



Organization for Policy Research & Development Studies (DROPS)

Afghan Peace Talks

June 2019

DROPS ANALYSIS

Efforts to Take Talks to Next Level amid a Lingering Lack of Consensus on Afghan Peace

By Bismillah Alizada, Deputy Director of DROPS

June was a busy month for the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (Zalmay Khalilzad), the Afghan government and the Taliban Negotiating Team. Mr. Khalilzad struggled to take the talks to another level, meaning moving to the two remaining points on the agenda: a comprehensive ceasefire and intra-Afghan dialogue. The Afghan government strived to solidify its position and role in the talks. The Taliban put more efforts in further strengthening their positions in the process. As the month drew to a close, there were signs that the talks were inching towards another level, although not very promising at this stage. Moreover, lack of consensus among major actors and players in the Afghan peace (talks) resurfaced.

Ambassador Khalilzad [started off with a fresh round of trips](#) to Afghanistan, Germany, Belgium, Pakistan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in a bid to garner international support for the Afghan peace. In Kabul, Mr. Khalilzad's talks with the Afghan government was [focused on intra-Afghan dialogue and the role Germany can play in the process](#). In Brussels, he [sought full coordination of NATO in the process](#), and stated that the US and NATO will decide together on staying or leaving Afghanistan. In Islamabad, the talks focused on [Pakistan's cooperation](#)

[with regards to peace talks](#) and “further steps” that Pakistan can take towards this objective. Although it was not made clear what was meant by “further steps”, it could be concluded that Pakistan was encouraged to cooperate in taking the talks to the two remaining points on the agenda of talks: a comprehensive ceasefire and intra-Afghan dialogue. Khalilzad’s trip was backed by a surprise trip to Kabul by Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, who [emphasized](#) that “the hour has come for peace in Afghanistan” and [hoped](#) a peace agreement is reached by September.

The Afghan government also made efforts to solidify its position and place in the peace process. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani [created](#) the Ministry of State for Peace Affairs and [appointed](#) Salam Rahimi as his special representative and state ministry for peace affairs. President Ghani also announced that he will [release 887 Taliban prisoners](#) in a gesture of good faith, claiming that the released prisoners will act as ambassadors for peace. The move stirred [harsh reactions](#), mainly from presidential candidates. Meanwhile, to show that the Afghan government has an upper hand on the battle ground, Afghanistan’s National Security Advisor stated during a special interview that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) [will “break Taliban’s backbone in four months.”](#) It remains unclear, however, whether the ANDSF will be able to deliver this promise or not, but the assertion was boastful. President Ghani also sought the support of Pakistan in the process during a [two-day trip](#) to Pakistan where he [insisted](#) that Pakistan and the Taliban have “strong interdependencies”. This move came at a time when Pakistan had invited around [30 political leaders](#) in a peace conference, and all of the participants of the conference were from among the opposition of the government. Although it is too soon to assess whether these efforts could help solidify the position of Afghan government in the peace talks, at least this much is clear that these efforts have not yielded any positive results yet, but [Kabul seems optimistic](#).

Taliban also made bold efforts to strengthen their position in the talks. In an Eid message, the Taliban leader once again insisted that they [will not stop fighting before their objectives are met](#), namely the withdrawal of foreign troops and establishment of an Islamic system. The message was [renounced](#) by Ambassador Khalilzad as “bombastic” in tone and [added](#) that it will only “serve to complicate and disrupt the peace talks.” Meanwhile, the [Taliban sent a high-profile delegation led by Mullah Baradar to hold talks with Chinese officials](#) ahead of the 7th round of talks in Qatar. Although the details of this talk is not publicly available yet, it seems that the Taliban strive to hold talks with major stakeholders in the region as they progress in the talks with the US.

The Taliban and the US [started the 7th round of talks in Qatar](#) on June 29 amid apprehensions by some of the regional actors with regards to the ongoing US-Taliban talks over peace in Afghanistan. Ambassador Reza Bahrami, Iran’s Ambassador to Afghanistan, [warned of a bleak future for Afghanistan](#) on July 19th, and added that the current talks gives the Taliban legitimacy at the cost of weakening the Afghan government. [Indian officials also criticized the lack of transparency](#) in the talks between the US and the Taliban. Amid all the

developments in June, the Taliban [remains hopeful for “an outcome” in the fresh round of talks](#), as does the US and most possibly the Afghan government. However, there is no promising sign that this round of talks can yield substantive outcomes with regards to the two remaining points in the agenda of the talks, i.e. a comprehensive ceasefire and comprehensive intra-Afghan dialogue.

