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Top Negotiator Dr. Abdullah to visit India on Oct 6

Afghan government's top negotiator for inter-Afghan talks, Abdullah Abdullah, will be visiting India from October 6 for four days. As the Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, he represents the Afghan govt in talks with Taliban, which started in September in Doha.

This is his first visit to New Delhi in the current position and he is expected to meet top officials of the Indian government. Joint Secretary, PAI or Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran division of Ministry of External Affairs, JP Singh had met Abdullah on the sidelines of Intra Afghan ceremony on September 12 in Doha.

At the ceremony, India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar had said, "Interests of minorities, women and vulnerable sections of society must be preserved and the issue of violence across the country ...

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Miller: Taliban Must Reduce Violence

The US and NATO forces commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Scott Miller, in a visit to the northern province of Faryab last week said the Taliban must reduce violence as it remains high amidst peace efforts.

"We did talk about the violence," Miller said about his meeting with officials during his trip. "We're trying to understand, make sure we understand the violence and really this is about the Afghan security forces protecting the Afghan people. But we all acknowledge that violence is too high, and the Taliban must lower their violence."

Violence remains high in the country amidst the ongoing peace negotiations in Doha between the Afghan republic and the Taliban negotiating teams. The start of the direct negotiations has faced delay over two disputed points on the procedural rules. So far, the contact groups of both sides have held seven meetings to discuss procedural rules for the negotiations.

"If Doha does have an opportunity to move forward here. So, we will ...

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U.S. starts dismantling 400 bases across Afghanistan



It has been revealed by the highly placed diplomatic sources that United States (US) has started demolishing its medium and smaller size basis throughout Afghanistan and dismantling of almost four hundred such basis will be completed by the end of this month.

Most of the facilities have already been demolished. The Pentagon

hasn't made up its mind about the future of its five major bases, viewed the biggest in the region outside the Gulf. Washington had hinted earlier that it would consider vacating the major basis as well but now the strategists are confused about the decision.

The US has spent billions of dollars on each five bases and it would be

extremely difficult for Afghan forces to man and control the complex basis. The systems fit in the basis are sensitive and the most modern, the US would never allow any other country to have access to these systems since it could jeopardise US security system.

Increasing influence of China in Afghanistan as great source of

concern for the United States while Iran's presence in Afghanistan equally worrisome for Washington. Pentagon would never allow the two countries to come near to its systems put in place in Afghanistan.

Especially Faraha base close to Iran's border, would be retained by the United States through any method in long run, the sources hinted. The major airbases like Bagram, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif and Faraha could be retained by the United States through an arrangement that would be discussed by the authorities with the United States. Interestingly US has already assured its Taliban interlocutors that it wouldn't retain any of the bases and the US forces destroyed its basis before withdrawing its troops in many areas in accordance the desire of the Taliban leadership.

The sources told The News here on Thursday that the visit of Abdullah Abdullah has helped in streamlining the affairs in Afghanistan. The last soldier of the United States will be leaving Afghanistan in eight months; May next year. The US will be leaving 4000 troops in Afghanistan behind by end of this month as rest have started leaving war torn Afghanistan where the US and other ...

P3

Trilateral meeting on Afghan peace talks soon

Foreign ministers from Afghan, the United States and Tajikistan will meet soon on the Afghan peace process and developments in the region. Deputy Foreign Minister Mirwais Naab hailed the United States a strategic partner for Afghanistan. He praised Tajikistan as an important neighbour. A statement for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Friday the trilateral meeting would review the ongoing peace negotiations in Qatar, opportunities and challenges.

The deputy foreign minister called the international community's participation in the opening ceremony of the peace talks an important move. He emphasised on regional and international support for violence reduction and a lasting cease fire in Afghanistan.

The three foreign ministers would also discuss investment, trade and transit, regional connectivity, energy and counter-terrorism.



Deadly Car Bomb Explosion Kills 15 in Nangarhar

At least 15 people have been killed and more than 30 others wounded in a car bomb attack that targeted a government building in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar, officials said, adding that the death toll could rise.

"The car bomb detonated at the entrance of the district headquarters building. Several armed attackers tried to enter the building after the attack but were killed by security forces," the governor's spokesman Attaullah Khogyani told AFP news agency on Saturday.

The explosion hit an administrative building located in Ghani Khel district that also housed some military facilities, he said.

