

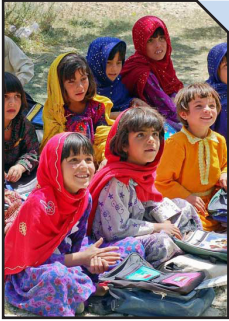
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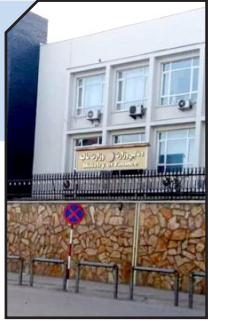
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# Heart of Asia

*Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region*

Tuesday, November 10, 2020

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## Iranian Official Met UN Envoy, Discuss Afghan Affairs

The Iranian FM's special envoy for Afghanistan affairs says Iran supports the peace process owned and led by Afghans, and also it considers the peace and security of Afghanistan as its own peace and security.

Heading a delegation, Deborah Lyons Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA has traveled to Tehran to discuss some issues over the Afghanistan affair.

Yesterday, she met and held talks with Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian, the Iranian Foreign Ministry's special envoy for Afghanistan affairs over current developments, the political and security situation as well as the peace process in Afghanistan. In this meeting, Taherian stressed the significant role of the United Nations and international consultations in facilitating Inter-Afghan Peace Talks, and also, he expressed Iran's ... **P2**



## Danesh Blames Taliban for Less Progress in Talks

Second Vice President Sarwar Danesh at a gathering on Monday blamed the Taliban for consistent delays and lack of process in the direct negotiations between negotiating teams of both sides in Doha.

The Taliban is "the main obstacle" for progress in the peace negotiations in Doha, Danesh said, adding that the Taliban does not believe in a peaceful solution to the war in the country.

Danesh said the new US administration should review the Afghan peace process and that there is a need for support to the process from all sides.

The peace negotiations were inaugurated in September with the hope to end the four decades of war in the country. Negotiating teams representing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban held more than 10 meetings in small set up called contact groups to discuss procedural rules for the talks. The two sides have agreed on almost all articles of the ground rules for negotiations except two: religious basis for the talks and the connection ... **P2**

# Taliban Expect Biden to Stick to Afghan Peace Deal Without 'Significant Change'



The Taliban say they expect President-elect Joe Biden to stick to a peace agreement the insurgent group sealed with the United States earlier this year to end the war in Afghanistan, America's longest.

The February 29 landmark pact negotiated by President Donald Trump's administration has set in motion a "conditions-based" withdrawal of all U.S. and NATO

troops from Afghanistan by May 2021. The U.S. military has since cut the size of its troop presence to 4,500 soldiers, from around 13,000 at the time of the signing of the deal and vacated several Afghan bases.

"It (the agreement) serves the interest of the Afghan nation and the interest of the American nation. It should not be subject to any significant change and should be implemented in the

form in which it is agreed upon," Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem told VOA when asked for his comments on the fate of the pact under the next U.S. president.

"It is our expectation that the ongoing peace process and the agreement with the U.S. government will remain on track," Naeem said. He spoke to VOA from Qatar's capital, Doha, where the Taliban maintains its political

office.

The agreement requires the Taliban to not attack international forces and to prevent transnational terrorist groups, such as al-Qaida and Islamic State, from operating in Afghanistan. It has also opened first-ever direct peace talks between the insurgent group and representatives of the Afghan government, which was not part of the U.S.-Taliban deal.

Doha is hosting what are officially known as intra-Afghan peace negotiations, which began September 12 but have stalled for the most part because of disputes between Taliban and Afghan negotiators over procedural matters.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, congratulating Biden on his election victory, said Sunday that ties between Kabul and Washington are expected to deepen in areas of counterterrorism and building peace.

"Afghanistan looks forward to continuing/deepening our multilayered strategic partnership w/ the United States -- our foundational partner -- including in counterterrorism & bringing peace to Afghanistan," Ghani wrote on Twitter.

