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Taliban's Doha office revived, initial talks begin

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With Pakistan's facilitation, the Afghan Taliban's Doha office has been revived and currently Taliban's and President Ghani government's representatives are holding initial talks on devising rules and agenda for formal negotiations, a media report said on Friday.

Dawn.com quoted an unnamed top Pakistani official confirming the resumption of initial contacts between the two parties. Privy to the expected dialogue, he said formal talks were expected to begin in March.

"Yes I can confirm Taliban's Doha office has been revived and now with the facilitation of Pakistan, Afghan Taliban are holding initial talks with senior Afghan government officials to chalk out the strategy and set rules for formal talks," the official told Dawn on condition of anonymity.

Another official said Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif had given the green signal for facilitating the resumption of dialogue when he met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in Kabul earlier this week.

The official also confirmed that the Afghan Taliban have held two rounds of talks with senior officials in Beijing, and Pakistan was taken on board by Chinese officials about the conclusion of the talks held in the Chinese capital.

Details reveal that in the initial level talks, the Afghan Taliban are being represented by Qari Din Mohammad from the Taliban political office in Doha who also went to China in late November, 2014 to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. Qari Din Muhammad also held a meeting with senior US diplomats in Doha this week.

Islamabad, Beijing, Doha and Dubai are the possible venue for talks, and a final destination would be decided by the end of this month.

Foreign Office spokesperson Tasneem Aslam said Pakistan has vital stakes in peace and stability in Afghanistan and is ready to provide whatever assistance it can. “We are ready to facilitate the reconciliation process to the possible extent,” she confirmed.

However, a Taliban spokesperson on Thursday denied reports stating their leadership was willing to hold peace talks with US officials. Zabihullah Mujahid described these reports as false.