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Afghanistan at UN: IEDs Being Used for 'Brutal' Terrorist Attacks Against Civilians

Afghanistan called for new measures to tackle the problem of the indiscriminate use of explosives against civilians, as they presented the draft resolution titled "Countering the Threat Posed by Explosive Devices" to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on Friday.

Diplomat Sayed Musaddeq spoke at the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) General Debate and underscored the alarming trends that continue relating to the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Calling for new measures to tackle the problem, he shared the grim experience of terrorist attacks that have already claimed ...

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Pakistan blocking India-Afghanistan connectivity, troubling our foreign policy: Delhi

Union Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar on Friday accused Pakistan of hampering trade and connectivity between India and Afghanistan, which is a troubling issue as far as foreign policy is concerned.

"They have blocked connectivity between India and Afghanistan... I think until we address that problem. This challenge of how do you have a normal relationship with this very unique neighbor is a very troubling issue for our foreign policy," Jaishankar said during an online event.

He said that state-sponsored terrorism by Pakistan makes it very difficult for countries to maintain "normal relations" with them.

"Terrorism from Pakistan continues and remains publically acknowledged by their government as a policy they are justifying. It makes it very ...

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Ghani orders fundamental changes in Kabul police to improve security



President Ashraf Ghani has ordered fundamental changes in Kabul police department to fight growing crimes in the city, a statement from Presidential Palace said on Friday. This was discussed during a security meeting chaired by President Ashraf Ghani. Improvements in security situation, implementation

of security charter were discussed. Kabul security team briefed the meeting on security strategy in dealing with crimes and acts of terrorism. The team presented its working report on patrolling in Kabul city, arrest of hundreds of criminals, fight against corruption and

implementation of security charter. President Ashraf Ghani stressed that more efforts were needed to improve security situation in Kabul and deal with criminals. Ghani said that people should feel themselves security and asked for use of technology to overcome crimes.

He demanded the effective use of Security Charter and bringing fundamental changes in Kabul Police to improve security.

However, First Vice-President Amrullah Saleh has taken charge of Kabul's security for a few weeks in compliance with President Ashraf Ghani's directives.

The VP wrote on his Facebook page: "I don't have anything called compassion for criminals in my dictionary in terms of enforcing the law to ensure public security." Saleh, who served as National Directorate of Security (NDS) chief from 2004 to 2010, said told Kabul residents: "I will discharge my other duties and responsibilities the way I did in the past."

Implementation of the security charter would be part of his programme, Saleh said. "I know Kabul like the back of my hand ... You can be sure, the list of thieves, harassers, extortionists, violators of law, usurpers of public property and criminals is pre-arranged."

The former spymaster called on people to help the relevant agencies and provide them information that could help improve the security environment in the nation's capital.

HCNR Abdullah to visit Tehran on Sunday: Tehran

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman said that the Head of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah is set to visit Iran on Sunday. Saeed Khatibzadeh noted that Abdullah Abdullah along with other Afghan officials including members of the High Council for National Reconciliation as well as Afghan National Assembly and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are scheduled to visit Tehran Today (on Sunday).

During the three-day visit, Abdullah Abdullah will hold meetings with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Speaker Iranian parliament, the Foreign Minister, and other high-ranking officials.



Over 40 Schools Closed Due to Conflicts in Helmand: Official

More than 40 schools have been closed following clashes between the government forces and the Taliban in the southern province of Helmand over the last 10 days. The clashes are underway in different parts of Helmand, including the outskirts of Lashkargah city and Nad Ali, Nahri Saraj and Nawa districts.

The Education Directorate of Helmand said the clashes have prevented "thousands" of students from going to school.

"The schools are closed due to conflicts and due to displacement of families," said Daud Shah Safari, head of Helmand Education Directorate.

The Helmand clashes started 10 days ago when the Taliban intensified their attacks in different fronts in the province.

Helmand students called on both sides of the war to end violence so



that they can go back to school. "The Taliban should not close schools. Peace should be established in Afghanistan," said Abdul Hakim, a student.

"We call on the Taliban to allow all students to go to school," said Nusratullah, a student.

According local officials, more than 5,000 families were displaced in the clashes.

"We have integrated four teams to survey the areas and help those who have been newly displaced," said Sayed Ramin, head of Refugees and Repatriation Directorate of Helmand.

The Helmand conflicts started amidst ongoing peace negotiations in Doha between teams representing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban.

UK PM: ...

"In time we want to use tests to keep open more parts of the economy that have sadly been closed," he said.

