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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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## World Should Not Forget Afghanistan, Finland Tells Donors Before Geneva Conference

Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto urged the global community to not forget Afghanistan and held stabilise the nation ahead of the 2020 Afghanistan Conference scheduled in Geneva later this month.

"Unfortunately, the aid has not come for all areas in the country," said Haavisto, who was in Doha after visiting Afghanistan to discuss the peace process and the upcoming international pledging conference in Geneva.

He was giving a lecture organised by the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies (CHS) at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

Haavisto said that Finland has so far contributed €385 million euros to the international aid for Afghanistan since 2002.

"As the international donors ... **P3**



## 74 Taliban Militants Killed in Airstrikes by Afghan and U.S. Forces in Kandahar

Officials said that 74 Taliban fighters were killed in army airstrikes in parts of the Kandahar province.

Jamal Nasser Barakzai, Kandahar police spokesperson said that the attacks took place last night in the Jari, Maiwand and Arghandab districts.

Afghan air force had targeted areas near Camp Ahmad Khan in the Jari district, killing 34 Taliban fighters. At least 12 Taliban insurgents were killed in a US airstrike in the Mujahid Camp area between Maiwand and Jerry districts.

In addition, 28 Taliban fighters were killed and three more were wounded in the airstrikes carried out in the Chahar Gholbeh, Khosrow and Joey Lahore areas of Arghandab district.

Security officials reported that the Taliban were relocated to residential houses in Arghandab district and security forces were forced to be more careful during clashes.

# Imran Khan Says 'No One Can Predict' Afghanistan's Future



Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that no one can predict how the future in Afghanistan will unfold, pointing out to the outcome of the Afghan peace process and a future government in the country.

"I'm afraid no one can predict which way things will go in Afghanistan right now," Khan said in an interview on Der Spiegel on Oct. 30. "What I can say is that after Afghanistan, the

country that wants peace most is Pakistan."

The peace negotiations in Doha between delegates from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban started on September 12. The talks have faced deadlock over two disputed points on procedural rules of the negotiations that include the religious basis for the talks and the connection of the US-Taliban deal

with the negotiations.

Khan said his country used Afghan refugees as a leverage to bring the Taliban to the table of negotiations. "With 2.7 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, we have a certain amount of leverage, which we used to the utmost. I am very pleased that we succeeded."

Abdullah Abdullah, head of the High Council for National Reconciliation,

visited Pakistan in September and met with its leaders, including Imran Khan. Meanwhile, Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar also visited Pakistan this month and met with its officials.

In response to a question that he allegedly discussed a power-sharing deal between Hekmatyar and the Taliban once the US troops withdraw, Khan said, "Gulbuddin Hekmatyar took part in the elections in Afghanistan and he accepts the constitution of Afghanistan."

"We have no favorites in Afghanistan. Our only interest is that the future government in Kabul does not allow India to operate from there against Pakistan," Khan said.

This comes as the Pakistani prime minister at an event in Islamabad last week on Monday said his government will make the utmost efforts to ensure that there is a reduction in violence and a ceasefire in Afghanistan as Afghan are suffering from the war every day.

Khan said stability in Afghanistan will benefit Pakistan as it wants to connect to Central Asia economically through Afghanistan. He mentioned that lessons should be learned from the past and that the two countries should look to the future and move forward from the past.

## Taliban Says No to External Mediation for Intra Afghan Peace Talks

The Taliban has reiterated that there is no mediator between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban in the intra Afghan peace talks.

"The host country [Qatar] can share its views and advice individually, if necessary, without participating in intra Afghan negotiation sessions," said Mohammad Naeem, a spokesperson for the Taliban's political office in Qatar. The peace talks between the Afghanistan government and the Taliban have hit a standstill as disagreement on the procedural rules prevails between both the parties and the host country have urged both the parties to cooperate.



## HRW: Afghan Police Raid On Kabul Journalists' Home Act of Intimidation

An Afghan police raid on the home of two female journalists in Kabul in mid-October raises concerns about rising threats to women in public life and questions the Kabul police, who "seem to have taken a page out of the Taliban's playbook" said Patricia Gossman, Associate Asia Director of Human Rights Watch (HRW). Afghan police from Kabul's PD10 forcibly entered the home of photojournalist Tahereh Rezaei, which she shared with another female journalist at midnight on Oct. 15.

Rezaei said the police did not have a search warrant which is required by law, and made the two female journalists and several guests hand over their phones while they searched the house, including the bedrooms and the women's laundry. The police also filmed the women without giving an explanation for doing so.



