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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Issue No. 883

www.heartofasia.af

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Parliament Will Implement Electronic Voting in Assembly

The Lower House of Parliament says it will shift the paper voting to electronic voting and the work on new plan is 90 percent complete.

The Lower House secretariat said that the plan also includes an electronic system tracking MPs' attendance.

"The voting system in the Wolesi Jirga will shift to electronic in the next few days as the technical department of the Wolesi Jirga has completed the project by 90 percent," said Hujjatullah Kheradmand, the deputy head of the parliament secretariat.

Last Wednesday, the voting process for five nominee ministers and Central Bank acting governor was disrupted due to a dispute on some votes that were marked twice.



Over 47 Percent of Afghans Are Under Poverty Line: Survey

A new survey by the Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) shows that more than 47% of Afghan citizens live below the poverty line.

According to a survey released Monday, 47.3 percent of Afghanistan's population is below the poverty line.

The survey cited that the poverty rate has decreased by about 10% compared to the previous solar year.

Poverty rose to 54.5 percent in the country in the last solar year.

The National Statistics and Information Authority surveyed 21,000 households, including Afghan nomads.

According to the new survey, the national unemployment rate is 18.6 percent, with 15.2 percent of the country's workforce unemployed. The survey shows that of Afghanistan's total labor force, 34.9 percent is in urban areas and 43.9 percent is in rural areas. The workforce of nomads also reaches 53.6%.

The National Statistics and Information Authority said: "The findings of this survey show that the share of ... **P3**

Serious Debates of Intra-Afghan talks to Begin Today: Abdullah



The head of the high council for national reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah says that serious discussions of the intra-Afghan talks will begin on Wednesday.

"on Monday, both sides [the Government and Taliban teams] held a meeting and heard each other's opinions on the agenda.

Yesterday [Tuesday], the delegations have consultations among their members, and serious talks will begin today," said Abdullah Abdullah at a meeting in Kabul on Tuesday. According to him, both sides of the talks have a comprehensive agenda. "What issues does our delegation want to address soon or what

issues do they (the Taliban) want to address, the purpose should be achieving peace," he stressed. "Ending the war and establishing peace in the country are the demands of the Afghan people," he added.

Mr Abdullah emphasized that "peace" requires peaceful thinking

and belief, hoping that the Taliban group would take a "big step" and seize this opportunity for establishing peace.

It is worth mentioning that talks on the agenda have reportedly begun on Saturday after the two sides agreed on the procedure of the negotiations last week.

Afghan, U.S. forces conduct raids against Al-Qaeda

American troops and Afghan intelligence agents have conducted airstrikes against the Al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan.

Eight terrorists were killed and three others caught alive by US troops and National Directorate of Security (NDS) operatives, says a media report.

The raids were carried out in Helmand and Nimroz province over the past several days, the Long War Journal reported.

The strikes negate Taliban's claim that Al Qaeda no longer has a presence in Afghanistan, following the US invasion of the country.

The US launched an airstrike on Dec. 3 that targeted a Taliban meeting ... **P3**



Civilian deaths surge in Afghanistan amid Taliban talks

The US pulled back on air strikes after striking a peace deal with the Taliban in February 2020. But the Afghan Armed Forces stepped up their own strikes as they entered talks with the war-torn country's former rulers.

The number of civilians killed annually in US and coalition air strikes has soared from 2017 by 330 percent to some 700 civilians in 2019, Neta C Crawford, co-director of the Costs of War Project at Brown University has said.

A report released on Monday said that the jump in deaths of Afghan civilians in air strikes came after the United States loosened its criteria and escalated attacks on the Taliban. The United States pulled back on air strikes after striking a peace deal with the Taliban in February 2020.

But the Afghan Armed Forces stepped up their own as they entered talks with the rebels.



While total deaths from air strikes has fallen, attacks are now coming from Kabul's forces, and have accelerated in recent months.

The Afghan Air Force, Crawford wrote, is now "harming more Afghan civilians than at any time in its history."

She said that in the first six months of 2020, 86 Afghan civilians were killed and 103 injured in AAF air strikes.

In the three subsequent months, as Afghan-Taliban talks continued in Doha, the toll intensified, with 70

civilians killed and 90 injured. She urged a negotiated ceasefire while the two sides discuss a deal, to avoid more civilian injuries.

But with the United States accelerating its drawdown of troops, some worry that the Taliban could take advantage to further pressure Kabul's forces, sparking reprisals.

"Unless there is a ceasefire, both sides will continue trying to gain a tactical advantage while negotiations are underway. The toll on civilian lives is likely to increase," Crawford wrote.

