

## United States Foreign Policy: Peace Agreement with the Taliban in 2020

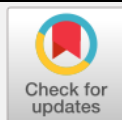
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### ABSTRACT

*The events of 9/11 of 2001 led the United States to issue a Global War on Terror (GWOT) policy. One implementation of this policy is the war against Al-Qaeda groups under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The U.S. has launched several attacks against the Taliban, killing many U.S. soldiers and civil society in the region. After decades of fighting the Taliban with military force, the U.S. ultimately signed a peace treaty with the Taliban on February 29, 2020. Although the U.S. military is still at the forefront of warfare, it chooses to use a lenient approach to its war opponents. This research aims to determine the factors influencing the United States to enter a peace agreement with the Taliban in 2020. The theory used is the decision-making theory. This research will use the qualitative research method and data from scientific writings and credible news that discuss related or similar topics. The findings in this research imply that three factors impacted the peace agreement with the Taliban signed by The U.S. in 2020. They are domestic politics, economic and military capacity, and international context.*

**Keywords:** Decision-Making Theory; Peace Agreement; Taliban; United States

### 1. Introduction

Discussions about great power conflicts are common in the study of international relations, where certain actors can determine international security dynamics. One of the most recent is the Al-Qaeda attack on the Pentagon. This phenomenon may be one of the most popular

examples in modern international relations involving state and non-state actors in a coercive approach.

The U.S. experienced the worst terrorism tragedy in 2001, which is now referred to as the 9/11 incident. At that time, Al-Qaeda destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon. Responding to this attack, the U.S. then issued a Global War on Terror (GWOT) policy which later became U.S. legality in initiating all forms of efforts to fight against terrorist groups (Stohl, 2008). One form of implementation of this policy is the war against the Al-Qaeda group led by Osama Bin Laden. This policy was made to push the Al-Qaeda group to surrender to the U.S. Al-Qaeda, which at that time took refuge in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, rejected this request. This rejection then triggered the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan to fight the Taliban.

In doing so, the U.S. has carried out dozens of military attacks against the Taliban over the past 18 years. The long journey of fighting the Taliban group has become a concern for many groups. Not a few also think that this conflict should have ended long ago. Few U.S. citizens and international parties said the Afghanistan war was not worth continuing (Hubbard, 2021). In this regard, the first initiative indicating the beginning of the process of talks on a peace agreement was held on July 28, 2018, through the U.S. - Taliban Meeting during Donald Trump's presidency. So that in the end, the U.S. - Taliban conflict relationship then turned into a peace agreement signed on February 29, 2020, in Doha, Qatar (International Crisis Group, 2020).

The peace agreement entered into by the U.S. is quite odd. The reason is that the military strength and U.S. position, which is still strong in the international system, allows the U.S. to continue to use a military approach in intervening in Afghanistan. In addition, historical facts show that large countries tend not to use peace agreements to resolve conflicts with their war opponents, let alone wars with terrorist groups. This can be seen in several incidents of war or conflict that have occurred so far. Historical records show that conflicts between warring actors do not usually end in peace agreements. For example, Germany fought against the allies in World War I from 1914 to 1918. Germany ultimately lost, and the Allies won the war (Roberts, 2004). Next was the Second Sino-Japanese War, where Japan conflicted with China from 1937-1945 (Mitter & Moore, 2011). This war also ended in defeat by Japan and victory by China. World War II in 1939-1945 (Weisiger, 2013) also produced similar results where the victory belonged to the West Block, while the East Block was declared defeated. A quite different example can be seen in the Korean War, where North Korea fought with South Korea for three years, from 1950-1953 (Kim, 2013). However, the end of this war was not a peace treaty either, but a truce. So it can be seen that armed wars tend to end in defeat and victory or truces, not peace agreements.

The U.S. action that ultimately stopped military operations that had been carried out for years and cost thousands of U.S. troops is interesting to study. The anomaly of a large country that tends not to use peace agreements with its enemies and the peculiarity of the U.S., which has a very large military force but chooses to use a "soft" approach to dealing with its opponents raises quite a big question mark regarding the reasons behind the decision of the superpower to choose a peace agreement.

