of 2018, official rounds of negotiations have been taking place between the U.S. and the Taliban. At the same time, the very same elements mentioned as the reason for the presumed absence of ‘ripeness’, as identified by Zartman in 2015, are still identifiable if analyzing the U.S. – Taliban peace negotiations. This thesis argues that this indicates shortcomings in the ripeness theory. Not only there seems to be a system error in the ripeness theory because the model struggles to cope with multi-party conflicts, but namely the ripeness theory lacks the ability to be interdisciplinary and consequently overlooks the importance of the historical and political dimension. This thesis argues that it is exactly the historical and political developments that are significant contributing factors to ‘ripening’ the conflict and hence, explain the reason why peace negotiations were able to sprout from the Afghanistan conflict, despite Zartman’s conclusion the time was not ripe to do so.

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## List of Abbreviations

ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, Afghan forces
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces, Afghan forces
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MEO	Mutually Enticing Opportunity (ripeness theory)
MHS	Mutually Hurting Stalemate (ripeness theory)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization, North Atlantic Alliance
QCG	Quadrilateral Coordination Group
RSM	Resolute Support Mission
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
U.N.	United Nations
U.S.	United States of America
WO	Way Out (ripeness theory)

## Introduction

One of the most commonly employed methods in conflict resolution is that of negotiation. In recent decades, scholars, policymakers, or whoever interested in resolving conflicts, have deliberated about the right *timing* for such efforts. In other words: when is a conflict ‘ripe’ for the initiation of peace negotiations? The existing ripeness theory, made especially popular by William I. Zartman, is crucial in understanding when conflicting parties consider negotiations as preferable to continued fighting.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, Zartman published an article with case studies among which he presented the Afghanistan conflict as a negative case for ripeness, seen from his ripeness theory. Scilicet: the time would not have been ‘ripe’ for peace negotiations. However, only three years later, official rounds of negotiations have been taking place between the U.S. and the Taliban since the beginning of 2018. At the same time, the very same elements mentioned as the reason for the presumed absence of ‘ripeness’, as identified by Zartman in 2015, are still identifiable if analyzing the U.S. – Taliban peace negotiations. This seems, as this analysis explores, to indicate certain flaws in Zartman’s ripeness theory.

Since the Cold War policymakers have been emphasizing negotiated settlement as the best option to end armed conflict.<sup>2</sup> As suggested by Zartman, studies on peaceful settlement of disputes generally view “the substance of the proposals for a solution as the key to a successful resolution of conflict”.<sup>3</sup> However, there is a growing awareness that the *timing* of efforts for resolution is an equally important key in such studies.<sup>4</sup> A rich variety of literature can be found on how to determine the right time for negotiation and “the concept of the ‘ripe moment’ remains one of the most important concepts in the study of peace and conflict”.<sup>5</sup>

The ripeness theory “explains when and why parties to a conflict decide that negotiation is a better option than continued fighting”.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, it concentrates on inter-party relations through the concepts of Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) and Way Out (WO), or Mutually Enticing Opportunity (MEO).<sup>7</sup> The concept of MHS is described by Zartman as: “when the parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Walch, “Rethinking Ripeness Theory: Explaining Progress and Failure in Civil War Negotiations in the Philippines and Colombia.” *International Negotiation* 21, no. 1 (2016), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Walch, 76.

<sup>3</sup> William I. Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments.” *Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 1 (2001), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives”, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Walch, 76.

<sup>6</sup> Walch, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Walch, 76.

escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them (although not necessarily in equal degree or for the same reasons”, therefore “they seek an alternative policy or Way Out”.<sup>8</sup> According to Eamonn O’Kane, “the perception by the parties that they are in a mutually hurting stalemate and a sense that a negotiated solution is possible” are the core elements that are interlinked and both must be present for a conflict to be ‘ripe’.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, as stated by Zartman, “ripeness is only a condition, necessary but not sufficient, for the initiation of negotiations”.<sup>10</sup> Although the ripeness theory is not able to predict when a given situation will become ripe, “it is predictive in the sense of identifying the elements necessary (even if not sufficient) for the productive inauguration of negotiations”.<sup>11</sup>

The ripeness theory initially rested on six case studies conducted in African countries. In 2015 Zartman published a study based on cases that analyzed the role of a mediating party in conflict. Here, he argued that the role of a mediator is “to help the parties feel that they are stuck and it hurts (MHS), evoking the objective factors already present, and to develop a sense of a Way Out”.<sup>12</sup> Afghanistan was one of these analyzed conflicts. In this case study he concluded that both elements of ripeness were nonexistent and therefore efforts to open negotiations failed.<sup>13</sup>

Since 2015, however, the situation in Afghanistan has changed rapidly. Although Zartman stated that “in Afghanistan the basic element of a stalemate is absent and almost no third party is interested in the job”, official rounds of negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban have taken place since 2018.<sup>14</sup> In September 2018, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo named Afghan-American Zalmay Khalilzad, the former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. His mandate was to “coordinate and lead U.S. efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table” and to explore “how best to reach a negotiated settlement to the conflict”.<sup>15</sup> Since then, nine rounds of negotiations have been concluded in August 2019, after which Khalilzad stated that they were

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<sup>8</sup> Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives”, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Eamonn O’kane, “When Can Conflicts Be Resolved? A Critique of Ripeness.” *Civil Wars* 8, no. 3-4 (2006), 270.

<sup>10</sup> Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives”, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives”, 9.

<sup>12</sup> William I. Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.” *International Negotiation* 20, no. 3 (2015), 481.

<sup>13</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East”, 485.

<sup>14</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East”, 485.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad Travel to Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.” *Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson*, Washington D.C. 3 October, 2018 <https://www.state.gov/special-representative-for-afghanistan-reconciliation-zalmay-khalilzad-travel-to-afghanistan-pakistan-the-united-arab-emirates-qatar-and-saudi-arabia/> (accessed on October 23, 2019).

“at the threshold of an agreement”.<sup>16</sup> The Taliban reiterated the same in a statement saying they “finalized an agreement”.<sup>17</sup> Based on this, it can be stated that official rounds of negotiations were in fact initiated, despite Zartman’s analysis the time was not ‘ripe’ to do so.

The above described indicates that Zartman’s analysis of 2015 does not suffice any longer, as negotiations were, contrarily to Zartman’s conclusion that the time was not ripe to do so, initiated. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the following research-question: *Why, despite Zartman’s conclusion that the time was not ‘ripe’ for the initiation of negotiations, were peace negotiations nevertheless able to sprout from the Afghanistan conflict in 2018?* In answering the research question, this thesis first explores the ripeness theory in depth and its existing criticisms, which functions as the basis for the methodology. Secondly, Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict seen from his ripeness theory is explicated. In order to better understand Zartman’s analysis, this thesis provides an analysis of different perspectives from the Afghanistan conflict at the time of Zartman’s analysis in 2015. Thirdly, an analysis of the U.S. – Taliban peace negotiations (2018-2019) is provided which serves as the basis to test the ripeness theory to the (new) reality in Afghanistan as compared to that of 2015. The time-line of this thesis is thus limited between 2015 and 2019. Lastly, this thesis indicates flaws in the ripeness theory. Not only there seems to be a system error in the ripeness theory because the model struggles to cope with multi-party conflicts, but namely the ripeness theory lacks the ability to be interdisciplinary and consequently overlooks the importance of the historical and political dimension. On the basis of this analysis, it argues the question is not so much about whether or not the ‘ripe’ moment has changed in more favorable ways for ‘ripeness’, but that the ripeness theory is overlooking historical and political developments. By focusing on the top-down decision makers, ripeness theory overlooks the influence of domestic (and international) political pressure. This analysis shows that it is exactly this domestic (and international) political pressure that has developed historically that is of significant influence in ‘ripening’ the conflict, ultimately explaining the reason why peace negotiations were able to sprout from the Afghanistan conflict.

Several academics have already expressed reservations about the ripeness theory. For example, Colin Walch states that “factors which may explain why parties stay at the

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<sup>16</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad (@US4AfghanPeace), “We are at the threshold of an agreement that will reduce violence and open the door for Afghans to sit together to negotiate an honorable & sustainable peace and a unified, sovereign Afghanistan that does not threaten the United States, its allies, or any other country.” 31 August 2019, 4:40p.m. Tweet. <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1167945304290672642> (accessed on September 27, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, “Statement of Islamic Emirate concerning tweet of Donald Trump about negotiations”, 8 September 2019 <https://alemarahenglish.com/?p=51409> (accessed on September 27, 2019).

negotiation table after the start of the negotiation process – that is, how the ripeness of the moment is sustained until an agreement has been reached – are not well elaborated.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, he argues that “the apparent move toward negotiation does not mean that a peace agreement will be sought or concluded”, pointing to organizationally fragmented rebel groups that could be “less flexible to make concessions”.<sup>19</sup> A lack of cohesion between the military and political branches could cause them to leave the negotiation table before an agreement is reached.<sup>20</sup> Others, like Eamonn O’Kane, point out to the difficulty in identifying when ripeness begins.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, O’Kane indicates that Zartman is not completely clear on what is meant by ‘hurting’ as he stresses the importance of a MHS.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, many conflicts could have been chosen to reassess the ripeness theory to the world’s realities. What is however striking about the conflict in Afghanistan is that Zartman himself analyzed this conflict as a case study in 2015 and assessed it as ‘unripe’, while official rounds of negotiations took place only three years later. Could the context of the conflict, that already lasted for so long, have shifted so rapidly? Or is it much more plausible that the ripeness theory might rather overlook certain factors that could otherwise explain the reason why negotiations were able to sprout from the conflict? This thesis argues the latter, which makes this analysis a valuable contribution to the academic field of conflict resolution. Especially because the ripeness theory is one of the most popular theories (in the field of conflict resolution) to predict whether or not the time is ‘right’ to initiate peace negotiations and since negotiated settlement has since the end of the Cold War been emphasized as the best option to end civil war.

Of course, no analysis is without its weaknesses and in this case the weakness of the research lies in the recent nature of the analyzed situation and, as a consequence, the lack of (primary) sources. This ‘gap’, so to say, is tried to fill by making use of an extensive amounts of reports, like UNAMA and SIGAR (who report on the mission and the situation in Afghanistan regularly), tweets from officials (U.S. President Donald Trump, Zalmay Khalilzad, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Taliban spokespersons), news articles (New York Times, Al Jazeera, TOLO News), official Taliban statements, statements by the governments of Afghanistan and the U.S. and interviews (i.e. Afghan President Ghani, President Trump and Taliban officials). All this is combined with an extensive amount of secondary literature

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<sup>18</sup> Walch, 75.

<sup>19</sup> Walch, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Walch, 75.

<sup>21</sup> O’Kane, 271.

<sup>22</sup> O’Kane, 271-272.



of which the theoretical part relies mainly on publications by William I. Zartman (who has written extensively about ripeness theory) and publications that criticize the existing ripeness theory (i.e. Eamonn o’Kane, Colin Walch, Steven Forde, Peter Coleman). The substantive part relies on publications that focus on the history of the conflict in Afghanistan, the Taliban, earlier attempts for peace negotiations in Afghanistan, the current situation in Afghanistan and the U.S.-Taliban peace negotiations since 2018.

Furthermore, it must be noted that, at the time of writing, the outcome of the U.S. - Taliban peace negotiations is unknown. However, it does not matter for this analysis, for the question this thesis seeks to answer is why peace negotiations were able to sprout from the Afghanistan conflict and developed in such mature forms, despite Zartman’s conclusion that the time was not ‘ripe’ for the initiation of negotiation as seen from his ripeness theory. Moreover, the ripeness theory does not indicate anything about the successful conclusion of peace negotiations, but merely whether or not the time is ‘ripe’ for the *initiation* of such negotiations.

## **I. Theoretic Outline: The ‘Ripe’ Moment for Negotiation in Conflict?**

This chapter provides a brief introduction into the field of conflict resolution and its two most commonly employed methods to manage conflicts in international relations, namely negotiation and mediation. The focus of this chapter is primarily aimed at explicating the problems with the right timing of negotiation in conflict, explaining William I. Zartman’s ripeness theory that helps identify that ‘right time’ for negotiation and the critiques raised against this theory. Firstly, a short introduction in conflict resolution methods is provided. Secondly, the ripeness theory, as seen from William I. Zartman’s studies, is explained. Thirdly, and last, a summary of critiques is explicated on this Ripeness theory. The key point of this chapter is to provide a solid basis of understanding and reflections upon the ripeness theory in order to better understand, and ultimately revise, Zartman’s ripeness analysis of the Afghanistan conflict.