Johnson then struck a cautious tone: "No country in the world is regularly testing millions of people, so we need to take the time to establish how to do this effectively and safely, and to build the logistics and distribution operation necessary for a large-scale operation across the country."

Johnson was asked why he was implanting local lockdowns over vast swathes of the country, rather than a short 'circuit-breaker' national lockdown, a policy supported by the main opposition Labour Party.

He said: "I don't think it makes sense to be locking down the whole country when there's such a big difference in the infection rate across the UK." Government data on Friday showed that 15,650 more people tested positive for coronavirus across the UK over the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 689,257. A further 136 people died from coronavirus, bringing the total to 43,429.

White House...

weapons marked a significant walkback from the administration's previous position. Officials had earlier insisted the U.S. wouldn't accept an extension of New START without three things: both sides declaring all their nuclear warheads; stricter verification measures; and China taking part in negotiations that would also limit its growing nuclear arsenal.

By Georgiy Kuhaleyshvili

Is Afghanistan ready to say goodbye to American military?

On October 8, US President Donald Trump posted tweet about the need to return home a small number of US troops remaining in Afghanistan by Christmas (before December 25). Earlier, the United States planned to reduce its armed contingent from 12 to 4.5 thousand people by the end of this year. In addition to the Americans, military personnel from 38 countries of the world, including Ukraine, are serving in Afghanistan as part of NATO's Operation Resolute Support to train and assist local security forces.

Around the same time, in 1989, the USSR was withdrawing its armed contingent from Afghanistan. Like 31 years ago, the situation in Afghanistan is unstable. Trump runs the risk of repeating the mistake of the Soviet leadership, which led to the defeat in the confrontation with the Mujahideen of the government forces, for which more than 15 thousand Soviet soldiers and officers, including 3 thousand Ukrainians, died.

Trump's motives The American president is clearly pushing the timeline. According to an agreement between US Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban political leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in Doha in February 2020, all foreign troops are to leave Afghanistan by May 2021. Among other agreements - the beginning of peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government on the future development of the country, the exchange of prisoners. The Taliban pledged not to cooperate with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, not to provide them with refuge in Afghanistan. According to unofficial information, there are secret additions to the agreement, according to which the United States reserves the right to launch airstrikes on the positions of terrorist organizations after leaving Afghanistan and recognizes the dominance of the Taliban in rural areas of the country. One gets the impression that Trump is rushing to withdraw the American military from Afghanistan in order to earn points of voters three weeks before the US presidential election. The owner of the Oval Office is aiming for a second term, but already loses in rating to his opponent from the Democratic Party, Joe Biden. After the debate on September 29, the gap between them widened to 16%. The Democratic candidate leads the states of Pennsylvania, Florida, Iowa, Ohio, Nevada, Wisconsin, Michigan, where Trump won the 2016 election.



To close the gap, the president decided to fulfill one of his key promises to voters - to end the "eternal wars." The war in Afghanistan has been going on since October 2001 and is the longest in the history of the United States. 2.4 thousand American soldiers were killed there. The antiwar movement in the United States is a stronghold of the Democratic Party. The large losses of Americans in the armed conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq during the presidency of George W. Bush became one of the reasons for the defeat of the Republican candidate John McCain in the 2008 presidential elections.

Trump is trying to compensate for the failures in containing the coronavirus pandemic and defeat in the foreign policy arena by reducing the US military presence around the world. This year, the American president announced plans to reduce the US military presence in Iraq and Germany, and last year withdrew most of the US military from Syria.

The fruits of war

Now is not the right time for the US military to leave Afghanistan, based on the original goals that the US pursued 19 years ago, invading this country that

no one has ever been able to conquer. The Bush Jr. administration wanted to overthrow the theocratic Taliban regime that seized power in Afghanistan in 1996, form a democratic government, and clear the country of the al-Qaeda camps responsible for the September 11 attacks in the United States. The military presence in Afghanistan was needed for psychological pressure on Iran, strengthening American influence in the region of Central Asia, rich in hydrocarbon resources, where the positions of Russia and China are strong. The territory of Afghanistan could be used for laying pipelines for the export of natural gas from the fields of Turkmenistan and Russia to Pakistan and India. The fight against drug trafficking and the illicit production of opiates was relevant.