Rezaei was made to sign a statement that she would never again host gatherings where music is played while the guests were asked to sign similar ones stating they would never participate in such events. Gossman said that the response from senior government officials was "no less disturbing" and raises serious questions about the government's commitment to defend women's rights and media freedom in the negotiations.

First Vice President Amrullah Saleh dismissed the allegations as a

"rumor" and issued an additional threat to those reporting it to be held "accountable."

"Opposition to the government and spreading rumors against the government and defamation of institutions is cooperation with the enemy," he said.

The Ministry of Interior also dismissed the report, claiming the search was carried out "in the presence of a prosecutor" which would not replace the need for a lawful warrant. Gossman stated that the Afghan police have a ... **P3**



## Lukashenko...

causing him to deploy some of Belarusian military near the western border. "They [the NATO forces - TASS] calmed down, they understood we were not kidding," the Belarusian president said. Nationwide demonstrations have engulfed Belarus following the August 9 presidential election. According to the Central Election Commission's official results, incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko won by a landslide, garnering 80.10% of the vote. His closest rival in the race, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, came in second, with 10.12% of the ballot. However, she refused to recognize the election's outcome, and left Belarus for Lithuania. After the results of the exit polls were announced late on August 9, mass protests erupted in downtown Minsk and other Belarusian cities. During the early post-election period, the rallies snowballed into fierce clashes between the protesters and police. The current unrest is being cheered on by the opposition's Coordination Council, which has been beating the drum for more protests. In response, the Belarusian authorities have castigated the ongoing turmoil and demanded that these unauthorized demonstrations be stopped.

## Russia calls...

similar moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-and shorter-range missiles remained relevant today. In September 2019, media reports said that Putin had sent the leaders of several countries, including NATO members, a proposal to impose a moratorium on deploying intermediate-and shorter-range missiles in Europe and other regions. The US subsequently rejected the initiative.

By Luke Coffey

# For Future Prosperity, Afghanistan Must Look North

When the international community talks about a "regional solution" for Afghanistan, mostly it is referring to the situation in Pakistan. Sometimes the regional solution is expanded to include India and China. Until recently, it was rare for the Central Asian republics to be discussed in this context.

This is because many people fail to see Afghanistan for what it really is — a Central Asian country. Afghanistan is not part of the Middle East, and referring to it as part of the so-called "broader Middle East" is also misleading. At least half of the country is culturally, historically, economically and geographically part of Central Asia. Policymakers must recognize this.

While the current focus on Afghanistan is on peace talks taking place in Doha, longer-term economic prospects will be realized through greater economic integration with Central Asia.

Connecting Afghanistan with the broader region and international markets is part of the solution to bring prosperity and stability to the country. Free trade has been shown to improve livelihoods and lift people out of poverty. As a recent World Trade Organization study concluded: "Trade liberalization helps poor countries to catch up with rich ones, and this faster economic growth helps to alleviate poverty."

Landlocked Afghanistan suffers from a lack of connectivity with its neighbors, but this has not always been the case. For centuries, going back to the Middle Ages, what is now called Afghanistan was an integral part of regional trade along the Silk Road. Cities such as Balkh, Badakhshan, Bamiyan, Kabul and Herat were important trading stops on this trading route.

Thankfully, there is a growing

recognition that Afghanistan's economic future is closely linked to Central Asia. Today, the country has the potential to occupy this important role again by serving as an important trade route not only east to west but also north to south. Regional trade and infrastructure projects in the pipeline could bring significant benefits to the Afghan economy and the region.

Currently, three rail links connect northern Afghanistan with Central Asia — one offers a connection with Uzbekistan and two connect with Turkmenistan. These links will play a major role in Afghanistan's participation in future regional transit projects.

There are also efforts to connect Afghanistan with Europe via Central Asia. In December 2017, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey signed the Lapis Lazuli Corridor Agreement. The goal of the corridor is to transport goods between Europe and Afghanistan in seven to nine days using a network of rail and ferries.

There are also important north-south projects in which Afghanistan serves as a key transit country connecting Central Asia with South Asia. The Central Asia-South Asia power project, also known as CASA-1000, was inaugurated last February in Afghanistan. This project will bring surplus electricity from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Another major scheme, the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline project, could fundamentally change the natural gas connectivity of Central Asia. When complete, the proposed 1,700 km pipeline will carry natural gas from Turkmenistan to India, helping to end Russian and Chinese hegemony over the region's energy market. In addition, a fiber-optic cable will run



alongside the pipeline.

Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan understand the importance of stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. While Kazakhstan does not share a land border with Afghanistan, it is intertwined through historic trading routes that still link the two countries. Over the years, Kazakhstan has played a constructive role in Afghanistan. As the region's biggest economy and a secular republic, it has a direct interest in ensuring that Afghanistan becomes stable.

Since the death of former President Islam Karimov in September 2016, Uzbekistan has made gradual, but important, steps toward opening up and reforming its governance. Relations with neighboring countries, which have been strained for years, are beginning to improve. This new approach under the leadership of Karimov's successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, holds immense promise for the region, especially for Afghanistan. As the largest international donor, and the country that has been most involved in helping Afghanistan for the past two decades, the US has a role to play in facilitating economic relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Thankfully, there is a growing realization of this in Washington. The Trump administration's strategy for Central Asia published last February placed an important focus on Afghanistan's role in the region. Two of the six "policy objectives" directly deal with Afghanistan: "Expand and maintain support for stability in Afghanistan" and "Encourage connectivity between Central Asia and Afghanistan."

It is anyone's guess how the Doha peace talks will play out. If anything, the outlook is far from good following a recent spike in violence. But regardless, the international community cannot give up on Afghanistan. It must find ways to help the country achieve not only security but also economic prosperity. Helping Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics to integrate and realize their potential for trade and economic partnership can go a long way to achieving this goal.

If history teaches us anything, it is that Afghanistan and the combined countries of Central Asia form an integral part of broader Eurasian trade and commerce. This is how it was in the past and, with the right approach, how it will be in the future.

By Stefanie Glinski

## 40 years of violence: The Kabul museum preserving the memories of thousands lost in Afghanistan's wars

Quiet music is playing in the narrow, dimly lit staircase leading down to the basement of a West Kabul house.

From the outside it doesn't look any different from the other homes lining the wide, tree-lined road, but inside live the memories of Afghanistan's long war's victims. The room, with its dark floors and white walls has been filled with glass vitrines - memory boxes documenting the lives of those who died at the hands of the war's perpetrators over the past 40 years.

The museum, hosted at the Afghanistan Centre for Memorial and Dialogue (ACMD) first opened at the beginning of 2019, attempting to both remember victims and capture the stories of lives lost.

Hamidullah Rafi agreed to have the museum exhibit his sister Rahila's story.

Two years ago in August 2018, he arrived to chaos and carnage, frantically looking for his sister who had been studying at a West

Kabul university prep centre in the Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood that had just been the centre of an ISIS attack. After hearing about the attack from a relative, Mr Rafi immediately made his way there. He remembers one woman, covered in tears, screaming her daughter's name; another girl, her face pain-struck, shouting for her sister.

The attack - perpetrated by a suicide bomber on foot - would take the lives of 48 people and injure dozens more, most of them students studying for their university entrance exams.

Mr Rafi's sister Rahila, an ambitious 17-year-old who worked as an English instructor on the side and hoped to work in economics, was among the dead. "We drove from hospital to hospital, searching admission lists for her name. We didn't want to search for the dead bodies then, we didn't want to give up hope," Mr Rafi told The National. The family eventually found Rahila at the morgue, recognisable only

by her clothes and the watch she had been wearing.

Two years on, it could have been easy for the attack, its victims and the devastation wrought among families to fade into obscurity among the hundreds of similar atrocities committed across the war-torn country.

But today, snippets of Rahila's memories, including a cabinet with some of her belongings - her watch, her diary, even an ID card - are kept at the museum's showroom.

Thirty-six of such memory boxes, as well as around 5,000 other stories are collected here, back to 1978, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan.

As the Taliban and the government have, for the first time, started direct negotiations in Qatar's capital Doha, hoping to reach a possible peace and power sharing deal, the question of what happens to the war's victims becomes all the more relevant.

"The testimonies on display here show that perpetrators came... P3

## Kabul, Colombo celebrate 62 years of ties



Afghanistan and Sri Lanka on Saturday celebrated 62 years of diplomatic relations between the two friendly countries, the Afghan Embassy in Colombo said.

November 1st marks the 62nd Anniversary of Afghanistan and Sri Lanka diplomatic relations.

