

Trump breaks off talks on end to US war in Afghanistan

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9 September 2019

In a bizarre series of tweets on Saturday night, US President Donald Trump said that he had called off secretly planned talks at the Camp David presidential retreat for the next day with both the US-backed regime in Afghanistan and the Taliban.

He also announced that Washington was halting its nearly year-long negotiations with the Taliban in Qatar aimed at ending the 18-year-old American military intervention in Afghanistan, the longest war in US history.

“Unbeknownst to almost everyone, the major Taliban leaders and, separately, the President of Afghanistan, were going to secretly meet with me at Camp David on Sunday. They were coming to the United States tonight,” Trump declared on Twitter Saturday.

He claimed that he had called off the talks in response to a suicide car bombing at a checkpoint near the US Embassy in Kabul last Thursday that claimed the lives of 12 people, including one US soldier and a member of the Romanian military attached to the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the blast, as it had for an earlier suicide bomb attack last Monday that killed at least 18 people near the so-called Green Village, a fortified enclave in Kabul housing US military contractors and NGOs.

After the latest bombing, Trump claimed, “I immediately cancelled the meeting and called off peace negotiations. What kind of people would kill so many in order to seemingly strengthen their bargaining position?”

As with most of the US president’s tweets, every word is a lie.

There was no immediate cancelation of the planned meeting. On Friday, a day after the bombing in Kabul, the chief US negotiator, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the senior US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Scott Miller, flew to Doha, the Qatari capital, for another round of talks with the Taliban.

Taliban negotiators themselves said that until Saturday, there appeared to be no disruption of the Doha talks, which completed their ninth round at the end of August. On September 2, Khalilzad announced that a peace agreement had been concluded “in principle,” which still had to be approved by Trump.

As for “what kind of people would kill so many in order to seemingly strengthen their bargaining position,” Trump doesn’t have to look far to find the answer.

The US military and Afghan puppet security forces have sharply stepped up bombing and assassination campaigns directed against the Taliban and its sympathizers. In recent weeks, a number of senior Taliban commanders and their relatives have been killed as Washington uses military force in a bid to promote its own “bargaining position.”

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported last month that at least 1,500 people were killed in July, the highest death toll since May 2017. This follows an earlier UN report that found that civilian deaths rose to 3,804 in 2018, an 11 percent increase over the previous year and the highest annual toll since the war began with the US invasion of October 2001.

Another report put out by UNAMA in May stated that US-NATO forces along with the Afghan security forces killed more civilians during the first three months of this year (when the Doha talks were already ongoing) than the number falling victim to the Taliban and other armed groups opposed to the regime in Kabul.

Appearing on television news talk shows on Sunday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo defended Trump’s aborted plan to bring the Taliban to Camp David, while reporting that the US military had killed 1,000 of its fighters over the previous 10 days.

Clearly, both the Taliban and the US military have continued armed attacks—American attacks proving far more deadly—even as US and Taliban negotiators have

been hammering out a deal in Doha.

The deal, trading a US troop withdrawal for a guarantee that Al Qaeda and related groups will not be allowed to use Afghanistan for preparing and launching overseas attacks, reportedly called for the withdrawal of some 5,400 US troops from Afghanistan. This was to begin roughly five months after the agreement was signed, with the Pentagon either closing or turning over to Afghan security forces five of its bases in the country.

The withdrawal of the remaining 8,600 US troops was reportedly going to be “conditions-based” and dependent largely upon the Taliban reaching a ceasefire agreement and political settlement with the US-backed regime.

Trump issued statements insisting that the US would maintain a permanent presence in Afghanistan, while repeatedly proclaiming that he could end the war “very quickly” if he wanted “to kill 10 million people.”

The real reason for Trump cancelling the previously undisclosed meetings was the failure of Khalilzad and General Miller to extract new concessions demanded by the Trump White House from the Taliban.

In planning to bring both Afghanistan’s US puppet President Ashraf Ghani and senior Taliban officials to Camp David, Trump apparently believed that he could wrap up an overall peace deal that he could then present to the US public in advance of the 2020 election campaign. When he ran in 2016, Trump made a campaign promise to end the “forever war” in Afghanistan, which is deeply unpopular.

Whether Trump thought he could stage a photo with the Taliban leaders—reprising a similar occasion when Ronald Reagan praised their predecessors in the Afghan mujahideen as the “moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers” during the CIA-orchestrated war of the 1980s—is unknown.

It is likely that Washington demanded that the Taliban come to the US and agree to an unconditional and total ceasefire. The Islamist movement has repeatedly refused to take such a step, insisting that it will enter into a ceasefire with US and NATO troops after reaching a deal with Washington, but will do so with Afghan regime forces only after a settlement is reached between the conflicting Afghan factions.

“We promised there would be intra-Afghan talks once we finalized our agreement with the Americans,” a senior Taliban leader told the *New York Times*. “If Trump and his administration think they would solve the confrontation between the government and the Taliban somewhere in Washington in a meeting, that’s not

possible because we do not recognize the stooge government.”

Trump’s sudden revelation of the aborted plan for the Camp David meetings touched off a wave of criticism from both Democratic and Republican politicians, a number of whom condemned the move because of its proximity to the anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington.

These utterly reactionary protests are meant to cover up the fact that the 9/11 attacks were seized upon by Washington as the pretext for carrying out long-planned US invasions of Afghanistan and, 18 months later, Iraq.

In both wars, the strategic aim was to assert US hegemony over principal sources of the world’s petroleum and natural gas—the Caspian Basin and the Persian Gulf—in an attempt to reverse by military means the decline of American capitalism’s global dominance.

In its negotiations in Doha, Washington has no doubt calculated that it can continue the pursuit of these aims through an Afghan government that includes the Taliban, a reactionary Islamist movement that traces its origins to the CIA-backed war against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul in the 1980s.

Trump’s revelation of the canceled secret meeting and the indication that the US is preparing once again to escalate its 18-year-old war was welcomed by the puppet government of President Ghani, which is utterly dependent upon the US military. The Indian government also reacted positively to the move, seeing it as weakening its regional rival, Pakistan, whose ISI military intelligence agency has provided long-term support to the Taliban, as well as China.

It is perhaps more than a coincidence that Trump called off the Camp David meeting at the precise moment that the foreign ministers of Pakistan, China and Afghanistan were meeting in Islamabad to discuss plans for the aftermath of a US-Taliban peace agreement.



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