Ordinary Afghans also welcomed Biden's victory, hoping the president-elect might slow the U.S. troop withdrawal to allow for a stable peace to take root, as opposed to Trump who said in a recent statement ... **P3**

## Security Forces Discover Taliban Drone in Paktika

The National Directorate of Security (NDS) has discovered a Taliban drone and seized a large number of arms and weapons during an operation in Barmal district of Paktika province.

Media reported that the operation was carried out in Murghi area of Barmal district and two Taliban militants were killed in the operation.

The reconnaissance drone was equipped with seven different cameras and was also used to launch small bombs.

Local residents and eyewitnesses also said that during the operation, a large number of heavy weapons and ammunition from the Taliban were seized by the National Security Forces.



## Afghanistan, Belarus Ready to Expand Cooperation in Key Sectors

Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Belarus to Tajikistan with concurrent accreditation to Afghanistan Oleg Ivanov paid a working visit to Afghanistan on 1-6 November, said the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Oleg Ivanov held meetings with acting Afghan Minister of Economy, co-chair of the joint Belarus-Afghanistan committee on trade and economic cooperation Karima Hamid Faryabi, acting Afghan Minister of Industry and Commerce Nisar Ahmad Ghoryani, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan Mirwais Nab.

"The parties reaffirmed their readiness to expand Belarus-Afghanistan cooperation in key areas of interaction, and agreed to organize in Minsk in 2021 the second meeting of the joint Belarus-Afghanistan committee," the ministry informed.



Oleg Ivanov also met with the leadership of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment and the regional branches of the Afghanistan Chamber of Industries and Mines. The parties confirmed interest in organizing joint business and exhibition events in Belarus in 2021. The Belarusian ambassador made

a presentation on the country's export opportunities in the context of expanding trade partnership with Afghanistan and took part in round tables with representatives of Afghanistan business circles on the supply of Belarusian pharmaceutical products, engineering and petrochemical products, and also food products.



### Iranian Official...

readiness to cooperate with the United Nations in this issue.

Pointing out that the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the peace and security of Afghanistan as its own peace and security, he emphasized Iran's support for the peace process owned and led by Afghans.

Hailing the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the people of Afghanistan and its efforts to resolve the problems of that country, Ms. Lyons announced the readiness of the United Nations to play an effective role in advancing the peace process and cooperating with countries in the region.

### Danesh Blames...

of the US-Taliban deal with the talks in Doha.

This comes as peace negotiator Fawzia Koofi on Sunday said that they remain hopeful that the disputed points on procedural rules of the talks are removed within the next few days to resume the meetings between delegates from both sides of the negotiations.

Sources familiar with the process said the host of the talks, Qatar, and other countries supporting the Afghan peace process have expedited their efforts to remove the hurdles in the way of the direct negotiations between both sides. "The draft is exchanged between the two sides. Some words are added. Some words are changed. We hope to solve this issue within the next few days," Koofi said.

"Recommendations are made by our side and by their side. The prolongation of the process is due to the fact that we are discussing the recommendations they make, and they discuss recommendations we make so that we can reach an agreement. We hope to achieve a result," said Mohammad Naeem, spokesman for the Taliban's political office in Doha.

By Divyanshu Jindal

# Rising Barriers to Indian Soft Power in Afghanistan

Over the course of last two decades, India has presented itself as a major player in Afghanistan in the realm of soft power. Through strategically investing in multi-sectorial social-economic activities, India has not just presented an alternative to the hard power tactics that Afghanistan has witnessed from Pakistan, it has also won the 'hearts and minds' with the ideas of nation building and cultural influence through art, culture, music, education opportunities and economic investments. This should conclude in the verdict that India holds a key position in any engagement that focuses on Afghanistan's future and that India can affect the course of developments keeping in view its own national interests. However, this seems far from reality as it can be argued that today India is being limited by the barriers to its soft power and thus, the fears of losing relevance in Afghanistan might be becoming a reality.

