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## **AFGHANISTAN: NATO AND US TROOPS SEE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE IN 2019**

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The Times of Central Asia (2 January 2019)

The US and NATO Forces spokesman in Afghanistan says Afghans and the Taliban have a real serious opportunity ahead of them, Afghan broadcaster TOLONews reports.

NATO troops stationed in Kabul said on January 1 that 2019 brings an opportunity for peace as they ushered in the new year with a special workout session.

Troops participated in a 60-minute event comprising of sprints, squats, push-up and jumps at an open-air gymnasium days after reports of a possible US drawdown emerged.

General Scott Miller, Commander of US and NATO's Resolute Support mission forces in Afghanistan, who participated in the special workout session, told troops the Taliban and the Afghan government are talking about peace.

The policy review is going on in multiple capitals, peace talks (are) out there, regional players pressing for peace, the Taliban talking about peace, the Afghan government talking about peace, Miller said.

Spokesman for US and NATO Forces in Afghanistan Colonel David Butler meanwhile said this year brings a unique opportunity for peace in Afghanistan.

2019 brings a special and unique opportunity in Afghanistan. I think we have all seen the progress of peace talks and the Afghans and the Taliban have a real serious opportunity ahead of them, an opportunity for peace. Think of this □ 40 years of war has a possibility of coming to an end, he said.

A White House spokesman last week said US President Donald Trump had not issued orders to the Pentagon to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. But the administration has not denied reports that the United States plans to pull out almost half of the 14,000-strong force currently deployed.

The reports come amid an intensification of moves towards peace negotiations in Afghanistan.

US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad met Taliban representatives last month and discussed issues around a future troop withdrawal.

<https://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/20674-afghanistan-nato-and-us-troops-see-an-opportunity-for-peace-in-2019>

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