These goals have not been fully achieved. Afghanistan is still dominated by terrorist organizations. The secular regime of President Ashraf Ghani, which controls 30% of the country's territory, including the capital Kabul and major cities, is opposed by 20 terrorist organizations, including Al-Qaeda, Haqqani Network, and ISIS. In January-September 2019, more than 1.6 thousand people died as a result of terrorist ... **P3**

By Jeff Seldin

Concern U.S. Downplaying Al-Qaida Threat in Afghanistan

There are growing concerns the United States is vastly underestimating al-Qaida's strength and influence in Afghanistan, even as the White House continues to talk about ever more ambitious deadlines for bringing home U.S. troops still stationed in the country.

Specifically, international terrorism officials, as well as Afghan officials, point to a widening gap between U.S. assessments of a significantly diminished al-Qaida and their own, which see a terror group that is strengthening its grip despite absorbing numerous blows.

"Senior figures remain in Afghanistan, as well as hundreds of armed operatives," Edmund Fitton-Brown, coordinator of the United Nations monitoring team for Islamic State, al-Qaida and the Taliban, said Friday during a webinar on the future of Afghanistan.

"[Al-Qaida leader] Ayman al-Zawahiri remains close to the Taliban," he said, adding, "The Taliban regularly consulted with al-Qaida during the negotiations

with the United States and they offered informal guarantees that would honor their historic ties with al-Qaida."

The warning of a retrenched al-Qaida is not entirely new.

A U.N. report issued this past July warned the group "is covertly active in 12 Afghan provinces," adding it likely commands 400 to 600 fighters.

U.N. member states have further warned of additional armed support from al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), an affiliate that is thought to have another 150 to 200 fighters in Afghanistan's Nimruz, Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

Afghan officials have, likewise, cast doubt on reports that the threat from the terror group has faded.

Instead, they argue their intelligence shows the Taliban have used ongoing peace talks with the United States to strengthen their ties to al-Qaida and others.

"The Taliban try to use these groups and organizations more than before in fighting inside Afghanistan," Zia Seraj, the acting

head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the Afghan spy agency, said in May.

US threat assessment

While international and Afghan counterterrorism officials see a growing threat, a number of key U.S. officials continue to portray al-Qaida in Afghanistan as a fading power.

During a virtual talk at the Washington-based Atlantic Council in September, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said there are "fewer than 200 al-Qaida left in Afghanistan."

Days later, National Counterterrorism Center Director Christopher Miller went even further in written testimony submitted to lawmakers on the House Homeland Security Committee.

"Al-Qaida's presence in Afghanistan has been reduced to a few dozen fighters who are primarily focused on their survival," Miller asserted, adding the terror group is "probably incapable of conducting attacks outside the country under sustained CT ... **P3**

Afghanistan at...

thousands of citizens' lives, with perpetrators deploying large scale explosions and using a range of weapons, including improvised explosive devices.

Recognizing that the continued flow of conventional arms contributes to many conflicts, he also called for new measures to tackle the problem.

Describing the double threat that terrorism and organized crime pose to international peace and security, Musaddeq warned that unless more effective controls are enforced to prevent the flow

of small arms and light weapons, conflicts and other forms of criminal activity will continue, with a spill over effect reaching across borders.

IEDs and roadside mines are one of the leading causes of civilian casualties in Afghanistan and has become a popular tactic for the Taliban.

On Saturday itself, a roadside bomb was discovered and defused in Kabul city, while three security personnel were killed and another was injured when their car hit a mine in the Salang district of Parwan.

Pakistan blocking...

hard to conduct normal relations with them. They don't do normal trade with India. We don't have a normal visa relationship," he said.

"As two neighbouring countries who have built a relationship painstakingly, there were political issues of difference, issues on their relationship with Pakistan, major trade issues - a whole set of issues. We have been engaging

and talking to them over many years," he said.

Furthermore, Jaishankar said that he is surprised why after all these years of dialogue there is a sudden change in status quo.

"The point which we are grappling with is, if you have a very major neighbour with which you have issues, you have been talking all along. Why this change to deal with the emerging situation that rises thereby?" the EAM claimed.

First Pistachio Processing Factory Opens in Badghis Province

The first pistachio processing factory in Badghis was inaugurated last week in the presence of local government officials and business community members.

With a processing line equipped with five pistachio crushing machines, the factory has the capacity to process 300-500 kilos of pistachio in one hour, which is 7,200-12,000 kilos in a day. The factory's processing line has the capacity for installation of five more crushing machines that could double the processing capacity of the factory.

Financed by the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture and the private sector, this factory is built at a total cost of USD 157,500.