To examine further, the authors limit the research period from 2018 (when the first initiative to initiate a peace agreement took place) to 2020 (when the peace agreement was signed) with the research question narrative as follows "Why did the United States enter into a peace agreement with the Taliban in the year 2020?".

## 2. Literature Review

From the results of observations made, this study found that in previous studies, heated discussions about the US-Taliban conflict were broadly dominated by 3 points, namely: (1) The effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts that have been made; (2) the Transformation of the current view of the Taliban which is no longer seen as a terrorist, but has the potential to be invited to reconciliation; and (3) Justification of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. The intervention by the U.S. in Afghanistan has generated a lot of debate, especially in terms of the justification that the U.S. has and the effectiveness of the intervention in overcoming domestic problems in Afghanistan. The Taliban has a strong potential to be invited to reconciliation, so the U.S. intervention failed to have a better impact.

In the first category, the regime (Shahrani, 2015); tribal politics (Baczko, 2016); and just war theory (Connah, 2020) play an important role in this issue. The application, impact, and effectiveness of a regime's use of military force in maintaining its authority has also become quite a hot topic of discussion on this issue. In resolving a conflict and using military efforts, non-military aspects such as politics are also needed.

In the second category, the diplomatic approach (Behuria et al., 2019) and discourse analysis (Renner & Spencer, 2013) are important instruments in conflict resolution, which in this case refers to the US-Taliban conflict. There has been a change because of the Taliban, which was initially seen as a terrorist and considered an enemy, then turned into a partnership with the potential to be invited to reconcile.

In the third category, discussions regarding the justification for U.S. intervention in Afghanistan play an important role. From the point of view of international law (Ulfstein, 2003), there is a view that the actions taken by the U.S. are justified as steps in self-defense efforts. However, on the other hand, there is also a view that the intervention by the U.S. has also contributed to the failure of the government in Afghanistan so that it is not following the initial objectives of implementing the War on Terror policy.

The temporary findings from the literature review that has been carried out have concluded that there has been no research that specifically discusses the background of the conflict resolution efforts carried out by the U.S. until it finally made a peace agreement with the Taliban in 2020. This study regarding the interests of the U.S. - Taliban peace agreement is important for being investigated further to understand better what influences U.S. foreign policy so that it chooses non-military measures to resolve the conflict with the Taliban. For that, by using the theoretical framework of foreign policy making. This research is expected to identify the factors that prompted the U.S. to sign a peace agreement with the Taliban.

## 3. Research Method

The method used in this study is a qualitative method intended to explain the data obtained, both in the form of scientific writings and other sources, as well as the actions drawn from the writing or data (Neuman, 2009). This qualitative method uses a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research to implement the theory that will be used, namely Coplin's decision-making theory.

The deductive approach is used to describe or give an overview of the object to be studied through data or samples collected in a study where the results of the research will then be processed and the conclusions analyzed in the form of an overview. This method was taken to obtain an objective explanation of the background that influenced U.S. foreign policy in signing a peace agreement with the Taliban.

The data collection technique used a library study mechanism with a triangulation technique to analyze the data. The types and sources of primary data for this study were obtained from official U.S. Government documents and statements by political elites or international government officials. At the same time, secondary data will be obtained from reports and previous literature that discusses issues related to the conflict between the U.S. and the Taliban.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The decision-making theory put forward by William D. Coplin explains that state action embodied in foreign policy results from three determinants that influence policymakers: domestic political conditions, economic and military conditions, and international context (Coplin & Marbun, 2003).

##### **4.1. Domestic Political Conditions**

The U.S. - Taliban peace agreement is in progress during Donald Trump's presidency. Judging from the domestic political conditions in the U.S. during the leadership of these two presidents, there has been a lot of turmoil debating the essence of the US-Taliban war. In terms of domestic influence, many Americans think the war with the Taliban in Afghanistan is no longer worth fighting for. Reporting from one of the U.S. news pages, U.S. News & World Report, this media said that after nearly 20 years in the country, most U.S. citizens said that the war in Afghanistan was not worth continuing and regretted the U.S. decision to want still to continue its conflict with the Taliban (Hubbard, 2021). This statement was also obtained from a survey by the AP-NORC Institute (Associated Press - The Nonpartisan and Objective Research at the University of Chicago).

