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U.S., Russia share a complex and bloody history in Afghanistan

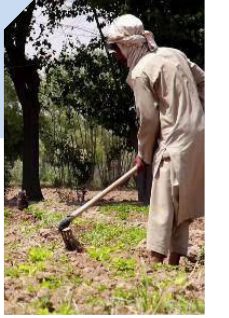
America is rapidly pulling troops from Afghanistan

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NDS Prevents Attacks Targeting Media Outlet, Hospital in Kabul

Two suicide bombers affiliated to Daesh, who allegedly were plotting an attack on a media outlet and a hospital in Kabul, were arrested in an operation by Afghan forces, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) said in a statement on Tuesday.

The two, Lotfullah (aka Khorasani) and Ahmadullah, are residents of Shakardara district of Kabul, the statement said.

One of them sought to attack Mawla Ali Hospital in the Golaee Dawa Khana area in the west of Kabul, the NDS said. Another, the statement added, wanted to attack a media outlet in Kabul, according to confessions they made, as mentioned in the NDS statement.

The two were called in to Kabul by three other Daesh members, the NDS said.

The statement did not mention specifically where the operation was conducted.



UAE, Afghanistan discuss cultural cooperation

ADuring a remote meeting, Noura bint Mohammed Al Kaabi, Minister of Culture and Youth, and Mohamed Zahir, Minister of Culture and Information of Afghanistan, discussed ways of reinforcing the cultural and creative cooperation between the UAE and Afghanistan.

"We aim to reinforce our cultural ties with Afghanistan and strengthen our partnership in various knowledge and artistic areas, as well as implement joint projects and initiatives that will reinforce our ties, through an annual cultural agenda and joint initiatives," Al Kaabi said.

Al Kaabi and Zahir also discussed hosting the UAE-Afghanistan Cultural Days in Abu Dhabi, which will aim to enhance their communication and exchange cultural experiences, as well as develop joint cultural interaction tools, promote the culture, heritage and history of both countries, and highlight Afghanistan's history to the local public in the UAE.

Al Kaabi then praised the ...

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China, Pakistan Urge Taliban to Reduce Violence, Start Talks



In a trilateral virtual meeting held between Afghanistan, Pakistan and China on Tuesday, the Pakistan and Chinese officials have reiterated the call on the Taliban to reduce violence to help pave the way for the start of intra-Afghan talks, the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Tuesday as violence continues across the country.

"On July 7, 2020, the 3rd round China-

Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Vice Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue was held via video link. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaohui, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Mirwais Nab and Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood co-chaired the dialogue," Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

According to the statement, the three sides conducted in-depth

discussions and reached consensus on cooperation against COVID-19, the Afghan peace and reconciliation process, and trilateral cooperation. The statement also reads: China and Pakistan appreciated the efforts by the Afghanistan government and relevant parties in expediting the exchange of the prisoners to pave the way for the start of the Intra-Afghan Negotiations and call for

violence reduction and humanitarian ceasefire. China and Pakistan will enhance cooperation with the Afghan government in support of the "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned" peace reconciliation process, the launch of Intra-Afghan Negotiations at an early date, support the preservation of the gains since 2001, and looked forward to the early restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan."

"Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to further strengthen dialogue and work for continuous improvement of bilateral relations including through the effective implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). China will continue to play a constructive role in improving Afghanistan-Pakistan relations," the statement said.

"The Afghan government should release the Taliban prisoners based on the peace agreement and avoid sabotaging the peace process," said Sayed Akbar Agha, a former Taliban commander.

The Afghan government expects that the intra-Afghan talks can start sometimes during the current month, but sources close to the Taliban have said that they do not see the prospect for such talks unless the Afghan government ensure the release of 5,000 prisoners demanded by... P3

Pakistani spying drone crashes in Afghanistan

A Pakistani drone has crashed in Sarkano district of eastern Kunar province, an official said on Tuesday. Abdul Ghani Musaman, the governor's spokesman, told Pajhwok Afghan News the Pakistani drone entered Afghanistan's soli near the Durand Line for spying.