"This factory is built according to

the market standards. In addition to crushing and processing pistachios, this factory also does sorting, grading, cleaning, and packaging of the pistachios. We are sure this factory will help Badghis pistachio gain international recognition," said Head of Agriculture Department in Badghis, Abdul Tawab Tayeb. The current and traditional method of crushing and processing pistachios in Badghis results in 10% waste of the products, but with the establishment of the new factory, the waste is reduced to 1%.

According to estimates from traders in western Afghanistan, if the Badghis pistachio is crushed and cleaned by a machine, the value of one kilo of pistachio kernels will increase by 150



AFN. Based on these estimates, the value of Badghis pistachios this year could go up by over 600 million AFN, equivalent to over USD 7 million.

This year, about 36,458 tons of fresh pistachios have been produced in the province, of which 18,299 tons of dried pistachios have been obtained.

Concern U.S....

[counterterrorism] pressure."

One international counterterrorism official, though, speaking on the condition of anonymity, called such optimistic pronouncements "hugely problematic." Others warn the U.S. is making a mistake by failing to account for substantial support from a vast majority of the 10,000 foreign fighters currently in Afghanistan.

Still other officials and experts fear the U.S. assessments of a "few dozen" al-Qaida fighters are not intended to be accurate, but rather to align with repeated calls by U.S. President Donald Trump to bring U.S. troops home from Afghanistan as soon as possible.

"It's just not credible to say that there are only a few dozen al-Qaida guys running around Afghanistan," said Thomas Joscelyn, a senior fellow with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

"That's clearly undercounting for your own policy desires," he said, cautioning that the U.S. has long been guilty of sharing overly optimistic assessments of al-Qaida in Afghanistan.

"There are so many pronouncements made by the military on al-Qaida's strength in Afghanistan that were wrong over the years," he said, noting earlier U.S. estimates of as few as 50 operatives. "They just go from one inaccurate assessment to another."

'Relationship with al-Qaida'

But Joscelyn added even the U.N. estimates of 400 to 600 al-Qaida operatives might be too low.

"The Pakistani Taliban is known to have a very tight relationship with al-Qaida," Joscelyn said. "How many of the Pakistani Taliban guys...are dual-hatted, they're also al-Qaida guys? Nobody can tell you, but we know that some of them are."

Even within U.S. military and intelligence circles, there is some skepticism that al-Qaida is barely hanging on - thanks in part to ongoing support from the Taliban despite pledges to counter the threat.

They have taken steps. But this is unfinished business from my point of view," U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, who has been spearheading peace talks with the Taliban, told the U.S. Institute for Peace last month. "They need to take more." Still, Khalilzad insisted al-Qaida fighters "are a very small number."

"They are mostly focused on survival because we are hunting for them," he said.

Is Afghanistan...

attacks. The Taliban control 20% of the territory of Afghanistan, mainly in rural areas, and they have 60 thousand people under arms. The number of ISIS fighters is much less - 2-2.5 thousand people.

The problem of drug trafficking has not been resolved. In 2019, 6.7 thousand tons of opiates were produced in Afghanistan, which is 21% more than a year earlier. The country has not become a stronghold of democracy in the Middle East. Corruption is rife in Afghanistan, and the leadership does not always support the United States in the international arena. In 2014, then Afghan President Hamid Karzai backed the results of the pseudo-referendum in Crimea.

Trump repeats Gorbachev's mistake

It is highly likely that after the withdrawal of American and other foreign troops, the Taliban will violate agreements with the United States and try to overthrow the secular government. There has already been such a precedent in the history of Afghanistan. In 1992, the Afghan mujahideen liquidated the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, which was sponsored by the USSR until the withdrawal of its armed contingent in May-December 1989. At first, the government forces of President Mohammed Najibullah successfully defended Kabul and other major cities. However, after the mutiny of the Minister of Defense Shahnawaz Tanay in March 1990 and the defection to the side of the Mujahideen of the infantry division of General Abdul-Rashid Dostum in March 1992, they lost the initiative, and their opponents took control of the entire country. The situation may repeat itself, with the difference that the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani will be in the place of Najibullah, and the Taliban will replace the Mujahideen.

Peace talks between Ghani and Baradar have been under way in Qatar since September 12. The government and the Taliban see Afghanistan's development differently. If the Afghan authorities are in favor of preserving the secular

system, then the Taliban want to revive the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which existed from 1996 to 2001, and introduce Sharia laws in the country. An exception is to allow women to receive education. The Taliban oppose women to study and work. There have been cases of public executions of those who violated this rule in areas controlled by Islamists. Zahra Hussein, a public activist in Kabul, fears a deal with the Taliban could lead to their return to power.