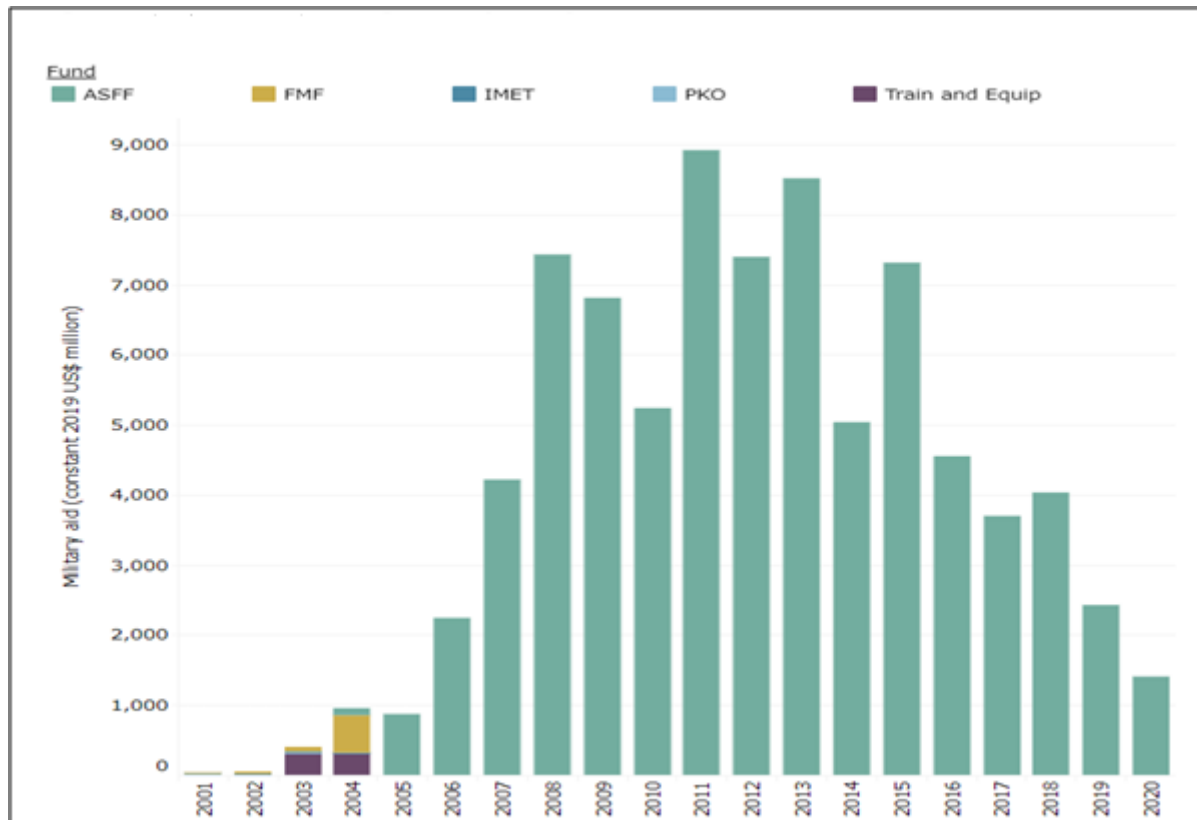
In line with this argument, Shadi Hamid, a senior in U.S. politics in foreign policy, especially in the Middle East, also has a similar view. Hamid believes that the Taliban know and know Afghanistan better than the U.S. The ideal view aspired to by the U.S. in Afghanistan is not something that the people of Afghanistan need. The Taliban know better what is needed and what kind of regime should be established in Afghanistan. Even Hamid also said that the US-backed Afghan government failed not only because of the Taliban. Conversely, this failure was also influenced by the U.S.'s blindness and bias toward Afghanistan (Hamid, 2022).

