

AFGHAN HIGH PEACE COUNCIL, TALIBAN AND NORTHERN ALLIANCE TO MEET IN PARIS THIS WEEK

Reuters reports that after the final French combat troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan on Saturday, Paris will host a meeting this week between the Afghan high peace council and the Taliban. It appears that talks have been ongoing for some time, but it is quite encouraging that the parties are now willing for it to be announced publicly that the discussions are taking place. From the Reuters story:

France said on Sunday officials from the Afghan government, the Taliban rebel movement and other factions would meet this week near Paris to discuss the country's future as NATO troops prepare to pull out in 2014.

Speaking on RFI radio, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, whose country withdrew the last of its combat troops from Afghanistan on Saturday, said Afghan President Hamid Karzai had given his green light to the meeting.

"Discreet talks have been taking place between different factions for three years," Fabius said.

"If you want peace, it's usually between people who don't agree, and over there they don't talk to each other. So there will be discussions, but it won't be negotiations."

The story goes on to point out that both the exact date and location for the meeting will not be disclosed and that the location will be

“entirely closed off”.

We get more on the meetings from Afghanistan’s Khaama Press:

A senior Afghan high peace council official said three members of the council will attend the Paris conference.

Abdul Hakim Mujahid a former Taliban group member and Haji Din Mohammad advisor to president Hamid Karzai are among the three officials who attend and meet the Taliban group members.

Farhadullah a spokesman for the Afghan high peace council said Afghan peace delegates will clarify the stance of Afghan peace council regarding the peace negotiations in Paris conference.

Meanwhile Abdul Hakim Mujahid who was presenting the Taliban group in United Nations and is currently a member of the Afghan high peace council said they will hold direct talks with the Taliban group members during the summit.

Mr. Mujahid said the conference is based on Afghanistan and only Afghans should decided how to resolve the current crisis and war in the country.

Significantly, the Reuters piece points out that the Northern Alliance also will be taking part in the meetings. Recall that the US supported the Northern Alliance in the overthrow of the Taliban after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

Missing from both stories is any mention of US involvement in the peace talks. Instead, the US appears to be spending its energy at the current time trying to negotiate an agreement with Afghanistan that will provide blanket immunity for US troops staying beyond the planned end of 2014 end of combat operations by coalition forces. Also, Washington is consumed with

developing a plan for how many of these US troops will remain behind and what their roles will be. Apparently, these efforts are a higher priority to the Obama administration than negotiating a peace that would make our presence unnecessary.