### **I.I Conflict Resolution Methods: Negotiation and Mediation**

The field of conflict resolution emerged as a specialized field from the 1950s onwards and rapidly became a broad, fast-growing, interdisciplinary academic field. According to Jacob Bercovitch et al., conflict resolution is essentially studying “the phenomenon of conflict and analyze ways to bring it under control, bringing their insights and concepts to bear on actual conflicts, be they domestic or international, so as to foster better and more effective relations among states and peoples”.<sup>23</sup> Correspondingly, conflict resolution embodies “ideas, theories, and methods that can improve our understanding of conflict and our collective practice of reduction in violence and enhancement of political processes for harmonizing interests”.<sup>24</sup> Conflict resolution is thus not only an academic tool to analyze conflict, but also one that exceeds the academic nature to a more practical one in how to manage (international) conflict.

Two of the most commonly employed methods to manage, and ultimately dissolve, conflicts in international relations are negotiation and mediation.<sup>25</sup> The two methods share

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<sup>23</sup> Jacob Bercovitch, Kremeniuk V. A, and I. William Zartman. *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Bercovitch, Kremeniuk, Zartman, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob Bercovitch, and Richard Jackson, “Current Developments in International Conflict Management: Assessing the Relevance of Negotiation and Mediation\*.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 14, no. 2 (2001), 14.

common characteristics, but reveal significant differences as well. For the sake of this thesis, it is important to lay bare these differences and clarify both methods in order to be able to understand the peace process in Afghanistan, which will be elaborated on in the next chapters. Referring to Bercovitch and Richard Jackson, (international) negotiation can be broadly defined as “a process by which states and other actors in the international arena exchange proposals in an attempt to agree about a point of conflict and manage their future relationship”.<sup>26</sup> Contrarily, mediation is “a form of diplomatic bargaining in which the parties to a dispute seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, a party not directly involved in the conflict to resolve their differences without invoking the authority of the law”.<sup>27</sup> An important difference is thus that negotiation is a voluntary bilateral process in which the parties are themselves in control over any decision they reach. The introduction of a mediator changes this nature of a dyadic bargaining structure into a triadic one.<sup>28</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to reassess the ripeness theory – concerned with the right timing for negotiations – to the realities in Afghanistan. Therefore, this theoretical chapter proceeds with explaining the ripeness theory, a theory based on the notion when the time is ‘ripe’ for opening negotiations.

## **I.II William I. Zartman & The Ripeness Theory**

Preliminary work in the field of conflict resolution focused primarily on what proposals for a solution should consist of. In recent decades, however, there has been considerably more interest in the *timing* of such efforts.<sup>29</sup> In other words: when is a conflict *ripe* for (peace) negotiations? Two main hypotheses exist in literature on the timing of peace efforts. As stated by Bercovitch and Jackson, one camp suggests that the success rate of conflict management is the highest if initiated early in the conflict, “before adversaries have crossed a threshold of violence, inflicted heavy losses on each other, and become entrenched in their positions”. The other camp, on the contrary, argues that as the conflict develops, the ‘ripe moment’ will arise at later stages of a conflict, because the parties “have reached a hurting stalemate and may be willing to moderate their intransigence and revise their expectations”. Thus, as the conflict endures, it ‘ripens’ with the passing of time with a hurting stalemate as the ultimate stage of ripeness.

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<sup>26</sup> Bercovitch and Jackson, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Bercovitch and Jackson, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Bercovitch and Jackson, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives”, 8.

In accordance with the literature on determining ‘the right time’ for negotiations, not only could peace negotiations turn out to be costly for (one of) the parties, but also two other potential risks are identified that may occur if negotiations were to be initiated in unripe situations. Firstly, actors may agree to partake in negotiations only due to external pressure and therefore pose insincere intentions. Secondly, peace negotiations could be used as a manner to regroup, rearm and extend the conflict.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, both sides must perceive the situation as appropriate for negotiations. The decision whether and when to initiate negotiations is therefore a central issue in any peace process.<sup>31</sup>

As mentioned by Robert L. Rothstein, “the analytical and practical debate about the issue of timing has been dominated by William I. Zartman’s powerful and popular metaphor of a ‘ripe moment’ for negotiations”.<sup>32</sup> Zartman is “a prolific scholar who has offered remarkable understanding and insight about conflict, negotiation, and peace”.<sup>33</sup> He has written extensively about the ‘ripe’ moment for negotiation. Zartman suggests that “ripeness is only a condition, necessary but not sufficient, for the initiation of negotiations”.<sup>34</sup> Elaborating on this, he argues that ripeness is “not self-fulfilling or self-implementing”; “it must be seized, either directly by the parties or, if not, through the persuasion of a mediator”.<sup>35</sup> Zartman himself notes that the theory does not explain the successful conclusion of negotiations once initiated, but it’s limited to merely the opening of negotiations. It “refers to the decision to negotiate, it does not guarantee any results”.<sup>36</sup> At the bottom of this lies not a predictive nature in the sense that it can reveal when a given situation will become ripe, but referring to Zartman it “is predictive in the sense of identifying the elements necessary (even if not sufficient) for the productive inauguration of negotiations”.<sup>37</sup>

Essentially, as claimed by Zartman in 2000 and 2001, “The concept of a ripe moment centers on the parties’ perception of a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), optimally associated with an impending, past or recently avoided catastrophe”.<sup>38</sup> This first element necessary for a ripe moment, he argues, “is based on the notion that when the parties find

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<sup>30</sup> Hendrickson, “Zartman, I. William, and J. Lewis Rasmussen, Eds. Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques.” *Perspectives on Political Science* 27, no. 2 (1998), 120.

<sup>31</sup> Robert L. Rothstein, “The Timing of Negotiations: Dueling Metaphors.” *Civil Wars* 9, no. 3 (2007), 263.

<sup>32</sup> Rothstein, 263.

<sup>33</sup> Larry Crump, P Terrence Hopmann, Terrence Lyons, and Bertram Spector, “En Hommage: The Contributions of I. William Zartman.” *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 11, no. 1 (2018), 53.

<sup>34</sup> Zartman, “The timing of Peace Initiatives”, 9.

<sup>35</sup> William I. Zartman, Ripeness: The hurting stalemate and beyond. *International conflict resolution after the Cold War*, 2, (2000), 227.

<sup>36</sup> Zartman, Ripeness: The hurting stalemate and beyond, 241.

<sup>37</sup> Zartman, “The timing of Peace Initiatives”, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Zartman, “The timing of Peace Initiatives”, 8.

themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them [...], they seek an alternative policy or Way Out”.<sup>39</sup> That is to say: a mutually hurting stalemate diverges from a mere military deadlock or stalemate, as it is based on *perception*: both parties must perceive they are in a stalemate and that enduring the conflict would only increasingly hurt both. It is inherently subjective.

According to Zartman, the Way Out (WO) is the second element necessary for a ripe moment. Zartman argues that “parties do not have to be able to identify a specific solution, only a sense that a negotiated solution is possible for the searching and that the other party shares that sense and the willingness to search too”.<sup>40</sup> Essentially, in the absence of a Way Out, the push associated with the mutually hurting stalemate would leave the parties with empty hands and nowhere to go.<sup>41</sup> In his study in 2015, Zartman argues that the parties “need to turn the promise of a Way Out into the pull factor of a mutually enticing opportunity (MEO)”.<sup>42</sup> The “MEO is not an external element operating on the parties like the MHS”, but it is basically “the creation of the parties themselves operating within the negotiations”.<sup>43</sup>

Zartman also touched upon the role of a mediator in conflict in his study of 2015. Here, he proposes that the major challenge for a mediator is to ripen the parties’ perceptions. Referring to Zartman, both two elements mentioned above, that of the MHS and the WO, are necessary but insufficient conditions necessary for parties to consider the acceptance of a mediator.<sup>44</sup> Subsequently, Zartman argues that the role of the mediator is, in essence, “to help the parties feel that they are stuck and it hurts, evoking the objective factors already present, and to develop the sense of a Way Out”.<sup>45</sup> In accordance with Zartman, the mediator’s job is to ripen the conflict.

All the above has explicated the problems surrounding the timing of peace negotiations, outlined the essence of the ripeness theory as laid out by Zartman and explained the basic elements needed for the ‘ripe’ moment for negotiation. But a theory is only a theory and is not insusceptible for criticism. Scholars in the field of negotiation have expressed criticism against the ripeness theory. These are crucial to keep in mind when reassessing the ripeness theory to the realities in Afghanistan, because it helps identify flaws both in the theory and Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict through this theory. The next

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<sup>39</sup> Zartman, “The timing of Peace Initiatives”, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Zartman, “The timing of Peace Initiatives”, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Zartman, “The timing of Peace Initiatives”, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 481.

<sup>43</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 481.

<sup>44</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 480.

<sup>45</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 481.

section continues with explicating these criticisms and lays bare the questions that the theory raises.

### **I.III The Problems with Ripeness**

Although ripeness theory is a useful starting point for understanding the motives that might move one another to negotiation in conflict, it has various limitations. Take for example Eamonn O’kane, who critiques ripeness’ theoretical underpinnings through a case study of the Northern Ireland peace process. In his analysis, he both highlights the subjective nature of both the theory itself and the information needed to apply it, and argues that the claim of the theory being able to help predict when conflicts are ripe for resolution is unsustainable.<sup>46</sup> In doing so, he firstly problematizes the issue of identifying when ripening begins. How can one know when and if the moment is ‘ripe’? Secondly, O’kane highlights the great stress Zartman places on the importance of a mutually hurting stalemate, but sharply questions what precisely is meant with ‘hurting’.<sup>47</sup> Hurt is linked to the perception of high costs, but Zartman does not clarify enough when exactly such costs exceed the limits of what one might perceive as acceptable or not. Moreover, Zartman asserts that the importance of the mutually hurting stalemate lies in that “the parties of the conflict perceive it exists, regardless of whether it would appear to exist to ‘outsiders’”.<sup>48</sup> Thus, referring to O’kane, mutually hurting stalemates as such are “largely subjective rather than objective situations”.<sup>49</sup> It is here where O’kane identifies the core problem in using the concept of ripeness as a predictive tool. It is exactly that dimension of the subjective perception that is hard to grasp and identify.<sup>50</sup> In his words: “Ripeness at one level seems to work only in a predictive context if all parties have perfect knowledge, not only of objective factors but also of the subjective perceptions of the other parties. This is evidently not the case.”<sup>51</sup>

By the same token, it seems the whole idea of ‘ripeness’ has fundamental flaws in several ways. Not only is identifying when exactly the time is ‘ripe’ for negotiation dubious and at the same time impossible to predict, but Zartman’s assertion of the ‘ripe’ moment is intrinsically dichotomous of nature. A situation is either ripe or unripe. Referring to Peter T. Coleman et al., “this dichotomy contributes to the parsimony of the model, but limits its

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<sup>46</sup> O’kane, 268.

<sup>47</sup> O’kane, 271-272.

<sup>48</sup> O’kane, 274-275.

<sup>49</sup> O’kane, 274-275.

<sup>50</sup> O’kane, 276.

<sup>51</sup> O’kane, 276.

explanatory power.<sup>52</sup> Because ripeness theory is not presented as a continuous variable, the theory lacks the explanatory power to find answers for conflicts wherein parties are willing to negotiate in ‘unripe’ moments. Even more so, if it was to be ripe, Zartman does not provide any guidelines on how ripeness is to be sustained until an actual peace agreement between the parties is reached. On the implications that the theory only addresses the opening of negotiations, Zartman himself comments that “ripeness theory can reach beyond the decision to negotiate into the negotiations themselves by indicating that the perception of ripeness has to continue during the negotiations if the parties are not to re-evaluate their positions and drop out, in the revived hopes of being able to find a unilateral solution through escalation”.<sup>53</sup>

From another perspective, in his study on the civil war negotiations in the Philippines and Colombia, Colin Walch argues that the “factors which may explain why parties stay at the negotiation table after the start of the negotiation process [...] are not well elaborated”.<sup>54</sup> By illustration, Walch argues that “organizationally fragmented rebel groups are less flexible to make concessions and unlikely to stay at the negotiation table until an agreement is reached, especially when there is a lack of cohesion between the military and political branches”.<sup>55</sup> In essence, the fact that parties might move toward negotiation is a mere decision that does not inherently signify an actual peace agreement will be sought or concluded.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, once negotiations are opened, there is still much that could happen, especially in the absence of an external mediator to keep the parties committed to reach an agreement. This, referring to Walch, indicates an insufficiency in the concept.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, Coleman et al. summarize various critiques raised against ripeness theory. These include the notion of ripeness being a passive metaphor that is primarily determined by external circumstances as well as ripeness theory being limited to the individual level, causing it to focus on top-down decision makers and neglecting “the critical roles played by the readiness of midlevel and grassroots leaders, as well as by the general population in peace processes”.<sup>58</sup> It therefore misses a political dimension. Moreover, ripeness theory implicates economically national cost-benefit assumptions: this form of rationality offers “limited predictive value under conditions where noneconomic forms of reasoning motivate disputants

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<sup>52</sup> Peter T. Coleman, Antony G Hacking, Mark A Stover, Beth Fisher-Yoshida, and Andrzej Nowak. “Reconstructing Ripeness I: A Study of Constructive Engagement in Protracted Social Conflicts.” *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2008), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Zartman, “The timing of Peace Initiatives”, 14.

