

## Rolling Update

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## A Rolling Update of Peace Negotiations with Taliban

### Introduction

This document provides periodic updates on developments related to the peace negotiations with the Taliban, aimed at ending the armed conflict between the Taliban and the post-2001 government in Afghanistan supported militarily by international forces, particularly from the United States. The intention of compiling this document is two-fold.

First, this document provides a synthesis of all past events since 2010 regarding peace negotiations with the Taliban for those unfamiliar with the background and context of the peace negotiations. Second, this document provides monthly updates to summarize the latest developments in peace negotiations.

The latest round of peace negotiations starting in late 2018 appears to have been envisaged as a two-stage process. The first stage is an agreement between the Taliban and the United States while the second stage is an agreement to be reached between the Taliban and all other Afghan stakeholders in “intra-Afghan” peace talks.

The first stage has been formally completed with the signing of a peace agreement by the Taliban and the United States. The second stage is expected to start in September 2020.

All the information on this periodic update drawn from on secondary sources including news reports and analyses and statements by various stakeholders.

### Key Years

#### 2010

Since 2010, the Government of Afghanistan has made several unsuccessful attempts to make peace with the Taliban to end the conflict. Until very recently, these initiatives were unheeded by the Taliban who have consistently refused talks with the Afghan government and have instead insisted on having direct peace talks with the United States as the occupying force in the country.

#### 2014

Attaining peace has been a priority of the National Unity Government (NUG) since its formation in 2014. President Ghani approached the regional countries, particularly Pakistan, to help Afghanistan in its efforts toward peace. He also made efforts to convince the international community that a peace process led and administered by Afghans could be successful.

The Kabul process aiming to build a regional and international consensus on an “Afghan led, Afghan owned” peace process was launched in June 2017. During the first Kabul Conference, President Ghani outlined his efforts to convince Pakistan to cooperate with his government in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table, and stated that Pakistan had rejected to cooperate and that it was unclear what Pakistan wanted from Afghanistan.[1]

[1] Center for Strategic & Regional Studies. (2018, February 17). *The upcoming meeting of the Kabul Process and the fate of the peace talks*. Retrieved March 2, 2019, from CSRS: <http://csrskabul.com/en/blog/the-upcoming-meeting-of-the-kabul-process-and-the-fate-of-the-peace-talks/>

## 2018

The second round of the Kabul Peace Process was organized on February 28, 2018. In this round, President Ashraf Ghani offered the Taliban peace talks without preconditions. The proposal included amnesty for Taliban fighters, recognition of the Taliban as a political party, amendment of the Constitution, and lifting sanctions on Taliban leaders.[2] The Taliban, however, did not accept this offer, stating that they would start their spring offensive a month later in April.

In September 2018, US President, Donald Trump, appointed Zalmay Khalilzad as U.S. Special Envoy for Afghan Peace and Reconciliation. The appointment of Khalilzad, an Afghan-American who previously worked as US ambassador to Afghanistan, was a serious indication by Washington to reach a peace deal through negotiations. [3] To gather regional and international support, Khalilzad started his consultation meetings in Islamabad, Riyadh, and Doha. He also visited Russia and subsequently met with President Ashraf Ghani, Afghan political figures, and some civil society representatives to hear their opinions, priorities and concerns regarding a peace settlement.[4]

The first round of talks between US envoy and Taliban delegation took place on October 12, 2018 in Doha, Qatar. [5] According to Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, the group discussed ending Afghan conflict and agreed to continue similar meetings in the future.[6] The second round of talks between US envoy and high-ranking Taliban members, including Khairullah Khairkhwa and Taliban military chief, Mohammad Fazl, took place in November 2018 in Doha, Qatar. However, the US State Department refused to comment on the meeting.[7]

Meanwhile, at the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in November 2018, President Ghani presented his roadmap for reaching peace with the Taliban. He introduced a 12-member negotiating team, consisting of men and women, led by Abdul Salam Rahimi, his Chief of Staff. The President added that his government had the potential and capacity to pursue peace negotiations and that Afghanistan had entered a new chapter in the peace process. The President offered an unconditional peace negotiation, but he drew redlines for a peace settlement. Respecting the Afghan Constitution and women's rights as well as preventing interference of foreign terrorist and criminal groups in internal affairs of the country were specified as the redlines for the Government of Afghanistan in the proposed negotiations.[8]