"My Embassy colleagues and I are immensely delighted to join Foreign Minister Mohammed Haneef Atmar in celebrating the 62nd Anniversary of our fast-growing, multifaceted relationship with the friendly Government and people of Sri Lanka," the Afghan ambassador in Colombo, Ashraf Haideri, said.

Since time immemorial, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have shared intertwined civilizational ties influenced by such

major belief systems as Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, which dominated much of the Gandhara region—including modern Afghanistan—from where Buddhism spread to South Asia, Central Asia, and East Asia.

"And history tells us that some of the early settlers of this paradise-island hailed from the northwest of India and the Indus River region, which Afghans then and today have inhabited."

The envoy said the majestic and revered Buddhas of Bamiyan were a testament to their shared heritage and to Afghanistan's cultural pluralism and diversity, which underpin the Afghan identity today.

"That is why Afghanistan's former imperial powers—who later embraced and championed Islam in... P3



# ADB OKs additional funding for agro project

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a grant of \$18.28 million in additional financing for the Panj-Amu River Basin Sector Project.

The extra funding for the project, project seeking to boost agricultural productivity in northeastern Afghanistan, will enhance access to water.

In a statement, ADB said the extra funding would enhance the resilience of watersheds to disaster and climate risks by expanding project activities in Badakhshan,

Kunduz, and Takhar provinces.

The project will also help improve water access and management in six more provinces -- Samangan, Baghlan, Bamyán, Panjsher, Parwan and Wardak.

ADB Project Officer Mohammad Hanif Ayubi said: "Agriculture remains a major engine of growth for Afghanistan and plays an important role in improving the lives of the Afghans."

He hoped the additional financing would help Afghanistan recover from the COVID-19 impact by



**Asian Development Bank**

improving water availability for irrigated agriculture and creating employment opportunities for rural communities.

## 40 years of violence...

from all sides: the Soviets, the Mujaheddin, the Taliban, the government, the US, the Islamic State and other affiliated groups," explained ACMD's Associate Fatima Alawi, adding that each testimony has been collected by the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation, a non-profit group working with war victims.

Mr Rafi agreed to have his sister's story exhibited, saying that victims had so far been excluded from the peace process, as well as any negotiations.

He hoped that her story would help raise the importance of victim inclusion.

"After the attack, I found Rahila's diary," he said.

"She had been journaling about peace, hoping that one day she could contribute to solving the crisis. That's why she wanted to study hard. I couldn't stop my tears reading her words."

Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has called for both justice and the inclusion of victims in the peace process.

"Recovery will depend on reconciliation and development at the national and community level. The right to justice must be preserved for serious crimes that targeted civilians, including reparations for victims," a Commission report released ahead of the Taliban and government's meeting in Doha said.

Haji Sardar Mohammad, 70, is another person whose story is exhibited at the museum. A tribal elder and district council head from the southern Kandahar province, he said the Taliban was after him, attacked his house several times, but eventually killed his 25-year-old son Essa.

"Two Taliban members were standing [outside my house], demanding he would come with them. He refused and they shot him. You cannot trust them. One of them makes peace with you, the other comes and kills you," Mr Mohammad said in his testimony, written out and placed over his son's memory box containing photos and even clothes.

His son, he said, had been a farmer. He had just returned from the mosque, sitting at home with his family when the Talibs arrived.

"There are no official records of victim stories, so we are trying to change just that," Fatima Alawi told The National. "Each victim has the right to be heard, each life needs to be preserved."

A wall filled with sticky notes is propped up at the museum's exit. Most messages are written in Dari and Pashto, some of them are in English.

"This war has been enough," reads one of them. "Peace is all we need in our country."

## Kabul, Colombo...

our flourishing region—revered and protected the Buddhas of Bamiyan, as have the many modern governments of Afghanistan." In the modern era, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka established non-resident diplomatic relations on November 1, 1958. "Our missions in New Delhi mostly handled our bilateral affairs, which, except for some intervals during the war years, continued after the fall of the Taliban in 2001."

He said Afghanistan initiated to elevate our diplomatic ties with Sri Lanka, following high-level fruitful exchanges between Former President Hamid Karzai and Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, currently the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, in 2011 and 2012. In 2013, Afghanistan opened its embassy in Colombo, which Sri Lanka reciprocated in 2014. As two democracies in South Asia, the fast-growing relations of Afghanistan and Sri Lanka enjoy strong and unreserved support of our two governments' leadership.

"Shortly after his notable electoral victory last November, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and I had a very friendly and fruitful meeting, in which we conveyed to him the warm congratulations of President Ashraf Ghani and his firm commitment to further expanding our bilateral relationship, which President Rajapaksa warmly welcomed."