Obaidullah Shinwari, a member



of the Nangarhar provincial council, was reported as saying by Tolo news agency that at least eight of those killed were civilians.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blast. Armed groups such as ISIL (ISIS) and the Taliban have carried out attacks against the Afghan government, national

security and defence personnel and civilians.

The attack comes as representatives of the Afghan government and Taliban are engaged in negotiations in the Qatari capital, Doha, to end the country's decades-long war. The intra-Afghan talks followed a US-Taliban peace deal signed in February in Doha.

Top Negotiator...

and its neighbourhood has to be effectively addressed."

India was present along with around 30 countries at the ceremony.

India's policy towards the Afghan peace process is that it should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled and "respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan."

Even as peace talks in Afghanistan have gained momentum, India has increased its reach out to a number of stakeholders in the country. September saw a visit by Afghan leader Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum, during which he met External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and Foreign secretary Harsh Shringla.

New Delhi is Afghanistan's major development partner and has built number infrastructure projects in the country like the India-Afghanistan friendship dam in the western province of Herat and the Afghan Parliament in the capital Kabul.

Sudan's...

by South Sudan whose leaders themselves battled Khartoum as rebels for decades before achieving independence in 2011.

Al Jazeera's Hiba Morgan, reporting from the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, said not every group was present in Juba.

"While this deal is been called the final agreement, there are major groups that are yet to sign an agreement with the transitional government," Morgan said.

"The biggest concern is the implementation of the security arrangement because there are concerns about splinter groups," Morgan added.

By TAHIR QADIRY

Afghanistan's vision for achieving a perennial peace

The ongoing peace talks between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban in Qatar comes in the backdrop of certain epochal events that may change the course of the 21st century. On the one hand, the catastrophic Covid-19 pandemic caught the entire world off-guard, but on the other hand, humanity witnessed unprecedented unanimity against adversity. A similar chorus echoed that set the stage for these extant talks, intended to herald a new era of stable and sustainable peace in Afghanistan after four decades of war and bloodshed. Furthermore, an identical voicing was replicated regional and globally because of Afghanistan's determined and resolute efforts to forge consensus; it's accentuation is timely as the concerted international attempt to endorse Afghan narrative vis-a-vis the Taliban movement not only strikes consonance with the aspirations of the Afghan people, but it also has the potential to immensely contribute toward thriving and peaceful region and the world.

The upcoming Geneva donor conference will present another window of opportunity for all stakeholders of Afghan peace to showcase solidarity amid the reconciliation process. For the Taliban movement, this golden opportunity should be seized by doing away with all kinds of violence, upholding a ceasefire and acknowledging the new Afghanistan. It is also very important that Afghanistan's allies endorse an End-State, acceptable to the people of Afghanistan, the region and the world.

Quintessential upshot

It is of paramount importance to understand that the national, regional, and international consensus, and confidence-building measures undertaken by the government of Afghanistan are the derivatives of constitutional democracy that Afghanistan accomplished after the fall of the Taliban movement in 2001. Commensurately, the constitutional democracy gave rise to empowered, vigilant, and vigorous civil societies and educated demographic dividend that not only bolstered the accountability of the administrative machinery of the country but also directed the leadership toward achieving the longing aspirations of the Afghan people. With such a background that will serve as the fulcrum of any peace deal, the hopes are at new heights, yet grounded in the practicalities of the regional dynamics.

Putting the stopper on a four-decade-old war

Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the country has witnessed an obdurate, dastardly, and diabolical carnage. Things invariably changed in the post-2001 era in terms of the establishment of the constitution, strengthening of democratic principles, the economic surge and so on. However, the violence unabashedly unleashed continued killing innocent lives in the country. Since 2001, more than 111,000 people have lost their priceless lives. Similarly, the international community that invested in blood and treasure, while ensuring security in Afghanistan, has suffered some heavy casualties over the last 19 years. Furthermore, this unnecessary war not only resulted in the casualties for the Afghan civilians and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), who are bravely fighting more than 20 terrorist groups at various forefronts, but it also resulted in mass displacement of thousands of citizens within the country and abroad.