Every other U.S. presidential candidate or president-elect always promises to end the war with the Taliban and bring back U.S. troops who have been fighting in Afghanistan (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). They conveyed these promises during the campaign and their presidential tenure. However, the initiation and process of forming a peace agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban only took place during Donald Trump's leadership. Initial initiation for the peace agreement began during Donald Trump's leadership on July 28, 2018, which was later signed on February 29, 2020.

This research also assesses that this peace agreement was also triggered by changes in the U.S. geopolitical strategy, which began to focus on Asia. This then results in conflicts or other "affairs" in the Middle East region that are no longer very attractive to the U.S. One concrete example that supports this argument is the Pivot to Asia policy formed during the leadership of Barack Obama. Pivot to Asia is also often referred to as a rebalance strategy in which the focus of U.S. foreign policy begins to shift from the previous one under Bush's leadership which tended to be centered on the Middle East region, then began to change to focus more on the Asian region which is considered an area with political and economic activity that will develop rapidly (Campbell & Andrews, 2013).



As previously mentioned, all U.S. presidential candidates and president-elect have always campaigned for their promise to end the conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, this research argues that the seriousness of implementing this was more visible when Donald Trump took office. Reflecting on the efforts made, another president (Obama) has indeed started promoting the Pivot to Asia policy. However, efforts to reduce the intensity of the conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan were not very visible in this era, considering that the budgeted costs for the conflict were increasing yearly during his reign.



**Figure 1. U.S. Military Assistance to Afghanistan 2001-2020**

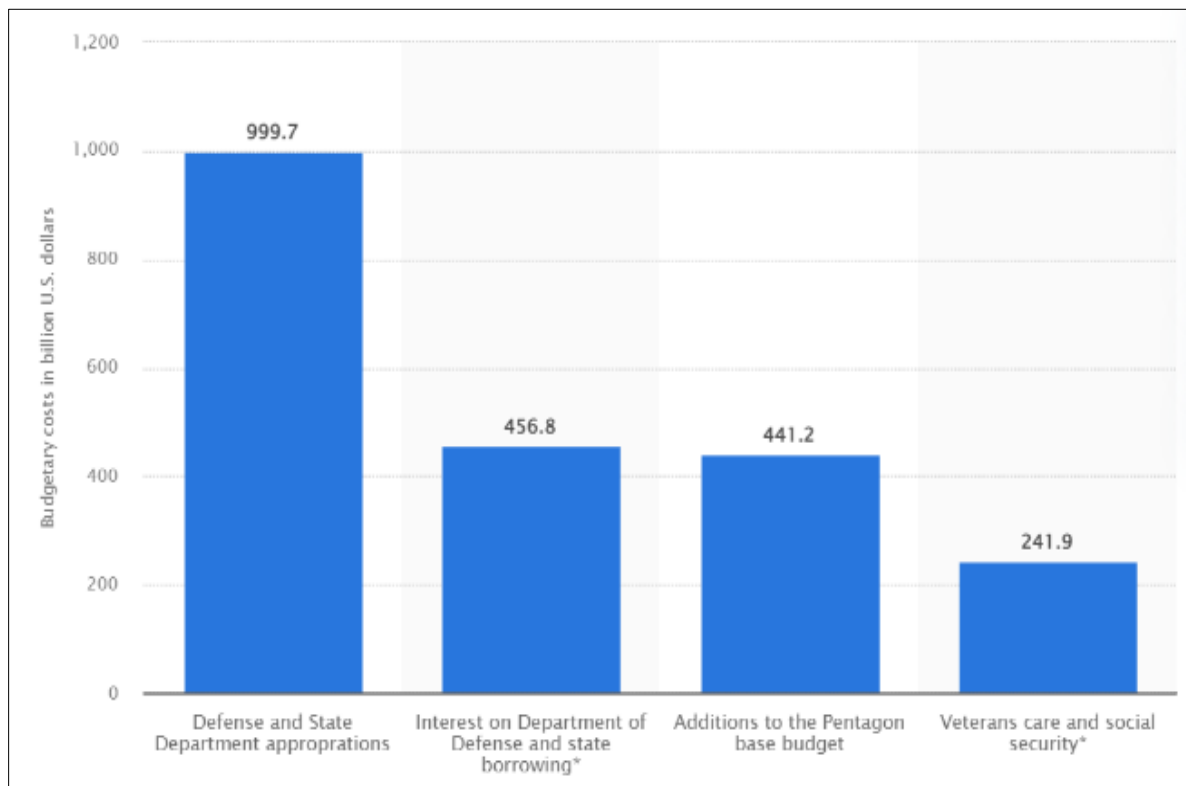
Source: [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute \(2021\)](#)