<sup>54</sup> Walch, 75.

<sup>55</sup> Walch, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Walch, 75-76.

<sup>57</sup> Walch, 76, 97.

<sup>58</sup> Coleman, Hacking, Stover, Fisher-Yoshida, and Nowak, 6.

or where experiences of pain and sacrifice are construed as noble and thereby sustain the conflict”.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, as mentioned by both Coleman and O’kane, the model of ripeness theory seems to be incapable of coping with multi-party conflicts, as it assumes the elements of ripeness to be “joint states that simultaneously affect both parties to a conflict (mutually hurting stalemate)”.<sup>60</sup>

To sum up, ripeness theory is not indisputable, as various scholars have expressed their critiques on various aspects of the theory. These include the dichotomous nature of ripeness, the assumption that the mere decision of parties to get to the table means that the situation was or is ‘ripe’ for resolution, the ambiguously defined notion of a ripe moment as well as the ‘hurt’ in a hurting stalemate, the difficulty in identifying when exactly a situation is ‘ripe’ for resolution or not and a lack of understanding and guidance on how ripeness is to be sustained.

To conclude, why do these critiques matter for this analysis? Firstly, it provides a solid base of reflections upon the ripeness theory. Secondly, these critiques help identify the flaws in Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict as a negative case for ripeness in 2015. This thesis continues with a disquisition of Zartman’s analysis of this conflict and the context of the Afghanistan conflict at the time. Lastly, a revised analysis of Afghanistan as a case study for the ripeness theory is provided. In doing so, it comes to light that a great amount of the above mentioned critiques are applicable to Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan case, and, on top of that, unveils another lacking dimension in Zartman’s theory: that of historical sensitivity.

## **II. Case study: Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict (2015)**

On 11 September 2001, a terrorist attack was carried out against America, of which Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden was held responsible, which left nearly 3,000 victims dead. The Taliban has strong ties with Al Qaeda and, at the time, protected Bin Laden and refused to hand him over to the Americans.<sup>61</sup> In response, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) under the banner of ‘the war on terror’.

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<sup>59</sup> Coleman, Hacking, Stover, Fisher-Yoshida, and Nowak, 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Coleman, Hacking, Stover, Fisher-Yoshida, and Nowak, 6. O’kane, 271.

<sup>61</sup> BBC News, “Why is there a war in Afghanistan? The short, medium and long story.”, *BBC News*, September 8 (2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49192495> (accessed on November 14, 2019).



Other allies joined the war, and the Taliban was quickly toppled off its throne in 2001. However, the Taliban never really disappeared – over the years they increasingly regained influence, and continue to do so, especially in rural areas of Afghanistan. Ever since, 18 years after the invasion began, the U.S. and the international community have struggled to rule out the Taliban and at the same time preventing the Afghanistan government from collapsing.<sup>62</sup>

In 2015, Zartman published an article in which he analyzed several conflicts by means of his ripeness theory. Afghanistan was one of these cases, and was identified as a negative case for ripeness with, according to Zartman, failed attempts for opening negotiations as a consequence.<sup>63</sup> The peace process has evidently changed significantly in 2018-2019 in comparison with 2015, since peace talks between the Taliban and the U.S. have meanwhile led to ten rounds of official negotiations. This calls for a revision of Zartman’s analysis, as his analysis of 2015 does not suffice any longer. Before this revision can be provided, this chapter first proceeds with explicating Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict as a negative case for ripeness and continues with elaborating on this by analyzing the context of the conflict at the time. In doing so, it provides several perspectives from which several aspects of ripeness (be it negative or positive) are extracted. These include perspectives from the U.S., the Taliban and the Afghan government (although excluded from the 2018-2019 U.S. – Taliban peace talks) as well as exemplifying the several attempts made for peace talks throughout this period up to 2015. Altogether, this serves as a firm background to be able to revise Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict, reassess his ripeness theory to new reality and in doing so identify possible flaws in this theory.

## **II.I Zartman’s analysis of the conflict in Afghanistan seen from ripeness theory (2015)**

In his study of 2015, Zartman posed the conflict in Afghanistan as a negative case because to his assessment two elements of ripeness did not appear and attempts at opening negotiations failed for that reason.<sup>64</sup> In essence, Zartman declares, “the basic element of a stalemate is absent and almost no third party is interested in the job”.<sup>65</sup> Here, he mentions that negotiations have been pursued for a number of years “within the quadrangle of U.S., U.N., Afghanistan,

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<sup>62</sup> BBC News, “Why is there a war in Afghanistan?”

<sup>63</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 485.

<sup>64</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 485.

<sup>65</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 485.

and the Taliban, with Pakistan providing advice from the sidelines”.<sup>66</sup> He does identify times when a stalemate occurred, but concludes that these were never lasting, because of repeated renewed confidence of the Taliban in “eventual and impending victory”.<sup>67</sup> Zartman argues that the announcement of U.S. troop withdrawal in any case was only reinforcing this perception, consequently removing any threat or pressure to bring about a stalemate or make it hurt for the Taliban. Since they would withdraw anyhow, it left the U.S. with little to negotiate for or threaten with.<sup>68</sup> Zartman does point to the hopeful efforts from the Afghan government, who had something to negotiate for: safety after the Taliban takeover.<sup>69</sup> According to Zartman, “the U.N. representatives’ office has been pre-negotiating with the Taliban” for several years, but it was unclear on behalf of whom and over what.<sup>70</sup> But, despite all these efforts, Zartman concludes that ultimately “the capital element of stalemate is not shared on any of the sides of the quadrangle. Although talks and pre-negotiations have taken place on all sides, the situation has not been ripe for any negotiations. These are all instances at best of Staggered Stalemates”.<sup>71</sup>

The above describes the reasons mentioned by Zartman for the presumed absence of the ‘ripe’ moment for negotiation in the Afghanistan conflict. To better understand Zartman’s analysis, the context of the conflict at the time is explored. Here, several aspects are identified that, indeed, underline his reasoning seen from a 2015 perspective.

## **II.II The context of the Afghanistan Conflict in 2015: Some Perspectives for Ripeness**

### *U.S. perspectives*

As mentioned before, the U.S. became actively involved in Afghanistan when the NATO-led coalition invaded the country in 2001 to topple the Taliban regime. NATO assumed leadership of ISAF in 2003 and in its heyday consisted of more than 130,000 troops from 51 NATO and partner nations.<sup>72</sup> The ultimate goal was to improve the capabilities and capacities of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). Although the amount of U.S.

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<sup>66</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 485.

<sup>67</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 485.

<sup>68</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 485.

<sup>69</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 487.

<sup>70</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 487.

<sup>71</sup> Zartman, “Mediation: Ripeness and Its Challenges in the Middle East.”, 487, 488.

<sup>72</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, “U.S. Relations With Afghanistan”, *Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet*, U.S. Department of State, July 8 (2019), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-afghanistan/> (accessed on December 20, 2019).

forces remained more or less stable – on average around 30.000 – under George W. Bush’s administration, a surge was carried out by Obama in 2009, ordering 17.000 more troops to Afghanistan, hereby boosting the approximately 36.000 U.S. troops already there by 50%. Obama stated that these measures were needed in order to meet urgent security needs and to stabilize a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, as the security situation in Afghanistan remained very fragile.<sup>73</sup>

The ISAF mission ended in December 2014, and with that the full responsibility of protecting the Afghan population fell on Afghan shoulders – to be more precise, the ANDSF. When the ANDSF took over “full responsibility for security in Afghanistan” when ISAF officially ended, the U.S. and NATO “transitioned to a new mission”.<sup>74</sup> The Resolute Support Mission (RSM) was subsequently launched on January 1, 2015. This non-combat mission’s main objectives were to train, advise, and assist support to the ANDSF.<sup>75</sup> Simultaneously, under Obama’s presidency, the U.S. started to concentrate its efforts on “devising an end-game strategy for Afghanistan”, and announced a drawdown of troops as soon as ISAF would end.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the U.S. had planned a reduction of its armed forces in Afghanistan from 98000 to 55000 by the end of 2015. This is what Zartman meant with the absence of the basic element for a mutually hurting stalemate: by announcing a troop withdrawal in any case, this took away any threat or pressure for a stalemate or to make it ‘hurt’ for the Taliban. If the U.S. would leave Afghanistan anyhow, the Taliban would get what they wanted in the first place (Afghanistan freed of international ‘invaders’), leaving the U.S. with little to negotiate for.<sup>77</sup>

However, at the request of the Afghan government, Obama announced that the U.S. would halt its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and keep the troops present at the time in place through most of 2016.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the plan was eventually discarded due to growing concern in Washington regarding the ability of the ANDSF (the Afghan forces) to protect its

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<sup>73</sup> NBC News, “Obama OKs 17.000 new troops for Afghanistan – Additional marines, army soldiers expected to deploy in coming months”, *NBC News*, February 17 (2009), [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29242187/ns/world\\_news-south\\_and\\_central\\_asia/t/obama-oks-new-troops-afghanistan/#.XfzVvi2ZPOQ](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29242187/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/t/obama-oks-new-troops-afghanistan/#.XfzVvi2ZPOQ) (accessed on December 14, 2019).

SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*, October 30 (2015), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2015-10-30qr.pdf> (accessed on December 1, 2019), ii.

<sup>74</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, “U.S. Relations With Afghanistan”.

<sup>75</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, “U.S. Relations With Afghanistan”.

<sup>76</sup> Colin P. Clarke, Christopher Paul, and National Defense Research Institute (U.S.), *From Stalemate to Settlement: Lessons for Afghanistan from Historical Insurgencies that have been resolved through Negotiation. Rand Corporation Research Report Series*, Rr469. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2014, 48.

<sup>77</sup> This is further elaborated on under “Perspectives from the Taliban” in chapter II.II.

<sup>78</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, October 30 (2015), 86.

population. Accordingly, the Afghan forces had not been able to defeat the Taliban with the full support of ISAF, so how could they do so now?<sup>79</sup> By illustration, the Taliban, normally unable to get hold on provincial capitals, seized the city of Kunduz – which suffered a deteriorating security situation after the ISAF drawdown – on September 28, 2015.<sup>80</sup> It was the first provincial capital the insurgents captured since 2001.<sup>81</sup> Although the Afghan forces have since retaken the city, it painfully illustrated the increasing strength of the Taliban, the unsustainability of the international coalition forces' efforts and questioned the leadership and readiness of the ANDSF.<sup>82</sup> In overall, the Afghan forces succeeded in retaining control over major urban centers and key infrastructure. Howbeit, support for the Taliban remained strong in rural areas whereas the Afghan forces struggle to pacify these areas.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported that in 2015 “conflict-related violence increased in Afghanistan as the ANDSF sought to contain insurgent activity whose intensification resulted in record-high levels of civilian casualties”.<sup>84</sup>

The U.S. decision to maintain the current level of forces in Afghanistan was thus, to no surprise, welcomed by the Afghan government, stating that it demonstrated “renewed partnership between Afghanistan and the United States on the basis of shared interests and threats”.<sup>85</sup> Even though ISAF – and with that the active combat mission – had ended, Obama declared in a statement that the U.S. would remain committed to Afghanistan and would “not allow Afghanistan to be used as a safe haven for terrorists to attack our nation again”.<sup>86</sup> Under RSM, the U.S. troops would now focus on “training Afghan forces, and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of Al Qaeda”.<sup>87</sup> But, it was clear that the Taliban had made gains. On this, Obama commented:

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<sup>79</sup> T. Farrell, and M. Semple, “Making Peace with the Taliban.” *Survival* 57, no. 6 (2015), 84.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Fisher and Christopher Mercado, “Why Kunduz Fell”, *Small Wars Journal*, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/why-kunduz-fell> (accessed on November 25, 2019).

<sup>81</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, 30 October (2015), ii.

<sup>82</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, 30 October (2015), ii.

<sup>83</sup> Fisher and Mercado, “Why Kunduz Fell”.

<sup>84</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*, July 30 (2015), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2015-07-30qr.pdf> (accessed on December 1, 2019), 93.

<sup>85</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, “Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan welcomes decision by President Obama to continue cooperation with Afghanistan”, 15 October (2015), <https://president.gov.af/en/government-of-the-islamic-republic-of-afghanistan-welcomes-decision-by-president-obama-to-continue-cooperation-with-afghanistan/> (accessed on December 1, 2019).

<sup>86</sup> The White House, “Statement by the President on Afghanistan”, *Office of the Press Secretary*, October 15 (2015), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/15/statement-president-afghanistan> (accessed on December 12, 2019).

<sup>87</sup> The White House, “Statement by the President on Afghanistan”, October 15 (2015).