Also, in November 2018, Russia hosted the first round of peace talks between a Taliban delegation and the member of the High Peace Council, a non-government body responsible for overseeing peace efforts in Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan did not have an official delegation at this event but delegates of more than 10 countries including China, Pakistan, India, Iran, and Central Asian states were present.[9] The Afghan delegation reiterated the offer of peace talks without pre-condition while the Taliban reaffirmed that they would only talk about peace with the United States. The Taliban also reiterated their position regarding the full withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and the reform of the Afghan Constitution based on Islamic Sharia Law.[10]

On December 18, 2018, US and Taliban delegations held the third round of negotiations in the golf state of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE), in the presence of-

[2] Calamur, K. (2018, March 28). "Is Peace on the Horizon for Afghanistan?" Retrieved March 2, 2019, from The Atlantic: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/03/afghanistan-taliban-tashkent-conference/556508/>

[3] Osman, B. (2018, September 5). "As New U.S. Envoy Appointed, Turbulent Afghanistan's Hopes of Peace Persist." Retrieved March 3, 2019, from International Crisis Group: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/new-us-envoy-appointed-turbulent-afghanistans-hopes-peace-persist>

[4] Constable, P. (2018, October 13). "Taliban says US envoy held talks on possible paths to end Afghan war." Retrieved March 2, 2019, from CITIZEN: <https://www.princegeorgecitizen.com/washington-post/international/taliban-says-us-envoy-held-talks-on-possible-paths-to-end-afghan-war-1.23462914>

[5] Nelson, C., & Shah, S. (2018, October 12). *U.S. Envoy Meets Taliban In Push for Afghan Peace Talks*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from The Wall Street Journal: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-envoy-meets-taliban-in-push-for-afghan-peace-talks-1539377851>; and, ALJAZEERA. (2018, October 13). *Afghanistan: Taliban confirms talks with US peace envoy in Qatar*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/envoy-afghan-peace-meets-taliban-officials-qatar-181013084549975.html>

[6] Radio Free Afghanistan. (2018, October 13). *U.S. Envoy Briefs Afghan Leaders On Peace Effort After Reportedly Meeting Taliban*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/u-s-envoy-briefs-afghan-leaders-on-peace-effort-after-reportedly-meeting-taliban/29541923.html>

[7] Amiri, S. S. (2020, March 19). *A Summary of the Peace Process*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/summary-peace-process>; and, Radio Free Afghanistan. (2018, November 18). *Afghan Taliban Reportedly Holds Talks With U.S. Envoy In Qatar*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghan-taliban-reportedly-holds-talks-with-u-s-envoy-in-qatar/29607328.html>

[8] Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. (2018, November 28). "Afghanistan's Ghani Presents 'Road Map' For Peace Talks at UN Conference." Retrieved March 2, 2019, from <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-ghani-roadmap-peace-talks-un-conference-/29626218.html>

[9] BBC. (2018, November 9). "Afghanistan war: Taliban attend landmark peace talks in Russia." Retrieved March 2, 2019, from BBC NEWS: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46155189>

[10] Kiselyova, M. (2018, November 9). "Taliban attends peace talks in Moscow for first time, no progress reported." Retrieved March 3, 2019, from REUTERS: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-afghanistan-taliban/taliban-attends-peace-talks-in-moscow-for-first-time-no-progress-reported-idUSKCN1NE159>

-the representatives of UAE, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, however, the Taliban refused to meet with the Afghan government delegation who were also in UAE.[11]

## 2019

The second round of talks in Moscow between Afghan political figures and the Taliban delegation took place in February 2019. The outcome of this two-day event was the agreement for a roadmap to end the conflict. The first step in this roadmap consists of a full withdrawal of foreign troops and the Taliban's commitment to respect the fundamental rights of Afghans. Both sides described the talks as "very satisfactory" and "very successful".[12]

Both parties agreed on a nine-point statement which emphasizes the need to reach a peace deal, continued for "intra-Afghan" dialogue – despite the fact that the Government of Afghanistan was not included in these talks, direct talks between the United States and the Taliban, systematic reform in national institutions, inclusion of regional countries in the process, complete withdrawal of foreign forces, assurance that Afghanistan's territory will not be used against any other country, protection of women's rights as per Islamic provisions, protection of freedom of speech as per Islamic provision, attracting development aid for Afghanistan's reconstruction, removal of Taliban leaders from the United Nations' blacklist, and opening a Taliban office in Doha, Qatar.[13]