He said the aircraft crashed on Monday night but the reason behind the crash was yet to be ascertained. The Pakistan government has said nothing in this regard.



Russian-American dialogue on Afghanistan irked some political circles in U.S., Kremlin says

Russia and the United States have established a regular dialogue on Afghanistan, which could have bothered certain political circles in Washington, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev stated in an interview with the Argumenty i Fakty weekly, commenting on the publications about the alleged bounties on US servicemen that Moscow allegedly offered to Afghan militants.

Patrushev noted that the US administration repeatedly imposed sanctions against Russia "based on fake news."

"Now, their media has suddenly latched on to Afghanistan, which our countries have established a regular dialogue on; apparently, this fact bothered certain political circles," Patrushev said.

"Russian and American intelligence services cooperate in a wide range of fields. Countering terrorism is a field



where we have concrete practical results," Patrushev underscored. In this regard, he continued, any allegations that Russia conspired with the Taliban, especially in a bid to assassinate US servicemen, are baseless.

"I would like to believe that in the future, the American media will be more responsible with their publications and won't fuel additional strife between Moscow and Washington. We can only hope that US political circles will settle their internal issues without trying

to score an electoral win at Russia's expense," the security official said. "Such a hostile thrust in our direction is hardly likely to facilitate the restoration of the atmosphere of trust, which both Moscow and Washington have been proclaiming for several years already," the secretary underscored.

Moscow has never cooperated with the Taliban, outlawed in Russia, the Security Council secretary went on. "Frankly speaking, it was the United States that laid the foundation for the Taliban movement," ... P3

U.S. killing of...

in Iraq, for which immediate action was necessary and would have been justified," Callamard said.

"No evidence has been provided that a drone strike in a third country was necessary or that the harm caused to that country was proportionate to the harm allegedly averted.

"Soleimani was in charge of Iran's military strategy, and actions, in Syria and Iraq. But absent an actual imminent threat to life, the course of action taken by the US was unlawful." The killing of Soleimani, who headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, provoked enormous outpourings of grief in Iran.

Tehran retaliated by firing a volley of ballistic missiles at US troops stationed in Iraq. While the attack on the western Iraqi base of Ain al-Assad killed no US soldiers, dozens suffered brain trauma.

Callamard's report addresses targeted killings through armed drones, in light of the proliferation in drone use and their expanding capability during the last five years.

It makes recommendations designed to regulate their use and enhance accountability.

UAE, Afghanistan...

"Peace Carpet Initiative" launched by H.H. Sheikh Fatima bint Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to reinforce the culture of peace and hope among women and support children's rights in Afghanistan.

Sheikha Fatima's project was established in 2010, has provided thousands of job opportunities in traditional carpet production in Afghanistan, and helped improve local living standards in rural areas. Over 4,000 people work for the project, with 70 percent of them being women. The UAE and Afghanistan have established solid ties based on mutual respect and many common factors, such as Islamic culture, and over 130,000 Afghan citizens reside in the UAE, Zahir said.

By Kathy Gannon

U.S., Russia share a complex and bloody history in Afghanistan

Moscow and Washington are intertwined in a complex and bloody history in Afghanistan, with both suffering thousands of dead and wounded in conflicts lasting for years.

Now both superpowers are linked again over Afghanistan, with intelligence reports indicating Russia secretly offered bounties to the Taliban to kill American troops there.

But analysts suggest that despite these apparent differences, the two adversaries actually have much in common, especially when it comes to what a postwar Afghanistan should look like: Both want a stable country that does not serve as a base for extremists to export terrorism.

"The Russian endgame is an Afghanistan which will neither support jihadi movements in the former U.S.S.R. nor host American bases that might one day be used against Russia," says Anatol Lieven, a Georgetown University professor in the Middle Eastern state of Qatar and a senior fellow at the New American Foundation.