Unlike Obama, Trump seems more serious about handling the peace process with the Taliban. This was proven by initiating the first meeting with the Taliban, which we scheduled for July 28, 2018, which continued intensively during Donald Trump's leadership so that the peace agreement with the Taliban was signed on February 29, 2020. Meanwhile, at the beginning of his presidency, Joe Biden was only required to continue the contents of the peace agreement agreed with the Taliban previously, namely to return U.S. troops.

The final step in implementing the peace agreement in Biden's hands reaped several pros and cons. A few also argue that the peace agreement processes passed on from Trump to Biden put Biden in a difficult position ([Gross, 2021](#)). However, early in his appointment as U.S. President, a head of state needs to make a good impression and maintain the trust of his citizens. One of the efforts to achieve this is by fulfilling the promises made during the campaign period and realizing the agenda that is the goal of society in general, namely ending the conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan and returning U.S. troops. So it is only natural that the peace agreement process was finally continued during the era of Joe Biden's leadership.

#### 4.2. Economic and Military Conditions

When viewed further, this research also finds that the war waged by the U.S. with the Taliban in Afghanistan has resulted in too many losses. During the 18 years of invading Afghanistan, the costs incurred by the U.S. to carry out its mission have reached more than 2 trillion USD (Duffin, 2019).



**Figure 2. Total U.S. Spending on the war against the Taliban 2019-2022**

Source: Duffin (2019)

Not only that, apart from the fantastic budget, the U.S. - Taliban war in Afghanistan has also killed many U.S. military forces and civilians in that country. The invasion carried out by the U.S. in Afghanistan was recorded as having killed more than 2,000 US troops (Gollob & O'hanlon, 2020) and tens of thousands of victims from other categories.

**Table 1. The estimated death toll for U.S. troops and their coalition in the war against the Taliban**

Year	U.S. troop fatalities	Coalition troop fatalities	Contractors
2001	12	N/A	N/A
2002	49	21	N/A
2003	48	10	N/A
2004	52	8	N/A
2005	99	32	40
2006	98	91	20
2007	117	114	49
2008	155	140	51
2009	312	203	104
2010	499	211	357
2011	418	148	374
2012	310	92	247
2013	128	34	180
2014	55	20	103
2015	22	4	56
2016	14	2	47
2017	11	2	40
2018	14	5	27
2019	24	2	38
2020	8	N/A	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,445</b>	<b>1,139</b>	<b>1,788</b>

Source: [Statista Research Department \(2022\)](#)

In addition, many U.S. economic policies are like missteps in allocating budgets to facilitate their conflict with the Taliban. The closest example can be taken from the U.S., which increased the budget for the conflict with the Taliban in 2007-2008 (see [Figure 1](#)). This step seemed unwise considering that the U.S. was experiencing a severe economic crisis or what is commonly called The Great Recession in 2006-2008 ([Bennet & Kochhar, 2019](#)). Even though the U.S. then reduced its budget in 2009-2010, the U.S. finally increased the budget for the conflict with the Taliban drastically in 2011. This is as if the U.S. did not take important lessons from the previous economic crisis and still prioritized its conflict with the Taliban even though it was considered endless and did not positively impact the U.S.

The figure of 2 trillion USD issued by the U.S. and the resulting number of deaths is too exaggerated, considering that the budget distribution is intended more for the security of Afghanistan itself. The extra-mile efforts made by the U.S. to protect Afghanistan from the Taliban seem too imposing. Why is that? Because basically, Afghanistan's security should be Afghanistan's domestic responsibility itself, not the U.S. In the end, this has also strayed far from the initial goal of establishing the War on Terror policy, which should have ended with the death of Osama bin Laden.