The third round of talks in Moscow between Afghan political figures and the Taliban took place in May 2019,

where the parties discussed continuation of intra-Afghan talks, prisoner swap, ceasefire, foreign troops withdrawal, preserving Afghan sovereignty and women's rights, however, the parties did not reach an agreement.[14]

In July 2019, Afghan politicians, Journalists, civil society actors and youth met with Taliban delegation in Doha, Qatar, resulting in a joint-resolution.[15] Among others, supporting US-Taliban negotiations, unconditional release of elderly, disabled or ill inmates, stopping attacks on schools, religious establishments, hospitals, Bazaars and dams, as well as ensuring women's rights in any future political settlement were the provisions of this resolution. [16]

Similarly, the talks between US special envoy and the Taliban delegation continued in 2019. The fourth round of talks between the United States and the Taliban began on January 21, 2019 in Doha, Qatar.[17] According to the framework that has emerged from the peace talks, in the event of a negotiated peace, the Taliban would ensure that Afghanistan would not be used as a safe haven for terrorists or become a base for terrorists to launch attacks against the U.S. or its allies. In return, the United States would fully withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan. The framework is also said to have provisions for "enforcement mechanisms" though no details are available on how these mechanisms will work or who will enforce them.[18]

According to Khalilzad, the Taliban will ultimately agree to a ceasefire and direct talks with the Afghan government, a claim that has been denied by the Taliban.[19]

[11] ALJAZEERA. (2018, December 17). *Taliban meet US officials in United Arab Emirates*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/taliban-meet-officials-uae-monday-181217063219519.html>; and, Radio Free Afghanistan. (2018, December 18). *Afghan Taliban, U.S. Officials Meet In U.A.E. As Peace Efforts Intensify*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghan-taliban-us-officials-meet-in-uae-as-peace-efforts-intensify/29662366.html>; and, Amiri, S. S. (2020, March 19). *A Summary of the Peace Process*.

Retrieved July 20, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/summary-peace-process>

[12] Higgins, A., & Mashal, M. (2019, February 6). "Taliban Peace Talks in Moscow End with Hope the U.S. Exits, if Not Too Quickly." Retrieved March 3, 2019, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/world/asia/taliban-afghanistan-peace-talks-moscow.html>

[13] ISW NEWS. (2019, February 9). "Joint Statement by Afghan Political Leaders and Taliban Representatives at the Moscow Summit." Retrieved March 4, 2019, from <http://www.english.iswnews.com/4786/joint-statement-by-afghan-political-leaders-and-taliban-representatives-at-the-moscow-summit/>

[14] TOLONews. (2019, May 30). *Moscow Meeting Wrapped Up With A Joint Statement*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/moscow-meeting-wrapped-joint-statement>

[15] TOLONews. (2019, July 6). *Delegates In Doha For Intra-Afghan Talks*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghan-delegates-en-route-doha-intra-afghan-talks>

[16] Ruttig, T. (2019, July 11). *AAN Q&A: What came out of the Doha intra-Afghan conference?* Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Afghanistan Analysts Network: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/aan-qa-what-came-out-of-the-doha-intra-afghan-conference/>; and, TOLONews. (2019, July 9). *Doha Conference: Taliban Agrees To Reduce Violence*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/doha-conference-taliban-agrees-reduce-violence>

[17] Radio Free Afghanistan. (2019, January 23). *U.S. Envoy Meets In Qatar With Afghan Taliban Representatives*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/u-s-envoy-meets-in-qatar-with-afghan-taliban-representatives/29725923.html>; and, Gul, A. (2019, January 21). *Taliban, US Open Afghan Peace Talks in Qatar*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from VOA News: <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/taliban-us-open-afghan-peace-talks-qatar>

[18] Associated Press. (2019, February 8). "Khalilzad says there's tentative 'framework,' but much work still to do." Retrieved March 3, 2019, from The Columbian: <https://www.columbian.com/news/2019/feb/08/khalilzad-says-theres-tentative-framework-but-much-work-still-to-do/>

[19] Mashal, M. (2019, January 28). "U.S. and Taliban Agree in Principle to Peace Framework, Envoy Says." Retrieved March 2, 2019, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/28/world/asia/taliban-peace-deal-afghanistan.html>