Much of this was predictable. We understood that as we transitioned, that the Taliban would try to exploit some of our movements out of particular areas, and that it would take time for Afghan security forces to strengthen. Pressure from Pakistan has resulted in more al Qaeda coming into Afghanistan, and we've seen the emergence of an ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) presence. The bottom line is, in key areas of the country, the security situation is still very fragile, and in some places there is risk of deterioration.<sup>88</sup>

Obama subsequently made clear that the “mission is vital to our national security interests in preventing terrorist attacks against citizens and our nation”. The U.S. thus remained committed to its efforts in Afghanistan with as main goal to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorists. This, including Obama’s announcement that the level of U.S. forces would remain more or less the same through 2016, was contrary to Obama’s promise to end the war in Afghanistan and his message in 2011 to withdraw 33,000 additional U.S. troops before the end of 2011 and another 23,000 troops by September 2012.<sup>89</sup> Even though the announcement of troop withdrawal in any case (which was declared after Zartman published his analysis) was not relevant anymore, and with that Zartman’s argument that this could not bring about a mutually hurting stalemate, possibilities for peace negotiations at the time still seemed poor. Despite Obama’s belief that the only way to “end this conflict and to achieve a full drawdown of foreign forces from Afghanistan is through a lasting political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban”, no clear efforts for such a settlement were pursued from the U.S. side.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, as the Taliban gained ground with the ending of ISAF, the U.S. responded with remaining its full force on the ground throughout 2015 and 2016, hereby not indicating a perception of a (hurting) stalemate. The U.S. neither indicated to be more compromising or more negotiable to the Taliban’s cry that Afghanistan would not know peace before it would be ‘freed’ from international troops, nor gave indication it felt it had stalemated and should seek a solution other than remaining its full force on the ground. The meager possibilities for peace at the time of Zartman’s analysis are further explored and substantiated by providing some perspectives from the Taliban, the Afghan government and peace initiatives pursued at the time.

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<sup>88</sup> The White House, “Statement by the President on Afghanistan”. October 15 (2015).

<sup>89</sup> CNN Wire Staff, “Obama announces Afghanistan troop withdrawal plan”, *CNN*, June 23 (2011), <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/06/22/afghanistan.troops.drawdown/index.html> (accessed on December 10, 2019).

<sup>90</sup> The White House, “Statement by the President on Afghanistan”, *Office of the Press Secretary*, July 6 (2015), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/06/statement-president-afghanistan> (accessed on December 12, 2019).

### *Perspectives from The Taliban*

As mentioned before, the Taliban never really disappeared even though the Taliban regime was quickly toppled off during the intervention in 2001. According to Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "the ability of the Taliban to prolong the conflict without fears of being overwhelmed by the longevity of the war is based on five key pillars".<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, these five key pillars sustained both the ideological platforms as well as fulfilled the logistical needs of an insurgent organization.<sup>92</sup> These five key pillars include that the insurgency's character is of changing nature. For example, before 9/11 was a monolithic organization that was loosely affiliated and diffused, but after 9/11, the Taliban transformed and "began their activities with a stated objective of overthrowing the interim Afghan administration and forcing the U.S. and its coalition partners to withdraw". At the same time, the diffused character of the insurgency was a complex problem, but also added to their survivability (as it was more flexible).<sup>93</sup> Other pillars included their "ability to produce an enduring narrative of anti-Americanism and weak government" and the influence of external powers (like Pakistan) that contributed to destabilizing capacities.<sup>94</sup> The other key pillars contributing to the insurgency's perseverance were the armed position groups and organized crime networks in Afghanistan that were able to extend "its reach and ability to generate resources" as well as the crumbling unity among the international coalition partners together with the shortcomings among the ANSF's to defeat the Taliban.<sup>95</sup>

The ideological basis of the Taliban's war effort is, according to D'Souza, the "reiteration that an unbridgeable civilizational divide exists between the Christian West, especially the Americans, and the Muslim Afghans".<sup>96</sup> The oft-repeated rationale for Taliban's stated counter-violence consists of the logic that the U.S. has "illegally invaded an Islamic land and no peace can return to the land until Afghanistan is purged completely of American presence".<sup>97</sup> The Taliban described the international troops that have invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as 'occupiers' and the Western-backed government in Kabul is seen as their 'puppet'. In their words:

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<sup>91</sup> Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "Taliban: The Rebels Who Aspire to Be Rulers." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2016), 23.

<sup>92</sup> D'Souza, 23.

<sup>93</sup> D'Souza, 23.

<sup>94</sup> D'Souza, 23.

<sup>95</sup> D'Souza, 23.

<sup>96</sup> D'Souza, 24.

<sup>97</sup> D'Souza, 24.



The Kabul administration installed by the foreign powers as a tool to justify and protract their occupation – on top of not holding any legitimacy or being independent – is so incapable of governing that even directives and decrees issued by the head of this administration [...] are rebuffed by ordinary officials while governors hold powers of threatening the leadership.<sup>98</sup>

The above statement was also the reason behind the Taliban's unwillingness to negotiate peace with the Afghan government. Not only did the Taliban refuse to talk to the Western-backed government, they also rejected to take part in any kind of peace talks if the government did not order all foreign troops out of Afghanistan and frees all of their fighters from prison.<sup>99</sup> From the Taliban-perspective, possibilities for negotiating peace thus seemed meager as well. Obama's announcement to withhold troop withdrawal was condemned by the Taliban in a statement claiming that the U.S. was unwarrantedly increasing its expenditure and prolonging a war that they would "never win in a hundred years".<sup>100</sup> In view of Zartman's theory, the latter indicates the absence of a perception of a (hurting) stalemate, because of the Taliban's confidence in eventual and imminent victory in the conflict.

### *Perspectives from the Afghan Government*

The Afghan government side seemed to present the best prospects for negotiating peace, because of both its willingness to negotiate and its recognition of the need to talk with the Taliban in order to find a political solution to the conflict. Under Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who was installed in 2014, the Kabul administration signified achieving peace as top priority. His predecessor, Hamid Karzai, had also made rhetorical commitment to pursuing peace through dialogue with the Taliban, but, referring to T. Farrell and M. Semple, "lacked a coherent strategy to back it up".<sup>101</sup> On the contrary, Ghani viewed Pakistan's support for the Taliban movement as critical to the insurgency's success. In a press release of February 2015, the Afghan government stated that "both countries [Pakistan and Afghanistan] are committed to sincere cooperation for peace".<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, Ghani sought to approach Pakistan and

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<sup>98</sup> Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Can Kabul Administration be categorized as a government?", *Weekly Comment*, November 28 (2018), <https://alemarahenglish.com/?p=38018> (accessed on November 8, 2019).

<sup>99</sup> Al Jazeera, "Taliban: No peace talks until foreign troops gone", *Al Jazeera*, 6 March (2016), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/afghan-talks-taliban-refuses-participate-160305135801134.html> (accessed on November 30, 2019).

<sup>100</sup> Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement of Islamic Emirate concerning expansion of US military role by Obama to kill Afghans", *Statements*, 13 June (2016), <http://alemarahenglish.com/?p=49> (accessed on December 1, 2019).

<sup>101</sup> Farrell and Semple, 86-87.

<sup>102</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Press Release Regarding the Peace Process", 21 February (2015), <https://president.gov.af/en/press-release-regarding-the-peace-process/> (accessed on December 1, 2019).

posed himself the challenge of ending Pakistan's proxy warfare in Afghanistan, while at the same time "recognizing that the Pakistan military support for proxies was part of a broader regional strategy of confrontation with India, and not explicitly driven by an imperative to dominate or destabilize Afghanistan".<sup>103</sup> The Afghan government stressed that terrorist groups and armed Taliban opposition had to understand that by fighting Afghan security forces they would only serve foreign interests.<sup>104</sup> Therefore the government would respond to terror with strong power but would also keep open "the option for peace talks with those who are willing to join such talks."<sup>105</sup> Although the Afghan government thus stated that it will always defend and protect its nation – meaning it will fight the Taliban when needed – it also clearly presented a window of opportunity to negotiate with the Taliban. The part below elaborates on different initiatives attempted for negotiations.

### *Perspectives for Peace*

Since 2001, sporadic efforts have been pursued for peace talks with the Taliban and the Afghan government. In 2015, the Kabul administration announced that government officials had held informal brainstorming meetings with Taliban envoys in Urumqi, China, a meeting hosted by the Chinese government and facilitated by the Pakistan army. Afghan officials, however, did not claim to have reached any progress.<sup>106</sup> Under this Quadrilateral Coordination (QCG) framework, consisting of the U.S., China, Pakistan and Afghanistan, several informal peace talks were held. But, since the killing of Taliban leader Mullah Akhta Mansoor (Mullah Omar) in a U.S. drone strike, the Taliban-Kabul peace talks collapsed.<sup>107</sup> The news of Mullah Omar – who died in a Pakistan hospital in 2013 – was held secret by Pakistan until July 2015.<sup>108</sup> As the disclosure of his death was announced, the Afghan government grew skeptical of Pakistan's intentions. Consequently, ties between Pakistan and the U.S. and Afghanistan deteriorated dramatically at the time.<sup>109</sup>

The disclosure of Mullah Omar's death was veritably a destabilizing event in terms of possibilities for peace talks. The before mentioned Taliban-Kabul peace talks foundered and

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<sup>103</sup> Farrell and Semple, 88.

<sup>104</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Participation of Taliban groups in Upcoming Peace Talks Welcomed", 24 February (2016), <https://president.gov.af/en/participation-of-taliban-groups-in-upcoming-peace-talks-welcomed/> (accessed on December 14, 2019).

<sup>105</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan welcomes decision by President Obama to continue cooperation with Afghanistan."

<sup>106</sup> Farrell and Semple, 88.

<sup>107</sup> Abdul Basit, "Afghanistan." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 8, no. 1 (2015), 42.

<sup>108</sup> SIGAR, "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress", October 30 (2015), 89.

<sup>109</sup> Abdul Basit, "Afghanistan." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9, no. 1 (2017), 38.



relations with Pakistan disintegrated.<sup>110</sup> The Taliban later declared that they kept Omar's death a secret for the sake of maintaining solidarity in the fight against the U.S. and Afghanistan.<sup>111</sup> The announcement of the loss of the Taliban leader caused an outbreak of struggle between different factions within the Taliban, in particular involving the issue of peace talks with the Kabul administration.<sup>112</sup> Seen from the other side, referring to Abdul Basit, the Afghan government started to raise concerns about the "unity, composition and efficiency of the Afghan Taliban as a coherent group as a consequence".<sup>113</sup> To no avail, the Afghan government still called "on all armed opposition groups to seize the opportunity and join the peace process".<sup>114</sup> But, the Taliban still cancelled all planned peace talks.<sup>115</sup> In addition, The Pakistani military establishment started to lose its grip and influence on the Taliban as well.<sup>116</sup>

Other attempts for peace talks, including the diplomatic efforts of the fifth Summit of Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process under a Quadrilateral Framework end 2015, were hampered because of the Taliban's toughened stance on peace talks, "maintaining there could be no talks as long as foreign troops remained on Afghan soil".<sup>117</sup> As mentioned by D'Souza, "as the attempts to co-opt within the Taliban insurgency through peace deals and negotiations [intensified], the anti-talk constituency within the insurgency has demonstrated its capacity to scuttle such peace processes".<sup>118</sup> On the contrary, although the Afghan government has always condemned the Taliban's violence, it has also "repeatedly invited Taliban groups and other anti-government armed groups to abandon violence and choose a peaceful life by returning to the society and helping rebuild their country".<sup>119</sup> All these examples illustrate that only pre-negotiations and talks took place sporadically, but no real peace process or peace negotiations occurred.

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<sup>110</sup> Basit (2015), 42.

<sup>111</sup> SIGAR, "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress", October 30 (2015), 89.

<sup>112</sup> Basit (2015), 42.

<sup>113</sup> Basit (2015), 42.

<sup>114</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Press Release on the Death of Taliban Leader", 29 July (2015), <https://president.gov.af/en/press-release-on-the-death-of-taliban-leader/> (accessed on December 1, 2019).

<sup>115</sup> SIGAR, "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress", October 30 (2015), 89.

<sup>116</sup> Basit (2017), 38.

<sup>117</sup> Basit (2015), 43.

<sup>118</sup> D'Souza, 20.

<sup>119</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Participation of Taliban groups in Upcoming Peace Talks Welcomed".

### *Concluding Remarks*

In retrospect, the above-described attempts for peace negotiations underline Zartman's conclusion that only pre-negotiations and talks had taken place sporadically, and that this seems to be a consequence of the absence of ripeness at the time. Indeed, the U.S. had announced it would withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, hereby removing any threat or pressure to bring about a stalemate or make it hurt for the Taliban. However, this announcement was revoked eventually. Still, as is explained in this chapter, a mutually hurting stalemate did not seem to occur, as both the U.S. and the Taliban did not indicate any perception of having stalemated. Moreover, attempts for peace negotiations failed at the time, not bringing about any official peace negotiations. Zartman's analysis of the Afghanistan conflict at the time thus seems valid.