From a military perspective, the US-Taliban conflict does not provide good benefits for the U.S. Currently, many U.S. "competitor" countries are actively developing and implementing new technologies to make their conventional forces much more effective in a war. China, Iran,

Russia, and North Korea can prove that other countries have invested a lot, modernized their military forces, and equipped their military capacity with the most advanced technology.

In 2020, for example, Russia's military capacity was recognized as the most modern in history since the collapse of the Soviet Union. China's navy is also nearly 20% larger than the U.S. and is estimated to be 15 years ahead of the U.S. in modernization and expansion (Wood, 2020). Not only that, North Korea recently demonstrated the most advanced and intercontinental ballistic missile ever in the development of nuclear weapons history. Significant developments can also be seen from the Iranian state redoubling its efforts to support terrorist groups, expanding its inventory of missiles that threaten the country in the Persian Gulf region, and using nuclear blackmail to make European countries comply with Iran's nuclear aspirations.

Of course, the U.S. military capacity is still very capable and advanced in the global order. Not even a few also view that the U.S. vision to become global supremacy is possible with its technological capabilities. However, the war waged by the U.S. and the Taliban does not reflect the U.S.'s technological advances. The popular culture of guerrilla warfare in this conflict gives the impression that the U.S. is not moving forward from this conventional war. Thus, the conflict with the Taliban is no longer relevant and can highlight the progress and stability of the U.S. military from other countries.

#### 4.3. International Context

According to his theory, Coplin explained that 3 (three) indicators are included in the international context variable in a country's foreign policy making: geographical influence, economic, and political. However, this research finds that geographical and economic factors are less relevant to the discussion on the US-Taliban conflict because the war between the two actors is not based on ambitions to seize territory (geographical) or economic interests. The US-Taliban conflict is more likely caused by U.S. ambitions that do not want the Taliban to control Afghanistan because it is considered a terrorist group and contrary to U.S. principles. Therefore, the authors consider that these two indicators are not the basis for the war between the U.S. and the Taliban. So the discussion in this part of the international context will be more dominated by discussions on political factors from international parties to the U.S. - Taliban conflict.

Several countries, such as China and Iran, believe that the U.S. should leave (Sun, 2020) and stop interfering in Afghanistan's affairs (Fathollah-Nejad & Azizi, 2021). Aligned with China and Iran, Russia also has the same views and tends to be seen as siding with the Taliban. Not only that, Russia and the Taliban have even had a long relationship. Before the U.S. decided to end the conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan, several countries had carried out foreign relations with the Taliban either in the form of assistance to facilitate the handling of the conflict with the Afghan government or other forms of foreign relations, such as those carried out by China and Russia which have started to initiate bilateral interactions.

China has been trying to maintain a pragmatic relationship with the Taliban recently. The pragmatic in this context is that China is maintaining its relationship with the Afghan government and the Taliban. So far, China's relationship with the Taliban and Afghanistan is involved in bringing peace to these conflicting countries. From the efforts made, China has succeeded in giving the impression of being the most appropriate country to push the peace process between the Taliban and the Afghan government in a better direction (Pandey, 2019). However, even though China seems to be more involved in the peace process, not few also consider that China has sided with the Taliban by providing some assistance to the Taliban in the conflict (Kelemen, 2019).



The State of Russia experienced the same thing. Since 2015, Moscow has been in contact with the Taliban and has actively resolved the conflict by hosting several intra-Afghan meetings in 2019 (Noorzai et al., 2020). In addition, Russia has also “estimated” the victory the Taliban will achieve, so Russia hopes that her country can build cooperative cooperation with the Taliban for a better Afghanistan future. During the conflict with the Taliban, Russia has always shown its willingness to help peace between the Taliban and the Afghan government. But on the other hand, Russia is also often suspected of having provided a lot of assistance, including providing weapons to the Taliban during this conflict (Kurita, 2019).