The fifth round of talks between Zalmay Khalilzad and newly-released Mullah Baradar kicked off on February 25, 2019 in Doha, Qatar which lasted for 11 days. US envoy reported progress in the talks, however, no agreement was reached and the Taliban did not reverse their decision to meet with Afghan government delegation.[20]

Similarly, the sixth round of talks were also held in Doha, Qatar which started on April 30, 2019.[21] The main agenda for this round was foreign troops withdrawal and counter-terrorism assurances. Taliban political spokesperson in Doha, Suhail Shaheen, said that the talks ended with “progress” and described the round as “positive and constructive”. [22] Despite Taliban’s deadly attacks, the seventh round of talks between US envoy and the Taliban started on June 29, 2019 in Doha, Qatar.[23] This round of negotiation was focused on the timeline of foreign troops withdrawal and assurances that Afghan soil will not be used against US and its allies.[24]

Further, the eighth round of talks kicked off on August 3, 2019 in Doha, Qatar which lasted for 9 days.[25] This round of negotiation was concluded with no agreement,

with both sides stating that they will consult their leadership on next steps.[26]

The ninth round of talks between US envoy for Afghan reconciliation and the Taliban delegation began on August 22, 2019 in Doha, Qatar.[27] In this round, both parties reached an agreement “in principle”, conditional to president Trump’s approval. The agreement entailed withdrawing 5,400 troops from five bases in Afghanistan within 135 days, conditional to significant reduction in violence and counter-terrorism assurances.[28]

In September 2019, the Taliban delegation were scheduled to meet President Trump at Camp David where they would sign the peace agreement, however, after claiming the responsibility of a deadly attack in Kabul where 12 people including a US service member were killed, President Trump cancelled the meeting and called-off the peace talks.[29] While the Taliban expressed they were- “shocked” to hear the decision just before signing the agreement, they mentioned that their “doors are open” should the US decides to resume peace talks.[30]

[20] Radio Free Afghanistan. (2019, March 13). *U.S.-Taliban Peace Talks End In Doha With 'Real Strides' But No Deal* . Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/u-s--taliban-peace-talks-end-in-doha-with-real-strides-but-no-deal/29818588.html>; and, BBC. (2019, February 25). *Afghan peace talks: Taliban co-founder meets top White House envoy* . Retrieved July 20, 2020, from BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47351369>

[21] ALJAZEERA. (2019, May 1). *Khalilzad meets Mullah Baradar as Doha peace talks resume* . Retrieved July 20, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/taliban-due-resume-doha-peace-talks-bid-war-190501061030851.html>

[22] Sediqi, A., Jain, R., Jones, G., & Cawthorne, A. (2019, May 9). *Sixth round of Taliban-U.S. peace talks end*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from REUTERS: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-talks/sixth-round-of-taliban-u-s-peace-talks-end-idUSKCN1SF1PR>; and, ALJAZEERA. (2019, May 9). *US-Taliban talks end in Doha with 'some progress': Taliban* . Retrieved July 20, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/taliban-talks-doha-progress-taliban-190509150545009.html>

[23] Radio Free Afghanistan. (2019, June 29). *U.S. Envoy, Taliban Begin New Round Of Afghan Peace Talks In Qatar* . Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/us-envoy-taliban-begin-new-round-of-afghan-peace-talks-in-qatar/30027340.html>; and, Amiri, S. S. (2020, March 19). *A Summary of the Peace Process*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/summary-peace-process>

[24] Radio Free Afghanistan. (2019, June 30). *New Round Of Afghan Peace Talks Held Amid Deadly Attacks* . Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/new-round-of-afghan-peace-talks-opens-in-qatar/30028307.html>

[25] ALJAZEERA. (2019, August 13). *'Peace deal is near': What we know so far about US-Taliban talks* . Retrieved July 20, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/taliban-talks-peace-afghanistan-190510062940394.html>; and, Amiri, S. S. (2020, March 19). *A Summary of the Peace Process*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/summary-peace-process>

[26] ALJAZEERA. (2019, August 13). *'Peace deal is near': What we know so far about US-Taliban talks* . Retrieved July 20, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/taliban-talks-peace-afghanistan-190510062940394.html>; and, Gul, A. (2019, August 12). *Taliban, US End Latest Round of Talks Without Announcing Outcome*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from VOA News: <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/taliban-us-end-latest-round-talks-without-announcing-outcome>

[27] Sediqi, A., Jain, R., Ahmad, J., & Williams, A. (2019, August 22). *Ninth round of U.S., Taliban peace talks start in Qatar*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from REUTERS: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-talks/ninth-round-of-us-taliban-peace-talks-start-in-qatar-idUSKCN1VC2A7>

