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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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10 afs

Taliban Ought to Agree on Ceasefire



Kandahar: 33 injured in Daman bombing

At least 33 people were wounded in a car bomb attack in southern Kandahar province on Monday, officials said. Bahir Ahmadi, the governor's spokesman, told Pajhwok Afghan News the car bomb targeted the police headquarters in Daman district this morning.

He said a Mazda-type vehicle was used in the attack which wounded 33 individuals, seven employees of the district centre.

Two National Directorate of Security (NDS) personnel, nine policemen and 15 members of a family were also among the injured, the official added.

Some parts of the district centre and the police headquarters were damaged as a result of the massive bombing. Police spokesman Jamal Barakzai said Daman police chief Abdul Wadood was wounded along with two security guards.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the bombing.



Sweden Assures 'Continued and Long-Term Support' to Afghanistan

Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) Abdullah Abdullah on Sunday hosted the newly appointed Swedish Ambassador to Afghanistan Torkel Stiernlöf at Sapedar Palace, discussing joint cooperation for betterment of the country.

During the meeting, Abdullah congratulated Ambassador Stiernlöf on his appointment as the new Swedish Ambassador to Afghanistan and wished him all the best in the mission, said the Palace in a statement.

Thanking Sweden for its continued support to Afghanistan, Abdullah “asserted Sweden is a long-term ally and friend of Afghanistan.”

Meanwhile, Ambassador Stiernlöf praised the warm welcome and assured of his country's “continued and long-term support for Afghanistan and the peace process.”

“They also discussed the peace process, the talks in Doha, and the inaugural meeting of the Leadership ... **P2**



US Chargé d'Affaires Ross Wilson in a chat with reporters on Sunday said that the Taliban is expecting the release of thousands of their prisoners under their agreement with the United States by mid-December.

“The specific provision relating to another 7,000 Taliban prisoners

is contained in the US-Taliban agreement,” Wilson said.

“If you do the math, the Taliban expect under the terms of that agreement that there would be progress on releasing those prisoners by roughly mid-December. I have forgotten the exact date. I think it's our view,” he

said.

Wilson said that “all of the various parts of the US-Taliban agreement are interlocked with one another, intersect with one another and that you can't just take out one and say this one has to be adhered to without other aspects being adhered to.”

Wilson said that the US's “strong interest is in the united consensus among leaders of the Islamic Republic that can help to make tough decisions as these negotiations go forward, give clear direction to the negotiating team in Doha and do it in a way that reflects the national interests as opposed to a narrow political interest, or a narrow ethnic interest or some other narrow set of concerns.”

This comes as peace negotiators from the Afghan Republic and Taliban teams held their second meeting about the agenda of the negotiations in Doha following their first meeting on Saturday.

The meeting comes after the two sides agreed on procedural rules for the negotiations, a development that broke the deadlock and created hope for the peace process that is seen as the only way forward to end the decades of conflicts in Afghanistan.

So far, the details of the meetings have not been made public by the two sides, but both sides have expressed optimism about ... **P3**

Salang Pass Closed to Cargo Trucks

The protection and maintenance department of Salang Pass said on Monday that the strategic Salang highway has been closed to Cargo Trucks following the heavy storms and bad weather.

According to the department, the snowfall in the south of Salang and snowfall with wind in the north started at around 00:00am today and the current situation is expected to continue for more than two days and nights.

Snow thickness on the north is reported to be 16cm in dept ... **P2**

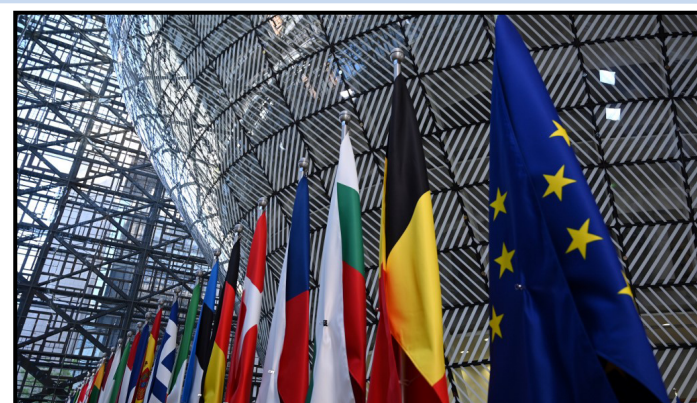


EU Holds Taliban Accountable for 'Unlawful Attacks' across Afghanistan

In a joint statement Monday, the European Union Delegations based in Kabul “strongly” condemned the “unlawful attacks” on media practitioners and religious leaders, holding the Taliban accountable for civilian casualties across Afghanistan.