Studies by Afghan/Foreign Think-Tanks and Organizations

Before Doha 7: Afghanistan peace efforts recovering from a lull?

Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN)

The seventh round of United States-Taliban talks in Doha is imminent. But US-Taliban negotiations in Doha for a negotiated solution to the Afghan war have been stalling in recent rounds, after some initial progress. So far they also still exclude the third key actor, the Afghan government. Parties in the so-called intra-Afghan dialogue have also been treading water; so far they have been hosted by the Russian government but should now continue in Doha, too. AAN's Thomas Ruttig looks at what has been achieved so far, the obstacles, including significant gaps between the US and Taliban positions, that still stand in the way of a comprehensive peace agreement and latest US attempts to insert a new dynamic into the Doha talks.

To read the analysis, [click here...](#)

Special Interview with Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation

Ariana Television Network

On June 13, Afghanistan's Ariana Television Network had a special interview with Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation to ask him about the recent developments regarding the Afghan Peace Process, talks with the Taliban, and prospects of these talks and more.

To watch the full interview, [click here...](#)

Special Interview with National Security Advisor Hamdullah

Mohib

Tolonews

In this program, host Lotfullah Najafizada has interviewed Hamdullah Mohib, the National Security Advisor, about Afghanistan-US relations, the Afghan peace process, Mohib's relations with the US government, the country's situation and the upcoming presidential elections.

In this interview, Mohib says his criticism of Zalmay Khalilzad's talks with the Taliban was on behalf of his govt and his people.

The topic of peace is also misused by some [Afghan politicians], Mohib says. He promises to "break the Taliban's backbone in four months" and he believes the stalemate in the battlefield is over.

To watch the full interview, [click here...](#)

Public Talk "Guest Speaker: Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani President Islamic Republic of Afghanistan"

Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI)

Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, delivered a speech at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) during his two-day visit to Pakistan. In this speech, he highlighted areas of cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the importance of regional connectivity and cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia through Afghanistan. He also talked about the Afghan Peace Process and the role of Pakistan therein.

To watch the full address, [click here...](#)

OPINION PIECES & COMMENTARIES

Talking with the Taliban

By Nishank Motwani

Breaking the Impasse in U.S.-Taliban Talks

By Sana Salman

The Afghan Taliban are clear about their goal in the ongoing 18-year conflict — total power, not shared power. From their first emir, Mullah Mohammad Omar, to current leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's leadership has been transparent about its objectives: monopolising power, expelling international military forces, dissolving Afghanistan's security apparatus, and implementing their puritanical version of Islamic rule across the country.

Given the Taliban's objectives, the question is to what extent humanitarian and development aid can be protected from political and security developments? In the context of ongoing peace talks, is there scope for seeking Taliban approval for existing and future service delivery?

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Winning in Afghanistan Requires Taking the Fight to Pakistan

By Michael Rubin

U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad was in Washington, DC last week to brief Capitol Hill on his ongoing talks with the Taliban. The senators were unimpressed, and with reason. There are many flaws in Khalilzad's plan: It revives the pre-9/11 formula of legitimizing Taliban rule in exchange for a Taliban pledge to close

At an estimated accumulated cost of USD \$975 billion from FY 2001 to FY 2019, the massive expenditure of both economic and political capital as well as the heavy casualties in the 18-year old U.S. war in Afghanistan has led the Trump administration to seek an end to the costly conflict—but no end is in sight.

When the United States decided to pursue direct talks with the Taliban last year to negotiate an end to its military presence in the country and pave the way for a peace process, it was hailed as a landmark development in the history of the conflict: the United States has come a long way from 2001 when President Bush doubled down on his stance of “no negotiations” with the Taliban. However, after a sixth round of discussions last month, the U.S. ...

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Talking to the Taliban With the Wrong Assumptions: The Conundrum of Afghan Peace

By Moh. Sayed Madadi

In his 1995 memoir *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara boiled down the American failure in Vietnam to one important factor: America's inability to fully grasp the complexity of its adversaries and the environment in which they operated. He wrote: “[t]he

terror camps; it undercuts the legitimacy of the elected Afghan government; and it discounts the Taliban's long history of insincere diplomacy and fleeting commitments. The biggest problem with Khalilzad's approach, however, is it ignores a simple fact: There can be no peace in Afghanistan so long as Pakistan chooses to undercut Afghan stability and support extremism. The missing piece to the Khalilzad strategy, therefore, is how to bring Pakistan to heel.