[28] Gaouette, N. (2019, September 10). *US and Taliban reach agreement 'in principle' on Afghanistan, envoy says*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/02/politics/us-afghanistan-agreement-in-principle/index.html>; and, ALJAZEERA. (2019, September 2). *US envoy shows draft of deal with Taliban to Afghan president* . Retrieved July 21, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/envoy-shows-draft-peace-deal-taliban-afghan-president-190902111633344.html>; and, Mashal, M. (2019, January 28). *U.S. and Taliban Agree in Principle to Peace Framework, Envoy Says*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/28/world/asia/taliban-peace-deal-afghanistan.html>

[29] BBC. (2019, September 9). *Afghan peace deal: Trump says Taliban talks are 'dead'* . Retrieved July 21, 2020, from BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49642655>; and, Stewart, P., & Lange, J. (2019, September 7). *Trump says he canceled peace talks with Taliban over attack* . Retrieved July 21, 2020, from REUTERS: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-mckenzie-idUSKCN1VS0MX>; and, Romero, D., De Luce, D., Yusufzai, M., & Mengli, A. (2019, September 8). *Trump says he's canceling Afghan peace talks, secret meeting with Taliban leaders* . Retrieved July 21, 2020, from NBC News: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/trump-says-he-s-canceling-afghanistan-peace-talks-secret-meeting-n1051141>

[30] BBC. (2019, September 18). *Afghanistan war: Taliban tell Trump their 'doors are open'* . Retrieved July 21, 2020, from BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49729612>

In November 2019, President Trump made a visit to Bagram Airfield and announced that the talks will soon resume between US and the Taliban. The revival of peace talks came days after a prisoner swap between US and the Taliban in which two American University of Afghanistan professors were exchanged with Taliban commanders.[31]

The talks between US envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban chief negotiator, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, started on December 7, 2019 in Doha, Qatar.[32] However, the negotiation was paused due to Taliban's attack on Bagram Airfield on December 11, 2019.[33]

## 2020 (To July 30)

The eleventh round of talks between US and Taliban kicked off on January 17, 2020 in Doha, with ceasefire as the main agenda of the negotiation.[34] However, the resumed talks only led to a 7-day "reduction in violence" between US forces, Taliban militants and Afghan government which came into effect on February 22, 2020 and was a pre-condition for signing the US-Taliban peace deal.[35]

On February 29, 2020 US and the Taliban signed the historic peace deal in Doha Qatar. The deal entails a fully-

fledged US and NATO troops withdrawal within 14 months, counter-terrorism assurances from Taliban, the start of Intra-Afghan dialogues and a complete ceasefire among all parties.[36] The Taliban declared the agreement as "termination of occupation of Afghanistan" and described it as a "great achievement".[37]

The agreement also provisions prisoner swap to include the exchange of 5,000 Taliban militants and 1,000 Afghan security forces before the start of the intra-Afghan dialogues.[38] Despite initial resistance toward the prisoner swap, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani, signed a decree on March 11, 2020 laying down the manner and conditions for release of Taliban prisoners.[39]

The first batch of Taliban prisoners were released in April 2020.[40] So far, the government of Afghanistan has released a total of 4,400 Taliban fighters, however, the government has said it will not release the remaining 600 prisoners on the list as they are very dangerous and the "law does not allow" them to be released.[41] The government has asked Taliban to provide new names, whilst, the militant group has accused Afghan government of fabricating criminal cases against the prisoners.[42] If both parties reach an understanding to release the-

[31] ALJAZEERA. (2019, November 29). *In surprise trip to Afghanistan, Trump says Taliban talks resumed*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/surprise-trip-afghanistan-trump-taliban-talks-resumed-191128190727618.html?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_medium=article\\_page&utm\\_campaign=read\\_more\\_links](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/surprise-trip-afghanistan-trump-taliban-talks-resumed-191128190727618.html?utm_source=website&utm_medium=article_page&utm_campaign=read_more_links); and, Gul, A. (2019, November 23). *Trump Suggests Peace Talks With Afghan Taliban Back on Track*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from VOA News: <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/trump-suggests-peace-talks-afghan-taliban-back-track>

[32] Radio Free Afghanistan. (2019, December 7). *U.S., Taliban Confirm Peace Talks Resumed In Qatar*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-us-relaunches-peace-talks-with-afghan-taliban/30313275.html>