What is 'Soft power' and 'Hard power'? Joseph Nye defines soft power as the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment, and that a country's soft power rests on its resources – culture, political values and foreign policies. In contrast, hard power involves the 'ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will'. When we look at the Indian soft power context in Afghanistan, two contrasting phenomena can be observed at play today. On one hand, where India's soft power in Afghanistan is seen as paramount by most scholars and is expected to make India a major actor in the region and thus a participant in the ongoing Afghan peace process, India found itself somehow sidelined in a process where actors like Pakistan, China, and

Turkey are playing a major role who base themselves on a foundation of hard power in Afghanistan.

India's Soft Power in Afghanistan

"Two international surveys in Afghanistan indicated that India is the most popular foreign country there—all of this without much Indian hard power on display", noted Rani Mullen in 2015. She highlights that India in 2012-13 allocated over 2000 study and training fellowships to Afghanistan, trained a generation of civil servants and potential key-makers and the fact that Hamid Karzai, former Afghanistan president studied in India undoubtedly enabled India to secure a close relationship with Afghanistan and an official strategic partnership, without having to flex a hard power muscle. Further taking in account the recent Indian record, it can be said that India has been a key development partner in Afghanistan, having achieved 400 projects in 34 provinces, built over 200 schools, sponsored thousands of scholarships and supplied wheat, medical facilities and more recently, COVID aid. The construction of Afghan parliament building and the Salma dam (also revered as Afghan-India Friendship Dam), stands testimony to the Indian support towards Afghanistan's development. It has often been highlighted that unlike other actors, India's endeavor to help Afghanistan has no other agenda than the stability and development of Afghanistan. However, today, India finds itself restricted in leveraging its soft power in Afghanistan, due to several reasons.

The 21st Century Race for Soft Power in Afghanistan

In sphere of aid and economic assistance, which Mullen notes is one of the key soft power tools, India has found a tough competitor in China,



who has deep pockets and ambitions to overshadow Indian efforts. India and China both have major geopolitical interests in Afghanistan who see Afghanistan as the gateway to an oil and resource rich Central Asia and to European markets besides the factors related to own national security due to growing extremism in the region. Both nations are now pushing hard to be the bigger stakeholder in the infrastructure and development of Afghan economy. However, where India is finding it increasingly hard to have access to Afghanistan, and have also been 'Dropped' recently from Chabahar rail project (which India see as the connectivity link to Afghanistan) by Iran due to lack of active engagement from India, China has been successful in making inroads, exemplified in the recent project of 'Sino-Afghan Special Railway Transportation' which links Afghanistan to China, via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, thus, integrating Afghanistan into the USD 62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Moving to the sphere of culture and media, India is now facing off against a rising Turkey. In his article in 2008, Shashi Tharoor had noted that the

television mega-serial "Kyu ki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi" had become India's biggest asset in Afghanistan where it was watched by 94 percent of Afghans. Today, this space is dominated by Turkish media. "Turkey's efforts in terms of humanitarian efforts and education across the Muslim world have contributed to its rising influence on a social and cultural level, namely the global success of its soap operas", notes Tanya Goudsouzian, a Canadian journalist covering Afghanistan for over 15 years. She emphasizes on the phenomenon that "War-weary Afghans have tuned in to Turkish dramas, which have proven to be culturally appropriate alternatives to Bollywood's song-and-dance escapism and Hollywood's 'America saves the world' propaganda." In other opinions too, Turkey enjoys an increasingly privileged position in Afghanistan society whose troops on the group as part of NATO forces have been seen in a different light than troops from other –countries and have not been seen as foreign invaders. In sphere of education, Turkish education is again becoming popular among Afghan families. The ethnic linkages with minorities like Uzbek minority... **P3**

By Madiha Afzal

## America should stay in Afghanistan until an intra-Afghan deal is reached — not forever

October 7 marked the 19th anniversary of the start of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. There is no doubt that the costs of this war to America and to Afghans have been enormous, and it's time for it to wind down. It is also clear that the only way out is a negotiated peace, taking the form of two agreements: one struck between America and the Taliban (which was signed in February, and for which the Trump administration deserves credit), and another between the Taliban and the Afghan government (for which talks are currently underway in Doha). Most can agree on those basic principles.