Laying the foundation

Considering the costs of an ugly and unnecessary war, the government of Afghanistan undertook numerous initiatives to form domestic, regional and global consensus for the peace talks. The government successfully forged consensus with 20 regional and 20 international key players, including India. Further, copious confidence-building measures were undertaken such as the organization of Consultative Peace Loya Jirga — a 3,000-member assembly from diverse sections of the Afghan population including scholars, women representatives, youth activists, civil societies — and the release of around 5,500 Taliban insurgents. Later, a 21-member peace negotiating team was created, which once again comprised members from various parts across the country, representing politicians, Islamic scholars, women, youth, and other diverse members of the Afghan population. The team that comprises of four women is in Qatar now, speaking face to face with the Taliban.

India's high stakes in new Afghanistan

Afghanistan has made drastic strides in the last two decades, and the contribution of its international allies, specially the US, the EU and India, in this is absolutely commendable. The pool of human capital, with young demographic dividend, has transformed into motivated citizens eager to make positive changes socially, politically, culturally, and economically. The

core notion of democracy has strengthened with people actively participating in the Afghan polity and consolidating checks-and-balances. Today, there are hundreds of independent media outlets operating actively in the country; hundreds of schools and universities are enrolling students from every corner of the land, women participation in Afghan society is at new heights with around 27 percent MPs in the parliament being women. The female student enrollment ratio has increased manifold with gross enrollment reaching over 83 percent. The GDP of the country has reached well over \$18 billion in 2019 from less than \$3 billion in 2001. The ANDSF has transformed into a professional, well-trained force in warfare tactics, while incorporating cutting-edge technology in its arsenal.

However, the key role played by our international partners in contributing towards our success as a nation cannot be overemphasized. India, being one of the strategic and largest trading partners of Afghanistan, has spent over \$3 billion in rebuilding and reconstruction efforts in the country. As a nation with which Afghanistan not only engages economically and politically, but also because of the shared common values, the cultural thread that defines the contours of our bond is unique. India's educational initiatives to give scholarships to Afghan students is another celebrated step, amongst many others. Since 2003, more than 70,000 Afghan students have graduated from India and there are currently around 17,000 Afghan students studying across various Indian states. Even during testing times of the Covid-19 pandemic, Afghanistan-India relationship continued the feat of ever-boasting bond, where India provided 75,000 tonnes of wheat to ensure food security while also providing essential critical drugs.

Further, India's firm stand to back the narrative of the new Afghanistan is well acknowledged among Afghans. During the inaugural ceremony of the Qatar talks, India reiterated its call for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled peace negotiations, which is considered extremely significant and important by the Afghan government. Its steadfast support in reaching the End-State is also vital from the Indian perspective as this will bolster India's regional security infrastructure. Considering India's growing global heft, it would be worth considering ... **P3**

By Mark S. Cogan and Dr. Gouri Sankar Nag

Obstacles and Opportunities On Long Road to Peace in Afghanistan

The long 19-year war in Afghanistan has been costly, both in human and financial terms. Since the United Nations began tracking Afghan casualties in 2009, more than 100,000 Afghans have been killed. U.S. military casualties stand at 2,448 with 20,722 wounded in action. In the first half of 2020, the UN has recorded 3,500 conflict-related civilian casualties, including 1,300 deaths. The United States has spent over \$2 trillion in Afghanistan since 2001. However, "intra-Afghan" peace talks have begun in Doha, Qatar that have the potential to bring the conflict to a close. In general, peace talks can only succeed if the process is institutionalized in a fashion that gives it legitimacy and a structured framework to monitor progress. A condition of the US-Taliban-negotiated agreement back in February, these talks still represent a significant achievement. Nevertheless, there are a number of political roadblocks to overcome—as well as fresh opportunities for Afghans and external actors.

It is a sense of minutiae and an awkward transition from a constant state of war that holds back talks

in Doha. First, while Afghanistan is home to a majority of Sunni Muslims, the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence (madhhab) remains a source of contention. Afghanistan is a fragile mixture of ethnicities from Shia Muslims; it is also home to decreasing numbers of Hindu and Sikh minorities, who fear being marginalized if a Sunni interpretation becomes the primary form of dispute resolution. While both the Taliban and the Afghan government follow the Hanafi school, the Shia Muslims, which represent about 15 percent of the population, also have their own schools of jurisprudence. Each has their own interpretations of Sharia law that are different, and these can affect important human rights issues such as the degree of freedom for women and girls, freedom of speech, and criminal justice. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani also sees the interpretations of the teachings of Abu Hanifa differently. In 2019, Ghani called on the Taliban to respect his teachings and abandon violence.