Even the Pentagon said this week in a report to the U.S. Congress that Russia backed Washington's deal with the Taliban as the best path forward, while at the same time the Kremlin has sought to cultivate interest with the group, limit the West's military presence and encourage operations against Islamic State militants.

Lieven, who studied the Soviet Union's invasion of the country in 1979 and its subsequent occupation, defeat and withdrawal a decade later, said Moscow would "prefer to see a mixed government in Afghanistan, with Taliban power limited."

He says Moscow has not forgotten its experience in Afghanistan, where at least 15,000 Soviet troops were killed in fighting that began as an effort to prop up a communist ally and soon became a grinding campaign against the U.S.-backed mujahedeen insurgency.

But in today's Afghanistan, the threat facing Russia is the Islamic State affiliate and its allies known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a terrorist organization that has taken aim at Russia's Muslim regions and was born of brewing discontent in Muslim-dominated Central Asia.

Even as Russia and the U.S. vie for influence in Afghanistan, they are aligned in their opposition to IS. Lieven says Moscow regards the Taliban as the



lesser evil and, like Washington, sees it as an ally in the fight against both IS and the IMU.

Remnants of the mujahedeen groups in Afghanistan are now warlords-turned-political leaders in the Kabul government and also are in the ranks of the Taliban. The chief Taliban negotiator in peace talks with the United States, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, fought in the 1980s on the side of the U.S.-backed mujahedeen, as did Mullah Mohammed Omar, the founder of the Taliban.

"A humiliating defeat of the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan by the Taliban would provide some in Moscow with a feel-good sense of revenge for the U.S. support to mujahedeen groups in the 1980s that led to the humiliating defeat and withdrawal of Soviet forces," says Andrew Wilder, vice president of the Asia Program at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Wilder said Moscow's vision of a postwar Afghanistan is much the same as Washington's.

"They would prefer an end state not that different from what the U.S. desires — a political settlement that leads to the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces but leaves behind a relatively stable and ethnically inclusive government that can ensure Afghanistan doesn't again become a safe haven for transnational terrorist groups," he said.

He said Afghanistan's neighbors, including the strategically sensitive nations of Central Asia bordering Russia, would be "the biggest losers" if a withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces led to a collapse of the country and a return to the anarchy of the

1990s.

As for the reports of bounties being paid to the insurgents, analysts also say that cash from abroad has flowed into Afghanistan for years. Loyalties are fluid in the country and money has been used to buy influence, curry favor or manipulate government officials since the collapse of the Taliban in 2001.

As far back as 2013, suitcases of cash given to the Afghan government by the CIA was being blamed for runaway corruption. Washington's own watchdog, the Special Inspector general for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has alleged that billions of dollars have been pocketed by government officials, warlords, drug lords and insurgents.

The money was pumped into Afghanistan by the U.S., Iran, Pakistan, Russia and India.

In Kabul's Sherpur neighborhood, the multistory marble mansions owned by warlords, drug lords and Kabul's political elite were built by corruption, according to Afghans who stage anti-graft protests. Last month, a group of lawyers and economists asked the International Monetary Fund not to lend money to Afghanistan because it would be pocketed by officials.

Insurgents also benefit from the exploding drug trade and have taken payments from countries seeking to buy influence, analysts say.

"U.S. military officials have often suggested that Russia is funneling arms to the Taliban, but the evidence hasn't been nearly as strong as it is for Pakistani and, more recently, Iranian support ... **P3**

Source: www.economist.com

America is rapidly pulling troops from Afghanistan

Faiza Ibrahim is too young to remember when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan as a theocracy. She can scarcely believe her parents' stories about it. She is a radio presenter in the western city of Herat. The idea that gun-toting zealots from the countryside used to forbid women to leave home unless fully veiled and accompanied by a male relative seems almost inconceivable: "My mother was unable to work and find bread. I couldn't imagine that time again."

