



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 19, 2013

## U.S. to Begin Talks With Taliban; Karzai Balks

Obama administration officials said on June 18 that representatives will begin formal talks with the Taliban “within a few days” at a new office in Doha, Qatar. The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak on the record, told the Associated Press that they viewed the Taliban’s opening of the office as a stepping stone to the fundamentalist Islamic movement’s repudiation of al-Qaeda.



A report from [France 24 news](#) on June 19 said that Taliban representative Mohammed Naeem (shown) held a news conference — broadcast live on Qatar’s al Jazeera television channel — from the militant group’s new office on Tuesday. Naeem told reporters that the Taliban wanted good relations with Afghanistan’s neighboring countries.

The officials said the United States and Taliban representatives will initially hold bilateral meetings, but expect that Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s High Peace Council would join the process with its own talks several days later. A senior Afghan official told Reuters that talks with the High Peace Council would go ahead.

“The peace talks will certainly take place between the Taliban and the High Peace Council,” an anonymous source identified as a “senior Afghan official” was quoted by Reuters as saying.

However, a June 19 report from [Fox News](#) cited a different message from Afghan President Hamid Karzai: He will refuse peace talks with the Taliban in the Qatar office unless only Afghans are involved and violence stops. This statement came after Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for an attack on the Bagram Air Base that killed four U.S. troops.

According to the report, quoting from a statement issued by Karzai’s office, the president said his High Peace Council would “neither attend nor participate in the talks” until the process is “completely” in the hands of Afghans.

An key reason why Karzai decided not to participate in the talks, noted Fox, was that the announcement released by the Taliban used the group’s formal name, “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.” That was the name under which the Taliban ruled Afghanistan from September 1996 until December 2001, when they were overthrown by the American-led invasion.

Shafiullah Nooristani, a member of the High Peace Council, told the AP that the use of the name “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” violated agreements Karzai’s government had made with the United States and caused diplomatic problems for Afghanistan.

“The agreement was that the office should open only — and only — for negotiations, not as a political entity like a parallel institution to the Afghan Embassy which is already there,” said Nooristan.

Fox reported that Afghan objections to being left out of the initial U.S.-Taliban talks have also caused Karzai to suspend negotiations on a new U.S.-Afghan security deal that would allow some U.S. troops to remain in the country after the international combat mission officially ends in 2014.



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However, Nooristan did give an indication that his government was open to settling the dispute, saying: “We are working to solve these contradictions and fix these problems and act based on the agreements we had before so the High Peace Council can go there and start the peace talks.”

A June 18 report in the British newspaper [The Guardian](#) noted that the announcement of the U.S.-Taliban talks came the day that NATO forces handed official control of Afghanistan’s security to Afghan troops.

*The Guardian* quoted a Taliban spokesman who said the group was opening the Doha office to “reach understanding and initiate talks with countries of the world for the purpose of improving relations with them,” and to support a peaceful, political solution to end the “occupation of Afghanistan.” The “occupation” apparently refers to U.S. and NATO forces still operating in the country.

“This is an important first step but it will be a long road,” *The Guardian* quoted a senior U.S. official as saying. “We have long said this conflict won’t be won on the battlefield, which is why we support the opening of this [Doha] office.”

The report also quoted Ben Rhodes, identified as a deputy national security adviser, who said: “The United States will be supporting a process that is fundamentally Afghan-led.... We can play a role in talking to the Taliban as well in supporting that peace process — and because we have issues of our own to bring up with them.”

*The Guardian* also published a transcript of the full statement made by a Taliban spokesman at a news conference in Qatar. Some of the language used by the spokesman leads one to wonder if the Taliban philosophy has changed much since the United States launched an invasion of Afghanistan to unseat the Taliban regime that had provided the al-Qaeda terrorist network with a safe haven from which they planned the September 11 attacks. For example:

- “The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has been waging jihad to put an end to the [U.S. and NATO] occupation and form an independent Islamic system.”
- “The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan considers it its religious and national duty to gain independence from the occupation and for that purpose has utilized every legitimate way and will utilize it in future too.”
- “The Islamic Emirate has deemed it essential to open the political office in the Islamic country of Qatar, for the attainment of the following objectives.

One: to reach understanding and initiate talks with countries of the world for the purpose of improving relations with them.

Two: to support a political and peaceful solution which includes the end of the occupation of Afghanistan and the establishment of an independent Islamic system and true security which is the want and aspiration of the nation.”

A report from the Doha-based [Al Jazeera news network](#) contained a significant statement:

Speaking to Al Jazeera, Mohammad Sohail Shaheen, Taliban spokesman and a member of the Doha political office, said the armed group will continue to attack U.S. targets in Afghanistan, but will simultaneously seek to end the conflict by pursuing peace talks.

He said there was no ceasefire with the U.S. and its allies and that the Taliban “simultaneously follows political and military options.”



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“There is no ceasefire [with the U.S.] now. They are attacking us and we are attacking them,” Shaheen said.

Which raises several questions, including:

- Did not the United States lead an invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 to remove the Taliban from power, because of their support for al-Qaeda, which admitted responsibility for the 9/11 attacks?
- Why has the United States suffered more than 2,000 military deaths in Afghanistan, if not to eliminate the influence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda there and prevent future terrorist attacks?
- Why has the United States not insisted that the Taliban renounce al-Qaeda and discontinue future attacks against U.S. troops as a precondition for engaging in “peace” talks?
- Finally, if the United States was not committed to the philosophy once advocated by General Douglas MacArthur in a letter to Rep. Joseph W. Martin, Jr., “There is no substitute for victory” (as the lack of a congressional declaration of war at the outset of the invasion of Afghanistan indicates), why have we sacrificed American lives in a fruitless mission our government still refuses to complete decisively?

*Photo of Taliban representative Mohammed Naeem: AP Images*



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