The fact that the two sides have begun a long negotiation process is

a significant development by itself, the product of slow developments and a requirement of the February 2020 agreement signed between the United States and the Taliban, headed by U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad. Other conditions of that deal involved a prisoner exchange, the withdrawal of American troops and the Taliban breaking ties with other insurgent groups like Al-Qaeda. Previously, the Taliban viewed the Ghani government as a puppet of the United States and the West. The Doha talks were originally scheduled for March, but Taliban attacks on Afghan forces proved an obstacle. Missteps over prisoner exchanges also complicated matters. The Afghan government refused to release the last 320 Taliban prisoners unless accompanied by a release of Afghan prisoners, which delayed the process. And external actors, namely the United States, continue to worry that the Taliban have not followed the steps outlined in the February agreement, such as distancing themselves from other extremist groups and reducing their attacks on ... **P3**

Miller: Taliban...

continue to work that but again it is about the integration of the security forces with the local governance as well."

Faryab governor Naqibullah Fayiq said they had a constructive meeting with Gen. Miller and Afghan officials who visited the province to discuss security problems in the northern province.

"In this meeting, NATO forces commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Miller, reiterated his support to the Afghan forces, especially in northern and northeastern province," Fayiq said.

Gen. Yasin Zia, Chief of Army Staff, said they assessed the security situation of northern provinces

in their trip to Balkh and Faryab provinces.

"The Afghan forces continue their efforts to protect the people... Our enemies should know that we are ready for defending the country and meanwhile, we are ready for peace. Peace is the only way to prosperity in Afghanistan," said Mohammad Ayub Salangi, the deputy head of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance.

Figures by the Ministry of Interior Affairs show that 69 civilians were killed and 141 more were wounded in 650 attacks by the Taliban over the last week. Taliban has not commented on the statistics provided by the Interior Affairs Ministry.

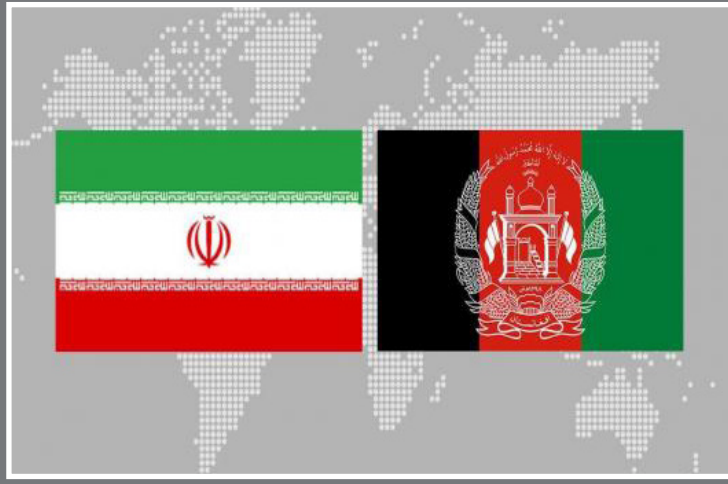
Cities, states...

political chaos could transcend into something worse, into physical action, in the event that we come up to a contested election," said Jonathan Wackrow, managing director at Teneo, a management-consulting firm that does corporate risk-assessment. Wackrow, who is also a CNN law enforcement analyst, said his firm is working with two major US financial institutions and three other Fortune 100 corporations

on their preparations. "I think if you had widespread unrest in major cities, that you will have a definite impact on business operations, (and) potential financial implications as well ... so we want to prepare them for the entire spectrum of threats and the consequences those threats may have on their organization, on their people, processes and technology so they can sustain operations in the midst of chaos," he said.

Exports to Afghanistan via Dogharoon up by 33pc: Iran

Iran has exported goods worth \$1.16 billion to Afghanistan via the Dogharoon Special Economic Zone over the past six months, a media outlet reported on Saturday. IRNA quoted the Dogharoon Special Economic Zone head as saying the value of the exports had increased by 33 percent, compared to the corresponding period last year, Mohammad Rostami said 34,981 trucks had transported Afghanistan's exports -- worth \$2.575 million and weighing 2,992 million tonnes -- to Iran. Half of the Iranian exports to Afghanistan were sent through Dogharoon to western Herat province -- the second biggest market in the country. Construction materials, fruits, and food items are among the goods Iran exported Afghanistan, which sent construction stones, oil seeds and used batteries to the neighbour.