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Taliban Unmasked: Afghan Taliban's Continued Symbiotic Relationship with al Qaeda and International Terrorism

By Tamim Asey

At a recent peace conference in Moscow, Taliban representatives sat in front of the Russian media and gave interviews to a select number of Russian women journalists. It was a message of change when compared to their brutal regime and their repressive policies toward Afghan women. The move was calculated and strategic; it was meant to send a message to the world that they have changed and are no longer a threat to regional and global security. The question is, have they really changed and cut ties with Al Qaeda and its allies? Are they different after almost two decades of fighting? Has the Taliban movement been

basic lesson is: understand your opponent...[w]e don't understand the Bosnians, we don't understand the Chinese and we don't really understand the Iranians."

Little has changed in the quarter-century since McNamara's reflection. After 18 years of fighting in Afghanistan, the United States is diving into a peace process based on false assumptions about its primary adversary, the Afghan Taliban.

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The Afghanistan Conundrum

By Amin Saikal

Given Afghanistan's complex web of conflicting interests, separate US and Russian efforts to reach an enduring settlement may not succeed. The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council may need to reach a consensus among themselves and then implement a resolution aimed at stabilizing the country.

In January 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani publicly admitted that without American support, his government and the Afghan National Army (ANA) could not last very long. That remains the case today: the government is in disarray, and the ANA is barely holding out against the Taliban-led insurgency.

Yet US President Donald Trump

fundamentally transformed, or they have just become 'good politicians', i.e. pretenders, sugarcoating themselves into a new role only to change later once they once again assume power?

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Peace Is a Word That the West Has Taken From the Afghans

By Vijay Prashad

An Afghan man and his son watch as soldiers from the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne Division prepare to sweep their home November 7, 2002 in southeastern Afghanistan. Soldiers discovered over a dozen mines and grenades, 14 rocket propelled grenades, and plastic explosives as they searched several compounds as part of Operation Alamo Sweep. (Photo: Scott Nelson/Getty Images)

It's difficult to explain the nature of the Afghanistan peace talks. There is no single table with the combatants arrayed on either side. Talks are not even taking place in the same city, since there are at least two sets of discussions ongoing. One location for the peace talks is Doha, Qatar, where the Taliban is meeting with the U.S. government.

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understandably wants to disentangle America, if possible through a political settlement, from what has become an unwinnable war. As such, the Taliban and their supporters have no ...

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Amid a Spike in Violence, Have Afghan Peace Talks Lost Momentum?

By Johnny Walsh

After rapid progress in early 2019, the Afghan peace process has seemingly slowed. The U.S. chief negotiator, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, said in May that his negotiations with the Taliban were making slow but steady progress, but there has been little headway in starting talks among the various Afghan parties. Meanwhile, violence has ratcheted up, as typically occurs in the spring and summer in Afghanistan. The country's overdue presidential polls are scheduled for late September, further complicating efforts to achieve peace. Can talks succeed amid the violence and political discord? Will the elections drain momentum from the peace process? USIP's Johnny Walsh looks at the Afghan peace process ahead of the next round of talks in late June.

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The Taliban is killing fewer civilians but a worrying new trend is emerging

By Rupert Stone

Pro-government forces in Afghanistan have killed more civilians than the Taliban in the first months of 2019 as all sides claim they are working actively to prevent civilian deaths.

Casualty figures for the war in Afghanistan seem to reinforce the Taliban's cruel and bloodthirsty reputation. The militants consistently harm more civilians than any other party to the conflict, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which provides the most thorough casualty reporting.

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Why the role of Afghan women is important in the current peace talks?

By Amina Zurmati and Qudratullah Zurmati

Over the last 17 years, the United States of America has engaged in backchannel talks with the Taliban to little avail. But for the first time in years, a peace process is underway in earnest in Afghanistan. In early February 2019, landmark peace talks took place in Doha between Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Special Representative for

اجماع منطقه‌ای برای صلح؛ رییس‌جمهور غنی در پی چیست؟

خادم آزاد

مذاکرات صلح افغانستان به رهبری ایالات متحده در قطر آغاز شد. اگرچه این مذاکرات در آستانه‌ی دور هفتم قرار گرفته و تصور عموم این است که ایالات متحده بازی‌گر اصلی منازعه و مصالحه‌ی افغانستان است، اما در سال‌های اخیر، خشونت جاری در افغانستان بازی‌گران و متولیان منطقه‌ای دیگر نیز داشته است. پاکستان مهم‌ترین حامی طالبان در دوران حاکمیت این گروه بر افغانستان و سپس آغاز شورش‌گری آن بوده است. جمهوری اسلامی ایران و روسیه در چهار سال اخیر، مناسبات وسیعی با این گروه برقرار کرده است. هند، در نقطه‌ی مقابل استراتژی پاکستان در امور افغانستان، از نظام سیاسی جدید حمایت می‌کند. چین به‌عنوان یکی از قدرت‌های منطقه‌ای و بین‌المللی، منافع و ملاحظاتی در سرنوشت جنگ و صلح افغانستان دارد. کشورهای آسیای میانه و حاشیه‌ی خلیج فارس نیز منفعی در جنگ و صلح افغانستان و...

