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Al Jazeera

Afghanistan and US in 'Taliban talks'

Karzai says three-way negotiations have taken place, and says he believes Taliban is "definitively" interested in peace.

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The US and Afghan governments have held three-way talks with the Taliban, Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said.

"There have been contacts between the US government and the Taliban, there have been contacts between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and there have been some contacts that we have made, all of us together, including the Taliban," Karzai told *The Wall Street Journal* in an interview published on Thursday.

The newspaper said Karzai had declined to specify the location of the talks or go into further detail, saying he feared this could damage the process.

Karzai, whose government had protested over being left out of recent talks between Washington and the group, said he believes most Taliban members were "definitively" interested in a peace settlement.

"People in Afghanistan want peace, including the Taliban. They're also people like we all are. They have families, they have relatives, they have children, they are suffering a tough time," the newspaper quoted Karzai as saying.

Karzai's remarks suggest progress in tentative peace efforts as the US and NATO begin withdrawing forces and prepare to transfer security responsibilities to Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

Karzai arrived in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital, on Thursday for meetings with government officials and his Iranian counterpart, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Karzai's office said the talks, which come amid strained relations between the Afghan and Pakistani governments, would focus on expanding relations, economic ties and "enhanced co-operation" on ending 10 years of war in Afghanistan.

Pakistan, a historic backer of the Taliban, says it will do what is required by Kabul to support an Afghan-led peace process, but there is a wide degree of scepticism in Afghanistan and the United States about its sincerity.

In a statement last month, the Taliban said it would step up political efforts after Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, said that US talks with the group were still at a preliminary stage.

But it said it would not give up its armed struggle.

Speaking to Al Jazeera, Mirwais Yasini, a member of the Afghan parliament, said, "All sides including the US, Afghanistan and the Taliban must come to the point that there is no militancy, insurgency, suicide bombing, aerial bombardment. This [violence] is not the solution."

Only a "tremendous decrease" in violence, Yasini continued, could bring all sides closer to "some sort of solution like power sharing or giving shelter to the Taliban in Afghanistan."

No compromises

In an exclusive interview with Al Jazeera, Abdullah Weqas, a Taliban commander in Afghanistan's eastern Kunar Province, said that the group's military campaign had forced the Americans to the negotiating table.

"The Americans didn't want negotiations with us before, now they want to talk to us," Weqas told Al Jazeera.

"The foreigners have suffered a lot of casualties here, that's what persuaded them to talk. They have been shamed in front of the whole world; this is one of our successes."

US officials are believed to have held a series of secret meetings with the Taliban in Germany and Qatar since 2010, but those talks had to be suspended last December after Karzai objected to the process.

Al Jazeera's Bernard Smith reporting from Kabul, the Afghan capital, said that talks may become complicated since for many Taliban fighters there are certain issues not up for negotiation, including accepting the country's constitution.

"If the current Taliban leadership is seen as giving way on issues like the constitution, the presence of foreign troops here, and the imposition of Sharia law, then there is a risk that a new hardline Taliban leader could emerge, and some of those foot soldiers will fall in behind him," Smith said.

Rahmatulla, another Taliban fighter in Kunar, told Al Jazeera: "The prophet Mohamed tells us not to accept our leaders' orders if they are against Islam. If our leaders make a deal that is against God, we won't accept it."