However, the situation in terms of the peace process has changed significantly ever since official rounds of negotiations have been taking place between the U.S. and the Taliban as of 2018. Although, according to Zartman's analysis at the time, the conflict in Afghanistan was not 'ripe' for the initiation of negotiations, negotiations were, as a matter of fact, initiated in 2018 – and have so far been 'successful' in the sense that official negotiations actually took place – only three years later. This means that Zartman's analysis of 2015 - even though the very same elements identified by Zartman as the reason for the presumed absence of 'ripeness' in 2015 continued to be identifiable - does not suffice any longer. Therefore, this thesis continues with explicating the U.S. – Taliban peace negotiations (2018-2019) and reassesses Zartman's ripeness theory with Afghanistan as a case study.

### **III. U.S.-Taliban peace negotiations 2018-2019: A reassessment of Zartman's Ripeness theory**

The results from this reassessment are at the least ambiguous, which indicates flaws in the ripeness theory. It argues that by limiting itself to the individual level and focusing on top-down decision makers, the ripeness theory lacks a political and historical dimension. It shows that it is exactly the political and historical narrative that is of significant impact on 'ripening' the conflict for the initiation of negotiation.

The first part of this chapter provides a background on the U.S – Taliban negotiations (2018-2019). The second part considers a reassessment of the ripeness theory by analyzing the Afghanistan conflict on the backdrop of the earlier described background. The third and last part of this chapter elaborates on the missing political and historical dimension in the

ripeness theory, ultimately explaining the reason why negotiations were initiated, even though Zartman had argued the time was not ‘ripe’ to do so. It must be noted that, in contrast to the previous chapter, the perspective from the Afghan government is left out in this reassessment of the ripeness theory with the Afghanistan conflict as a case study. The reason for this is that the Afghan government is excluded from the U.S. – Taliban peace negotiations. As the negotiations are bilateral of nature, the analysis is limited to only the parties included in these negotiations. To include the perspective from the Afghan government in the previous chapter however did matter, because it helped illustrate and explain the context that served as the background of Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict as a case study for the ripeness theory at the time.

### **III.I A shift in U.S. policy: The U.S.-Taliban bilateral peace negotiations**

Under Trump, the U.S. policy started to shift as it “dropped its objection to not directly talking with the Taliban, moving away from its longstanding stance of supporting an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process to direct bilateral negotiations”.<sup>120</sup> Since early 2018, direct negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban have been taken place in the form of several official rounds of peace talks in Doha, Qatar.

This shift in the U.S. policy sprouted on the backdrop of a seemingly stalemated conflict. As time passed, (still) a victory for neither side seemed near in the foreseeable future. The Taliban’s control or influence increased in 2018 and, simultaneously, the Afghan government’s control or influence decreased from 65% in May 2017-July 2018 to 63.5% in October 2018.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, referring to the SIGAR quarterly report of January 2019, “the Afghan government’s control or influence of its districts decreased by nearly two percentage points since July to 53.8%”.<sup>122</sup> Since SIGAR started collecting district-control data in November 2015, the control or influence of the Afghan government over its districts “has declined more than 18 percentage points; contested districts have increased by about 13 points; and insurgent control or influence has risen by about five points”.<sup>123</sup> In April 2019, the US-commanded NATO RSM in Afghanistan even “formally notified it is no longer assessing

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<sup>120</sup> Abdul Basit, Iftekhharul Bashar, Mohammed Sinan Siyech, Sara Mahmood, and Amresh Gunasingham, “South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 11, no. 1 (2019), 40.

<sup>121</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*, January 30 (2019), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-01-30qr.pdf> (accessed on September 27, 2019), 65.

<sup>122</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, January 30 (2019), 65.

<sup>123</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, January 30 (2019), 75.

district-level insurgent or government control or influence”, subsequently stating that they were of “limited decision-making value”.<sup>124</sup> U.S. General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, once again “described the security situation in Afghanistan as a stalemate, saying the Taliban ‘are not losing right now’ and ‘we used the term stalemate a year ago and, relatively speaking, it has not changed much’”, as published in a SIGAR quarterly report in January 2019.<sup>125</sup>

One who seemed increasingly aware of the invincibility of the conflict, and the losses it had cost in both terms of lives lost and money, was Donald Trump, U.S. president as of January 2017. In his remarks on the U.S.’ new Afghanistan strategy, Trump acknowledged the “extraordinary sacrifice of blood and treasure” the war had cost and that “the American people are weary of war without victory”.<sup>126</sup> “Nowhere is this more evident than with the war in Afghanistan, the longest war in American history”, he continued.<sup>127</sup> Likewise, President Trump pledged a new approach on his annual State of the Union in February 2019. Acknowledging the war in Afghanistan had cost nearly 7000 American heroes who would never return home, “52,000 badly wounded and 7 trillion dollars spent in fighting wars in the Middle East”, Trump vowed: “Great nations do not fight endless wars”.<sup>128</sup> To withdraw all troops out of Afghanistan by the end of his term in 2020 would fulfill an important election promise. What Obama already intended to do, was now renewed once more under Trump’s presidency. In 2018, Trump ordered the military to start withdrawing about 7,000 troops from Afghanistan.<sup>129</sup>

But, a drawdown of troops was not the only part of the new approach in Afghanistan. As a consequence of Trump’s new Afghanistan policy, a renewed attempt to pursue

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<sup>124</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*, April 30 (2019), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-04-30qr.pdf> (accessed on September 27, 2019), ii.

<sup>125</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, January 30 (2019), 65.

<sup>126</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia”, *Remarks*, August 21 (2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/> (accessed on September 30, 2019).

<sup>127</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia”, August 21 (2017).

<sup>128</sup> CNBC Television, “President Trump: Great Nations do not fight endless wars”, *CNBC Television* [YouTube], February 6 (2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNhfge9Eb0&t=382s> (accessed on September 28, 2019).

<sup>129</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Mujib Mashal, “U.S. to Withdraw About 7,000 Troops From Afghanistan, Officials Say”, *The New York Times*, December 20 (2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/20/us/politics/afghanistan-troop-withdrawal.html> (accessed on October 10, 2019).

reconciliation with the Taliban was sought.<sup>130</sup> Trump announced that the U.S. was “holding constructive talks with a number of Afghan groups, including the Taliban”, concluding that:

We do not know whether we will achieve an agreement, but we do know that after two decades of war the hour has come to at least try for peace and the other side would like to do the same thing, it’s time.<sup>131</sup>

Thus, since early 2018, official peace talks have taken place in Doha between the U.S. and the Taliban. In September 2018, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo named Afghan-American Zalmay Khalilzad, the former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. His mandate was to “coordinate and lead U.S. efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table” and to explore “how best to reach a negotiated settlement to the conflict”.<sup>132</sup> Under guidance of Khalilzad, several rounds of negotiations have taken place in Doha with an authoritative delegation from the Taliban, including Mullah Baradar, who was designated head of the Taliban political council in late January 2019.<sup>133</sup> According to Khalilzad, the peace negotiations would require the both parties to agree upon several interconnected issues: troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue & negotiations, and reduction in violence leading to a comprehensive ceasefire”.<sup>134</sup> Respectively, no peace agreement would be reached if the parties had not agreed upon these issues, as Khalilzad stated “nothing will be final until we agree on all four issues”.<sup>135</sup>

The several rounds of negotiations resulted in a peace deal framework in January 2019, wherein the insurgents would guarantee to prevent Afghan territory from being used by terrorists and that could lead to a full pullout of U.S. troops in return for larger concessions from the Taliban.<sup>136</sup> However, as Khalilzad stated, “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”. This also meant a comprehensive ceasefire and an intra-Afghan dialogue wherein both the Taliban and the Afghan government would talk with each other and decide on Afghanistan’s future, something the Taliban had been refusing to do as long as foreign troops

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<sup>130</sup> Ashok Behuria, Yaqoob Ul Hassan, and Sanya Saroha, “Us-Taliban Talks for Afghan Peace: Complexities Galore.” *Strategic Analysis* 43, no. 2 (2019), 126.

<sup>131</sup> CNBC Television, “President Trump: Great Nations do not fight endless wars”.

<sup>132</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad Travel to Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.” *Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson*, Washington D.C., October 3 (2018), <https://www.state.gov/special-representative-for-afghanistan-reconciliation-zalmay-khalilzad-travel-to-afghanistan-pakistan-the-united-arab-emirates-qatar-and-saudi-arabia/> (accessed on October 23, 2019).

<sup>133</sup> Behuria, Ul Hassan and Saroha, 127.

<sup>134</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad (@US4AfghanPeace), May 2 (2019), 2:51p.m. *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1124068842550984706> (accessed on September 30, 2019).

<sup>135</sup> Khalilzad (@US4AfghanPeace), May 2 (2019).

<sup>136</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, January 30 (2019).

remain stationed in Afghanistan. The negotiations therefore continued and eventually peaked over the summer in 2019.<sup>137</sup> After nine rounds of negotiations, Khalilzad announced they were at the “threshold of an agreement”.<sup>138</sup> This concept agreement was said to include a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops over the following 15 to 18 months, a ceasefire, the Taliban’s assurance that Afghanistan will not be a safe haven for terrorists and a set date for intra-Afghan talks in Oslo, Norway.<sup>139</sup> The negotiations however came to a halt for a small period of time, when Trump froze the peace negotiations because of a Taliban attack in Kabul that killed twelve people, including an American soldier, in the beginning of September of that year.<sup>140</sup> On Thanksgiving, Trump however declared the negotiations with the Taliban were revived again when he made an unannounced surprise visit to Bagram Airfield, the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan.<sup>141</sup> The negotiation teams of the U.S. and the Taliban have since then resumed peace talks for the tenth round of negotiations.

At the time of writing, the outcome of these peace negotiations is unknown (a comprehensive and detailed timeline of the U.S. – Taliban negotiations can be found under Appendix I). . However, it does not matter for this analysis, for the question this thesis seeks to answer is why peace negotiations were able to sprout from the Afghanistan conflict and developed in such mature forms, despite Zartman’s conclusion that the time was not ‘ripe’ for the initiation of negotiation as seen from his ripeness theory. Moreover, the ripeness theory does not indicate anything about the successful conclusion of peace negotiations, but merely whether or not the time is ‘ripe’ for the *initiation* of such negotiations. Therefore, on the background of the above-described context, this chapter proceeds with a reassessment of ripeness theory with the Afghanistan conflict as a case study.

<sup>137</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad, (@US4AfghanPeace). “Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” 26 January 2019, 8:13a.m. *Tweet*. <https://twitter.com/us4afghanpeace/status/1089194661573480449> (accessed on October 25, 2019).

<sup>138</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad (@US4AfghanPeace), September 1 (2019), 1:40a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1167945304290672642> (accessed on September 27, 2019).

<sup>139</sup> Colum Lynch, Lara Seligman and Robbie Gramer, “Khalilzad edges closer to Pact with Taliban – The U.S. Envoy is expected to travel to Afghanistan within days to seek approval from President Ashraf Ghani” – *Foreign Policy*, August (2019), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/28/khalilzad-edges-closer-to-pact-with-taliban-zalmay-khalilzad-negotiations-afghanistan-war-diplomacy-new-details-on-peace-negotiations-ashraf-ghani-elections-kabul/> (accessed on October 13, 2019).

<sup>140</sup> See:

Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), September 8 (2019), 12:51a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1170469618177236992> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

And:

Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), September 8 (2019), 12:51a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1170469619154530305> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

<sup>141</sup> Washington Post, “Trump delivers Thanksgiving greetings to U.S. troops in Afghanistan”, *The Washington Post*, November 28 (2019), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?destination=%2fpolitics%2ftrump-makes-surprise-visit-to-us-troops-in-afghanistan%2f2019%2f11%2f28%2f7fe71f2a-11e8-11ea-bf62-eadd5d11f559\\_story.html%3f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?destination=%2fpolitics%2ftrump-makes-surprise-visit-to-us-troops-in-afghanistan%2f2019%2f11%2f28%2f7fe71f2a-11e8-11ea-bf62-eadd5d11f559_story.html%3f) (accessed on November 30, 2019).

### III.II A reassessment of ripeness theory to the new reality of the Afghanistan conflict

To refresh the mind: Zartman argues that two elements need to be present in order for a conflict to be ‘ripe’ for the initiation of negotiations. These elements are a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), a Mutually Enticing Opportunity (or Way Out) or, in absence of a MHS, an external mediator that can help ‘ripen’ the perceptions of both parties to help bring about a MHS. In 2015, Zartman concluded from his analysis of the Afghanistan conflict that it was not ripe for negotiations, as the basic element for a MHS was absent and no third party was interested in mediating or help bringing about the perception of both sides they were in a stalemate. But, the very same reasons Zartman identified for the conflict not being ripe for negotiations are found in analyzing the earlier described U.S.-Taliban peace negotiations. One could still argue that a Mutually Hurting Stalemate is absent. However, negotiations surely *were* initiated and negotiations *did* take place in very mature forms (up to ten rounds of peace talks between the U.S. and Taliban negotiating teams and a framework agreement on the table). Does this indicate that the ripeness theory is overlooking certain factors?