[بیشتر بخوانید...](#)

What Do the Taliban Want in Afghanistan? A Lost Constitution Offers Clues

By Mujib Mashal

There was an air of expectation on both sides as the Taliban and American diplomats gathered to meet for the latest round of peace talks on Saturday.

Afghan and Western officials say that if the Taliban express willingness to finally go to the negotiating table with the Afghan government, American diplomats might be willing to play their

Afghanistan Reconciliation, and the Taliban representatives that have promoted the possibility of a negotiated peace further than any previous attempt in the 17-year-long conflict. Renewed hope that a political settlement with the Taliban could be reached has been fostered by some development such that a U.S. State Department spokesperson said the Taliban agreed that peace will require agreement on counterterrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, and a cease-fire (Luce, 2019). Such developments have led to an increased expectation that the 17-year war in Afghanistan could be brought to an end.

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main negotiating card: offering some sort of provisional schedule for the withdrawal of United States troops from Afghanistan.

That phase of agreement has evaded negotiators for more than nine months, through six rounds of talks in Doha, Qatar. The hardest work, however, might come only after the Taliban and Afghan officials agree to begin discussing a political settlement.

The Taliban have remained officially vague about what kind of government they envision. But some clues to how the insurgents view power and ...

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NEWS

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad Travels to Afghanistan, Belgium, Germany, Pakistan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will travel to Afghanistan, Belgium, Germany, Pakistan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates from May 31 – June 16, as part of an overall effort to facilitate a peace process that ends the conflict in Afghanistan.

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Taliban seeking revival of Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan: Nabil

The Taliban are seeking revival of Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, former Afghan intelligence chief Rahmatullah Nabil said on Sunday, amid peace talks between the United States and the Taliban.

Nabil, who is a candidate for September presidential election, said that the Taliban are seeking whole power in Afghanistan.

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Khalilzad Heads To Another Round Of Talks With Taliban

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Peace Zalmay Khalilzad will hold new talks this month with the Taliban in Qatar, the State Department said on Saturday, as momentum builds for a deal to end America's longest war.

Khalilzad has started a new multi-nation trip to different countries over the Afghan peace talks, the statement said.

In this trip, the US Special Envoy will visit Afghanistan, Belgium, Germany, Pakistan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates from May 31 to June 16, the statement said.

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US, Taliban Talks Are 'Very Sensitive': Kay

The NATO Senior Civilian Representative to Afghanistan Nicholas Kay said that the next round of the US and Taliban talks are "very sensitive" and that the alliance remains committed to continue providing support to Afghanistan so that the country does not again become a safe haven for international terrorists.

"We are continuing with our mission. I expect our Defence Ministers to send a strong signal of continued commitment," Kay said in an interview with TOLONews.

Taliban Leader Expects 'Honesty' From US

Taliban's leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada in an Eid message on Saturday stressed on his previous stance about an end to the presence of the US military in Afghanistan and said the group is open for talks but they expect "honesty" from the United States.

He said the Taliban has continued to create a consensus among neighboring and regional countries in its favor and their participation in Moscow conference, where representatives of 12 countries attended, is an example of this "success".

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Kabul Optimistic On A Potential Peace Deal

The Afghan government leaders on Wednesday welcomed US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's remarks about a potential peace agreement with the Taliban as he said that Washington hopes Afghanistan achieves a peace deal ahead of the presidential elections – scheduled for September 28.

Accompanied by the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad Pompeo arrived in Kabul for an unannounced visit on Tuesday. He visited India after his trip to Kabul.

He said that the “real” negotiations will be between the Afghans.

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Critics Lash Out At Ghani Over Prisoners Release Decision

Majority of the 887 prisoners who are expected to be released by the Afghan government are members of the Taliban, critics said, adding that it will have a possible impact on the country's situation and that the decision has been made without wider consultations.

