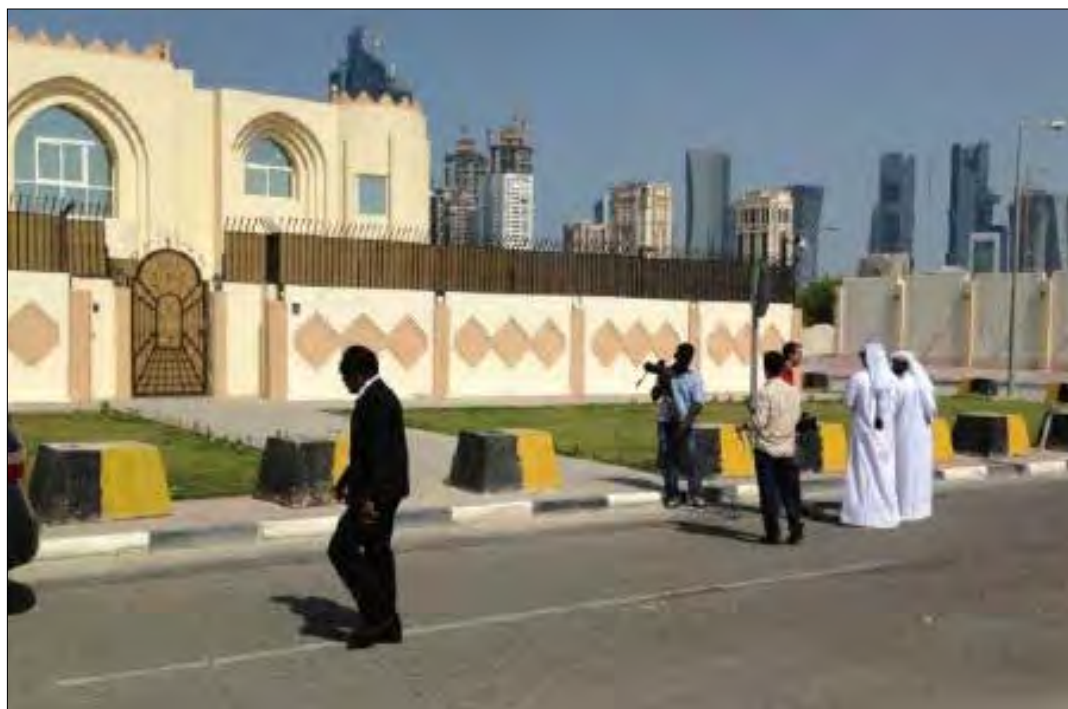




Iran Talking to the Taliban

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Republic of Iran's relationship with the Taliban has long existed in the shadows, while Iran's official enmity toward the Taliban is public and dates from the August 1998 Taliban massacre of Iranian diplomats and intelligence officers stationed at the Iranian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. That incident nearly led to war between Iran and the Taliban in 1999. That enmity was one of the reasons why Iran cooperated with the broader international coalition in ousting the Taliban and supporting the Bonn process which culminated in a new, post-Taliban Afghan government in 2002.

As US influence grew in Afghanistan, however, Iranian military officials responded by re-establishing ties to the Taliban including allowing Taliban commanders to utilize Iranian banks and the smuggling of Iranian weaponry to the Taliban. Esmail Qaani who assumed leadership of the Qods Force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite external operations group, upon Qassem Soleimani's death in January 2020, was in charge of Qods Force operations in Afghanistan including Iranian ties with the Taliban until then.



The Taliban Office in Doha, Qatar.

Source: Ana.ir, <https://ana.ir/fa/news/33/31802>

The excerpted report from Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs brings Iran-Taliban ties into the open. While the United States and its NATO efforts to advance a peace process with the Taliban is discussed in Western press, the Iranian government is undertaking its own efforts to establish diplomatic rather than simply intelligence and military ties. That Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's special envoy, is both speaking to the Taliban representation in Doha, Qatar, and meeting with senior Afghan officials in Kabul suggests that Tehran may also be seeking to play a mediating role, not in concert with that of the United States and its Resolute Support partners. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The two sides exchanged views on international negotiations.”

Source: “Tamas Teliphoni Namiyandeh-e Vizheh-e Vazir-e Amor-e Kharjeh-e Kashavarman ba Moghamat Daftar-e Siyasi Taliban dar Qatar (Phone Call of the Special Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Our Country to the Political Office of the Taliban in Qatar),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 May 2020. <https://mfa.gov.ir/portal/newsview/594140/>

Phone Call of the Foreign Minister's Special Envoy to the Taliban

Mohammed Ebrahim Taherian, special representative of our Minister of Foreign Affairs, examined current developments in Afghanistan in a telephone conversation with officials of the Taliban political office in Qatar.... During the telephone conversation, the two sides also exchanged views on future developments in international negotiations and comprehensive efforts to prevent the widespread spread of the coronavirus in Afghanistan...

Mr. Taherian has traveled to Kabul in recent weeks to meet with the country's leaders, including Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, to present the Islamic Republic of Iran's positions and proposals for resolving the current political problems in the country, and our country's readiness to provide comprehensive assistance.