[33] Radio Free Afghanistan. (2019, December 13). *U.S. Envoy Briefs Pakistani Officials On Peace Talks With Taliban*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/us-envoy-briefs-pakistani-officials-on-peace-talks-with-taliban/30325212.html>

[34] Khaama Press. (2020, January 17). *US and Taliban discuss signing a 'peace deal': Shaheen*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from The Khaama Press: <https://www.khaama.com/us-and-taliban-discuss-signing-a-peace-deal-shaheen-89790865/>; and, Afghanistan Times. (2020, January 20). *Mystery surrounds US-Taliban peace negotiations*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from Afghanistan Times: <http://www.afghanistantimes.af/mystery-surrounds-us-taliban-peace-negotiations/>; and, Yusufzai, R. (2019, December 15). *10th time lucky?* Retrieved July 21, 2020, from TNS: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/582890-10th-time-lucky>

[35] Qazi, S. (2020, February 22). *US-Taliban truce begins, raising hopes of peace deal*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/pact-taliban-reducing-violence-start-saturday-200221094340829.html>; and, Graham-Harrison, E. (2020, January 16). *Taliban offer to stand down fighters to restart peace talks with US*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/16/taliban-offer-to-stand-down-fighters-to-restart-peace-talks-with-us>; and, Popalzai, E., Paton-Walsh, N., Stracqualursi, V., & Hansler, J. (2020, February 21). *Seven-day reduction in violence in Afghanistan to begin, US announces*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/02/21/politics/us-taliban-reduction-in-violence-afghanistan/index.html>

[36] Qazi, S. (2020, February 29). *Afghanistan's Taliban, US sign agreement aimed at ending war*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/afghanistan-taliban-sign-deal-america-longest-war-200213063412531.html>

[37] *Ibid*.

[38] BBC. (2020, February 29). *Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51689443>; and, Graham-Harrison, E., Sabbagh, D., Makoi, A., & Borger, J. (2020, February 29). *US and Taliban sign deal to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/29/us-taliban-sign-peace-agreement-afghanistan-war>

[39] IANS. (2020, April 9). *Afghanistan government releases first batch of 100 Taliban prisoners*. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from The Free Press Journal: <https://www.freepressjournal.in/world/afghanistan-government-releases-first-batch-of-100-taliban-prisoners>

[40] *Ibid*.

[41] Ariana News. (2020, July 16). *Atmar says no law allows release of remaining 600 prisoners from Taliban list*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from Ariana News: <https://ariananews.af/atmar-says-no-law-allows-release-of-remaining-600-prisoners-from-taliban-list/>

[42] Live Mint. (2020, July 8). *Afghanistan says will not release 600 'too dangerous' Taliban*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from Live Mint: <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/afghanistan-says-will-not-release-600-too-dangerous-taliban-11594214970445.html>

-remaining prisoners, it is expected that the intra-Afghan dialogues start within a week of the completion of the swap. The agreed site for the first intra-Afghan negotiation is said to be Doha, the capital of Qatar.[43]

Since the US-Taliban peace agreement, the insurgency group has intensified their offensive on Afghan forces, while halting their attacks on foreign troops. Within 45 days of signing the agreement, Taliban have reportedly conducted 4,500 attacks in Afghanistan, marking a 70% increase from the same period last year. The data also indicate that Afghan National Security Forces' (ANSF) casualty has sharply increased, while, Taliban casualty has dramatically declined compared to previous year.[44]

Similarly, in June 2020, Afghanistan's National Security Council said that ANSF witnessed their bloodiest week in the 19 years of Afghan war.[45] While Afghan government and its allies condemned the attacks and said it is in violation of the provisions of "reduction in violence" as stipulated in the agreement, Taliban dismissed the claims and stated that their attacks on Afghan government targets have substantially decreased.[46]

This is while less than a week ago Taliban raided Afghan Directorate of Security in Aybak, Samangan where 11

people were killed and 63 others were injured, the insurgent group took responsibility for the attack and said that it is a message to those who "do not understand the language of diplomacy".[47] The domestic and international calls on Taliban to stop attacks before the start of intra-Afghan negotiations is dismissed as "illogical" by the insurgent group.[48]

