



### [Authorities in Afghanistan Plan to Release Additional Taliban Prisoners](#)

The government of Afghanistan has announced a plan to release 900 Taliban prisoners, as a ceasefire between the two entered its final day. The prisoner release is a stipulation included in the peace negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan government that were brokered by the United States in Doha earlier this year. Those negotiations dictated that 5,000 Taliban prisoners would be released by the Afghan government, in exchange for the release of 1,000 Afghan security personnel held by the Taliban. The announcement to release 900 prisoners came on the final day of a ceasefire between Afghan military forces and the Taliban that marked Eid al-Fitr. Thus far, the release of prisoners has been a thorny subject for both the Taliban and the Afghan government. President Ashraf Ghani has been unwilling to sanction the release of all 5,000 Taliban prisoners at once due to security concerns. On the other side, the Taliban has demanded that all the captives be released, saying the Afghan government is renegeing on the peace deal.

According to the Doha peace deal signed in February, the Taliban and Afghan government are both required to release prisoners. Also included in the deal is an agreement for the United States to withdraw its military from Afghanistan completely, based on conditions on the ground. However, in the months since the deal was signed, the Taliban has increased its attacks on Afghan security forces. As a result, President Ashraf Ghani has been reticent to continue releasing Taliban prisoners. However, the Taliban proposed a ceasefire to mark Eid al-Fitr, which the government was happy to observe. President Ghani has made his support for a lasting ceasefire with the Taliban well known, and his government called on the group to extend the truce.

Upon the announcement of the Eid ceasefire, the Afghan government announced plans to release up to 2,000 Taliban prisoners, with an initial 900 to be immediately freed. A spokesman for Afghanistan's national security advisor said that the government was prepared to continue releasing prisoners as long as attacks by the Taliban stopped. It wasn't immediately clear whether the Taliban was prepared to extend the ceasefire, but a spokesman for the group's political office in Qatar said on Twitter that the Taliban would also release a "remarkable" number of prisoners in reciprocation. The de-escalation on both sides has raised the possibility for direct intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the government. Direct negotiations between the two were a key part of the U.S.-brokered deal from February, and observers hope that the ceasefire and prisoner release will build sufficient trust on each side to have a direct dialogue.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo welcomed the news from Afghanistan, saying it presented a "tremendous opportunity" to end fighting in the country after almost two decades. The leader of the Taliban used the ceasefire to remind the United States of the agreement from the Doha deal that American troops would leave Afghanistan entirely if conditions permitted, including direct intra-Afghan talks. Observers are now analyzing the situation closely and hoping that the positive atmosphere fostered by the ceasefire and prisoner release can bring peace to Afghanistan.