While the Afghan government – including international allies – put efforts together for peace and prosperity in the country, the Taliban seem to have doubled up violence throughout Afghanistan that target journalists, religious scholars, human rights activist and students to name a few.

“We consider these not only as savage attacks against Afghan blood, but as an attack on the very peace process in Afghanistan,” the statement. “Recognizing the bravery of Afghanistan's people, we are confident that these attacks will fail in their intent to silence the diversity



of opinions.”

Addressing efforts on peace process since early September, the EU delegation call for all-inclusive negotiations that will open the doors for Afghans in all walks of life to freely express and actively engage in building a peaceful country.

“It has never mattered more for the people of Afghanistan to feel able to express themselves freely

and provide their opinions on the peace talks, as well as engage in the process, to achieve an inclusive and sustainable peace,” the statement read.

“Upholding the free flow of information and holding the perpetrators accountable will benefit everyone who wishes to live in a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan.” ... **P3**

Sweden Assures...

Committee of the HCNR at the Presidential Palace," said the statement.

- Pompeo Dubs Peace Council 'Inclusive and Authoritative', Carrying Tough Duty in Process
- Peace Council Acts after Criticized on Dull Performance

This came days after the HCNR hold its leadership committee meeting on Afghan peace negotiations, which plays vital role in facilitating the process.

Salang Pass...

and at the southern part is about 15cm. Meanwhile, the department reported, that the Salang Highway is open to passenger vehicles, but must use Tire chains for better grip and safety. The department has asked drivers to consider the speed, weight and height allowed when crossing the route.

Biden picks...

someone with the highest levels of integrity and intellect." In Congress, Becerra played a key role in passing the Affordable Care Act - former president Barack Obama's key domestic policy achievement. In his current role, Becerra leads the coalition of 20 states defending the program better known as Obamacare, including before the Supreme Court in November. Biden has asked Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and a member of President Donald Trump's coronavirus task force, to stay on as chief medical adviser.

By Manish Tewari

Biden in Afghanistan

In the wake of the September 9, 2001, terror attacks on the US, President George W. Bush greenlighted Operation Enduring Freedom on October 7, 2001. The avowed aim was to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. For 17 months the then American Administration under the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld combine relentlessly pounded that war devastated country from air and land even as a bulk of the Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership escaped to Pakistan and even Iran where they were sheltered by the respective deep states of both these nations. Black sites, waterboarding, rendition and Guantanamo Bay were some of the new words that entered the everyday lexicon of people around the world.

On March 20, 2003, the United States of America invaded Iraq and soon Afghanistan became a sideshow for the Bush Administration. By the time Bush demitted office in January 2008 the number of US troops in Afghanistan were 47,000 in number. They were supplemented by 50,000 additional NATO troops and 70,000 personnel of the Afghan national army. However, the mission had not gone according to plan. Despite a civilian administration under Hamid Karzai assuming office on December 22, 2001, the hold of the Afghan government and the coalition forces on Afghanistan was at best tenuous.

Barack Obama inherited the war. Even as a Democratic presidential nominee Obama had visited Afghanistan on the 19th of July, 2008. He made a distinction between the United States' involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan by terming the latter as a war of necessity. In February 2009, Obama increased the number of US troops by 21,000 that included 4,000 military trainers. Ten months later, bowing to pressure from the Pentagon and the ground commander in Afghanistan, General McChrystal Obama announced a surge of 30,000 troops in Afghanistan, bringing the total number of US troops deployed to a hundred thousand. Forty thousand NATO troops, additionally, were already serving their tours of duty in that country.

However, the situation did not stabilize and the Taliban kept on gaining ground. While its grip on the country side kept waxing and waning but on the whole its influence increased.

