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## Should the US negotiate with the Taliban?

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The Daily Mail [reported](#) Monday that the United States was backing a plan to allow the Taliban to open up a headquarters in Qatar, presumably in order to facilitate negotiations with the Islamist organization to help end the Afghan war.

But is it a good idea to engage in negotiations with the Taliban? Can they be trusted? Will allowing them to open a headquarters grant them undue international legitimacy?

"It's a bad idea," Michel Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute told The Daily Caller.

"Afghans have never lost a war; they just defect to the stronger side. If the United States starts legitimizing the Taliban, we appear weak, and Afghans will flock to make accommodation with the Taliban."

Rubin went on to explain that "[b]etween 1995 and 2000, American diplomats sought to engage the Taliban at up to the cabinet level" and that the "result was disaster."

"Now we are talking about engaging with exactly the same officials that in the run-up to 9/11 lied to our faces with absolutely no reason to believe they are any more sincere now than there were then," he added. **[\(RELATED: Clinton: Kabul attackers will be dealt with\)](#)**

Barak Mendelsohn, senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, told TheDC that the story was "not real news, it's been discussed for a while (Turkey was often mentioned as a possible host.)"

"Whether this is a good idea depends on what the U.S. gets in return," he continued. "On balance I would say that it's a move with little cost though hardly important benefits. I'm not sure that the U.S. is getting here anything besides a known and official Taliban address when all other Taliban channels are uncertain."

Malou Innocent, a senior policy analyst at the Cato Institute who has written that she "endorse[s] diplomatic engagement with most of America's enemies," told TheDC that talks were futile at this point.

"At present, it's doubtful that talks with the Taliban can produce a sustainable peace," she said, "given the resiliency of its cross-border sanctuary, the intractable, decentralized, and adaptable nature of its shadow government, the other regional actors whose support remains key for a long-term settlement, among other factors."

Mendelsohn added that with American troops set to begin withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban has no reason to engage seriously in negotiations.

"The Taliban so far didn't seem to be in a hurry to talk to the U.S., especially not about substance," he said. "And why would they; the U.S. is

leaving anyway and seems desperate to communicate. The Taliban can push as much as it wants. It can make some procedural concessions to reduce the real pressure on its fighting forces, but the bottom line is that they just need to continue and be resilient, everything else is falling into the right places anyway.”

As for bestowing the U.S. bestowing the Taliban with legitimacy by allowing them to open up an international headquarters, Mendelsohn argued the organization already had legitimacy.

“[T]he Taliban already has internal legitimacy and while an office in Qatar will give it somewhat greater international legitimacy this won’t make any substantive difference,” he said. “Control over large swaths of Afghanistan and the recognition of the U.S.-led coalition that they must reach a bargain with the Taliban is ... much more important source of international legitimacy.”

Jamie Fly, executive director of the Foreign Policy Initiative, said that the whole focus of the discussion was misguided. American should be striving to defeat the Taliban, not negotiate with them, he argued.

“It is foolish to believe that a solution to the war in Afghanistan rests in negotiations or reconciliation,” he told TheDC. “We need to defeat the Taliban and show the Afghan people that we stand with them against extremism, rather than elevating those that seek to undo the gains of recent years.”

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