Already it was given away that results from this analysis includes that the ripeness theory seems to be lacking a historical and political dimension. Before this can be explained and illustrated, there was something else that was striking when analyzing the Afghanistan conflict as a case study for the ripeness theory. Although this neither illustrates the historical nor the political dimension, it is worth mentioning because it does illustrate the complexity of analyzing conflicts through theories such as the ripeness theory. Although this thesis will argue that the ripeness theory overlooks the importance of the historical and political dimension, it is only one (missing) aspect of the theory this thesis touches upon. To touch upon all possible aspects the theory could lack, overlook or underestimate would be too broad and complex for this analysis and would negatively affect this analysis seen the scope of this thesis.<sup>142</sup>

What is worth mentioning, however, is that the ripeness theory seems to have trouble coping with multi-party conflicts, as was already argued by Eamonn O’kane.<sup>143</sup> This is noteworthy for this analysis, because when analyzing the Afghanistan conflict seen from the ripeness theory it was difficult to identify which parties to focus on. As the theory focuses on

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<sup>142</sup> Recommendations for further research could be to explore other aspects the ripeness theory lacks, overlooks or underestimates.

<sup>143</sup> O’kane, 271.



the right time for the initiation of negotiation, it seems to solely focus on bilateral relations. Therefore, Zartman's theory has difficulty with multiple parties of conflicts, let alone a conflict in which one of the parties – the U.S. – actually plays the role of warring party and mediator (because as far as the latter is concerned: yes, it is about purely bilateral negotiations between two warring parties – the U.S. and the Taliban – in which the U.S. actually paves the way for negotiations between Afghanistan and the Taliban as a kind of mediator). This indicates a system error in the ripeness theory, as the model struggles to cope with multi-party conflicts.

The second thing that is conspicuous, is that the reasons Zartman gave to argue that the basic element for a Mutually Hurting Stalemate was missing in 2015, can still be found in the context from which the U.S. – Taliban negotiations sprouted. To repeat his arguments, Zartman stated the basic element for a Mutually Hurting Stalemate is missing, because 1) if stalemates occurred, they were never lasting due to the Taliban's confidence in "eventual and impending victory"; and 2) the announcement of the U.S. troop withdrawal in any case reinforced this perception, removing any threat or pressure to bring about a stalemate or make it hurt for the Taliban (since they would withdraw anyhow).<sup>144</sup> To turn to the Taliban first, they have only hardened their stance in military terms during the negotiations with the U.S. This is not only to strengthen their bargaining position, yet also to illustrate that as long as foreign troops remain in Afghanistan, they will not lay down their weapons until they leave.<sup>145</sup> The negotiations with the U.S. have "emboldened them to keep fighting until they convince or compel the U.S. to withdraw from Afghanistan".<sup>146</sup> They have made clear that "efforts will continue on every level to liberate our country".<sup>147</sup> The Taliban's stance remains:

Jihad against occupation is an individual obligation upon every Muslim member of this nation [...]. So long as the occupation is not completely eradicated and path for the establishment of a true pure Islamic system not paved, jihad shall remain an obligation.<sup>148</sup>

The above does not indicate a perception of having stalemated, if looked from Zartman's ripeness theory perspective. From the American perspective, the political logic of Trump's Afghanistan policy seems to repeat "the dubious American preconception that the Taliban

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<sup>144</sup> For an explanation of Zartman's analysis of 2015, see Chapter II.I.

<sup>145</sup> Behuria, Ul Hassan and Saroha, 126.

<sup>146</sup> Basit et al., "South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka."

<sup>147</sup> Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Determination of the Islamic Emirate, *Statements*, February 1 (2019), <https://alemarahenglish.com/?p=41066> (accessed on September 14, 2019).

<sup>148</sup> Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Remarks by spokesman of Islamic Emirate concerning Jirga recommendations by one half of Kabul's administration", *Statements*, May 3 (2019), <https://alemarahenglish.com/?p=45416> (accessed on November 17, 2019).



could be subdued on the battlefield and then pressured into a political settlement”.<sup>149</sup> In the year 2018, the U.S. intensified airstrikes and the use of drones.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, in a meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, Trump even stated that he could win the war in Afghanistan “in a week”, but that he just does not want “to kill ten million people” and did not want to wipe the country “off the face of the Earth.”<sup>151</sup> Seen from these perspectives, it looks like both parties do not acknowledge they are in a deadlock or precipice. This would mean, according to Zartman, a Mutually Hurting Stalemate couldn’t be identified. Subsequently, in light of Zartman’s ripeness analysis, this would mean the time should not have been right for the initiation of negotiations.

Yet, negotiations were initiated. Why? War-fatigue on both sides seems an obvious reason. Trump was very vocal in wanting to bring home the American soldiers from Afghanistan. But in this, both the U.S. and the Taliban share the same wish, leaving them with something concrete to negotiate for. The Taliban stated they have a very clear policy during the talks, namely: “until the issue of withdrawal of foreign troop forces from Afghanistan is agreed upon, progress in other issues is impossible”.<sup>152</sup> “It is the demand of both Afghan and American people”, Suhail Shaheen stated, a spokesperson for political office of the Taliban.<sup>153</sup> However, even though the U.S. announced troop withdrawals from Afghanistan, Trump did state this would be condition-based, saying “a hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum that terrorists, including ISIS and Al Qaeda, would instantly fill”.<sup>154</sup> By doing so, it leaves the U.S. with something to negotiate for as well. Both actually have very much reason to negotiate. Simply withdrawing troops from Afghanistan, as wished by Trump, “would be to admit that nearly two decades of American policy has failed”.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, it could intensify the conflict, weaken the position of the (Western-backed) Afghan government and create a vacuum that could risk proxy war driven by neighbors like India and

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<sup>149</sup> “The Trump Administration’s Afghanistan Policy.”

<sup>150</sup> UNAMA, “Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018”, *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*, February (2019), [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_annual\\_protection\\_of\\_civilians\\_report\\_2018\\_-\\_23\\_feb\\_2019\\_-\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_annual_protection_of_civilians_report_2018_-_23_feb_2019_-_english.pdf) (accessed on September 28, 2019).

<sup>151</sup> Guardian News, “Trump says he could win Afghan war and wipe country ‘off the face of the Earth’”, *Guardian News* [YouTube], July 22 (2019), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=50&v=aISfdXXxTPk&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=50&v=aISfdXXxTPk&feature=emb_logo) (accessed on September 15, 2019).

<sup>152</sup> <http://alemarahenglish.com/?p=40854>

<sup>153</sup> Suhail Shaheen (@suhailshaheen1), October 11 (2019), 5:44a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/suhailshaheen1/status/1182637974183464960> (accessed on November 1, 2019).

<sup>154</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia”, August 21 (2017).

<sup>155</sup> The Economist, “Banyan – Why no one can afford to call of peace talks in Afghanistan”, *The Economist*, November 16 (2019), <https://www.economist.com/asia/2019/11/16/why-no-one-can-afford-to-call-off-peace-talks-in-afghanistan> (accessed on November 30, 2019).

Pakistan.<sup>156</sup> But, the Taliban too has something at stake. Although they are in favor on the battlefield due to controlling vast rural areas, “sending suicide bombers into the capital and making shocking raids on provincial cities”, they have not been able to win the war either.<sup>157</sup>

Strikingly, it seems there are two sides of every coin. Scholars have argued that factually speaking the conflict in Afghanistan has been in a deadlock, since 2014.<sup>158</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, described the security situation in 2019 as a stalemate as well and stated that this situation has not changed much in a year.<sup>159</sup> There is now a broad consensus from the American perspective that military force alone can at best result in a stalemate.<sup>160</sup> But, as to be in line with ripeness theory, the stalemate is not necessarily about facts but predominantly about perceptions. And those shared by the Taliban and the U.S. are ambiguous at the least. Although both publically share the perception that the war can be won, both simultaneously show signs of having the perception to have stalemated and seeking a Way Out (Mutually Enticing Opportunity) as well. In a speech, Trump acknowledged the “extraordinary sacrifice of blood and treasure” the war had cost and that “the American people are weary of war without victory”.<sup>161</sup> Likewise, spokesperson of the Taliban Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, said in an interview:

We do not want a victory that is completely military. We want to solve this thing on the table in a peaceful manner so that after the withdrawal of foreign forces there should be no fighting among Afghans. There should be peace forever.<sup>162</sup>

On the same note, Trump stated that “after two decades of war the hour has come to at least try for peace and the other side would like to do the same thing, it’s time”.<sup>163</sup> Both the U.S. and the Taliban thus also show signs of being in a stalemate, that it hurts and that they both are willing to seek an alternative Way Out instead of seeking military victory (in other words: a Mutually Enticing Opportunity).

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<sup>156</sup> The Economist, “Banyan – Why no one can afford to call of peace talks in Afghanistan”.

<sup>157</sup> The Economist, “Banyan– Why no one can afford to call of peace talks in Afghanistan”.

<sup>158</sup> Basit et al., “South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.”

<sup>159</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, January 30 (2019).

<sup>160</sup> “The Trump Administration’s Afghanistan Policy.”

<sup>161</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia”, *Remarks*, August 21 (2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/> (accessed on September 30, 2019).

<sup>162</sup> BBC News, Taliban official: “War in Afghanistan should end soon”, *BBC News* [YouTube], February 6 (2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rk2QhECbTtI> (accessed on September 30, 2019).

<sup>163</sup> CNBC Television, “President Trump: Great Nations do not fight endless wars”.

When put as such, one could argue that the tides have changed and both a Mutually Hurting Stalemate and a Mutually Enticing Opportunity have occurred which made possible the initiation of negotiation, as, according to ripeness theory, the time was ‘ripe’ to do so. But, war-fatigue on both sides is obvious as shown above. War-fatigue is of course an evident reason for parties to consider negotiations to end conflict. However, what this analysis will show is that especially on the U.S. side, there is not only increased fatigue of war among the top-down decision makers, but also broadly shared within society, a fatigue that is also widely shared at the international level and the Western coalition, which developed historically. But, because the ripeness theory focuses on top-down decision makers, it lacks the ability to identify such historical and political developments. This indicates that the question is not so much about whether or not the ‘ripe’ moment has changed in a more favorable way for the initiation of negotiations, but that the ripeness theory is lacking a dimension that is both historical and political, which is the reason behind the ambiguous results from this reassessment of the Afghanistan conflict by means of the ripeness theory.

### **III.III What ripeness theory overlooks: the historical and political dimension**

The missing dimension in the ripeness theory seems to be a political and historical one. In chapter I the critique was already presented that ripeness theory lacks a political dimension, because it is limited to the individual level. Consequently, it focuses merely on top-down decision makers.<sup>164</sup> By focusing on the top-down decision makers, ripeness theory overlooks the influence of domestic (and international) political pressure. This analysis shows that it is exactly this political pressure (most visible on the U.S. side) that is not only shared by the top, but also shared within the broad domestic and international public, that is of significant influence in ‘ripening’ the conflict. This historical narrative of the untenable nature of the conflict, as this thesis will add, is a critical contributing factor behind the initiation of the U.S. – Taliban negotiations. This seems to be a reason behind the ambiguous results when conducting a reassessment of the ripeness theory to the new realities of the Afghanistan conflict.

As argued by Rothstein, domestic politics are crucial in peace negotiations for two reasons. Firstly, “there is usually strong disagreement within each side of the negotiating parties about the wisdom of risking negotiations with an enemy that is considered untrustworthy, about the proper timing for such negotiations, and about whether such

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<sup>164</sup> Coleman, Hacking, Stover, Fisher-Yoshida, and Nowak, 6.

movement will suggest a weakening of the will to continue to struggle”.<sup>165</sup> Secondly, for the top-down decision-makers, a growing gap between rhetorical promises of victory and actual achievements could cause decreased domestic support for continued involvement in the conflict.<sup>166</sup> Something the ripeness theory seems to overlook (as it focuses on top-down decision makers and therefore does not recognize such domestic or international political influences).