On December 28, 2014, the United States and NATO ended their combat missions in Afghanistan and commenced Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS) and the NATO-led Resolute Support. The objectives of both these missions were narrowly defined, namely to



conduct counterterrorism operations targeting terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and its local ISIS affiliate, as well as focusses on building up local Afghan security forces to help fight the Taliban. However, this recalibration was nothing more than a fig leaf to create the illusion of an honorable exit. The fact being that the Taliban continued to hold sway over much of the countryside. Obama handed over the Afghan war to Donald Trump who during his 2016 election campaign had heavily critiqued the continuing US presence in Afghanistan. However, on the 21st of August of 2017, in the eighth month of his Presidency he declared at Fort Myer: "I arrived at three fundamental conclusions about America's core interests in Afghanistan. First, our nation must seek an honorable and enduring outcome worthy of the tremendous sacrifices that have been made, especially the sacrifices of lives. The men and women who serve our nation in combat deserve a plan for victory... Second, the consequences of a rapid exit are both predictable and unacceptable. 9/11, the worst terrorist attack in our history, was planned and directed from Afghanistan because that country was ruled by a government that gave comfort and shelter to terrorists. A hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum that terrorists, including ISIS and Al Qaeda, would instantly fill, just as happened before September 11th. Third and finally, I concluded that the security threats we face in Afghanistan and the broader region

are immense. Today, 20 US-designated foreign terrorist organizations are active in Afghanistan and Pakistan — the highest concentration in any region anywhere in the world." He added another 4,000 troops to the by-now-depleted US presence in Afghanistan that stood at 8,400 post the 2015 winding down. However Trump realized that things were not working out. A year later, on September 21, 2018, he appointed Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as the American Special Representative for Afghanistan reconciliation to try and broker a deal with the Taliban. On February 29, 2020, Khalilzad and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar signed the agreement for bringing peace in Afghanistan in Doha. It was followed up with the intra-Afghan talks between the government in Kabul and the Taliban that began on September 12 to map out a political role for the latter. However, they are bogged down over procedural issues as yet with a huge trust deficit to bridge especially between the women of Afghanistan and the Taliban. Concurrently, violence levels, rather than decreasing, are only escalating. At least 369 pro-government forces and 212 civilians were killed in Afghanistan in October 2020 marking the highest civilian death toll in a single month since September 2019 with the US also launching air strikes in the Helmand Province and Donald Trump threatening to bring the bulk of the US troops home by Christmas both from Iraq and Afghanistan. ... **P3**

By DAVE LINDORFF

For the U.S. in Afghanistan's Endless War, Surrender is Apparently Not an Option

The U.S. War in —or on— Afghanistan has rightly been called the "Forever War."

Launched on October 7, 2001, while the ruins of the World Trade Center were still smoldering from the 9/11 attacks five weeks earlier, the war is now in its 19th year, making it almost nine years longer than the Vietnam War. And yet, over the years, almost any time a president has attempted to ratchet down the war, or to talk about ending it — while that may have been a popular desire among the American people — the media, conservative and liberal alike, have started talking about how such a thing would be "premature," or would lead to disaster with the Taliban moving back into power (see FAIR.org: 1/31/19, 9/11/19 and Extra magazine 7/11, 9/11).

Now that the just-defeated President Donald Trump, heading out of office on January 20, is trying to make good on his campaign promise to end the U.S. war in that impoverished

and long-suffering "graveyard of empires," he too is being accused of being somehow precipitous for proposing the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan.

On Wednesday, October 7, Trump tweeted a message promising to have all 5,000 "BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas."

After all these years, and considering the small number of U.S. forces still in that country (after first raising the number of troops in Afghanistan from 8,500 when he took office to 14,000 in 2017, Trump has reduced the number of troops there from 13,000 in October 2019 to 5,000 at the end of this November, a record that could hardly be called "precipitous" by any definition!), it might seem like a long overdue move, especially coming from a president who ran for office vowing to end America's "ridiculous endless wars."

But to look at most media reaction, you'd think Trump was FDR saying he was pulling U.S. forces out of France and Italy in

the middle of the final assault on the Nazi Wehrmacht.

The media went on the attack against his proposed withdrawal almost instantly.

