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## US-Taliban talks evoke mixed response

By Muzhary Rahman

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Some residents of Kabul are optimistic about secret talks between the United States and Taliban fighters, others are skeptical.

On Dec. 20, 2011, US Vice President Joe Biden told the Newsweek magazine those who ruled Kabul before 9/11 were not the US enemies. "Look, the Taliban per se is not our enemy. That's critical."

Qatar, the US and Germany reportedly agreed at the 2nd Bonn Conference on December 5 to let the Taliban open their political office in Doha. The move is apparently aimed at facilitating the ongoing reconciliation campaign.

The US has reportedly agreed to transfer five ex-Taliban officials from Guantanamo Bay to the proposed Taliban office in Qatar, but Afghan government says the detainees be handed over to Kabul. However, the Taliban did not comment so far.

"We are happy over the breakthrough in the US-Taliban negotiations," said the head of the Afghan blind union, Mohammad Hassan Fayaz, who saw dialogue as the only way out of the current quagmire.

Elyas Ahmad, a teacher at a private school in Kabul, said: "Just like the Russians had failed in our country, the US will meet a similar fate if it doesn't move on cautiously."

The talks would make headway only if the insurgents were given a role portion in the government, the teacher believed, stressing sincerity on both sides.

"The talks are encouraging, give the fact that the Taliban and the US are the main players, who have finally chosen to sit across the negotiating table," remarked a Kabul University student, Ahmad Javed.

But another student, Latifa, sounded pessimistic. "The US is playing politics of ambiguity; we don't know what its target objectives in Afghanistan are!"

The talks are a brand new game initiated by Americans, according to Shagufa Ahmadi, a student of literature at Kabul University. "Outsiders are treating us like puppets. As long as their meddling doesn't end, there will be no peace in our country."

She suggested the Taliban and the Afghan government should hold face-to-face talks without foreign interference.

President Hamid Karzai on Saturday hailed US Vice President's remarks that Taliban were not America's enemies as a message of peace to the people of Afghanistan.

Speaking at a ceremony in Kabul, Karzai said: "We are very happy that America has announced that Taliban are not their enemy. This will bring peace and stability to the people of Afghanistan."