Haideri said much like Sri Lanka's valued location as "the Jewel of the Indian Ocean," Afghanistan is "the Heart of Asia," the gateway to all Silk Roads in all directions: north and south; east and west. "We sit right between South Asia and Central Asia, awaiting sustainable peace to be achieved with regional cooperation and support so that Afghanistan can play our natural role as a land-bridge between the subcontinent, South West Asia, and Central Asia."

The ambassador said given geographic centrality for transit trade, including energy, no major connectivity project could bypass Afghanistan. "That is why Sri Lanka would greatly benefit from a more beefed-up presence in the country (with a population of over 30 million consumers) where Sri Lankan diplomats could work to help the Sri Lankan private sector take advantage of the numerous investment opportunities in the Afghan virgin markets, while looking northwards to explore similar opportunities in Central Asia (with a population of over 70 million consumers)." Despite COVID-19 challenge, he said they worked hard over the past few months to facilitate the recent signing of a cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and

Investment (ACCI) and the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC). "We did so, knowing the vast trade and investment potential on both sides that need to be realized."

He said they had no doubt that within a year of such connectivity, they could easily need to operate a daily fight between Kabul and Colombo—carrying tourists seeking rest and recuperation; patients seeking treatment; students seeking quality education; and businesspeople seeking investment opportunities. Moreover, Sri Lanka's principal products such as the Ceylon tea; apparel and textiles; spices; food, feed, and beverages; and coconut and coconut-based products could easily find profitable markets in Afghanistan.

"In the same vein, we have encouraged the jewelry sector of Sri Lanka to visit Kabul and see for themselves the endless investment opportunities in this virgin market in Afghanistan as one of the minerally richest countries in the world with large reserves of precious and semi-precious stones."

In light of these bilateral trade and investment opportunities, Haideri said they welcomed the recent appointment of a seasoned Sri Lankan public servant, Ambassador-Designate Piyal De Silva, to represent his country in Afghanistan.

Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also called for investigations into the "disturbing allegations" of the Kabul police's illegal and abusive treatment of women and the Afghan government's initial response.

## HRW: Afghan...

long and deeply flawed record protecting women's rights.

"At a moment when Afghan women are fighting to ensure that women's rights are protected in a peace agreement

with the Taliban, who banned music when in power in the 1990s, this action by the police and the response of senior officials is particularly concerning." The United Nations Assistance

## World Should...

prepare for the conference in Geneva in November this year, our message to the donors will be not to forget Afghanistan," he said.

"We all need peace in Afghanistan, particularly the neighbouring countries like Iran, Pakistan and India. Our battle while preparing for

the conference is to convince the donors to commit for the development in Afghanistan. There should be no donor fatigue."

He called Qatar's role in hosting the ongoing Afghan peace process "appreciable" and expressed hope for the success of the peace talks.

"There are always people who

promote cynicism whenever there are peace negotiations. I am however hopeful for the success of the ongoing process," Haavisto added. Haavisto paid a two-day visit to Afghanistan on Oct. 26-27 to discuss current issues and the 2020 Afghanistan Conference, co-hosted by Finland, the Afghan Government and the United Nations.

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# Trudeau says Nice attack does not define Islam

Condemning a deadly attack in the France's Nice, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that these terrorist attacks do not define Islam.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau while defending 'free speech' said it is important but it sure does come with limits, WION reported. His statement about free speech was related to the recent controversy surrounding the cartoon printed and re-printed by the Charlie Hebdo magazine in France and said Canada will always "defend freedom of expression". Learning from Macron's mistake, Trudeau distanced himself from any direct statement in the press conference and said freedom of expression does not come without limits. "We owe it to ourselves to act with respect for others and to seek not to arbitrarily or

unnecessarily injure those with whom we are sharing a society and a planet," Trudeau said. "We do not have the right for example to shout fire in a movie theatre crowded with people, there are always limits," he added.

He also urged people to be more aware of their words and actions towards fellow humans. "In a pluralist, diverse and respectful society like ours, we owe it to ourselves to be aware of the impact of our words, of our actions on others, particularly these communities and populations who still experience a great deal of discrimination," he said.

He also openly condemned the attacks saying, "it is unjustifiable and Canada wholeheartedly condemns these acts while standing with our French friends who are going through extremely difficult times."