To illustrate the importance of the political dimension and how the historically accumulated political pressure – both domestically and internationally – developed: already before Obama’s presidency, domestic support for continued U.S. involvement in Afghanistan began to falter. To that end, “Obama had been elected on a foreign-policy platform that included winding down U.S. military commitments to both Iraq and Afghanistan”.<sup>167</sup> Not only were reallocation of public finances necessary, because of the market crash of 2008 and “the financial stimulus package used to counter its economic impact”, but also “the threat perceptions engendered by the 9/11 attacks that had fuelled military interventions had begun to fade”.<sup>168</sup> War-fatigue was outspread. In 2015, Obama spoke to the American people:

I know many of you have grown weary of this conflict. As you are well aware, I do not support the idea of endless war, and I have repeatedly argued against marching into open-ended military conflicts that do not serve core security interests.<sup>169</sup>

Likewise, the Trump administration was faced by the same harsh realities as during Obama’s presidency. The Afghan forces proved to be fragile and weak “owing to poor training, inadequate motivation, uninspiring leadership and a high rate of desertion”.<sup>170</sup> Especially government corruption and incompetence were at the least increasing and Pakistan’s support for the Taliban persisted thoroughly. Moreover, NATO’s commitment crumbled as U.S. forces were drawn down and domestic political support for continued U.S. involvement seemed nebulous and delicate.<sup>171</sup> A Pew Research survey showed that “almost half of the American public believes that the U.S. has failed to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan”.<sup>172</sup> Clearly, the U.S. was not able to live up to its rhetorical promises to win the war in

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<sup>165</sup> Rothstein, 274.

<sup>166</sup> Rothstein, 274.

<sup>167</sup> “The Trump Administration’s Afghanistan Policy.”

<sup>168</sup> “The Trump Administration’s Afghanistan Policy.”

<sup>169</sup> The White House, “Statement by the President on Afghanistan”, October 15 (2015).

<sup>170</sup> “The Trump Administration’s Afghanistan Policy.” *Strategic Comments* 23, no. 9 (2017). <https://www-tandfonline-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/pdf/10.1080/13567888.2017.1388018?needAccess=true> (accessed on November 1, 2019)

<sup>171</sup> “The Trump Administration’s Afghanistan Policy.”

<sup>172</sup> Basit et al., “South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.”

Afghanistan. This is illustrated also by Trump’s acknowledgment of the “extraordinary sacrifice of blood an treasure” the war had cost and that “the American people are weary of war without victory”.<sup>173</sup>

Of course, the ripeness theory is not blind to war-fatigue as this could motivate parties to move to the negotiation table. But, the ripeness theory only focuses on the top-down decision makers of both parties. However, the war-fatigue and critique was not only present among the American public, yet also internationally. Amidst the ongoing U.S. – Taliban negotiations, civilian casualties hit record-high statistics. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented the “highest number of civilian casualties that it has recorded in a single quarter since it began systematic documentation in 2009” from July 1 to September 30, 2019.<sup>174</sup> July, August and September 2019 – when developments in the U.S. - Taliban negotiations peaked – saw “extreme levels of violence”.<sup>175</sup> Conspicuously, “civilian deaths (not casualties) attributed to Pro-Government Forces [meaning the Afghan and U.S. forces] continued to exceed those caused by Anti-Government Elements [meaning the Taliban]” in the first quarter of 2019.<sup>176</sup> The international sentiment that the international commitment to the war in Afghanistan might hurt more than it does good is illustrated by head of UNAMA Yamamoto, who states “the harm caused to civilians by the fighting in Afghanistan signals the importance of peace talks leading to a ceasefire and a permanent political settlement to the conflict”.<sup>177</sup> He continues by asserting: “civilian casualties are totally unacceptable especially in the context of the widespread recognition that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan”.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, seen internationally, most NATO allies are under domestic pressure to end the operation in the foreseeable future.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia”, *Remarks*, August 21 (2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/> (accessed on September 30, 2019).

<sup>174</sup> UNAMA, “Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2019”, *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*, October 17 (2019), [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_protection\\_of\\_civilians\\_in\\_armed\\_conflict\\_-\\_3rd\\_quarter\\_update\\_2019.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_-_3rd_quarter_update_2019.pdf) (accessed on October 28, 2019).

<sup>175</sup> UNAMA, “Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2019”.

<sup>176</sup> UNAMA, “Midyear Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 June 2019”, *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*, July 30 (2019), [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_poc\\_midyear\\_update\\_2019\\_-\\_30\\_july\\_2019\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_poc_midyear_update_2019_-_30_july_2019_english.pdf) (accessed on October 12, 2019).

<sup>177</sup> UNAMA, “Civilian casualties in Afghanistan spike to record-high levels – UN report”, *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*, October 17 (2019), <https://unama.unmissions.org/civilian-casualties-afghanistan-spike-record-high-levels—un-report> (accessed on October 26, 2019).

<sup>178</sup> UNAMA, “Civilian casualties in Afghanistan spike to record-high levels – UN report”, October 17 (2019).

<sup>179</sup> Timo Noetzel, and Benjamin Schreer, “Nato’s Vietnam? Afghanistan and the Future of the Atlantic Alliance.” *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 3 (2009), 541.

This historically accumulated domestic pressure was clearly visible on the side of the U.S. As mentioned earlier, domestic support in the U.S. for continued involvement in Afghanistan already began to falter before Obama's presidency. The domestic pressure became even more visible with a report, which appeared in December 2019, by the *Washington Post* on the basis of transcripts, reports and notes from interviews with (former) soldiers, diplomats, politicians, development cooperation staff and others who have been involved in the U.S. deployment in Afghanistan since 2002.<sup>180</sup> The report called the "Afghanistan Papers" gives a strong impression that the U.S. government had structurally reported more positively about the progress made in Afghanistan than was actually true.<sup>181</sup> The main conclusions drawn by the *Washington Post* are 1) data and statistics were deliberately presented in the most positive way possible to reinforce the message that the U.S. was winning the war, 2) there had been no coherent strategy and objectives were changed time and time again, 3) the abundance of money pumped into Afghanistan had negative impact and fueled corruption.<sup>182</sup> What is striking about the Afghanistan Papers is that a total picture is created in which almost every one of those directly involved agrees that the war cannot be won and that reconstruction only had been successful within very confined boundaries.

It is this total historical picture of increasing political pressure that is not only shared by the top, but also broadly by the domestic and international public (and the Western coalition), that shows the untenable nature of the conflict, which has developed over the years, that ripeness theory seems to be overlooking. Of course, Trump can still publicly state it could wipe Afghanistan "off the face of the earth in literally ten days", but what is publicly said does not necessarily reflect one's true mind. It is the historical narrative of faltering domestic and international support for continued involvement and continued domestic and international pressure that haunted Trump like a shadow. Obama was already aware of it, and so was Trump. The same goes for the Taliban who, despite their growing influence and their mindedness of continuing to rage war until Afghanistan would be freed of 'international occupation', also knew the war was not to be won. They too needed a Way Out. As the Taliban themselves state, they "called for dialogue twenty years earlier and maintain the same

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<sup>180</sup> This information was received through a "freedom of information" request, in which the Washington Post received hundreds of research documents from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) that were prepared as part of the SIGAR Lessons Learned program.

<sup>181</sup> Craig Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War – At War With the Truth", *The Washington Post*, December 9 (2019), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/> (accessed on December 16, 2019).

<sup>182</sup> Craig Whitlock, "The Afghanistan Papers".

stance today” and they “want to solve this thing on the table in a peaceful manner”.<sup>183</sup> Seen from one side of the coin, the basic element for a Mutually Hurting Stalemate is missing as both parties continue their war efforts and publicly state they could win the war if they wanted to. This, according to ripeness theory, indicates a missing perception of being in a hurting stalemate. Yet, seen from the other side of the coin, both parties do realize the war cannot be won and both do seek a way out of the conflict other than military victory. But, most strikingly, what is especially visible on the U.S. side that it is not only war-fatigue that is shared by the top-down decision makers, but also war-fatigue that is outspread within the domestic public, the international stage and the Western coalition. But, especially the latter is overshadowed because ripeness theory lacks the ability to be interdisciplinary and, consequently, overlooks the importance of the historical (and political) dimension. But, it is exactly these historical and political developments that are significant contributing factors to ‘ripening’ the conflict for the initiation of negotiations. And, therefore, it is this side of the coin that explains the reason why negotiations were initiated, even though the other side of the coin could indicate the time was not ‘ripe’ to do so.

## Conclusion

The core question of this thesis was why peace negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban were able to sprout from the Afghanistan conflict, despite Zartman’s conclusion that the Afghanistan conflict was not ripe for the initiation of such negotiations seen from his ripeness theory. In answering this question, a reassessment of the ripeness theory was conducted based on the context around the U.S. – Taliban negotiations in 2018-2019 as compared to the context of the conflict in Afghanistan at the time of Zartman’s analysis in 2015.

The first chapter of this thesis introduced us to the world of conflict resolution and primarily focused on one of its most commonly employed methods: negotiation. The goal of this chapter was to explicate the problems surrounding the timing of peace negotiations, outline the essence of the ripeness theory as laid out by Zartman and explained the basic elements needed for the ‘ripe’ moment for negotiation: a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) and a Way Out, or Mutually Enticing Opportunity (MEO). But, it was also showed that the ripeness theory is not indisputable. The ripeness theory has been critiqued for the

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<sup>183</sup> See:

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, “Statement of Islamic Emirate concerning tweet of Donald Trump about negotiations”.

And;

BBC News, Taliban official: “War in Afghanistan should end soon”.



dichotomous nature of ripeness, the assumption that the mere decision of parties to get to the table means that the situation was or is ‘ripe’ for resolution, the ambiguously defined notion of a ripe moment as well as the ‘hurt’ in hurting stalemate, the difficulty in identifying when exactly a situation is ‘ripe’ for resolution or not and a lack of understanding and guidance on how ripeness is to be sustained.

In 2015, Zartman identified the Afghanistan conflict as a negative case for ripeness seen from his ripeness theory. The absence of ripeness was, according to Zartman, the reason for the failed attempts for opening negotiations. The second chapter of this thesis has explicated Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict and provided a background that explained the context of the Afghanistan conflict on which Zartman’s analysis was based. In Zartman’s view, the conflict in Afghanistan was not ‘ripe’ at the time with failed attempts for negotiation as a consequence, because 1) if stalemates occurred, they were never lasting due to the Taliban’s confidence in eventual and imminent victory; and 2) the announcement of U.S. troop withdrawal in any case reinforced this perception, consequently removing any threat or pressure to bring about a stalemate or make it hurt for the Taliban. By analyzing different perspectives extracted from the Afghanistan context at the time of Zartman’s analysis, this chapter showed that Zartman’s analysis seemed valid at the time, as only pre-negotiations and talks had taken place sporadically. This, indeed, seemed to be a consequence of the absence of ‘ripeness’.

However, as thesis has shown, the situation in terms of the peace process has changed significantly since 2015. Since the beginning of 2018 official rounds of negotiations have been conducted between the U.S. and the Taliban, meaning that the initiation of negotiation *was* possible despite the presumed absence of the ‘ripe’ moment at the time of Zartman’s analysis. In chapter three it is showed that it is here where the core problem of this analysis comes to light: in reassessing Zartman’s ripeness theory to the new realities in Afghanistan, ambiguous results were found to emerge. Firstly, it was argued that there seems to be a system error in the ripeness theory, because the model struggles to cope with multi-party conflicts. Secondly, and most strikingly, is that when looking back at Zartman’s analysis of the Afghanistan conflict in 2015 and the context at the time, the same elements mentioned that indicate the presumed absence of the ‘ripe’ time for the initiation of negotiation, are still to be found in the context from which the actual negotiations in 2018-2019 have sprouted anyway. This analysis has found that the question should not be so much about whether or not the ‘ripe’ moment has changed in a more favorable way for the initiation of negotiations, but that the ripeness theory lacks a political and historical dimension. By focusing on top-down



decision makers, the ripeness theory overlooks the influence of domestic and international political pressure, while it is exactly this historically developed political pressure that is of significant influence in ‘ripening’ the conflict. This thesis has shown that of course, war-fatigue could very well be reason to decide to move to negotiations to end conflict. This war-fatigue is evident for both the U.S. and the Taliban. But, the ripeness theory seems to be blinded by focusing on top-down decision-makers, consequently overlooking, which is most clearly visible on the U.S. side, that the war-weariness is not only shared at the top, but also broadly within the domestic *and* international public, including the Western coalition. It is exactly these political influences and developments fuelled by the public that the ripeness theory struggles to identify.