"The U.S. military was blindsided Thursday by President Donald Trump's assertion that all U.S. troops will be out of Afghanistan by the end of the year," wrote the Associated Press (10/19/20), saying that unnamed "U.S. officials" were claiming "they are not aware of such a plan and have gotten no actual order to accelerate the more gradual pullout they've been executing." Those same unnamed "Pentagon officials," joined by unnamed officials in the State Department, were said to "fear a hasty withdrawal could force the U.S. to leave behind sensitive military equipment," and to "stress that the Taliban has still not met requirements to reduce violence against the Afghans, a key element of the U.S. withdrawal plan."

These complaints are appalling on their face, ... **P3**

UN Calls for Improved Access to Justice for Crimes of Violence Against Women

Afghan women and girls are being failed by the country's justice system with their access to justice for crimes of violence remaining tenuous, finds a new report released today by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the UN Human Rights Office.

The report, titled, "In Search of Justice for Crimes of Violence Against Women and Girls," examines the response of the justice system and the redress provided to survivors in reported cases of violence against women and girls in the period between September 2018 and February 2020.

UNAMA found that only half of reported crimes reached a primary court, with perpetrators convicted in around 40 per cent of all documented cases.

"The stark reality is that too many women and girls still fail to see justice for the violence they experience, and impunity remains far too common," said Deborah Lyons, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. The report raises multiple concerns about the justice system's treatment

of women and girls, such as low rates of conviction for so-called "honour killings" — just 23 per cent as compared to a conviction rate of 51 per cent for murders unrelated to "honour". Other issues raised in the report include the problematic handling of rape cases and the ongoing detention of women for "running away".

"Far too many times, the justice system re-victimizes survivors instead of working on their behalf. This trend must stop. Serious efforts must continue to enable women and girls to access justice and to ensure that they are treated with dignity by the justice system," said Fiona Frazer, UNAMA's Human Rights Chief and Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Afghanistan.

UNAMA called for the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law (EVAW Law) to be amended to expand authorities' powers to investigate and prosecute all crimes in the Law and for strengthened institutional responses to crimes of violence against women and girls.

Pine nuts Production Reaches 85 Tons in Kapisa Province

Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) has reported that pine nuts production in north-eastern Kapisa province increased.

According to the officials, about two thousand hectares of land in Kapisa province are covered by pine nut forests. Most of these forests are situated in Tagaba, Najrab and Alhosai districts of the province.

Head of agriculture department in Kapisa, Humayun Habib, said pine nuts are an important export item of the province, and every year a majority of the province's pine nut production is exported to inside and outside of

Afghanistan.

Pine nut trees are mostly found in Afghanistan's eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Laghman, Nuristan, Kunar, Paktia, Khost and Paktika provinces. Meanwhile, the department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock in Kandahar has reported that work on the establishment of 25 commercial date gardens has kicked off.

"This 2 million AFN project and will be established in 3 districts of the province," said head of the department Hafizullah Sayedi.

Work on the gardens in Damaan district has officially begun, added Sayedi.



According to statement from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, this is the first time that commercial date gardens are being established in Kandahar province. The purpose of this project is to promote date cultivation and production in the province.

EU Holds Taliban...

Meanwhile, the delegations praised media practitioners in Afghanistan for advancing "freedom of expressing and freedom of press" despite ongoing threats to their lives. "We honor all those in Afghanistan who work tirelessly to advance freedom of expression and freedom of the press," the statement said.

"Our respective missions expect that all parties to the conflict will protect the freedom and the independence of the media and civil society in Afghanistan, which is indispensable to a vibrant, functioning, and economically viable democracy."

EU delegation reaffirm commitment to champion the freedom of all the Afghan people, calling for immediate compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Taliban Ought...

moving forward to finalize the agenda of the talks.

In the meantime, in reply to the remarks made by Ross Wilson about the release of more Taliban, Sediq Sediqi, spokesman for the president of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, say; "Taliban should listen to and accept what the Afghan nation, government, and international community say and ceasefire". Sediqi yesterday in a media conference noted that Taliban's expectation for release of more prisoners is not on time and seems to be way too much early, he also added "Taliban should wait for the results of the agenda of intra-Afghan peace talks in Doha".

Biden in...

This is the situation that Joe Biden inherits. In a piece in the Foreign Affairs magazine in spring, he stated: "It is past time to end the forever wars." However, it is easier said than done for if Biden sticks to the Doha exit plan to bring the number of US troops down to 2,500 with the Taliban not keeping its end of the bargain it is doubtful whether the Ashraf Ghani government would be able to hold up. All the blood and treasure that the US has expended would go down the tube with the clock being turned back to 2001. The Taliban and its mentor Pakistan will have the last laugh while a child born in 1979, who for the last 41 years only knows conflict as the new normal, the last weep.