U.S. starts dismantling...

foreign troops devastated the poor country for twenty long years by using most sophisticated weapons and ammunition.

With the visit of Dr Abdullah Abdullah Chairman Afghanistan High Council for National Reconciliation (NHCNR) to Pakistan, first in ten years, now all stakeholders of Afghan situation are on board with Pakistan. Of course, with the active assistance of the United States and facilitation by Pakistan, Doha process for Afghan talks would continue. Pakistan has told the relevant people that Islamabad will be never provide on its land a rendezvous to hold intra-Afghan dialogue. The sources said that Abdullah Abdullah, a disciple of late Northern leader Ahmad Shah Masood when praising Pakistan's role in Afghan conflict, experienced the authorities as music to their ears since Abdullah Abdullah had been stalwart of anti-Pakistan lobby in Afghanistan. New Delhi used to treat him as an asset due to its heavy investment on his companions in North of Afghanistan. The sources pointed out that Abdullah Abdullah who came to Pakistan by special plan of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, has reported to the president what transpired in his interactions in Pakistan.

The Prime Minister Special Representative for Afghanistan who made the visit a success through his diplomatic skill, has expressed his satisfaction about the outcome of the visit of the second important person in Kabul Administration after President Ashraf Ghani, the sources added.

Afghanistan's vision...

that New Delhi's advocacy for an Afghan narrative both regionally and globally will reap dividends for the entire South Asian region.

Conclusion

The Taliban has to acknowledge the ground realities of the new Afghanistan, stop violence and embrace humanitarian ceasefire if they truly intend to accomplish enduring peace in the country. This would ensue their integration and assimilation in an Afghan society as rightful citizens. For the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the preservation of the constitutional democracy that delineates the rights of all Afghan citizens, its corollaries, and the gains of the last 19 years are extremely important. The End-State, acceptable to the Afghans, the region, and the world, will reap immense benefits for all stakeholders. The global mobilization for the Afghan peace process that is in line with the aspirations of Afghans has the potential to write a new chapter in world history. And with that, Afghanistan will once again become an economic hub and a bridge between Central and South Asia that will connect and help transit values, ideas and commodities, and boast itself as a symbol of cooperation rather than confrontation.

Obstacles and...

Afghan forces. American forces are supposed to drawdown within 135 days of the agreement. Troop levels have been reduced to just 8,600 and President Trump is expected to reduce that number further before November. Among American and Afghan anxieties is the return of freed Taliban to the battlefield. A report from the Afghan Peace Dialogue Project at Queen's University in Belfast noted that 68 percent of 108 former Taliban prisoners have "resumed active roles in the conflict, or are in Taliban groups intent on resuming fighting, or are occupying military or political positions which are fundamentally linked to the Taliban war effort." A minority have halted their return due to family opposition or a desire to return to civilian life. A reduction in violence has proven difficult, as the Taliban have started over 350 operations in different regions of Afghanistan, resulting in the deaths of 20 civilians as well as more than 80 wounded. Other issues have critics concerned, such as the potential influence of the Taliban in a new system of Afghan governance, the \$500 million in Taliban funding that comes from the drug trade, and Pakistan's perceived influence over insurgent groups—although that has ebbed in recent years. The Doha talks have yet to offer substantive clues as to what the Taliban want out of the process. In years past, the Taliban have fought for the restoration of an Islamic emirate that ran Afghanistan from 1996-2001. What is certain is that in order to reach a stable peace, the Afghan government will need to concede some aspects of governance, giving it a role to play in whatever new system is implemented. Questions still remain about the Taliban's view of the Ghani-led government and its Khalilzad-brokered Constitution, which they have repeatedly denounced amid continued U.S. support. Peace negotiations often fail due to the hardening of positions. For example, the Taliban have advocated for a centralized system of government with a single sovereign leader acting under the guise of Sharia law; however, they have recently made concessions that loosen this "monopoly on power" with an aim on coexisting with Afghan institutions. The Taliban's cooperation

with other jihadist groups also threatens the peace process. When the U.S. proposed an initial timeline for troop reductions over a period of years, the Taliban responded quickly with a timeframe of months. While the Americans made concessions there, the Taliban has been cautious in disavowing al-Qaeda or the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP). Again the Taliban's insistence paid off, only agreeing to prevent actors from using "the soil of Afghanistan" to undermine peace in Afghanistan.

