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## Afghanistan: War without end

**There is a clear and pressing need to end the monumental folly of prosecuting a war in Afghanistan**

10/7/2010

There is a clear and pressing need to end the monumental folly of prosecuting a war in [Afghanistan](#). It is spreading in intensity into the tribal areas of [Pakistan](#) and could yet rattle a weak civilian government in Islamabad to bits. To persuade themselves that they are prevailing, the US, Britain and their allies maintain the illusion that they are building the capacity of the Afghan state, when that claim is being routinely undermined by corrupt elections and a president in [Hamid Karzai](#) who packs his administration with his relatives. Belief in the nation-building project has collapsed. The bar of success is being lowered.

The war has become both a magnet for, and training ground of, no less than two generations of jihadis, each more determined than the last. It is the rallying cause for terrorist acts against civilian targets across the world. Enormous military resources are being devoted to fighting the [Taliban](#) on both sides of the border – there are 140,000 Pakistan military in the tribal areas alone. Yet all that has been accomplished is a larger battlefield and a more intense battle. The Pentagon's initial optimism that a surge of US troops would push the Taliban out of Helmand and Kandahar has faded, even before troop levels have peaked. Everyone knows that this conflict can only end in a negotiated solution, but no one yet can imagine it happening.

It is against this background that we reveal today that talks have been taking place with the Haqqani network, a group based in North Waziristan and one of the most feared insurgents in Afghanistan. This is separate from the report in the [Washington Post](#) that Karzai has been holding secret high-level talks with the Quetta Shura, the Afghan Taliban organisation based in Pakistan, about a comprehensive settlement. But taken together there is now credible evidence of a desire in Washington as well as in Kabul to address the leadership of the main Taliban groups, to reconcile the so-called irreconcilables, and not rely on a policy of removing them.

It is not clear who is forcing whom to the negotiating table. It is assumed that the Taliban are propelled by a surge of drone strikes and by the desire of an older generation of fighters who know the benefits of peace to negotiate a deal, before they lose control altogether to radical Islamists. But too much also is unknown – how far these talks have gone, and whether indeed they present a viable alternative to the Taliban strategy of waiting the Americans out. For there is a third and more potent enemy that the US faces. It is chaos, the inability to stick to one course of action and to bend competing actors to that end. The war could continue simply because its momentum is now unstoppable.