Yet the discussion in Washington on policy options for Afghanistan — beyond the unhelpful campaign rhetoric and unexpected pronouncements from President Trump — is usually framed as a binary choice between two extremes. At one end, it's argued that in order to guarantee any semblance of human rights or democracy in Afghanistan, we would have to stay there indefinitely, consigning another generation to fighting an unwinnable war half a

world away. But, the argument adds, we actually have no responsibility to guarantee these values and principles in Afghanistan via a troop presence: Do we, after all, use troops to enforce democracy or women's rights in any country where those are deficient or threatened? At the other end, it's argued that we should abide by the U.S.-Taliban deal — the best that we could get, the argument goes — and withdraw all troops by May 2021 as long as counterterrorism commitments are met, as the letter of the February 29 deal dictates. Presented in this binary way, it seems obvious that it's better to leave by May 2021, regardless of progress (or lack thereof) on the intra-Afghan deal.

But this choice is a false one. It misses the third option: that America stay in Afghanistan until an intra-Afghan peace deal is reached, and condition its full troop withdrawal on the achievement of that deal. That is not the same thing as staying forever. It likely means we would need to keep a few thousand troops in Afghanistan beyond May 2021. The intra-Afghan negotiations that began in Doha on September 12

are complicated, painstakingly slow, and should not be rushed. America is helping that process, and Pakistan is involved as well. Though U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said recently that a deal between the Afghans may take months, not years, analysts argue that once the pressure of a U.S. election has passed, the process will probably take several years. It may stall, or stop and start. For U.S. soldiers to stay until an intra-Afghan peace deal is secured would be the best hope for securing a favorable outcome for both Afghans and Americans. That could mean that several thousand U.S. soldiers remain in Afghanistan for the next three to five years after the troop withdrawal scheduled for November 2020, at which point the number of troops will fall to 4,500. We could withdraw some people beyond that number, conditional on visible and sustained progress on an intra-Afghan deal. Even at an upper bound of 4,500, our troop presence for the next few years would still be less than 5% of what it was at the peak of the war in 2010-11. ... **P3**

### Iran FM Zarif...

relied on the US should understand that they cannot give money to buy security and kill Yemeni people because hallucination-like Trump does not exist no longer," Khatibzadeh said.

He made it clear that Iran is always ready to help neighbors to reach understanding that the regional security needs a regional mechanism.

Asked whether end of Trump's presidency would create changes in type of interactions with neighbors, Khatibzadeh said Iran has always had goodwill in its relations with neighbors.

"Iran's policy does not change by incoming or outgoing a person."

Commenting on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict underway between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Khatibzadeh said that Iran welcomes any initiative to cease the conflict.

Asked about Iran's plan for settlement of the conflict, the spokesman said the framework for resolving the conflict is clear.

Iran has welcomed any ways to resolve the conflict in this framework, he added.

Whenever those two countries arrive at a conclusion that war is not a correct way, others can help them better, Khatibzadeh added.

Iran is serious in the issues of border security and Takfiris' presence, he noted.

Pointing to Zarif's recent visit to three nations of Latin America (Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba) last week, Khatibzadeh said, "In the visit, Iranian foreign minister participated in the inauguration ceremony of the newly-appointed president of Bolivia."

Zarif also held talks with his Chilean and Nicaraguan counterparts for strengthening bilateral ties.

Khatibzadeh added, "In his visit, foreign minister Zarif visited Cuba and held high-profile talks with Cuban president and foreign minister. In the meeting, the two sides explored avenues for enhancing the mutual relationships in various areas."



# MoF Collects More than 140 Billion AFs in National Revenue

Ministry of Finance (MoF) on Monday said this year they have collected about 142 billion and 685 million AFs in national revenue.