Biden picks...

Biden has known Austin at least since the general's years leading U.S. and coalition troops in Iraq while Biden was vice president. Austin was commander in Baghdad of the Multinational Corps-Iraq in 2008 when Barack Obama was elected president, and he returned to lead U.S. troops from 2010 through 2011. Among Austin's wide range of military assignments, in 2009-2010 he ran the joint staff during a portion of Navy Adm. Mike Mullen's term as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Mullen had high praise for Austin. "Should President-elect Biden tap him for the job, Lloyd will make a superb secretary of defense," Mullen said in a statement late Monday night. "He knows firsthand the complex missions our men and women in uniform conduct around the world. He puts a premium on alliances and partnerships. He respects the need for robust and healthy civil-military relations. And he leads inclusively, calmly and confidently." Austin also served in 2012 as the first Black vice chief of staff of the Army, the service's No. 2-ranking position. A year later he assumed command of U.S. Central Command, where he fashioned and began implementing a U.S. military strategy for rolling back the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

By Andrea Mazzarino

Bringing Our Troops Home Is Not Enough

By the end of this year, the White House will reportedly have finally brought home a third of the 7,500 troops still stationed in Afghanistan and Iraq (against the advice of President Trump's own military leaders). While there have been stories galore about the global security implications of this plan, there has been almost no discussion at all about where those 2,700 or so troops who have served in this country's endless wars will settle once their feet touch US soil (assuming, that is, that they aren't just moved to less controversial garrisons elsewhere in the Greater Middle East), no less who's likely to provide them with badly needed financial, logistical, and emotional support as they age. When it comes to honoring active-duty troops and veterans of this country's forever wars, we Americans have proven big on symbolic gestures, but small on action. Former First Lady Michelle Obama's organization, Joining Forces, was a short-lived but notable exception: Its advocacy and awareness-raising led dozens of companies to commit to hiring more veterans. Unfortunately, those efforts proved limited in scope and didn't last long. Zoom out to the rest of America and you'll find yellow-ribbon bumper stickers on gas-guzzling SUVs galore; tons of "support our troops" Facebook memes on both Veterans Day and Memorial Day regularly featuring (at least before the pandemic struck big time) young, attractive heterosexual families hugging at reunions; and there is invariably a chorus of "thank you for your service" when a veteran or active-duty soldier appears in public. In practical terms, though, this adds up to nothing. Bumper stickers don't watch soldiers' kids while they're gone, nor do they transport those troops to competent, affordable specialists to meet their health and vocational needs when they return from battle. Memes don't power vets through decades of rehabilitation from traumatic brain injuries, limbs blown off by homemade explosives, depression, anxiety, and grief for comrades lost. I'm the spouse of a US naval officer. My husband has served on two different submarines and in three military policymaking positions over the course of our decade together. We've had to move around the country four times (an exceedingly modest number compared with most military families we know). We have dual incomes, as well as extended family and friends with the means to support us with care for our two young children and help us with the extra expenses when that uprooting

moment arrives every two or three years. We have self-advocacy skills and the resources necessary to find the best possible health providers to help us weather the strain that goes with the relentless pace of post-9/11 military life. And yet I feel I can speak for other military families who have so much less for one reason: I've dedicated much of my career to research and advocacy on behalf of people affected by the American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I've focused my attention, in particular, on the vast loss of life, both abroad and at home, caused by those wars, on decimated and depleted health care systems (including our own), and on the burdens borne by the families of soldiers who have to struggle to deal with the needs of those who return. Troops from our current wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere across the Greater Middle East and Africa are, in certain ways, unique compared to earlier generations of American military personnel. More than half of them have deployed more than once to those battle zones—often numerous times. Over a million of them now have disability claims with the Veterans Affairs Department and far more disabled veterans than in the past have chronic injuries and illnesses that they will live with, not die from. Among troops like my spouse who, as a naval officer, has never deployed to Iraqi or Afghan soil, days have grown longer and more stressful due to a distinctly overstretched military that often lacks the up-to-date equipment to work safely. And mind you, the costs of caring for the soldiers who have been deployed in our never-ending wars won't peak for another 30 to 40 years, as they age, and the government isn't faintly ready to meet the expenses that will be involved. **HOME COMING** And mind you, the Pentagon and Department of Veterans Affairs are even less prepared to care for the families of their troops and veterans, those most likely to be tasked with their round-the-clock care. Among the many grim possibilities from my own experience and the stories I've been told as an advocate over the years by military veterans, military spouses, and military children, let me try to paint just one picture of what it's like when a member of that military returns home from deployment: Imagine your spouse suddenly walking through the door after months away. His face is a greenish hue from fatigue and fear. He may tell you some horror story about some set of incidents that