The Presidential Palace has said that these inmates will be released on the order of the president within the next ten days.

Some former government officials lashed out at President Ghani over the controversial order and said that the move looks like a "deal for peace".

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Taliban statement's bombastic tone only serves to disrupt peace talks: US envoy

US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad on Sunday criticized the "bombastic tone" of the Taliban leader's statement, saying it only serves to complicate and disrupt peace talks.

“It was a pleasure to host Secretary Pompeo today at Arg, where we ...

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Taliban Takes 25 Members Of Peace Movement Apparently For Talks

At least 25 members of the People's Peace Movement have been taken by the Taliban probably for talks about issues around the Afghan peace process, one member of the movement confirmed on Sunday.

The 50-member peace convoy began their journey to Taliban-influenced areas in southern Helmand province on Thursday, May 31.

According to one member of the movement, they will meet the Taliban in Musa Qala district – which has been under Taliban influence for the past ...

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In Eid message, Taliban leader says won't cease fighting until goals met

Afghan Taliban leader, Hebatullah Akhundzada, vowed to keep fighting until the group's objectives were reached as he released a message on Saturday to mark the coming Muslim festival of Eid al-Fitr.

In a message released Saturday on the occasion of Eid, Taliban leader Hebatullah Akhundzada said that no one should expect the group to cease fighting until its goals were met. The statement also indicated the group was still not ready to open talks with Afghan government.

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US, NATO Will Decide On Afghanistan Together: Khalilzad

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, who is on a multi-nation visit on Afghan peace, has said that the United States and NATO will make a shared decision on remaining in Afghanistan or leaving the country.

Khalilzad said in a tweet on Thursday that he briefed the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Afghan peace process and thanked them for the “great sacrifices” made and their ongoing commitment.

Khalilzad said that he assured NATO and its allies continued full coordination.

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Visit of Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad

Special Representative for Afghanistan

The Taliban leader’s annual message was first in six rounds of peace talks between the group’s representatives and US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

The sides have cited progress on troop withdrawal and preventing Afghanistan from being used by terrorist groups, ...

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US, Europe Special Envoys Hope Peace Talks Will Start Soon

A meeting of the US-Europe Group for Afghan Peace was held in Berlin on Tuesday with the participation of US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, the head of the UN mission in Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto, special envoys from the EU member countries and Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Idris Zaman where the delegates held wide-ranging discussions on meetings on peace in Afghanistan in Norway, Germany, and Qatar.

Khalilzad said in a tweet that he had productive meetings with German ...

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Taliban Hopeful For 'Outcome' in Afghan Peace Talks With US

ISLAMABAD - The Taliban and the United States are both said to be making “serious efforts” to conclude a

Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad arrived in Kabul today for consultations with leaders of the National Unity Government, political leaders, civil society, and women to discuss progress in U.S. efforts to facilitate an inclusive peace process. His arrival in Kabul follows stops in Islamabad, Berlin, and Brussels.

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US Congress Wants Afghan Women's Presence In Peace Talks

The US Congress has asked the US State Department to include Afghan women in the ongoing peace process and make sure their voices are heard during the negotiations with the Taliban.

In a letter signed by dozens of Congress members, they have asked the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to make sure the achievements of the Afghan women in the past 18 years should be protected.

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In Islamabad, Khalilzad discusses additional steps Pakistan can take on Afghan peace

Visiting Islamabad on Sunday, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad

draft text in their latest round of peace negotiations in Qatar that could lay the ground for finding a political settlement to the war in Afghanistan.

Afghan-born American diplomat, Zalmay Khalilzad, is leading the U.S. team of negotiators in the ongoing ...

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Peace Marchers Discuss US Troop Withdrawal With Taliban

At least 24 members of the People's Peace Movement had discussed the US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan among other topics around peace during a five-day stay in Taliban-influenced Musa Qala district in southern Helmand province, head of the movement Iqbal Khyber said on Friday.

Earlier reports indicated that the peace activists were detained by the Taliban when they entered their territory earlier this week. But the activists rejected the reports.

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Ghani, Khalilzad hold talks with focus on intra-Afghan peace dialogue

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani met with visiting US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad on Sunday evening.

discussed additional steps Pakistan can take to advance Afghan peace process while meeting with its leaders.

During the visit, the diplomat met with Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, Additional Foreign Secretary Aftab ...

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Mohib Says ANDSF Will 'Break Taliban's Backbone In Four Months'

In a rare statement, Afghanistan's National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib has predicted that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) will "break the Taliban's backbone in four months" and he believes the stalemate in the battlefield is over.

