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AFP

Germany 'helps mediate US talks with Taliban'

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Germany is helping mediate secret, direct talks between the United States and the Afghan Taliban, with meetings taking place on German soil, Spiegel magazine reported here Sunday.

Germany's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Michael Steiner, is moderating the talks, the latest round of which took place on May 7 and 8 in Germany, the magazine said.

Steiner, a trained judge and long-term diplomat, once headed the UN mission to Kosovo.

The German foreign affairs ministry would not confirm the talks were being held when asked by AFP, but said that Germany "was supporting efforts to find a political solution" in Afghanistan.

A conference on Afghanistan will be held in Bonn on December 5, the ministry said, at the request of Afghan President Hamid Karzai in November last year.

US President Barack Obama's administration has been engaged in direct talks with senior Afghan Taliban officials responsible for leading the fight against the western-backed Kabul government, since the autumn of 2010, Spiegel said.

Three direct meetings have so far taken place. The first was held in Qatar and the second at the turn of the year in Germany.

The US side is represented by State Department and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials, while the Afghan side is led by a relative of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, the magazine added.

The New Yorker magazine reported in February that the Obama administration had begun direct discussions with senior Taliban figures.

According to the Washington Post newspaper, Obama is hoping to report progress toward a settlement of the Afghanistan war when he announces troop withdrawals in July.