For the U.S. in...

but are simply reported by the U.S. media as if they were self-evident truths. Yet Trump did, after all, run for president in 2016 vowing to end the U.S. wars abroad—Afghanistan being the most enduring of these conflicts. Besides, as early as August 2, Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had reported that he had been "instructed to pursue troop reduction in Afghanistan by Election Day 2020" by the president — something he and the Pentagon brass apparently didn't do.

How then, can anyone in the Pentagon or State Department now with a straight face claim to have been "blindsided" by the commander in chief's tweet a month later? As Richard Fontaine of the Center for a New American Security wrote in Atlantic Monthly (8/2/19), Pompeo said of Trump: "He's been unambiguous. End the endless wars. Draw down. Reduce."

Never mind. The pro-war, pro-empire media all piled on.

In an article on October 16, headlined "In Open Split, Trump's Top General, National Security Adviser Clash on Afghanistan Troop Withdrawal," ABC News (10/16/20) reported that Joint Chiefs chair Gen. Mark Milley, the military's top general, as well as Secretary of State Pompeo, "have vowed that withdrawal would be 'conditions-based,' including a reduction in violence."

Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that Trump is some kind of peacenik. Far from it! Just look at his support for the Saudi War on Yemen, his Tomahawk missile bombardments of Syria, his "fire and fury" threats against North Korea, and his threats of war on Venezuela, his provocative and dangerous drone killing of Iran's top general and his increases in Pentagon spending year after year. And then there's his amped up level of violence, primarily via airstrikes and drone missile attacks on Afghanistan — attacks which would likely continue even with U.S. troops out of the country.

What I am saying is that it is evident that after steadily reducing U.S. troop numbers in Afghanistan since last year, when Trump finally announced

his intention to make a full pull-out of remaining U.S. troops, it provoked serious institutional pushback from the Pentagon, State Department, National Security Council and the military/industrial complex. And clearly, influential media organizations have been quite obliging in helping institutional opponents to a troop draw-down in the Washington get their alarmist word out.

The Hill (11/16/20) ran an article, headlined "McConnell Warns Trump Against Troop Drawdown in Afghanistan," reporting that: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) fired a warning shot Monday against withdrawing more U.S. troops from Afghanistan, even as the Pentagon is preparing an order to do so.

McConnell, speaking from the Senate floor, warned that only a "small minority" in Congress would support a rapid drawdown and warned that a rapid withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan "would hurt our allies and delight, delight, the people who wish us harm." Honestly, one could imagine a similar comment being made by an ardent supporter of continued U.S. war on Vietnam as the embassy staff were climbing onto rescue choppers on the roof of the US Embassy in Saigon.

We've known for a long time that the U.S. has been losing or at best managing a stalemate in Afghanistan for years, and given that situation it's obvious that whenever the U.S. does finally leave, the Taliban will take over the country, so that unavoidable reality is not a great argument for not pulling out remaining troops.

But somehow, the idea of Trump's saying he's going to end the deployment of U.S. troops in Afghanistan just causes the media to lose it. Perhaps it's having to admit the U.S. has lost another war, or maybe it's just the need to keep justifying a Pentagon budget that consumes 50% of each year's federal discretionary spending.

The New York Times (11/12/20) was quick to quote General Milley as virtually committing an act of insubordination in an article headlined "Top General Declines to Endorse Trump's Afghan Withdrawal Timeline." The article quotes Milly:

I think that [Trump National Security Advisor] Robert O'Brien or anyone else can speculate as they see fit. I'm going to engage in the rigorous analysis of the situation based on the conditions and the plans that I am aware of and my conversations with the president.

Meanwhile, U.S. News (11/17/20) chose to highlight opposition to the idea of withdrawal from the president's own party. In an article headlined "Republican Outcry Over Trump's Afghanistan Withdrawal Plan Grows," the magazine wrote: The top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee on Tuesday added to growing condemnation within the party of reports that President Donald Trump plans to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq and Afghanistan in the waning days of his presidency.