Geopolitical Considerations Regional actors such as China, Pakistan, and India all have a role to play, although they are not officially part of this Afghan-only process. Current geopolitical tensions among the three actors render difficult scenarios. Security and economic carrots have been dangled in front of both the Afghan government and the Taliban. Both Pakistan and China have discussed regional security in anticipation of a U.S. withdrawal, partly out of pragmatism. China continues to crackdown on its Uighur Muslim community in Xinjiang Province, but worries about insurgent groups creating bases in Afghanistan. China's pragmatism led them to offer highway networks in Afghanistan to facilitate the reduction of violence. China is also interested in Afghanistan's untapped mineral wealth, and has offered to expand the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China is the third biggest investor in Afghanistan behind Pakistan and Iran, but infrastructure development and access to cheap Chinese credit could prove valuable to Afghanistan and profitable for Beijing.

Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan are compounded by its checkered, but improved relationship with the United States and the grim reality that the Americans are withdrawing troops. In anticipation, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi met with a Taliban delegation in August in hopes of encouraging the stalled peace talks. The economic situation in Pakistan remains precarious, despite an IMF bailout, but Islamabad is using its new foreign policy credibility to mediate in conflicts, such as between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and now in Afghanistan. Pakistan can hardly afford economic

shocks in Afghanistan, and it cannot afford a government in Kabul unfriendly to its interests—despite its rocky relationships with recent Afghan governments. A new regime with the Taliban having greater input could be more favorable. Finally, India's diplomacy has always been rooted in its contributions to Kabul, from supporting the training of Afghan security forces under the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement of 2011, to its wider support for governance initiatives, infrastructure development, capacity building, and ICT. The stakes however have changed for India, which seems to benefit the most from the status quo. Karzai often used anti-American rhetoric, whereas Ghani has moved closer to the United States. India also bases some of its unilateral actions in the Kashmir region in anticipation of impending change in the status quo. The links between New Delhi and Kabul are not simply bilateral, but with an eye on Pakistan and China. India worries that the peace process will favor Pakistan and the increased influence that the Taliban will likely have in Kabul. While India has gained favor in Washington through billions of dollars in Afghan investments, the return of the Taliban would adversely affect its interests, including the widening of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) via an expanded CPEC. For Afghanistan, the Doha talks are just the beginning of the peace process, which will undoubtedly experience periodic turbulence and discord. At this stage of the process, there are too many unanswered questions: How will Afghanistan bring about a lasting cease fire? How will former Taliban and other combatants reenter civilian life? Some clues can be found in a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project. Will Afghanistan's government remain committed to democracy under greater Taliban influence? What lies ahead for Afghanistan's women and girls? How does Afghanistan begin to reconcile these long years of internal conflict and what would that process look like? This is the just beginning of a long and painful process of peacemaking and peacebuilding. What's important at this stage is to keep the talks active and proceeding in good faith.

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Cities, states and businesses brace for election unrest in US

Corporate America, city governments and federal and local law enforcement across the country are making plans to deal with political instability, civil unrest and violence around the upcoming presidential election.

Concerns range from isolated violent incidents to a long stretch of mass protests, violent confrontations between extremists and widespread property damage, if the outcome of the election remains unclear or is hotly contested for weeks or months, according to security consultants, analysts of extremism, police officials and local elected leaders who spoke with CNN.

"It keeps me up at night," Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley, who chairs the US Conference of Mayors' Mayors and Police Chiefs Task Force, about the threat of violence. "I'm also worried that there will be a bogus attempt to prevent the counting of all the ballots, and that also could lead to a

variety of unrest in a variety of ways."

In recent months, federal law enforcement agencies, led by the FBI, have held discussions with sheriffs and local police who would be charged with keeping order in any protests that may surround disputed results, according to US law enforcement officials briefed on the matter. Among the concerns are armed extremists who may try to interfere with or halt vote-counting done by local canvassing boards. Groups ranging from right wing activists and white supremacists to antifa and anarchists have been active in recent months amid the George Floyd protests. Police department leaders in cities from Baltimore to Seattle and Portland told CNN they have prohibited officers from taking days off around the election. Baltimore Police Detective Chakia Fennoy said, in an email, the department is taking "extra precautions to include opening the Incident Command Room, having dedicated



personnel to respond to any issues and closely monitoring any information leading up to the election that may create issues affecting public safety."