occurred while he was deployed and indicate that he fears, given his state, he might even be out of a job soon. You think about the work you cut back on in the months since he left because you couldn't handle the 24/7 demands of caring for confused children who had stopped sleeping. What will you do to support the family if his worst fears come to pass? You need to remind him that, while he's been rattling on, there are children present whom he has yet to greet. He hugs them now, his face a combination of love and lack-of-recognition (given how they've grown in the months since he's been gone). The kids' facial expressions are a mirror image of his. You do your best to catch him up on the changes that have taken place in his absence: the kids' latest developments, your new work schedule, the need for more child care support, and the problems of your extended family (including the terminal illness of a family member). Family or friends want to swoop in and take the kids so the two of you can get away, yet after months of his silence, you're feeling too confused to want that yet. What's more, your own hard-earned role as head of the household is suddenly about to be subsumed by his needs. (After all, he's used to telling others what to do.) You try to call other spouses who were your lifeline while all your husbands were deployed together, but they're as stressed out and preoccupied as you are. Even the other commanders' wives are, like you, up far too often at night as their spouses accept calls about drunk driving, partner violence, suicide threats, and child abuse within the stressed-out command. Your unnerved husband is helping deal with such events, counseling those still on duty, and you're counseling him. One night, he tells you that part of the reason for his stress is the things he was asked to do by his war-traumatized commander while he was deployed. These stories keep you awake at night. You suggest he see a mental health professional. After all, the base has licensed psychologists and psychiatrists on staff, ready to help. He reminds you that the decision to seek care is not private in the military and the stigma among those handling his promotions could cost him his career. So you look for mental-health assistance yourself to deal with the stress and grief over your changed relationship with your spouse. The lone practitioner within 45 miles who accepts military insurance tells you ... **P3**

By Tom Fowdy

Why does China have to apologize for Australia's crimes?

This week has been beholden by controversy after a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman posted a digital illustration on his personal Twitter account depicting an Australian soldier holding a young boy under a blanket with a knife in one hand. The image was accompanied by the caption, "We are here to bring you peace," in reference to an inquiry into Canberra's war crimes in Afghanistan, a near 20-year conflict it has been engaged in along with the United States and other allies. Despite the fact that the report was built upon the testimonies of hundreds of witnesses and the incident depicted in the image was factually accurate, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison reacted with outrage and demanded China apologize, describing the image as "fake." First of all, the image, created by a Weibo artist, was not fake at all in what it depicted, nor was it factually misleading or exaggerated. Those pressing the accusation have failed to demonstrate why, or what their problem is. If one turns to Page 121 of the war crimes inquiry report, it specifies in its own words that Australian soldiers did indeed kill innocent, unarmed

civilians, including young boys, by slitting their throats. Yet Australia's politicians and the mainstream media not only fail to confront this reality, but pretend this is somehow an act of deception by China and that they themselves are victims of Beijing's "aggression." Why does China have to apologize to Australia for something that Australia itself committed? What kind of justice or bizarre arrangement is this? In making these demands, Canberra does not confront its own ill deeds, or as fellow spokesperson Hua Chunying suggested, engage in "soul searching." Instead, Australia projects the belief that China has no legitimate right to criticize it, while also lacking any actual empathy for what it has done. The issue at the heart of this debate is not whether Australia should apologize to Afghanistan for its own actions or ask for their views, but that Australia should affirm criticism of its armed forces for this moral outrage – something which apparently remains off-limits to countries such as China. Australian politicians and media believe they have the unreserved right to criticize China every day, even if their claims are false,

misleading or slanderous. It is precisely these things that have led to such a deterioration in relations between Canberra and Beijing. Every day, newspapers in Australia have depicted China with suspicion, paranoia and as a subversive threat. In Canberra, foreign policy has been quick to follow and support Trump's actions against China. Yet despite all this, the mindset still persists that actions apparently do not have consequences. If China criticizes Australia, it is because China is bad – not because Canberra has done anything wrong – and therefore it is China who should apologize. China has not done anything wrong at all; it has merely put its head above the parapet to criticize a country which believes itself beyond reproach. Australia's commitment to the American war machine is not to be questioned, nor least by a country which Australia believes it has the right to criticize, but which cannot criticize it. This inequality in sense of self-perception and status thus creates the bizarre logic demonstrated by the suggestion that China should apologize for highlighting the crimes of another country, which despite being completely factual, are ... **P3**