It was only in 2001 that American forces toppled the Taliban regime, when the mullahs who led the movement refused to hand over Osama bin Laden after the 9/11 attacks. But nearly two-thirds of the population is less than 25 years old, and so has little or no memory of the Taliban's rule. They are having to brush up on their history, however, as they contemplate the prospect of the Taliban returning to power in some form. The American troops that have propped up the Afghan government and held the Taliban at bay for the past 19 years are on their way out. Over the past four months

the number of American soldiers in the country has fallen by a third, from around 13,000 to 8,600. The administration of President Donald Trump has pledged to reduce their strength still further, as part of a deal it signed with the Taliban on February 29th. In exchange the Taliban are supposed to cease providing shelter to foreign militants and—an element of the peace plan that is proceeding much less smoothly—enter into talks with the Afghan government.

"Intra-Afghan talks", in which the government, the Taliban, opposition politicians and representatives of civil society were to discuss the country's future, had been due to start within days of the signing of the accord. But the process immediately bogged down. First, the government and the Taliban bickered over a prisoner exchange outlined in the deal. America had promised that the Afghan government, which was not party to the agreement, would release "up to" 5,000 Taliban prisoners as a gesture of goodwill. The Taliban, in return, were to

free 1,000 policemen and soldiers it held captive. Ashraf Ghani, the president, said 5,000 was too many, but the Taliban were adamant. Months passed.

Another sticking point has been the Taliban's continuing attacks on soldiers and civilians. Although the insurgents observed something close to a ceasefire in late February, to pave the way for the signing of the deal, they reverted to their old ways soon afterwards. The government says they carried out 422 attacks in a single week in June. This breaks a promise to reduce violence, the American and Afghan authorities say. But if the Taliban made such a pledge, it was only in private: the text of the deal did not spell out any truce.

The Taliban did at least cut back on attacks during the Eid holiday in late May. That seems to have spurred Mr Ghani to release most of the required prisoners, even though violence subsequently increased again. There is lingering disagreement, too, over 200-odd people the Taliban want freed, some of whom are accused ... **P3**

Brazil's Bolsonaro...

arguing that the economic damage of those orders is worse than the disease itself.

He has fired two health ministers during the crisis, both trained doctors, and replaced them with an active duty army general on an interim basis.

He joins a list of government leaders to become infected with the coronavirus, including British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez, both of whom were treated in hospital and needed extra oxygen.

Pan American Health Organization director for communicable diseases Marcos Espinal wished Bolsonaro a "speedy recovery" but said his infection carried a message.

"The message is that this virus is unpredictable and does not respect race, class or people in

power, despite security around any president," Espinal said. "For Brazil, the infection of its president should reinforce the need to strengthen implementations of social distancing recommendations and the use of masks to mitigate the spread of coronavirus," he added. Bolsonaro has often defied local guidelines to wear a mask in public, even after a judge ordered him to do so in late June. Bolsonaro has also railed against social distancing rules supported by the World Health Organization.

The U.S. embassy in Brasilia said via Twitter on Monday that the ambassador had lunch on July 4 with Bolsonaro, five ministers and the president's son, Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro. The ambassador had no symptoms, but would undergo testing and is "taking precautions," the embassy said.

Deadly Syrian,...

fled other parts of Syria as Assad, with Russian backing, seized back territory from them in the nine-year-old conflict.

The U.N. investigators urged major powers to open up a wider humanitarian aid corridor to reach

1.5 million people stuck in cramped tents and not allowed to cross into Turkey.

The U.N. Security Council, which in January allowed a cross-border aid operation to continue from two places in Turkey until July 10, is due to vote by Friday whether to extend it.