According to the Ministry of Finance, 7 billion and 170 million AFs have been collected in the last two weeks. Similarly, 142 billion and 685 million AFs have been collected from national revenues since the beginning of the fiscal year. Revenues collected over the past two weeks have been collected from customs, tax revenues and non-tax revenues.

According to MoF, the collected revenues include 394 million AFs from Mostofites, 1 billion and 186 million AFs from tax revenues, 1 billion and 757 million AFs from non-



tax revenues and 3 billion and 831 million Afghans from the customs sector. The Ministry also reports that since

the beginning of the current fiscal year, 100 billion Af (57.6%) of the development budget and 221 billion 731 million Af (73%) of the ordinary

budget have been spent. National income levels are likely to fall this year from last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

### Rising Barriers...

serves as an added advantage for deepening the ties. Further, a growing closeness with Pakistan, has helped Turkey to gain inroads and insights and thus become a major internal stakeholder in Afghanistan rather than just a friendly nation 1700 miles away.

What's Ahead?

It can be argued that gains from India's soft power in Afghanistan remains a case of unrealized potential due to the absence of credible hard power. Kabir Taneja, fellow at the Observer Research Foundation notes that India's position of goodwill in Afghanistan, gained due to a non-interventionist approach also limits India's aspirations of becoming a superpower, as there is little point to soft power if one cannot back it with hard power to protect their interests. In the era of peace process, Indian soft power is now pitted against the hard power elements of Pakistan which is pro-Taliban, and China, who uses soft power as a direct extension of its hard power, then there is Turkey, who might be on its way to replace India in the realm of media content through its rising popularity among the Muslim world. In this situation, Indian policymakers have their work cut-out which is to think about the relevance of Indian soft power without a support of hard power tools to decide both short-term and long-term plans in a post-withdrawal Afghanistan. It will be imperative to not only recalculate the tools used for deploying soft power, but also to figure out India's own rule in regional geopolitics if it wants to continue a soft power approach sans hard power credibility on ground.

### Taliban Expect...

that he would like all American troops to be home by Christmas.

Biden said during his campaign that if he were elected, he would maintain a small troop presence in Afghanistan to ensure al-Qaida and Islamic State terrorists do not threaten the United States from the war-ravaged country. But he opposed continued U.S. involvement in Afghan nation-building.

In a February debate among U.S. Democratic presidential hopefuls, Biden drew strong criticism from Afghans for saying that "there's no possibility of uniting" Afghanistan. The Taliban, however, maintains that it wants all foreign troops to leave Afghanistan for a durable peace deal between Afghanistan rivals to take roots that ends the war.

### America should...

Some might argue that staying beyond May 2021 would violate the February 29 agreement between Washington and the Taliban. But both the late start of the intra-Afghan peace negotiations (which began months after they were required to begin) and the Taliban's continuing relationship with al-Qaida already violate the deal. More substantively, Ambassador Khalilzad, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, and others in the administration have publicly said that American troop withdrawals beyond those currently scheduled for November 2020 will be based on "conditions on the ground." This phrase is usually understood to imply an evaluation of whether the Taliban has kept its counterterrorism commitments, and also an assessment of levels of violence on the ground between the Taliban and the Afghans (violence that has, tragically for so many, continued unabated through the spring and summer). Khalilzad often refers to phrasing in the text of the February 29 deal that establishes four parts as interrelated: the U.S. withdrawal, Taliban counterterrorism commitments, a lasting ceasefire, and a roadmap for the intra-Afghan deal. While the wording doesn't make explicit that withdrawal hinges on a ceasefire and the intra-Afghan deal, it can be read to imply that; I'd argue that we should use any ambiguity in the deal to stay until an intra-Afghan peace deal is achieved.