This thesis has shown that the historical narrative of the untenable nature of the conflict is the reason why negotiations were able to sprout from the Afghanistan conflict, despite the still identifiable absence of the ‘ripe’ time to do so. As Zartman would on the basis of his original theory have presumed, of course, both the U.S. and the Taliban can still publicly promulgate their imminent and impending victory in the war, but as this thesis has shown, what is publicly said does not necessarily reflect one’s true mind. If looked closer to the historical picture, there are two sides to every coin. Seen from one side of the coin, the basic element for a Mutually Hurting Stalemate is missing as both parties continue their war efforts and publicly state they could win the war if they wanted to. This, according to ripeness theory, indicates a missing perception of being in a hurting stalemate. Yet, seen from the other side of the coin, both parties do realize the war cannot be won and both do seek a way out of the conflict other than military victory. But, most strikingly, as was argued, especially on the U.S. side there is not only war-weariness shared by the top-down decision-makers, but that this war-fatigue is also outspread within the domestic *and* the international public, including the Western coalition. It is exactly the latter that is overshadowed because ripeness theory lacks the ability to be interdisciplinary and, consequently, overlooks the importance of the historical (and political) dimension. And it is exactly this side of the coin that explains the reason why negotiations were initiated, even though the other side of the coin could indicate the time was not ‘ripe’ to do so. This thesis thus calls for a more truly interdisciplinary approach of the ripeness theory and, in essence, to the field of conflict resolution. One should always analyze and fathom the other side of the coin. Indeed, there are two sides of every coin.

## Appendix

### Appendix I: Timeline of the U.S. – Taliban Peace Negotiations

Since early 2018, several rounds of peace talks were conducted in Doha. In January 2019, there seemed to be a breakthrough in the peace negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban. In the SIGAR quarterly report of January 2019, they state that “U.S. and Taliban officials have agreed in principle to the framework of a peace deal in which the insurgents would guarantee to prevent Afghan territory from being used by terrorists and that could lead to a full pullout of U.S. troops in return for larger concessions from the Taliban”.<sup>184</sup> In March 2019, the Taliban announced an “agreement regarding withdrawal of occupying forces and preventing Afghanistan from being used against others” was concluded during the negotiations. During January and that the talks in March, the fifth round of negotiations, were “about the details and nature of these two issues”.<sup>185</sup> Khalilzad reiterated this by declaring there was an “agreement in principle”, but at the same time assured that they had a “number of issues left to work out” and that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”, ‘everything’ meaning it includes an “intra-Afghan dialogue and comprehensive ceasefire”.<sup>186</sup>

In May, Suhail Shaheen, the spokesman for the Taliban’s political office, declared that talks between both negotiation teams continued “as well to reach a final agreement on withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan and not allowing any one to use the soil of Afghanistan against any other country”.<sup>187</sup> According to Shaheen, these issues were “crucial for other issues to be taken on”.<sup>188</sup> A SIGAR report from April 2019 also reported that spring 2019 saw “the opening of a break in the clouds of war”.<sup>189</sup> On the eve of the lingering summer, Khalilzad and his team were “working to promote intra-Afghan talks through a national, unified, and inclusive Afghan negotiating team that includes opposition parties and

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<sup>184</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, January 30 (2019).

<sup>185</sup> Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, “Clarification regarding current round of talks”, *Statements*, March 3 (2019), <https://alemarahenglish.com/?p=42316> (accessed on September 30, 2019).

<sup>186</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad, (@US4AfghanPeace). “Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” 26 January 2019, 8:13a.m. *Tweet*. <https://twitter.com/us4afghanpeace/status/1089194661573480449> (accessed on October 25, 2019).

<sup>187</sup> Suhail Shaheen (@suhailshaheen1), May 4 (2019), 10:33a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/suhailshaheen1/status/1124728757795872769> (accessed on November 1, 2019).

<sup>188</sup> Shaheen (@suhailshaheen1), May 4 (2019).

<sup>189</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, April 30 (2019).

representatives from civil society, particularly women and youth”.<sup>190</sup> Eventually, on July 7 and 8 (2019), “44 Afghan delegates (including 10 women) and 17 Taliban representatives gathered for the German- and Qatari-sponsored Intra Afghan Peace Conference”.<sup>191</sup> The goal of this Conference was to “initiate direct dialogue between the rival sides”.<sup>192</sup> On this, SIGAR reported that Khalilzad had told them that the “Doha dialogue included ‘serious discussion and was a strategic success’”.<sup>193</sup> Although the Taliban made clear the “conference is not a negotiations summit or meeting”, since it only agreed to attend the meeting if all attendees would do so in personal capacity, it was a significant step towards peace in Afghanistan.<sup>194</sup> Both Afghan delegates and Taliban representatives gathered around the table to talk about peace for the first time in such a format and even concluded a joint statement in which both sides called to reduce ‘civilian casualties to zero’.<sup>195</sup>

The developments in the peace process peaked over the summer of 2019. On September 1, after the ninth round of negotiations, Khalilzad reported that they were “at the threshold of an agreement that will reduce violence and open the door for Afghans to sit together and negotiate an honorable & sustainable peace and a unified, sovereign Afghanistan that does not threaten the United States, its allies, or any other country”.<sup>196</sup> He continued that he would travel to Kabul for consultations and that “war will only end when all sides agree it must end”. This meant that both Afghan President Ghani and U.S. President Trump had to endorse and sign the agreement, before the agreement would be final.<sup>197</sup> The final pact was said to include a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops over the following 15 to 18 months, a

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<sup>190</sup> Robert J. Palladino, “Department Press Briefing”, *Office of the Spokesperson*, U.S. Department of State, March 5 (2019), <https://www.state.gov/briefings/departments-press-briefing-march-5-2019/> (accessed on November 1, 2019).

<sup>191</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconciliation*, July 30 (2019), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-07-30qr.pdf> (accessed on September 27, 2019).

<sup>192</sup> Shereena Qazi, “Afghan talks: rival sides agree on ‘road map for peace’ – Afghan leaders and the Taliban call to reduce civilian casualties to ‘zero’ in a joint statement after talks in Doha”, *Al Jazeera*, July 9 (2019), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/afghan-peace-talks-rival-sides-agree-roadmap-peace-190709012150435.html> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

<sup>193</sup> SIGAR, “Quarterly Report to the United States Congress”, July 30 (2019).

<sup>194</sup> Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, “Clarification of Islamic Emirate regarding upcoming conference in Qatar”, *Statements*, April 7 (2019), <https://alemarahenglish.com/?p=44144> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

And,

Qazi, “Afghan talks: rival sides agree on ‘road map for peace.’”

<sup>195</sup> Qazi, “Afghan talks: rival sides agree on ‘road map for peace.’”

<sup>196</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad (@US4AfghanPeace), September 1 (2019), 1:40a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1167945304290672642> (accessed on September 27, 2019).

<sup>197</sup> See:

Zalmay Khalilzad (@US4AfghanPeace), September 1 (2019), 1:40a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1167945302625509377> (accessed on September 27, 2019).

And,

Zalmay Khalilzad (@US4AfghanPeace), August 31 (2019), 6:41p.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1167839852085338113> (accessed on September 27, 2019).

ceasefire, the Taliban's assurance that Afghanistan will not be a safe haven for terrorists and a set date for intra-Afghan talks in Oslo, Norway.<sup>198</sup> It only awaited the approval in Washington and Kabul. Was peace finally near in war-torn Afghanistan?

This prospect seemed however shattered in the blink of an eye on September 8, when Trump called off the peace negotiations all together after eleven people, including an American soldier, were killed in a Taliban attack in Kabul. Trump tweeted he had planned a meeting with major Taliban leaders at Camp David – the U.S. President's country retreat – but condemned the Taliban attack “that killed one of our great, great soldiers”, stating: “what kind of people would kill so many in order to seemingly strengthen their bargaining position? [...] They only made it worse!”<sup>199</sup> He continued that if the Taliban could not agree to a ceasefire during the peace talks, “then they probably don't have the power to negotiate a meaningful agreement anyway”.<sup>200</sup> In an Afghanistan policy speech, Trump commented on the U.S. – Taliban peace talks: “They're dead, they're dead. As far as I'm concerned they're dead”.<sup>201</sup> Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo, condemned the Taliban attack as well, arguing that “through these attacks, the Taliban demonstrate blatant disregard for the people and institutions of Afghanistan” and “for Afghans to truly reconcile, the Taliban must begin to demonstrate a genuine commitment to peace rather than continue the violence and destruction”.<sup>202</sup> From the other side, the Taliban commented that, although they had “productive negotiations with the U.S. negotiation team and finalized an agreement” and “both sides began making preparations for the announcement and signing of the agreement”, the announcement of the suspension of negotiations by the U.S. president “will harm America more than anyone else”.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Colum Lynch, Lara Seligman and Robbie Gramer, “Khalilzad edges closer to Pact with Taliban – The U.S. Envoy is expected to travel to Afghanistan within days to seek approval from President Ashraf Ghani” – *Foreign Policy*, August (2019), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/28/khalilzad-edges-closer-to-pact-with-taliban-zalmay-khalilzad-negotiations-afghanistan-war-diplomacy-new-details-on-peace-negotiations-ashraf-ghani-elections-kabul/> (accessed on October 13, 2019).

<sup>199</sup> See:

Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), September 8 (2019), 12:51 a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1170469618177236992> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

And:

Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), September 8 (2019), 12:51 a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1170469619154530305> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

<sup>200</sup> Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), September 8 (2019), 12:51 a.m., *Tweet*, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1170469621348098049> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

<sup>201</sup> Washington Post, “Trump on peace talks: ‘they're dead’”, *Washington Post* [YouTube], September 9 (2019), <https://youtu.be/pzksDbPS7wY> (accessed on 16 september 2019).

<sup>202</sup> Michael R. Pompeo, “Condemning Taliban Violence”, *Press Statement*, U.S. Department of State, September 17 (2019), <https://www.state.gov/condemning-taliban-violence/> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

<sup>203</sup> Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, “Statement of Islamic Emirate concerning tweet of Donald Trump about negotiations”, *Statements*, September 8 (2019), <https://alemarahenglish.com/?p=51409> (accessed on October 15, 2019).

As of September 2019 the peace negotiations were frozen, without anyone knowing if and when they would be resumed. But in November 2019, the frozen state of the peace talks seemed to thaw. In the end of November, the Afghan government in exchange for two Western hostages had released three Taliban commanders as part of a prisoner swap move.<sup>204</sup> It seemed to be an important measure for confidence building, because, after almost three months of silence and nescience, President Trump changed his mind regarding the peace talks with the Taliban. On Thanksgiving, Trump brought an announced Thanksgiving-surprise visit to U.S. troops at Bagram Airfield, the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan.<sup>205</sup> Here, he not only served Thanksgiving food to military personnel, but also met with Afghan President Ghani.<sup>206</sup> In his meeting with Ghani, Trump reiterated that the Taliban “wants to make a deal” and that the Taliban “didn’t want to do a ceasefire, but now they do want to do a ceasefire, I believe”.<sup>207</sup> Trump also made the remark that they made “a lot of progress” and at the same time were drawing down U.S. troops, approximately about 8,600.<sup>208</sup> Following Trump’s announcement that talks with the Taliban had been resumed, Khalilzad travelled to Doha and Kabul again on December 3. Here he met with several Afghan government officials and other Afghan leaders to “discuss how best to support accelerated efforts to get all parties to intra-Afghan negotiations”.<sup>209</sup> After a wavering interruption, the negotiating teams of the U.S. and the Taliban have resumed peace talks for the tenth round of negotiations. At the time of writing, the outcome of these peace negotiations is unknown.

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<sup>204</sup> Al Jazeera, “Taliban commanders ‘land in Qatar’ part of prisoner swap move”, *Al Jazeera*, November 20 (2019), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/taliban-commanders-land-qatar-part-prisoner-swap-move-191119052250266.html> (accessed on December 10, 2019).

<sup>205</sup> Washington Post, “Trump delivers Thanksgiving greetings to U.S. troops in Afghanistan”, *The Washington Post*, November 28 (2019), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?destination=%2fpolitics%2ftrump-makes-surprise-visit-to-us-troops-in-afghanistan%2f2019%2f11%2f28%2f7fe71f2a-11e8-11ea-bf62-eadd5d11f559\\_story.html%3f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?destination=%2fpolitics%2ftrump-makes-surprise-visit-to-us-troops-in-afghanistan%2f2019%2f11%2f28%2f7fe71f2a-11e8-11ea-bf62-eadd5d11f559_story.html%3f) (accessed on November 30, 2019).

<sup>206</sup> Dave Maclean, “Trump says Taliban open to ceasefire as he makes surprise visit to Afghanistan for Thanksgiving”, *The Independent*, November 28 (2019), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks-ceasefire-thanksgiving-troops-us-a9225266.html> (accessed on November 30, 2019).

<sup>207</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Trump and President Ghani of Afghanistan After Bilateral Meeting | Bagram, Afghanistan”, *Remarks*, November 28 (2019), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-ghani-afghanistan-bilateral-meeting-bagram-afghanistan/> (accessed on December 10, 2019).

<sup>208</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Trump and President Ghani of Afghanistan After Bilateral Meeting | Bagram, Afghanistan”, November 28 (2019).

<sup>209</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad Travels to Afghanistan and Qatar”, Media Note, *Office of the Spokesperson*, December 4 (2019), <https://www.state.gov/special-representative-for-afghanistan-reconciliation-zalmay-khalilzad-travels-to-afghanistan-and-qatar/> (accessed on December 15, 2019).

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