Banks, Fortune 500 companies and other

businesses, meanwhile, are working with security consultants to identify steps they should take to minimize potential disruption to their business and protect their employees and assets.

"The stakes are so high, that this ... **P2**

A look at the world

India inaugurates 'world's longest' highway tunnel

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday inaugurated "the longest highway tunnel in the world" built in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh that borders China.

Strategically important, the tunnel named after former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is located in Himalayas at an altitude of 3000 meters (10,000 Feet) from the mean sea level (MSL).

Modi travelled to Himachal Pradesh to inaugurate the tunnel.



In a televised speech, the Indian premier said the tunnel will give a new strength to India's border infrastructure.

"The Atal tunnel will give new strength to India's border infrastructure. It is an example of world-class border connectivity," Modi said.

He said that the tunnel will also be a "lifeline" to the nearby Ladakh region.

India and China are facing heightened faceoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), a de facto border near the Himalayan region of Ladakh in disputed Jammu and Kashmir.

An official hand-out said earlier that the Atal Tunnel is the "longest highway tunnel in the World."

"The 9.02 Km [5.6-mile] long tunnel connects Manali to Lahaul-Spiti valley throughout the year [...] the tunnel reduces the road distance by 46 Kms [28.5 miles] between Manali and Leh and the time by about 4 to 5 hours," the release said.

It added that it has been designed to handle traffic density of 3,000 cars and 1,500 trucks per day.

Sudan's government, rebels sign landmark deal



Sudan's government and rebel leaders gathered on Saturday to drumming, singing and dancing as they signed a landmark peace deal aimed at ending decades of war in which hundreds of thousands died.

"Today we have reached a peace agreement. We are happy. We have finished the mission," Tut Gatluak, head of the South Sudanese mediating team said, shortly before the signing of the deal that happened a year after the peace talks began.

Minister and leaders of governments from neighbouring countries as well as Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia attended the ceremony in Juba, the capital of neighbouring South Sudan.

"This signing of this agreement today is a significant day today for Sudan and South Sudan ... it means an end to suffering of many Sudanese people in different corners of Sudan and outside Sudan," said Mini Arko Minawi, leader of the Sudan Liberation Movement which is one of the parties to the deal.

"Obviously, economic challenge in Sudan is one of the challenges. Also fragile political situation is one challenge but I am sure we will achieve the peace we want ... there is need for tolerance," he added.

Entertainers from South Sudan and Sudan performed for the guests, while members of the rebel groups from Darfur, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile marched, singing songs of joy and carrying banners bearing the images of their party leaders. Ending Sudan's internal conflicts has been a top priority of the transitional government in power since last year's overthrow of longtime leader Omar al-Bashir amid a popular pro-democracy uprising.

The peace talks were mediated ... **P2**

Azerbaijan's army destroys Armenian military equipment

Azerbaijan's army troops destroyed a large amount of military equipment belonging to the Armenian military amid the ongoing border clashes between the two countries.

"During the present day, the troops of the Azerbaijani Army, successfully advancing in the intended directions, took possession of new strongholds and carried out a cleanup of the territory from the enemy," said the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry on early Saturday.

The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry also published a video of its military suppressing Armenia's "combat activity in various directions of the front."

Separately, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev held a phone conversation with his



French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday discussing the clashes at Armenia-Azerbaijan frontlines. In a statement by Azerbaijan's presidential office, Macron called President Aliyev to express his concerns over the clashes and urged a cease-fire and re-launch of negotiations.

The Azerbaijani president during the phone call stressed that Armenia is responsible for disrupting negotiation process and for triggering clashes. Border clashes broke out last week when Armenian forces targeted Azerbaijani civilian settlements and military positions, leading to casualties.

Relations between the two former Soviet republics have been volatile since 1991 when the Armenian military occupied Upper Karabakh, an internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan.

World powers, including the US, Russia, France and Germany, have urged an immediate halt to clashes along the frontier. Turkey, meanwhile, has voiced support for Azerbaijan's right to self-defense.

Four UN Security Council and two UN General Assembly resolutions, as well as many international organizations, demand the withdrawal of occupying forces.

The OSCE Minsk Group -- co-chaired by France, Russia, and the US -- was formed in 1992 to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, but to no avail. A cease-fire, however, was agreed to in 1994.



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