Doing so is the best way to throw our support behind the Afghan government and people, shedding the farce of neutrality Washington has had to maintain. Bolstering the Afghan government helps it fight to maintain the gains made in women's rights, human rights, and democracy — all values we hold dear and that we helped foster in Afghanistan over the last 19 years, but cannot impose ourselves. By leaving before an intra-Afghan

peace deal is reached, we risk plunging Afghanistan into further conflict leading to a Taliban victory; not only would that be a disservice to Afghans who have benefited from a realization of their rights, we would do ourselves a disservice by wiping away the gains we have helped achieve. To say that we have zero responsibility to safeguard these gains is disingenuous, and will not be looked upon kindly by Afghans. Lost in the discussions in Washington are the voices of Afghans themselves — such as that of a young victim of a recent blast in Nangarhar, whose notebook with the handwritten poem saying "what kind of people are these? Leaves you perplexed" was found after his death. America is uniquely implicated in Afghanistan's trajectory; that involvement has come at the great cost of American money and lives over the past two decades, but also Afghan lives over 40 years. The Afghans, after all, helped America win the Cold War in the 1980s. The argument that America is leaving because its costs in Afghanistan are sunk will cause many Afghans to blame America for the country's future problems.

I've struggled with the argument that the U.S. should remain in Afghanistan for a period, because it's often seen as endorsing a perpetuation of war. And in the aftermath of the U.S.-Taliban deal this year, American troops have seen zero casualties. But leaving now is akin to quitting the race when the finish line is in sight. Pulling out precipitously is an invitation to a cycle of violence and civil war, as my colleague Michael O'Hanlon has argued. And beyond real outcomes, we underestimate the power of the narrative in the region at our peril.

Some argue that we should concentrate our efforts on maintaining diplomatic and economic leverage over Afghanistan post-withdrawal. But we should be clear that our pre-withdrawal leverage is far greater than any post-withdrawal leverage would be,

especially in the context of new reporting that suggests that the Taliban may financially need America less than we think. Afghanistan's neighbor Pakistan, for its part, also says that it does not want a precipitous international withdrawal from Afghanistan. Its prime minister, who has long supported a political solution to the war, recently argued that he wants to see an international presence there until an intra-Afghan peace deal is reached, no matter how long it might take.

In recent months, the Trump administration has tended to brush the Taliban's violence under the rug, and to paint the terrorist group with a soft brush, all in the interest of getting out of America's "endless war." There is also a tendency to overstate Americans' wariness with war, which is perhaps driven as much by the narrative coming from Washington as the other way around. A January 2020 poll by the Chicago Council for Global Affairs, for example, found that Americans are "evenly divided on whether the United States should have long-term bases in Afghanistan" (48% said that they should, 49% said they should not). That, the poll found, was "the highest level of support for basing in that country since 2010."

The argument for staying in Afghanistan until an intra-Afghan peace deal is reached isn't driven by unrealistic idealism around promoting human rights and democracy, nor support for a nation-building project, nor the desire for endless war. It derives from a recognition that undesirable outcomes down the road in Afghanistan will be considered America's failure. We have a policy option at hand to achieve a better outcome for both America and Afghans. Those considering policy decisions in Afghanistan should ignore empty campaign rhetoric — such as that coming from our president — and choose to keep some troops on the ground until the Afghans have arrived at an agreement on the future of their country.

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# China for 'mutual respect' with new US President-elect

China on Monday called for stronger communication and mutual respect in bilateral relations with Washington in the wake of the apparent results of the recent US presidential election.

"We have always insisted that China and the US should strengthen communication and dialogues, to manage differences and divergences based on mutual respect, and expand cooperation based on reciprocity and mutual benefit," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters at a news conference in Beijing, according to the Chinese Global Times daily.

On Joe Biden claiming victory in the elections, Wang said: "We understand the result of the presidential election will be determined following US laws and procedures. We will

respond in accordance with international common practice."

Under the Donald Trump administration, US-China ties descended amid an intense trade war with two sides increasing tariffs.

Trump also punished Beijing over alleged rights abuses of Uighur Muslims in the Xinjiang province, as well as over its response to protests in Hong Kong.