A fresh spate of violence continues to grip various regions of the country, including a recent attack by the resurgent Taliban in western Ghor province, which left at least 15 members of the public uprising forces and civilians dead and dozens more wounded.

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Taliban Say Latest Round of Talks with US 'Critical'

ISLAMABAD - The seventh and latest round of peace talks between the U.S.

During the meeting in the presidential palace, Khalilzad briefed Ghani about his recent trips to Pakistan, Europe as part of peace efforts and detailed his future plans, a statement from the palace said.

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Taliban To Activists: No Peace If There Is No Withdrawal Timeline

A group of 24 peace activists who marched through Taliban-controlled Musa Qala district in volatile Helmand province said the group rejected their call for a ceasefire as they see it in favor of foreign forces in Afghanistan.

The activists who stayed in Taliban territory for five days said the Taliban told them that "peace is not possible without a timeline for foreign forces withdrawal".

Earlier reports indicated that the peace activists were detained by the Taliban, but later the peace marchers rejected the reports and said they held talks with the Taliban on issues around peace.

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US, Taliban Open Doha Talks in Fresh Bid to End War

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN - A fresh round of talks between the U.S. and the

and Taliban is "critical," said Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen on Sunday, the second day of talks with Washington's peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in the Mideastern state of Qatar, where the militant group maintains a political office.

Shaheen told The Associated Press both sides are looking for "tangible results" as they try to hammer out the fine print of agreements that will see the eventual withdrawal of over 20,000 U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan, and end America's longest-running war.

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Germany Pledges Facilitating Intra-Afghan Talks

Germany's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Markus Potzel, said at a press conference in Kabul on Wednesday that his country is willing to facilitate intra-Afghan talks as he met with President Ghani and a number of Afghan politicians and senior government officials.

Potzel said that at least 60 people will represent the Afghan government and the Taliban in the meeting. However, the exact date and venue for such a meeting is yet to be agreed upon.

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Abdullah blames Taliban's 'obstinacy' for persistence of war in Afghanistan

Taliban began in Qatar on Saturday, just days after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington is hoping for an Afghan peace agreement before Sept. 1.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed to The Associated Press that negotiations had begun. Originally scheduled to begin in the morning, the two sides sat down mid-afternoon for the seventh time in a series of direct talks that began last year following the appointment of U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

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Govt Releases 170 Taliban Prisoners Amid Peace Efforts

Sources said on Monday that the Afghan government has released at least 170 Taliban inmates from the Pul-e-Charkhi jail and that 130 others are expected to be freed on Tuesday.

According to the sources, the released prisoners were imprisoned on charges of membership and cooperation with the Taliban and were sentenced to years of prison.

The announcement on the release of the prisoners was made by ...

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Don't want peace at any cost: Rula Ghani

Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah on Wednesday said that the war in the country is continuing because of Taliban's obstinacy.

Speaking at a ceremony in Kabul to celebrate Mother's Day, Abdullah said that there is opportunity for peace talks, but the Taliban are insisting on their "unreasonable" stance.

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US Working On Post-Peace Plan For Afghanistan: Wells

The US State Department Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Principal Deputy Assistant, Alice Wells, says that the US and Afghanistan's donor countries are working on a post-peace plan for the country.

Wells appeared before the US Congress' Committee on Foreign Affairs on Thursday where she said the US Special Envoy for Afghan peace Zalmay Khalilzad has made significant progress in the peace talks with the Taliban.

Wells said Washington's main objective is bringing a durable peace in Afghanistan.

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Pompeo Discusses Peace Talks on Surprise Visit to Afghanistan

Afghans don't want peace at any cost, First Lady Rula Ghani said on Sunday.

Speaking at Peace and Reconciliation Summit in Kabul, Rula said that the existing system of governance and the Constitution cannot be traded away in peace process.

She also noted Afghans want sustainable peace not one that is short-lived.

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Putin Hopes Efforts On Afghan Peace Will Product Positive Results

Moscow cooperates with many other countries, including the United States, in efforts to resolve the Afghan issue, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with the Mir broadcaster on Thursday.

"We are certainly concerned about Middle East issues, as well as everything related to Iran's nuclear program and North Korea. We are closely following developments in Afghanistan. By the way, in this connection we continue rather fruitful cooperation with many countries, including the United States who ...

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Intra-Afghan peace talks to begin in less than two weeks:

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said during an unannounced trip to Afghanistan Tuesday "the hour has come for peace" in the war-torn country.