### A look at the world

#### Russia calls on U.S. to consider Putin's disarmament initiative

Moscow invites Washington to give serious consideration to the arms control initiative put forward by Russian President Vladimir Putin on October 26, the Russian Embassy in the United States said in a Twitter post on Friday.

"No one wants another missile crisis. President Putin's proposals provide compromise approaches for the benefit of all nations. We suggest that our partners give them serious consideration," the embassy said in response to remarks by US Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control Marshall Billingslea.

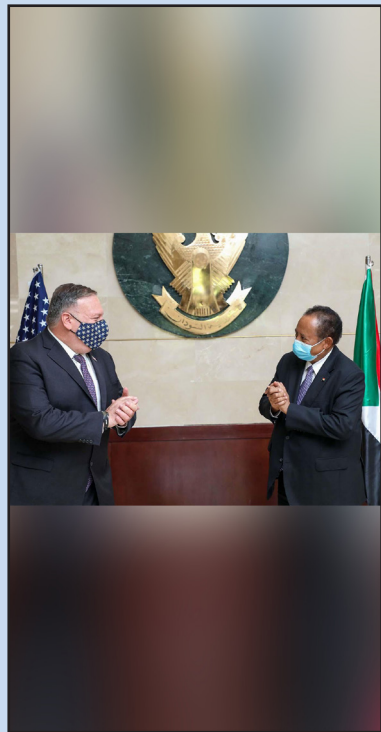


On Friday, he commented on a statement made by Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov. "Russia seems to now regret destroying the INF Treaty by cheating for more than a decade. The United States and our Allies have seen this before. It didn't work in the 80's. It won't work now. Thank you CIA," he noted.

On Wednesday, Antonov said that remarks by US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien who said that Washington would be ready to deploy intermediate-and shorter-range missiles in Europe posed a threat to regional and global security. He stressed that the additional steps proposed by Russian President Vladimir Putin on October 26 to de-escalate the situation in Europe would be a constructive alternative to such destabilizing plans.

Putin earlier reaffirmed Moscow's commitment to a moratorium on the deployment of ground-based intermediate-and shorter-range missiles until US-made missiles of similar types appeared in the respective regions. He added that Russia's call on NATO countries to impose a ... **P2**

#### Sudan, U.S. sign deal to restore sovereign immunity



Sudan said Saturday it has signed an agreement with the U.S. to restore the country's sovereign immunity.

In a statement, the Justice Ministry said the agreement would settle all cases filed against Sudan in US courts over the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

According to the statement, Khartoum agreed to pay \$335 million in compensation to the families of US victims of the 1998 bombings.

The agreement is part of the moves by Washington to remove Sudan from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.

By the agreement, Sudan's "legal status becomes like other countries that are not on the list of terror-supporting countries", the ministry said.

On Oct. 23, the Sudanese Foreign Ministry announced that the Sudanese transitional government agreed to normalize relations with Israel. On the same day, US President Donald Trump announced that his country started the process of removing Sudan from the list of terror-supporting countries.

Sudan became the fifth Arab country to agree to establish official relations with Israel after Egypt in 1979, Jordan in 1994 and both the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in 2020.

#### Lukashenko claims has no intention to flee Belarus

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has no intention to flee from the country under the pressure of the opposition, he said during his meeting with the employees of the Ministry of the Interior Friday.

"If someone thinks that I am about to pack and leave... Look, there have been situations when someone probably shivered. But here are generals who talk to me all the time and they saw that not one hair on my head has moved. Look, we had worse times, when cars burned on the streets, anarchists and scum from all over the world were coming [to Belarus] in mid-1990s, there's footage. They sought to storm the House of the Government, set up tents on the October Square. I still remember that. We've endured



all that," Lukashenko said, according to BelTA.

Lukashenko warned that in order to protect the country all existing means will be mobilized including law enforcement agencies and the military.

"I want not only the members of law enforcement present today but the military also to understand that the war is not the war that used to be, that it began with the external aggression. Any war will begin from the inside. It was being prepared in our country anyway. So everyone should understand that we will mobilize everything we have in order to protect our country, our land and our families, our children. I would like you to understand this," the BelTA news agency quoted him as saying at a meeting with the staff of the Interior Ministry.

The president called the situation on the western border of Belarus restive. "It is restive here in the west. What [US Secretary of State] Michael Pompeo told me, that's good, I noted that," he said. Earlier, the American diplomat assured Lukashenko that there is no threat to Belarus coming from NATO.

However, the president stated that NATO troops are on the move and restless ... **P2**



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