Peanut Farmers in Helmand Estimate 23,000 Metric Ton Yield

Officials in Helmand province said Tuesday that 5,000 hectares of land has been cultivated in the province this year, and estimate that 23,000 metric tons of peanuts will be harvested. A number of farmers in Helmand province are asking the government to invest in the development and processing of peanuts in the province. Nad Ali district has the largest number of peanut fields in the country. "This product is very easy and can be grown in a very short time and at a low cost; also it is only possible to cultivate in Helmand, especially in Nad Ali district," said Tor Jan, a peanut farmer. "The crop can be harvested in three months and we are very satisfied with the yield. Peanut cultivation needs less water and less expenses," said Mohammad, a peanut farmer. A number of farmers argue the government must create markets for peanuts in the province. "Helmand is the only province in the south where peanuts are grown and



yield a lot, but the problem is that we sell them at a very low price. We ask the government to create a special market for this product," said Islamuddin, a peanut farmer. "The government has to create a way for us to send our crops to foreign countries as well as to other provinces of Afghanistan. If we are given a path,

our crops will have a better market and better revenue," said Gul Ahmad, a resident of Nad Ali district. "In Helmand province, 5,000 hectares of land have been planted with peanuts and our estimation shows that this year we will get 23,000 metric tons of peanuts from the fields, which is an increase of about five percent over

last year. We are also trying to aid the processing of peanuts," said Zalmay Alako, head of Helmand's agriculture directorate. Peanuts in domestic markets are a valuable crop and promoting their cultivation and harvesting in the country can be a suitable alternative to growing poppy for opium.

Russian-American dialogue...

he pointed out, adding that in the 1980s, Washington had shelled out billions of dollars to support the Afghan mujahideen, "who later formed the bulk of terrorist forces not only in Afghanistan but also in the entire region." "National Security Advisor to US President [Jimmy Carter] Zbigniew Brzezinski's revelations are well-known, he admitted that Washington had sought to sponsor Afghan terrorists to satisfy its geopolitical goal," Patrushev noted. "Russia, in contrast, has never cooperated with the Taliban," the top security official emphasized, pointing out that the Russian Supreme Court had designated the Taliban as a terrorist group in 2003. When commenting on media reports about Russia's alleged 'bounties' to Afghan militants to kill US troops, Patrushev said that "these are ridiculous allegations." According to him, those who make such statements either know little about the situation in Afghanistan or "deliberately seek to distort the truth."

U.S., Russia share...

for the Taliban," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Wilson Center. "While Moscow has sought to scale up its engagement with the Taliban in recent years, much of this has been meant to promote support for peace and reconciliation. And this is part of a broader Russian objective to increase its influence in Afghanistan," he said. But for Brian G. Williams, author of "Counter Jihad. The America Military Experience in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria," and a former employee of the CIA's Counter Terrorism Center, Russia's endgame in Afghanistan is to hand Washington a humiliating defeat. "The generals in the FSB (Federal Security Service) and GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate) would again be boasting should American Chinooks be forced to chaotically evacuate U.S. personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul," he said, Williams said President Vladimir Putin "has always seen America as its primary competitor for power in post-Soviet Eurasia."

China, Pakistan...

the Taliban under the Doha peace agreement signed between the US and the Taliban on February 29. "With consideration of the measures taken by the Afghan government, the hope is that these talks start during July," said Geran Hewad, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "When the intra-Afghan talks started, it does not mean that the Taliban negotiate with the Afghan government as a government, also, the Taliban will not agree on a ceasefire on the start of the talks," said Sami Yousufzai, freelance journalist in Doha. Under the US-Taliban peace

America is rapidly...

an element of pragmatism, the Taliban still insisted on referring to themselves as leading an "Islamic emirate", just as they did when they ruled the country in the 1990s. "If this thing moves forward, the day's going to come where they can't just say, 'We will settle that later,'" says Andrew Watkins of International Crisis Group. The government, for its part, has said it wants to preserve "a sovereign, democratic and united republic". It will definitely resist the re-creation of a doctrinaire Islamist regime. In a speech by video-link to an American think-tank on June 24th Abdullah Abdullah, in effect the government's chief negotiator, said, "We cannot achieve peace with sacrificing the basic and fundamental rights of our people." He has said he will include women in his negotiating team. But he also concedes that the government will have to compromise to win the Taliban over—without specifying how. Yet more uncertainty surrounds America's part in Afghanistan's future. The only element of the peace plan going according to schedule is the withdrawal of American forces. "It is not the duty of us troops to solve ancient conflicts in far away lands that many people have never heard of," Mr Trump told cadets at the us Military Academy at West Point on June 13th. Claims that Russia