Pompeo met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to discuss ongoing peace talks between the U.S. and the Taliban.

Pompeo told reporters at the U.S. embassy in Kabul the two men "agree that peace is our highest priority and that Afghanistan must never again serve as a platform for international terrorism."

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Kunduz Women Want Peace Efforts To Be Expedited

A group of women's rights activists at a gathering in the northern province of Kunduz on Monday announced their support to the ongoing peace efforts by the Afghan government and the United States with the help of other allies of Afghanistan but said that the process should be expedited.

The activists said that Afghans are tired of war and that all stakeholders should engage in productive talks about finding a political settlement to the 17-year conflict in the country.

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Afghan talks with Taliban to be

Kabul

Intra-Afghan peace talks will begin in less than two weeks, Afghanistan's foreign ministry said on Sunday.

Sibghatullah Ahmadi, a spokesman for Afghan Foreign Ministry, said this following Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani's visit to Germany which is trying to facilitate Afghan talks with Taliban.

Ahmadi said that Germany has guaranteed to facilitate direct negotiations between Afghan

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Taliban Delegation In Beijing Ahead Of Doha Talks: Report

A Taliban delegation is visiting Beijing to hold talks with Chinese officials as part of a peace process ahead of their seventh round of talks with the US in Qatar, a former Taliban spokesman said as quoted by Arab News.

In April this year, US, China and Russia pressed the Taliban to hold talks with Afghan politicians and civilians, as an important step to end the 17-year conflict.

Abdul Hai Mutmayen, who has ...

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Taliban says US agreed to

held 6-7 July in Qatar: official

Intra-Afghan peace talks will be held during 6-7 July in Qatar, Afghan president's special peace envoy told 1TV on Monday.

Umer Daudzai, who is also the head of secretariat of High Peace Council, said that Germany is facilitating the meeting.

The dialogue will be held after the seventh round of US-Taliban talks in Doha, which have focused on Taliban assurances of preventing Afghanistan from being used by terrorist groups and foreign troop withdrawal.

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US Seeks Peace Agreement, Not Withdrawal: Khalilzad

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, says the United States is seeking a "comprehensive peace agreement, not a withdrawal agreement" in its talks with the Taliban.

Khalilzad apparently responded to a Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen's remarks on Tuesday, June 18, who said that the United States has "accepted" to withdraw all its forces from Afghanistan.

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Ghani Seeks Pakistan's Support

'withdraw all troops' from Afghanistan

A Taliban spokesman said on Tuesday that the United States agreed during the negotiations that it would withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan.

Suhail Shaheen, a spokesman for Taliban's political office in Qatar, said on Twitter that the US also agreed that it would avoid any intervention in Afghanistan in the future.

The Taliban have held at least six rounds of talks with the US.

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Ghani Discusses Peace, Elections With British Premier

President Ashraf Ghani met with British Prime Minister Theresa May in London where the two leaders held wide-ranging discussions on the ongoing efforts for peace in Afghanistan, the development of the Afghan security forces and upcoming presidential elections.

Ghani said in the view of regional consensus on the peace in Afghanistan, the role of Britain is quite important on peace.

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Pompeo Hopes for Afghan

for Afghan Peace Talks With Taliban

ISLAMABAD - Afghan President Ashraf Ghani ended a two-day official visit to Pakistan on Friday, where he is said to have sought the neighboring country's support in persuading the Taliban to engage in a peace dialogue with his government.

Ghani's delegation held extensive wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Imran Khan and his team in Islamabad, which focused on resetting

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Pakistan Key To Bringing Peace In Afghanistan: Hekmatyar

Hezb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has praised Pakistan's role in the ongoing peace process for his country and has said that "Pakistan could play a key role in bringing peace in Afghanistan and now they are doing it."

"Pakistan is a very important country and Islamabad could play a key role in bringing peace in Afghanistan and now they are doing it," Hekmatyar said as quoted by Anadolu News Agency.

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Iran's ambassador warns of bleak future for Afghanistan

Peace Deal Before September

ISLAMABAD - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Tuesday during a visit to Afghanistan that the Trump administration is aiming for a peace deal in the war-ravaged country by September.

His visit came as American and Taliban negotiators are scheduled to meet in Qatar later this week (June 29) for the next round of talks in their months-long dialogue aimed at finding a political settlement to the Afghan war.

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Scholars Denounce Terrorism At Int'l Symposium On Abu Hanifa

Religious scholars from many Muslim countries gathered at an international symposium on Imam-e-Azam (the great imam) Abu Hanifa in Kabul on Wednesday where they condemned terrorism and extremism in all its forms and manifestation.

