

NEW ROUND OF U.S.-TALIBAN TALKS BEGINS IN DOHA

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A new round of peace talks between the Taliban and the U.S. got under way in Qatar on Wednesday.

The latest negotiations between the two sides come as pressure builds for some sort of breakthrough in Afghanistan's gruelling conflict, with Washington jostling for a resolution.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said the "sixth round of talks between (the Taliban) and the U.S. will start in Doha today". The U.S. Embassy in Kabul confirmed the talks "are occurring".

U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, a former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, tweeted that he was in Doha and had met with the Indonesian Foreign Minister, who offered support for the talks. On Sunday, Mr. Khalilzad said Washington was "a bit impatient" to end the war, given its \$45 billion annual cost to the U.S. taxpayer and the continued toll on U.S. forces, some 2,400 of whom have been killed since the U.S.-led invasion.

Separately, thousands of Afghan politicians and representatives from various groups are meeting in Kabul this week at a 'loya jirga' peace summit.

Mohammad Omar Daudzai, Mr. Ghani's special envoy for peace, welcomed the fresh U.S.-Taliban talks and described how the jirga could feed into overall peace talks. "The jirga sets a logical beginning for the peace process," Mr. Daudzai told reporters. "The people in the jirga will decide and set boundaries and the framework of talks."

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