agreement, 5,000 Taliban prisoners will be released from the Afghan government's jails. So far the government has released 4015 of the inmates. But, the Afghan government has said that it will not 597 Taliban prisoners. The Afghan government on Sunday revealed one of the main reasons behind the delay in the intra-Afghan negotiations, saying it is not releasing 597 prisoners of the 5,000 inmates that were to be freed as part of the confidence-building measures established in the US-Taliban agreement signed in late February. These individuals are accused of

"crimes and moral issues" and are on a list that was given to the government by the Taliban, said Ahmad Rashid Totakhil, head of the prisoners' release affairs. "Murderers' are on the Taliban list and the government has resisted. It is a (victims') rights issue and the law does not allow to release someone under the pretext of being a Taliban member, who is charged with murder or even moral crimes like rape," Totakhil said. The Taliban rejected this and said the list includes names of members of the group who have been arrested on charges of being a Taliban member.

paid a bounty to the Taliban for every American soldier they killed are causing him embarrassment (see article). Joe Biden, his rival in November's election, has long been sceptical about state-building in Afghanistan. How forcefully either man would push to preserve Afghan democracy is unclear. Many doubt that either would send troops back in should the Taliban come close to toppling the elected government.

Covid-19 has made all these questions more fraught. The disease is said to be barreling through the Afghan security services. The American troops who remain in Afghanistan are providing less training to the Afghan army in part to avoid catching it from their Afghan comrades. Attempts to contain the spread of the virus have also hit the already sputtering Afghan economy. Nation-building, under any government, is looking harder than ever. Afghans like Miss Ibrahimy anxiously await the start of talks. She wants to remain working in Afghanistan to justify her parents' sacrifices. But she doubts that the gun-toting zealots her mother told her about have changed much. "If the Taliban come with that ideology that they had before 2001, then it won't be a change for peace, or better security or a better country," she says grimly.

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U.S. killing of Iran's Qassem Soleimani 'unlawful': UN expert

The US drone strike that killed Iran's top general Qassem Soleimani was "unlawful", the United Nations expert on extrajudicial killings concluded in a report on Tuesday.

US President Donald Trump ordered the killing in a January 3 drone strike near Baghdad international airport.

Soleimani was "the world's top terrorist" and "should have been terminated long ago", Trump said at the time.

Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis was also killed in the attack.

Callamard concluded that it was an "arbitrary killing" that violated the UN charter.

"In light of the evidence that the US has provided to date, the targeting of General Soleimani, and the deaths of those accompanying him, constitute an arbitrary killing for which, under IHRL (international human rights law), the US is responsible," said Agnes Callamard, the UN

special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, in her report published on Tuesday.

She said the strike violated the UN Charter, with "insufficient evidence provided of an ongoing or imminent attack", she wrote, adding that the US had provided no evidence that an imminent attack against US interest was being planned.

The independent rights expert does not speak for the UN but reports her findings to it.

Her report on targeted killings through armed drones - around half of which deals with the Soleimani case - is to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva on Thursday.

The United States withdrew from the council in 2018.

"No evidence has been provided that General Soleimani specifically was planning an imminent attack against US interests, particularly ... P2



A look at the world

Brazil's Bolsonaro, long a skeptic, tests positive for coronavirus

The right-wing populist told a group of television reporters that he had developed symptoms at the weekend.

"It started on Sunday with a certain malaise and became worse throughout the day on Monday, feeling poorly, exhaustion, a bit of muscle ache, fever hit 38 (degrees Celsius)," he said.

