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US Confirms Secret Talks With Taliban

Jason Ditz

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Top [US diplomat Richard Holbrooke confirmed](#) that the United States is engaged in secret, back-channel talks with the leadership of the Taliban, sponsored by the Saudi government. Holbrooke was quick to emphasize that the talks were not direct.

Instead, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Agency [is doing the negotiations on behalf of the United States](#). And well it might: the [ISI receives roughly one third of its annual budget directly from the CIA](#).

CIA Director Leon Panetta's Friday visit to Pakistan, [ostensibly to visit Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani](#), was actually to receive a direct update from the ISI about the progress of the negotiations.

But the Taliban leadership isn't directly involved either. Instead, a handful of Taliban sympathizers, ostensibly acting on their behalf, are doing the talking on their side.

While this might raise some hope for a diplomatic settlement, it mustn't be forgotten that the [Saudi government was reported to be holding similar talks over a year ago](#) and it turned out that the ostensible Taliban representative was someone they had severed all ties with years prior. Unfortunately in indirect talks it remains possible that the "United States" and the "Taliban" might come to an agreement without either side being satisfied with the deal.