"Increased military pressure brought the Taliban to the table," Rep. Mac Thornberry told reporters Tuesday, "and pretty much everybody agreed that further reductions would be conditions based."

"In other words, they give and we give. And I don't know of any condition which justifies reducing further the troops that we have in Afghanistan," said the Texas lawmaker, who did not seek reelection."

In the end, while it's admittedly hard to know when this president is serious about what he tweets or when he is just writing what pops into his head when he wakes up in the morning, if he was serious about pulling out all U.S. troops from Afghanistan by Christmas, the opponents of withdrawal appear to have won: Lame duck President Trump has reportedly scaled back his call from bringing all U.S. troops in Afghanistan home by Christmas, to an order to have only half of them brought home. That leaves the fate of the remaining 2,500 "Brave men and women in Afghanistan" up to his successor as commander in chief, Joe Biden.

Thanks in no small part to the media's full press against the current president's avowed withdrawal plan, Biden will enter office in January to become the fourth consecutive president in charge of the U.S.'s still endless war on Afghanistan.

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China warns U.S. not to interfere in its internal affairs

Stating that improving relations between Beijing and Washington depends on their decisions, Chinese Foreign Ministry on Mon. warned United States to abide by international rules and not to interfere in China's internal affairs.

Recent US anti-Chinese actions, including sanctions imposed against major corporations and ruling party officials, have provoked a backlash from Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Speaking to a group of business leaders from US firms, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that it was up to the US to make the correct decision on future China-US relations.

Wang Yi said that he hoped and believed that the US policy on China would eventually "return to objectivity and rationality". He added that the two countries should resume dialogues on all levels, Sputnik reported.

The cabinet minister stressed that the US should observe international norms and stay out of

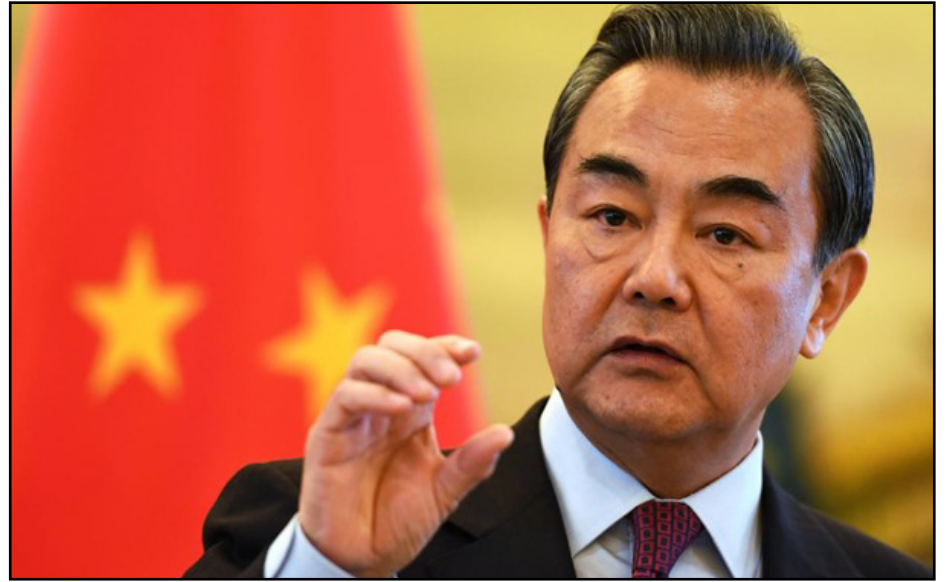
China's internal affairs.

On Friday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the United States has sanctioned Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials allegedly involved in a range of coercive activities.

He explained that activities have been used to co-opt and intimidate sub-national leaders, overseas Chinese communities, as well as academic and civil society groups in the United States and in other countries.

The United States and China have been on strained terms since 2017, when Washington's updated National Security Strategy portrayed China, a long-time advocate of a multi-polar world, as a major threat to US interests in world politics.

As a result of the sanctions, these Chinese companies will no longer be able to access the US security equipment and technology market.

