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## **FIRST ROUND OF RESURRECTED US-TALIBAN PEACE TALKS OPEN IN QATAR**

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09.12.2019

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Aljazeera (7 December 2019)

Renewed negotiations expected to pave the way for direct talks between Taliban and Kabul to end 18 years of war.

The United States has resumed talks with the Taliban in Qatar, three months after President Donald Trump abruptly halted diplomatic efforts that could end the US's longest war.

US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad on Saturday held the first official talks since September with the Afghan group in Qatar's capital, Doha, a US State Department spokesperson said.

The renewed talks were expected to pave the way for direct talks between the Taliban and the government in Kabul and, ultimately, a possible peace agreement after more than 18 years of war.

"The US rejoined talks today in Doha. The focus of discussion will be reduction of violence that leads to intra-Afghan negotiations and a ceasefire," said the spokesperson.

The meetings in Doha, where the Taliban maintains a political office, follow several days of talks in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, where Khalilzad met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

The Taliban has so far refused direct talks with Ghani, calling him a "US puppet".

During a surprise Thanksgiving Day visit to a US military base in Afghanistan last month, Trump said the Taliban "wants to make a deal".

Even during the stall in talks, Khalilzad has in recent weeks made a whistle-stop tour of nations with a stake in Afghan peace, including Pakistan.

He recently arranged a captive swap in which the Taliban released an American and an Australian academic whom they had held hostage for three years.

Meanwhile, the US military in its daily report said overnight on Saturday that US air attacks killed 37 members of the armed group and operations by the Afghan National Security Forces killed 22 other rebels.

The Taliban, which now holds sway over nearly half of Afghanistan, has continued to carry out near-daily attacks against military outposts throughout the country.

Trump has expressed frustration with the US's longest war, repeatedly saying he wants to bring

the estimated 12,000 American soldiers home and calling on Afghanistan's own police and military to step up.

Read more at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/resurrected-taliban-peace-talks-open-qatar-191207105319486.html>

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