The final word in peace negotiations will be with whoever is stronger on the battlefield. Despite the fact that the Afghan army, police and security services number over 350,000 people and have a numerical superiority over the Taliban, there is no consensus among Americans about their level of training. Former US Defense Secretaries James Mattis and Robert Gates spoke flatteringly about the Afghan security forces. In August, the Afghan National Army killed about a hundred Taliban militants in the provinces of Faryab, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Baghlan, Nimroz, and Nangarhar.

However, former US Naval Forces officer Thomas Johnson, who served as an advisor in Kandahar province, ex-US ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker, former adviser to the Afghan army Victor Glaviano and ex-adviser to the US Department of Defense Marin Smerski question the ability of the Afghan security forces to independently ensure order in the country. They focused on such problems as rampant corruption and desertion, low efficiency and organization, inept planning of operations. According to the head of the American non-governmental organization "Center for Stability and Development" Jonathan Schroden, the exception is the Afghan special forces, where the most qualified and least prone to corruption people serve. Although he recommends that after leaving Afghanistan, the US military leave a training mission in the country for further training of special forces and pilots. There is an opinion that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani

is deliberately delaying the release of all Taliban prisoners while awaiting the results of the presidential elections in the United States, because he understands that he cannot cope without American military assistance. Since 2014, 45,000 Afghan soldiers and police have died. The Afghan army and police depend on US funding. Since 2002, the United States has spent \$ 83 billion on the Afghan defense sector. During the presidency of Donald Trump, the United States Air Force has inflicted far more airstrikes on Afghanistan than under Barack Obama.

Not all Taliban adhere to the ceasefire. Some of them laid down their arms and went over to the side of the government, as did 300 militants in the provinces of Sari-Pul and Balkh. Others continue to organize sabotage and terrorist attacks. According to the Afghan Interior Ministry, the Taliban violated ceasefire 38 times between February and August. On the eve of negotiations in Doha, the Taliban killed 16 Afghan security forces in eastern Afghanistan. If the Americans leave Afghanistan soon, they will feel much more confident in confronting the government.

If Joe Biden wins the US presidential election, he may postpone the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. However, he, like Trump, loves to speculate about the importance of ending the "eternal wars." If the Taliban seize power in Afghanistan, then the question of why they shed their blood and what this war gave their country will arise in the families of the veterans and the dead military. This question has already arisen in American society after the end of the Vietnam War, when South Vietnam, abandoned by the Americans, was occupied by the North Vietnamese communists in 1975, or after the withdrawal of the US military from Iraq in 2013, where a year later ISIS seized vast territories. As a result, there is a growing unpopularity of protracted wars in American society and a growing rejection of the use of military force abroad, even when it is necessary to guarantee international security.

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Trump on if Biden wins: 'Maybe I'll have to leave the country'

President Trump joked that he would "have to leave the country" if he loses the upcoming presidential election against Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

"I will deliver optimism, opportunity and hope, and that's what we're doing, and this is why we have this kind of spirit, and I hate to say it because I don't want to insult Georgia, but it's this way all over our country," Trump told a cheering crowd at a campaign event in Macon, Ga., on Friday, later mocking the social distancing and face coverings at Biden's campaign events.

Trump added: "I shouldn't joke because you know what? Running against the worst candidate in the history of presidential politics puts pressure on me. Could you imagine if I lose? My whole life, what am I going to do? I'm going to say 'I lost to the worst candidate in the

history of politics.' I'm not going to feel so good." "Maybe I'll have to leave the country? I don't know," Trump added.

The anti-Trump GOP group The Lincoln Project quickly jabbed the president over his comment. Trump told a crowd of supporters at a campaign rally in North Carolina last month that "If I lose to him, I don't know what I'm going to do. I will never speak to you again."

Biden's campaign featured the president's comments in its own video on social media.

Trump also joked in 2016 that if he lost the Republican nomination for president, he would not remain in the public eye.

"I'm not sure you're ever going to see me there. I don't think I'm going to lose, but if I do, I don't think you're ever going to see me again, folks. I think I'll go to Turnberry and play golf or something," he said at the time.



A look at the world

UK PM: Restrictions could be imposed on Manchester

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson gave a coronavirus press briefing on Friday where he said he would impose tighter restrictions on Greater Manchester if an agreement could not be reached after days of fruitless talks.

Johnson praised local mayors and leaders in London and Liverpool for working with the government, and said that talks with them about the newly imposed local restrictions were "tough discussions, difficult decisions."