Biden on Saturday won the crucial state of Pennsylvania, and with the victory surpassed the necessary 270 Electoral College delegates needed to claim the White House, according to The Associated Press and other major news organizations.

The democratic leader now holds a commanding 290 delegates after the AP also called Nevada for the president-elect.



### A look at the world

#### Cuba, Venezuela hope Biden will seek to improve ties

Cuba and Venezuela said Sunday they trust that Joe Biden's victory in the US presidential election will usher in a new era of relations with Washington, which have been severely affected by sanctions. President Miguel Diaz-Canel said Cuba recognized that the US had chosen "a new direction in the presidential elections."

"We believe in the possibility of having constructive bilateral relations while respecting our differences," he said on Twitter.

After President Barack Obama re-established diplomatic relations with the Caribbean nation, President Donald Trump cancelled deals and imposed



harsh financial sanctions and new travel restrictions on the country.

From Venezuela, President Nicolas Maduro also congratulated newly elected President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris and expressed his willingness to engage in "dialogue" with the US.

"Venezuela, the Homeland of the Liberator Simon Bolivar, will always be open to dialogue and understanding with the people and government of the United States," he said in a tweet.

Maduro's relationship with Trump has also been rocky, even more so after Trump recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim president and expressed his willingness to oust Maduro from office, even if it meant using military force.

The Trump administration also filed charges against Maduro last March for drug-trafficking and offered a \$15 million reward for his arrest.

It is still unclear, however, whether Biden will reverse Trump's policies.

#### Iran FM Zarif to visit Pakistan on Tuesday



Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Saeed Khatibzadeh announced that Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif heading a high-ranking political and economic delegation will visit Pakistan on Tuesday to meet with Pakistani senior officials.

Speaking at a weekly press conference on Monday, Khatibzadeh said, "During the two-day visit to Pakistan, Zarif will have meetings with Pakistani senior political and military officials".

Zarif is due to meet with Pakistan Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, he added.

In response to a question of whether any connection has been made with Joe Biden's team before and after the US' presidential election, Khatibzadeh said, "Basically, Iran will have no connection with anybody beyond the issues related to JCPOA. On the other hand, a new administration has not yet taken power in the US. Iran will make its decisions according to the new situation after Biden's administration takes office. What matters is actions, not words and speculations".

"Iran's policies are unaffected by the US administrations. The party that has violated commitments and has also threatened the others to breach the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was the US. We must witness reforms of US policies in all spheres, then we will judge on the basis of the measures," he added.

Touching upon the decision of the Iraqi parliament about the issue of the US terrorist attack to assassinate Lt General Qassem Soleimani in the Iraqi soil last January and the end of Trump's immunity as his rival Biden won the 2020 presidential election, the spokesman said the agents who committed such crime are on Iran's list.

"In line with following up the case, Iran has had close cooperation with different sectors in Iraq," Khatibzadeh added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the spokesman advised certain neighboring countries that the region needs regional mechanism for its security and stressed that security cannot be bought from outside.

"Few regional states which had already ... **P2**

#### George W. Bush congratulates Biden on US election win

Former Republican President George W. Bush on Sunday congratulated President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on their victory in the 2020 election.

"Though we have political differences, I know Joe Biden to be a good man, who has won his opportunity to lead and unify our country. The President-elect reiterated that while he ran as a Democrat, he will govern for all Americans," Bush said in a statement.

Democrat Biden defeated incumbent Republican President Donald Trump



in the presidential race after garnering 290 electoral votes, according to The Associated Press. A candidate needs 270 electoral votes to win the US presidency. Bush said he offered "the same thing" he had offered Trump and his predecessor Barack Obama: "my pledge to help in any way I can."

He also congratulated Trump and his supporters, calling Trump's earning more than 70 million votes "an extraordinary political achievement."

"They have spoken, and their voices will continue to be heard through elected Republicans at every level of government," he said.

"The challenges that face our country will demand the best of President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris - and the best of us all. We must come together for the sake of our families and neighbors, and for our nation and its future," he added.



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