Second Vice President Mohammad Sarwar Danish inaugurated the three-day symposium that would see notable religious figures from...

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Indian official criticizes lack of transparency in US-Taliban talks

Iran's ambassador on Wednesday painted a bleak picture of the future in Afghanistan, adding that Tehran shouldn't be held responsible for it.

Ambassador Reza Bahrami was apparently referring to US peace efforts that have involved several rounds of talks with the Taliban.

He suggested that the Taliban were being granted legitimacy and the Afghan government was being weakened.

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Islamabad Vowed Shift In Its Afghan Policy: Politicians

Senior Afghan politicians who attended a two-day peace conference in the Pakistani city of Murree on Monday said Pakistan has assured to talk to the Taliban leadership to engage in intra-Afghan talks and agree on a ceasefire.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan also confirmed that Pakistan's previous policy towards Afghanistan was wrong and that Islamabad has now brought significant shift on its approach towards its neighboring country.

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NATO says post-peace troop presence in Afghanistan will depend on deal

An Indian official has criticized lack of transparency in peace talks between the United States and the Taliban.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that New Delhi is not aware of full details of US-Taliban talks.

According to the official, US has given no guarantees to New Delhi over the Afghan peace process.

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Essential To Include Reformers In Peace Talks

As talks between the US and Taliban resume this month, both sides are reportedly closer to an agreement tying a US troop withdrawal to Taliban guarantees not to allow foreign militant groups to attack the United States or to operate on Afghan soil. But many Afghans have raised concerns about what a settlement would mean for important gains since 2001, including constitutional guarantees protecting human rights.

The talks are proceeding on the ...

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NATO chief says Afghanistan peace deal closer than ever

Stoltenberg, who was addressing

The presence of NATO troops in Afghanistan after a peace deal will depend on the content of the deal, chief of the alliance said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference ahead of NATO's defense ministerial meeting in Brussels, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that it was too early to expect what kind of presence the alliance will have in Afghanistan after a deal.

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Afghans won't accept return of Islamic Emirate: Khalili

Afghan people will not accept return of Taliban's Islamic Emirate in their country, chairman of High Peace Council said on Wednesday.

Speaking at a ceremony in Kabul, Khalili said that peace under Islamic Emirate would not be real peace.

He said that the Taliban should understand that people reject emirate form of governance.

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Abdul Salam Rahimi appointed as Afghan state minister for peace affairs

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has appointed his chief of staff, Abdul Salam

reporters ahead of NATO's defense ministerial meeting in Brussels, reiterated the alliance's commitment to support peace efforts.

"And the best way to do that is to stay committed to Afghanistan, to continue to provide political support but also to continue to support the Afghan army and security forces with trainers and with funding," Stoltenberg said.

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Both elections and peace are top priorities for UN: envoy

Both elections and peace are top priorities for the United Nations, its envoy to Afghanistan said on Sunday.

"Regarding efforts related to the upcoming presidential elections and the work to create an initial peace framework in Afghanistan, I wish to reiterate that both processes are top priorities for the United Nations," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the U.N. secretary-general's ...

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Taliban, Pakistan Have 'Strong Interdependencies': Ghani

President Ashraf Ghani in an address to the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad on Thursday, June 27, said

Rahimi, as his special representative and state minister for peace affairs.

Rahimi's appointment was announced in a presidential decree released by the Office of Chief of Staff to the President on Saturday.

Rahimi will attend meetings of cabinet, National Security Council, high commissions and councils, according to the decree.

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Taliban kill 26 government militiamen as talks enter crucial stage

KABUL (Reuters) - Taliban militants killed at least 26 members of a pro-government militia in north Afghanistan on Saturday, officials said, as the Islamists and U.S. negotiators were set to begin a seventh round of peace talks in Qatar.

One U.S. official said the meeting was a "make-or-break moment" in efforts to end the 18-year-old war.

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that Pakistan should follow the "strategy of persuasion" in order to create a cooperation environment between the two countries as it has "strong interdependencies" with the Taliban.

Ghani stressed the need for giving up the "bad strategy" which he believes is the repeating of past mistakes in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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Senior Afghan leaders invited to Bhurban moot ahead of Ghani visit

Senior Afghan political leaders have been invited to a peace conference in the scenic town of Bhurban ahead of President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Islamabad.

Former Afghan prime minister and Hizb-e-Islami chief Engineer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is among the senior Afghan politicians who have confirmed participation, a Hizb leader said.

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