He said the government still has not reached a decision with the mayor and other local leaders in Greater Manchester, and that while he "completely understands" their



position, he said "the situation is grave." He said cases have doubled in that region in nine days, and that infections were moving up the age range. The number of patients in ICU is already 40% of the level at the last peak in spring.

"In two weeks, there will be more patients in ICU than at the peak of the first wave," Johnson said.

He then effectively issued an ultimatum, saying he "will need to intervene" if no agreement can be reached - widely interpreted as a threat to impose the restrictions without the approval of local leaders.

Johnson also raised hopes with regard to the country's much-criticized testing system.

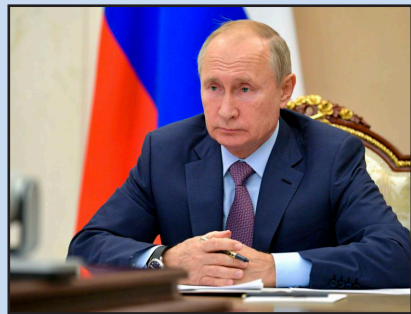
He said the UK had "started building the domestic infrastructure" to provide more rapid testing, which could provide results as quickly as within 15 minutes.

The tests are already being used in hospitals and the government would now "start distributing and trailing tests across the country."

The tests would be used not only on NHS staff but also on students in universities that have outbreaks, as well as areas with local outbreaks. ...

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White House rejects Putin response to U.S. arms control offer



U.S. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien rejected a Russian proposal to extend the New START nuclear arms control agreement for a year, saying that doing so without capping nuclear warheads the treaty doesn't cover was a "non-starter."

"The United States is serious about arms control that will keep the entire world safe," O'Brien said in a statement on Twitter. "We hope that Russia will re-evaluate its position before a costly arms race ensues."

O'Brien's statement was a response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's offer, made at a televised meeting of his Security Council on Friday, to extend the agreement "without any conditions for at least a year." He said it would be "very sad" to let the agreement expire as scheduled in February and said it has served its role limiting an arms race between the two nations.

The New START treaty put limits on the number of strategic nuclear warheads, such as submarine-launched ballistic missiles and intercontinental ballistic missiles. But it didn't limit many other types of nuclear warheads, and Trump administration officials had sought to broaden its terms before agreeing to an extension.

In another tweet on Friday, O'Brien said he believed Russia had agreed to the idea of a New START extension and an arms freeze during a recent meeting with his counterpart in Geneva. After that meeting, a senior U.S. official said the outlines of a deal had been reached, but Russian officials quickly said there was no agreement. Russia had earlier called for a five-year extension, as provided in the accord.

It's not clear if O'Brien's response spells the end for talks to extend New START. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Putin Friday that "intensive" consultations on the treaty are underway, and President Donald Trump is seeking to demonstrate foreign-policy wins in his race for re-election against Joe Biden, whom he trails in national and many key state polls.

Even the U.S. offer to extend New START in exchange for a freeze on nuclear ...

P2

Ardern Wins Landslide Victory in New Zealand on Covid Success

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern swept to a commanding victory in New Zealand's general election, securing a second term that will give her a bigger mandate to tackle social inequality.

Main opposition National Party leader Judith Collins conceded defeat in a speech to supporters Saturday night in Auckland saying she had spoken to Ardern earlier in the evening to congratulate her.

Collins, who struggled to gain transaction against the wildly popular Ardern during the campaign, pointed to the economic challenges facing the nation as it recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

"New Zealand is in for a tough economic ride and it is going to need better fiscal policy



than we have so far seen," she said. With 80% of the vote counted, Ardern's Labour Party had 49% support -- heading to its biggest share of the vote since the 1930s -- after a huge swing to the left in many urban and provincial electorates. National slumped to 27%, its worst showing since 2002.

Ardern, 40, has captured the hallowed center ground in New Zealand politics with a blend of empathetic leadership and skilled crisis management that has also won her fame abroad. Her successful handling of the coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated those strengths, drowning out criticism that she hasn't delivered on some key promises during her first term in office.

The landslide victory will give Ardern more scope to deliver the transformational government she promised when she came to power three years ago, particularly with Labour's ally the Greens pushing her to be more progressive on issues such as poverty and climate change. Still, she will be wary of alienating centrist voters with increased social spending at a time when debt is spiraling due to the government's pandemic response.

Voters are rewarding Ardern for crushing community transmission of Covid-19 while countries like the U.K., U.S. and even neighboring Australia are still battling to contain the virus.



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