To bolster peace efforts, Afghan government dissolved the Secretariat of High Peace Council and handed over its authorities to the State Ministry for Peace.[49] The ministry will be responsible for all peace-related issues and to build and strengthen national, regional and international consensus around peace.[50] On May 17, 2020 President Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah signed a power-sharing agreement to end the political impasse that was created after the result of the 2019 election was announced, both frontrunners had claimed presidency and held parallel inauguration in March 2020.[51]

Among others, the agreement paved the way for Abdullah Abdullah to appoint half of the cabinet, including State Minister for Peace and become the Chairman of High Council for National Reconciliation.[52] However, Abdullah has been criticized by a number of politician and Kabul residents for his passive role and not doing anything-

[43] ALJAZEERA. (2020, June 15). *Afghan government, Taliban agree on Doha as venue for talks*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/afghan-government-taliban-agree-doha-venue-peace-talks-200615054551706.html>; and, Amiri, S. S. (2020, June 7). *Intra-Afghan Negotiations to be Held in Doha: Sources*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/intra-afghan-negotiations-be-held-doha-sources>

[44] Shalizi, H., Sediqi, A. Q., & Jain, R. (2020, May 1). *Taliban step up attacks on Afghan forces since signing U.S. deal: data*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from REUTERS: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-afghanistan-taliba/taliban-step-up-attacks-on-afghan-forces-since-signing-u-s-deal-data-idUSKBN22D5S7>

[45] Tanzeem, A. (2020, June 22). *Afghan Security Forces Suffer Bloodiest Week in 19 Years*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from VOA News: <https://www.voanews.com/usa/afghan-security-forces-suffer-bloodiest-week-19-years>; and, NEWS WIRES. (2020, June 26). *Afghanistan reports 'deadliest' week in its 19 years of conflict*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from France 24: <https://www.france24.com/en/20200623-afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks-violence-ashraf-ghani>

[46] Shalizi, H., Sediqi, A. Q., & Jain, R. (2020, May 1). *Taliban step up attacks on Afghan forces since signing U.S. deal: data*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from REUTERS: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-afghanistan-taliba/taliban-step-up-attacks-on-afghan-forces-since-signing-u-s-deal-data-idUSKBN22D5S7>; and, Tanzeem, A. (2020, June 22). *Afghan Security Forces Suffer Bloodiest Week in 19 Years*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from VOA News: <https://www.voanews.com/usa/afghan-security-forces-suffer-bloodiest-week-19-years>

[47] Gul, A. (2020, July 13). *Taliban Attack on Afghan Spy Agency's Office Kills 11*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from VOA News: <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/taliban-attack-afghan-spy-agencys-office-kills-11>; and, ALJAZEERA. (2020, July 13). *Taliban car bomb attack on Afghan intelligence compound kills 11*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/dozens-injured-car-bomb-blast-afghan-spy-agency-office-200713074223424.html>

[48] Radio Free Afghanistan. (2020, July 13). *Taliban: Calls For Halting War Before Afghan Peace Talks 'Illogical'*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from Gandhara: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/taliban-calls-for-halting-war-before-afghan-peace-talks-illogical-/30722340.html>

[49] TOLONews. (2019, July 27). *Ghani Dissolves High Peace Council's Secretariat*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/president-ghani-dissolves-high-peace-council>

[50] Noori, L. (2019, July 5). *State Ministry for Peace Affairs to Follow All Peace-Related Issues, Presidential Office*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from Bakhtar News: <http://www.bakhtarnews.com.af/eng/politics/item/38841-state-ministry-for-peace-affairs-to-follow-all-peace-related-issues-presidential-office.html>; and, Welsh, T. (2020, January 28). *Q&A: The new Afghan Peace Ministry's role in conflict resolution*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from Devex: <https://www.devex.com/news/q-a-the-new-afghan-peace-ministry-s-role-in-conflict-resolution-96438>

[51] Adili, A. Y. (2020, May 20). *End of the Post-Election Impasse? Ghani and Abdullah's new power-sharing formula*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from Afghanistan Analyst Network: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/end-of-the-post-election-impasse-ghani-and-abdullahs-new-power-sharing-formula/>; and, ALJAZEERA. (2020, May 17). *Afghanistan: Ghani and Abdullah sign power-sharing deal*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/afghanistan-ghani-abdullah-sign-power-sharing-deal-200517105526348.html>

[52] Watkins, A. (2020, May 20). *Afghan Leaders End Political Impasse*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from CRISIS GROUP: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/afghan-leaders-end-political-impasse>

