



[Trump Administration Slashes Aid to Afghanistan After Pompeo Visit](#)

The Trump administration announced plans to cut \$1 billion in aid to Afghanistan after the country's two rival political leaders failed to agree on forming a new government. The move comes following U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Kabul to meet with both Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and former Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Ghani and Abdullah have each declared themselves president after a disputed election last year, and Pompeo was unable to break the deadlock between the two. In addition to cutting \$1 billion of aid this year, Pompeo said that the United States is also prepared to slash another \$1 billion next year. The continued political turmoil with Ghani and Abdullah comes at an inopportune time, as internal peace talks are slated to begin between the Afghan government and the Taliban. In a recent development, the two sides did agree to begin prisoner releases at the end of this month.

Despite the ongoing coronavirus crisis, Secretary of State Pompeo made an unannounced trip to Afghanistan in the hopes of breaking the deadlock between the rival political leaders, which was ultimately unsuccessful. In a statement following the attempted negotiations, he announced that Ghani and Abdullah were unable to resolve their differences, saying "The United States deeply regrets that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and former Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah have informed Secretary Pompeo that they have been unable to agree on an inclusive government that can meet the challenges of governance, peace, and security, and provide for the health and welfare of Afghan citizens." Pompeo was also critical of the two men, saying that their actions had "harmed U.S.-Afghan relations and, sadly, dishonors those Afghan, Americans, and coalition partners who have sacrificed their lives and treasure in the struggle to build a new future for this country" and was inconsistent with the terms they made to support the recent U.S.-Taliban peace agreement which called for intra-Afghan talks to begin by March 10th.

Since the U.S.-Taliban deal was signed last month in February, the peace process has stalled due to the political deadlock between Ghani and Abdullah. The talks that were supposed to begin by mid-March between the Afghan government and the Taliban are the next step in the process, and have been delayed as a result. These negotiations are critical to the terms laid out in the deal, and would allow the United States to continue withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

In a positive development on Wednesday of this week, Afghanistan's National Security Council announced that officials from the Afghan government had agreed on a prisoner release with the Taliban, which has been set for the end of this month. This is one of the critical conditions of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and may help spur the process of internal peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The two sides are expected to hold face-to-face negotiations in the coming days to finalize the details of the prisoner release and of continued inter-Afghan talks between them.