Unlike most countries, Iran has quite a contradictory and bold policy toward Afghanistan. Iran maintains good relations with the Afghan government to expand its political, economic, and cultural influence. However, on the other hand, Iran also provided significant support to the Taliban, which ultimately influenced the turmoil and political, social, and economic processes in Afghanistan (Akbarzadeh & Ibrahimi, 2019).

The foreign policy of other countries in explaining their position on the conflict in Afghanistan still has a lot of debate. Other countries generally position their country as a country that is non-violent and rejects oppression. However, on the other hand, many suspicions place these countries as actors who have facilitated and taken sides with the Taliban in the conflict in Afghanistan.

In literature, the availability of information apart from the U.S., Russia, China, and other major countries, the foreign policies of other countries are not very popular considering that the U.S. Overall mostly dominates this conflict, other countries have foreign policies that are quite similar to those of China and Russia towards the Taliban in that they generally also position themselves as a third party seeking to help resolve the conflict in Afghanistan, although these efforts are under-reported by the media. Like Turkey’s foreign relations efforts which also showed a desire to participate as a mediator in the conflict in Afghanistan by hosting peace talks meeting in March 2019 (Saber, 2019).

This research finds that there is not enough information about other countries’ policy factors towards the Taliban that significantly encourage the signing of a peace agreement by the U.S. This is due to the lack of availability of references that clearly explain the foreign policy formulations of other countries in positioning themselves towards the conflict in Afghanistan.

However, from several examples of bilateral relations established by several major countries with the Taliban during the conflict, it can be seen that regardless of the efforts made by these countries to help bring about peace, there is still a high possibility that they are involved in facilitating the Taliban. In line with the previous explanation, this certainly affects the position of the U.S. as a country that is openly involved in the conflict in Afghanistan as a party against the Taliban.

From the description above, it can be seen that several major countries deplore the conflict between the U.S. and the Taliban. Even in the context of this conflict, there appears to be a tendency from these countries to side with the Taliban. Pressure from several “competitor” countries whose current military and economic capabilities could jeopardize the U.S. position if they support and decide to assist the Taliban in this conflict must certainly be a considerable consideration for the U.S. in responding to the conflict in Afghanistan. Therefore, it is very rational if the U.S. ultimately ends the conflict with the Taliban through a peace agreement to secure the U.S. position and avoid potential conflicts that might arise if the war against the Taliban continues.

## 5. Conclusion

U.S. foreign policy, which decided to sign a peace agreement with the Taliban, was influenced by three variables, namely U.S. domestic political conditions, U.S. economic and military conditions, and the international context.

In terms of domestic political conditions, the U.S. has received much criticism and rejection of its ambition, which has always prolonged the conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The response was mostly obtained from U.S. political figures and even U.S. citizens themselves. Besides that, the reason why in the end, the U.S. chose to make peace in the conflict that had been going on for more than 18 years was due to a change in the U.S.'s geopolitical strategy, which began to focus on Asia (Pivot to Asia). This then results in conflicts or other "affairs" in the Middle East region that are no longer very attractive and popular for the U.S.

From an economic point of view, the U.S. has also suffered enormous losses by spending a budget of more than 2 trillion USD and losing thousands of lives of U.S. soldiers in its conflict with the Taliban. These losses and sacrifices are considered not commensurate with the results obtained by the U.S., where the U.S. is still unable to win the government of Afghanistan over the Taliban. Not only that, many U.S. policies were deemed inappropriate in providing a budget that still prioritized procurement to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan over other priorities when the economic crisis occurred.

If traced from a military perspective, the war waged by the U.S. and the Taliban does not reflect U.S. technological advances predicted to become global supremacy. The popular culture of guerrilla warfare in this conflict gave the impression that the U.S. was not moving forward from the conventional war. Thus, the conflict with the Taliban can no longer highlight the progress and stability of the U.S. military from other countries.

In addition, the international context also plays a role in this US-Taliban peace agreement. Even though it is not very significant, the position of the Taliban, which has begun to slowly gain support from several major countries such as Russia and China, is also worthy of consideration. The two countries that historically have had "competition" with the U.S. have contributed to putting pressure on the U.S. to end the conflict with the Taliban through a peace agreement.

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The author has declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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