Finishing the interview, he stepped back and removed his mask to reveal a smile, adding: "You can see from my face that I'm well and I'm calm."

Bolsonaro said he has been taking hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug with unproven effectiveness against COVID-19.



Bolsonaro has emulated his political role model Donald Trump in voicing skepticism about the virulence of the virus, although the U.S. president has moderated his tone. Bolsonaro tested negative in March for the coronavirus after several aides were diagnosed following a visit to Trump's Mar-a-Lago, Florida, resort.

The positive test on Tuesday looks set to spark a frantic period of contact tracing and tests for those who met Bolsonaro in recent days, including Economy Minister Paulo Guedes, lender Banco Bradesco's Chairman Luiz Carlos Trabuco and planemaker Embraer's CEO Francisco Gomes Neto. Over the weekend, Bolsonaro was also in close contact with U.S. Ambassador Todd Chapman during July 4 celebrations. Pictures showed neither wearing a mask.

Brazilian financial markets retreated following the news. Brazil's currency, the real, swung into negative territory and the benchmark stock index deepened losses to 1.5%.

Brazil has the world's second-largest outbreak behind the United States, with more than 1.6 million confirmed cases.

Bolsonaro has drawn criticism from public health experts for fighting state and city efforts to impose social distancing, ... P2

Deadly Syrian, Russian air strikes in Idlib amount to war crimes, U.N. says



Syrian and Russian planes have carried out deadly aerial strikes on schools, hospitals and markets in Idlib province that amount to war crimes, U.N. investigators said on Tuesday in a report that also condemned attacks by Islamist militants.

They said that "indiscriminate bombardment" by pro-government forces, ahead of a March ceasefire brokered with Turkey, claimed hundreds of lives and forced one million civilians to flee, which may amount to a crime against humanity.

The U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Syria also accused Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a jihadist group that controls part of northwest Syria, of firing artillery into civilian areas "with no apparent legitimate military objective".

Fighters from HTS, a group formerly known as Nusra Front, have tortured and executed detainees, it added.

"All sides likely committed war crimes," Paulo Pinheiro, chairman of the U.N. panel, told a news briefing.

"Children were shelled at school, parents were shelled at the market, patients were shelled at the hospital. Entire families were bombarded, even while fleeing these attacks."

The report, covering November 2019 until June 2020, was based on overflight data and witness testimony.

It examines 52 "emblematic attacks" in northwest Syria, including 47 attributed to the Russian-backed Syrian government.

"We document two incidents in the report where we think it was Russian airplanes that conducted those attacks," said panel member Hanny Megally.

The report said Russian warplanes were solely implicated in a deadly March 5 strike on a poultry farm near Marat Misrin that sheltered displaced people, and in three strikes that damaged a hospital in the rebel-held town of Ariha on Jan. 29.

Russia denies involvement in the latter attack, it said. The government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has denied many previous U.N. accusations of war crimes.

The region is home to a mix of Islamist militant and opposition groups, many of which ... P2

Arabs call for int'l stance against Israeli annexation

Arabs call for int'l stance against Israeli annexation

Nine Arab countries on Tuesday called for an effective international stance against an Israeli plan to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

The foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia, Oman and Kuwait held a virtual meeting on Tuesday.

A statement issued following the meeting called on the international community to take "clear and effective measures to prevent the implementation of the Israeli



annexation plan to safeguard international law and peace".

It also underlined the need to return to serious and effective talks for solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-state solution.

The Arab ministers reiterated their support to the 2000 Arab Peace Initiative, which offers Israel full diplomatic recognition from the Arab states in return for an Israeli withdrawal from Arab land occupied in 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian state. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to start annexing all settlement blocs and the Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank as of July 1.

The move, however, appears to have come to a halt in light of widespread international rejection of the plan along with differences with the US administration on its application.

International law views both the West Bank and East Jerusalem as "occupied territories" and considers all Jewish settlement-building activity there as illegal.



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