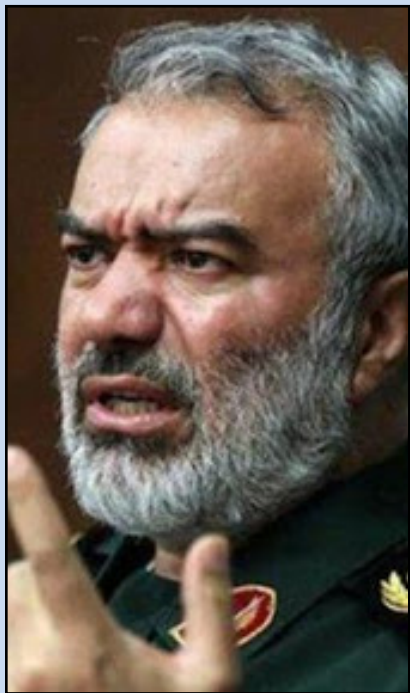


A look at the world

Iran says scientist killed by satellite-controlled machine gun

A satellite-controlled machine gun with "artificial intelligence" was used in November 27's assassination of a top nuclear scientist in Iran, the deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards told local media on Sunday.

Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh was driving on a highway outside Iran's capital Tehran with a security detail of 11 guards on November 27, when the machine gun "zoomed in" on his face and fired



13 rounds, said rear-admiral Ali Fadavi. The machine gun was mounted on a Nissan pickup and "focused only on martyr Fakhri-zadeh's face in a way that his wife, despite being only 25 centimeters away, was not shot," Mehr news agency quoted him as saying. It was being "controlled online" via a satellite and used an "advanced camera and artificial intelligence" to make the target, he added. Fadavi said that Fakhri-zadeh's head of security took four bullets "as he threw himself" on the scientist and that there were "no terrorists at the scene."

Iranian authorities have blamed arch foe Israel and the exiled opposition group the People's Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK) for the assassination. State-run Press TV had previously said "made in Israel" weapons were found at the scene.

According to Iran's defense minister, Amir Hatami, Fakhri-zadeh was one of his deputies and headed the ministry's Defence and Research and Innovation Organization, focusing on the field of "nuclear defense."

Turkey: 105-year-old woman beats COVID-19 in 5 days



A 105-year-old Turkish woman in Istanbul has beaten the coronavirus in just five days.

After noticing symptoms like weakness and loss of appetite, Huriye Baskapan and her children and grandchildren went to hospital for diagnosis and treatment. She was hospitalized when her COVID-19 test came out positive and problems were observed in her kidneys and liver. Her daughter and a grandchild were also infected with the same virus.

Despite her old age and chronic diseases, she managed to beat the illness with a five-day treatment. Other members of her family also recovered and returned to their daily routine.

"My illness passed quickly. I could not understand what happened. I was just told I was infected with this virus," Baskapan said.

She thanked the doctors and the Turkish state. "They took care of us at the hospital. They cared for us. May Allah give them a long life," she said.

Her doctor Emre Ozge said they gave "an aggressive treatment" to Baskapan for the first two days and revised the treatment according to daily blood tests and physical examinations.

"COVID-19 can be fatal for patients in old age and with underlying health conditions. She responded very well to the treatment," Ozge said.

Biden picks new health chiefs

US President-elect Joe Biden has made his selections for two key public health positions, sources said on Sunday, as he prepares to take office in January 2021 as the coronavirus pandemic rages to new levels across the US.

Biden plans to nominate California Attorney General Xavier Becerra as secretary of health and human services, two sources said, placing the Latino former congressman in a critical role battling the pandemic.

The former vice president is also expected to nominate Rochelle Walensky, chief of infectious diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital, to run the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a person



familiar with the decision said. The choice of Becerra, 62, who also had been considered a candidate for US attorney general, came as Biden faced more pressure to add diversity to his Cabinet appointments, including complaints from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus about the lack of Latinos. Becerra will lead the health agency as it struggles to handle a resurgence of coronavirus, including record infections and a daily death toll that has exceeded 2,000 in recent days, and prepares a mammoth effort to vaccinate Americans against the virus.

Neither Becerra nor Walensky could be reached for immediate comment. A spokesman for Biden's transition declined to comment.

Biden named some top members of his health team last week, and is expected to roll out the full team this week.

"Biden is living up to his commitment to make the Cabinet a reflection of diversity," said Robert Garcia, Mayor of Long Beach, California, and a longtime ally of Becerra and Biden.

Garcia said Becerra "has a strong record on healthcare but I think it goes beyond that. The president-elect selected ... P2



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