-related to peace since assuming the role. This is while Abdullah's spokesperson says that Abdullah has been meeting with political figures, women and youth representative, and that peace agenda is their priority.[53]

In late July, Taliban announced that they are ready to start intra-Afghan talks after Eid al-Adha conditional to release of their 600 remaining prisoners.[54] The announcement was followed by the latest reshuffle of Taliban negotiating team in Doha, Qatar. The Taliban released a list of 20-member negotiating team to lead their peace negotiations with Afghan government, to include 13 members of Taliban leadership council.[55]

While some high-ranking officials in Afghan government still maintain that the 600 Taliban prisoners based on a pre-list won't be released; on July 25, fifty Taliban

prisoners were freed, however, it is not clear if they are the ones on the Taliban issued list or the alternate list that Afghan government provided for Taliban in mid-July.[56]

In an unprecedented move, on July 28, 2020, Taliban announced three-day ceasefire during Eid al-Adha. Since June 2019, this is the third ceasefire among warring parties.[57] The ceasefire announcement is followed by the Taliban supreme leader's, Hibatullah Akhundzada, Eid message in which he reaffirmed the groups' intention of establishing an "Islamic government", and emphasized that the group is not looking for monopoly of power and that the sovereignty and strength of an "Islamic system" is in Afghans from all ethnic backgrounds united together. [58] The three-day ceasefire is welcomed by Afghan government and its international allies.[59]

[53] Ansar, M. (2020, July 13). *Politicians Criticize Abdullah for Inactivity in New Role* . Retrieved July 22, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/politicians-criticize-abdullah-inactivity-new-role>

[54] Gannon, K. (2020, July 24). *Taliban Ready for Talks With Kabul After Eid Holiday* . Retrieved July 26, 2020, from THE DIPLOMAT: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/taliban-ready-for-talks-with-kabul-after-eid-holiday/>; and, Ariana News. (2020, July 24). *Taliban says conditionally ready to start negotiations after Eid al-Adha*. Retrieved July 26, 2020, from Ariana News: <https://ariananews.af/taliban-says-conditionally-ready-to-start-negotiations-after-eid-al-adha/>

[55] Mehmood, A. (2020, July 20). *Taliban Chief Inducts Trusted Aides for Intra-Afghan Peace Talks* . Retrieved July 26, 2020, from The Medialine: <https://themedialine.org/by-region/taliban-chief-inducts-trusted-aides-for-intra-afghan-peace-talks/>

[56] TeleTrader. (2020, July 26). *Afghanistan releases another 50 Taliban prisoners* . Retrieved July 26, 2020, from TELETRADER NEWS: <https://www.teletrader.com/afghanistan-releases-another-50-taliban-prisoners/news/details/52777841?internal=1&ts=1595781387057>

[57] TOLONews. (2020, July 28). *Taliban Announces 3-Day Ceasefire for Eid* . Retrieved July 29, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/taliban-announces-3-day-ceasefire-eid?fbclid=IwAR3ztUMk6BIG3-q8dVQsgmOvBbi8CJfPG2LHxnbEbqa6HswuqFqP0byRkqw>

[58] Nekzad, K. (2020, July 28). *Taliban Head Seeks 'Pure Islamic Govt,' But Not 'Monopoly'* . Retrieved July 29, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/taliban-head-seeks-pure-islamic-govt-not-monopoly/>; and, Tanzeem, A. (2020, July 28). *Afghan Peace Talks Set to Start as Taliban Announce Eid Cease-Fire* . Retrieved July 29, 2020, from VOA News: <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/afghan-peace-talks-set-start-taliban-announce-eid-cease-fire>

[59] Ariana News. (2020, July 28). *Govt welcomes Taliban's Eid ceasefire, agrees to observe the truce*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from Ariana News: <https://ariananews.af/govt-welcomes-talibans-eid-ceasefire-agrees-to-observe-the-truce/>; and, The News. (2020, July 29). *US welcomes Afghan ceasefire as hopes for peace talks rise* . Retrieved July 29, 2020, from The News: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/693824-us-welcomes-afghan-ceasefire-as-hopes-for-peace-talks-rise>; and, TOLONews. (2020, July 29). *US, NATO Welcome Eid Truce, Urge Intra-Afghan Talks* . Retrieved July 29, 2020, from TOLONews: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/us-nato-welcome-eid-truce-urge-intra-afghan-talks>