

The Taliban's Recent Kabul Attack Inadvertently Tanked the Afghan Peace Talks

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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Neither the Taliban nor the US wanted to throw away the unprecedented progress that's been made towards peace thus far, but pressure on both sides from within their own ranks and outside regrettably led to the suspension of the Afghan peace process.

Trump shocked the world when he [announced on Twitter](#) over the weekend that a secret meeting between him and Taliban[1] leaders at Camp David was suddenly called off in response to the group's recent attack in Kabul that resulted in the death of an American soldier.

Secretary of State Pompeo, who was [reportedly against](#) the draft peace deal that emerged from the ninth round of talks between both sides, said that the US won't enter into any agreement without "[significant commitments](#)" from the Taliban, implying that some sort of ceasefire might be a prerequisite for restarting the negotiations and thus making them extremely unlikely to be revived because of the group's stalwart position against this. The Taliban responded by issuing an [official statement](#) condemning the US' decision and warning that it will "increase its loss of life and treasure", thereby publicly threatening the US and making it even more unlikely that Trump will change his mind given the optics involved.

Speaking of which, it was partially due to the extremely sensitive position that he was already in that he felt compelled to suspend the peace talks just prior to his planned secret summit with the Taliban. The military and diplomatic factions of the "deep state" recently united in opposition to the draft peace plan and put enormous pressure on Trump to scuttle the deal.

The final straw for him was the Kabul attack that killed an American soldier because he knew that he couldn't meet with the leaders of the same group that was responsible for this just days before 9/11 as it would have given his opponents the opportunity to claim that he "betrayed his base" (and the rest of America more broadly) by "selling out to radical Islamic terrorists" as part of a self-interested electioneering tactic to win next year's vote. As a result, the peace talks are now frozen, which plays to the benefit of Trump's "deep state" rivals, the Kabul government, [and India](#), all of which are against any deal.

It's convenient to entirely blame the Taliban for this latest turn of events, with some regarding it as so overly confident in its latest on-the-ground successes that it thought that it could continue its nationwide offensive without consequence while others believe that the

group can't control all the fighters in its ranks and that the Taliban leadership might not have wanted to target Americans during the run-up to the secret summit with Trump but that some "hardline" elements might have went "rogue" and did so anyhow.

In unraveling what probably really happened, it's important to point out that the Taliban [took credit](#) for the Kabul attack and its spokesman said that it was specifically targeting "foreign invaders". Some might view this as reckless given how close the long-awaited peace deal was to promulgation, but it should be kept in mind that the US hadn't stopped killing Afghans during this time, so the Taliban wasn't going to curtail its military activities either.

It's difficult to imagine the resumption of this now-suspended peace process anytime soon after Trump's very stern public reaction to recent events (issued under pressure from the "deep state" and the very uncomfortable optics that he was exposed to after the Kabul attack) and the Taliban's not-so-subtle threat to continue killing more Americans, but there is one possible scenario where this could happen and it requires Pakistan's support as the [irreplaceable intermediary](#) between both parties. If coordinated with the Taliban, then Islamabad could convey to Washington that the group didn't specifically intend to kill Americans during the Kabul attack but that the fatality was simply "collateral damage" unintended to derail the final step of the peace process. The group obviously can't say this openly for understandable reasons of "prestige" and to avoid a "hardline" rebellion from within its ranks, but it's the only realistic chance to get Trump to reconsider his decision to suspend the talks.

Likewise, if Islamabad coordinates with the pro-Trump peacemaking faction of the American "deep state", then it could convey to the Taliban that the US had to keep up its attacks against Afghans (however morally reprehensible) because any lull in the fighting would create narrative opportunities for their warmongering opponents to put insurmountable pressure on the President by publicly claiming that he's riskily undertaking a "de-facto unilateral ceasefire with terrorists" without receiving anything tangible in return. In other words, Pakistan could help reassure both sides that neither of them wanted to tank the peace talks at the very last minute but that internal pressure from "hardline" elements in both of their ranks made it impossible for them to scale down their military operations during the negotiations and thus resulted in the inadvertent outcome of an American soldier's death triggering Trump into being forced to react as he did by suspending the peace talks.

It can't be certain that this last-ditch peacemaking attempt will succeed, but if it does, then it'll return everything back to the way that it already was proceeding before this unexpected development and thus continue the trend of [redefining Eurasia's balance of power](#). Should the talks remain suspended, however, then the erstwhile status quo will likely remain in effect to the disappointment of all responsible stakeholders apart from the Kabul government and India, which have deep-seated interests in having the US retain an indefinite military presence in Afghanistan and possibly even ramp up its attacks against the Taliban as part of a "face-saving" measure in the aftermath of this fiasco. With this in mind, it can be expected that those two aforementioned players will lobby hard to convince Trump that they were right about the futility of negotiating with the Taliban, while every other international party of significance will encourage him to resume the talks.

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Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

Note

[1] legally designated as a terrorist group by Russia and many other countries

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About the author:

Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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