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## NATO calls Karzai claim of secret US-Taliban talks 'absolutely ridiculous'

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NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has called Afghan President Hamid Karzai's claim about secret talks between the US and Taliban an "absolutely ridiculous" accusation.

"I reject the idea that was publicly launched by President Karzai that ... there is so-called collusion between NATO, ISAF, the US and the Taliban. It is an absolutely ridiculous idea," Rasmussen told a news conference in Brussels on Monday.

*The NATO chief added the members of the western military coalition "fully respect the sovereignty of Afghanistan but we would also expect acknowledgement from the Afghan side that we have ... invested a lot in blood and treasure in helping President Karzai's country to move forward."*

In recent weeks, Afghan President Hamid Karzai has made several anti-US remarks and accused Washington of colluding with the Taliban in an attempt to justify the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan.

The Afghan president also banned the foreign forces from entering university campuses.

On March 10, Karzai said there were "ongoing daily talks between Taliban, American and foreigners in Europe and in the [Persian] Gulf states."

The Afghan president also referred to two bomb attacks carried out by the Taliban in the capital, Kabul, and the eastern city of Khost on March 9, stating, "Those bombs... were not a show of force to America. They were in service of America. It was in the service of the 2014 slogan to warn us if they (Americans) are not here then Taliban will come."

Meanwhile, the Afghan presidential office said in a statement on March 14 that Washington was "a friend and strategic partner of Afghanistan." The Afghan president's recent comments have been to "correct rather than damage this [US-Afghan] relationship," the statement added.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of fighting terrorism.