Closing school's wrong response to Covid-19: UNICEF

UN's children body UNICEF on Tuesday said closing schools was a wrong response to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, saying 7.5 million children in Afghanistan missed out on schooling during the lockdown. In a statement, the UN body said the number of schoolchildren affected by COVID-19-related school closures soared by 38 percent in November, placing significant strain on the learning progress and well-being of an additional 90 million students globally. The UNICEF said, "When schools close, children risk losing their learning, support system, food and safety, with the most marginalised children – who are the most likely to drop out altogether – paying the heaviest price." The UN body said that countries were not taking the necessary steps to make schools safe from COVID-19, instead were closing schools unnecessarily. "Evidence shows that schools are not the main drivers of this pandemic. Yet, we are seeing an alarming trend whereby governments are once again closing down schools as a first recourse rather than a last resort", Robert Jenkins, UNICEF Global Chief of Education, said in a statement.

The UNICEF highlighted a global study by "Insights for Education" which also said that there was no correlation observed between reopening of schools and infection levels. UNICEF urged governments to prioritize reopening schools and take all actions possible to make them as safe as possible. School re-opening plans must include expanding access to education, including remote learning, especially for marginalized groups. Education systems must also be adapted and built to withstand future crises. UNICEF's Framework for Reopening Schools, issued jointly with UNESCO, UNHCR, WFP and the World Bank, offers practical advice for national and local authorities. The guidelines focus on policy reform; financing requirements; safe operations; compensatory learning; wellness and protection and reaching the most marginalized children. "What we have learned about schooling during the time of COVID is clear: the benefits of keeping schools open far outweigh the costs of closing them, and nationwide closures of schools should be avoided at all costs," said Jenkins.

Afghanistan Aviation Sector Lost \$100m Due to Coronavirus

Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority says the aviation sector and two Afghan Airline Companies-Ariana Afghan Airlines and Kam Air have lost an estimate of \$ 100 million due to the coronavirus pandemic. Afghan aviation authorities said that

several plans will be implemented to improve the aviation sector, including infrastructural plans at Hamid Karzai International Airport. According to officials, there has been a \$40 million reduction in the income of Kam Air and Ariana Afghan Airlines

and a \$60 million reduction in the income of the civil aviation authority, compared to last year. Officials added that they are working on four infrastructure projects, including the construction of a terminal at Hamid Karzai International Airport

in Kabul that will be implemented in a partnership between the government and the private sector. But the head of the Hamid Karzai International Airport emphasized the need for construction of a new airport in Kabul

Afghan, U.S....

in the Nad Ali district of Helmand province. At least 40 rebels were killed or wounded during the strike. Abdullah Baloch, the Taliban's purported shadow governor for Farah province, was among the casualties, the report added. Eight Al Qaeda members were among those killed in the Nad Ali raid, but their names were not disclosed. US intelligence officials told the Journal that Baloch was "dual hatted" commander: he leads members of both the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Meanwhile, the NDS personnel detained three Al Qaeda leaders on Dec. 6 during a raid in Nimroz. The Al Qaeda leaders were as Mustafa, Hafiz Abdul Aziz and Hayatullah — all Afghan nationals.

Why does China...

derided as fake and deceptive. It is hard to believe that Australia is happy to profit existentially from a country it otherwise appears to despise so much, and yet conversely complain when that country makes a statement of protest against it by placing tariffs on their exports. Ultimately, all China wants in its relationship with Australia is to be treated as an equal. It is not looking to interfere in the country's politics or trying to subvert or infiltrate any institution; it is merely asking that Canberra respect its core interests and its national sovereignty. Learning to co-exist with Beijing does not mean that Canberra cannot have differences or disagreements with China, but rather that it conducts its relationship in a stable manner and does not react with contempt at the consequences of burning its own bridges.

Romania's PM...

respectively, for the two chambers of the parliament. Other parties, which will enter the new parliament, included the USR-PLUS Alliance with 15.24 and 14.75 percent, the Alliance for Unity of Romanians (AUR) with 8.77 and 8.69 percent, as well as the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania, with 6.13 and 5.98 percent. The partial results showed that no party is likely to win more than 50 percent of the votes to hold the majority in the future parliament. Thus, the future government will almost certainly be a coalition one.

Over 47 Percent...

young people (aged 15-24) who are unemployed and not engaged in education reaches 34.4%. Of the total unemployed youth far from education, 14.0 percent are men and 53.4 percent are women. "Nationally, 36.1 percent of adults and 54.0 percent of young people are literate." According to the survey, the multidimensional poverty index in Afghanistan has dropped from 51.7 percent to 49.4 percent. In last year's winter, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations reported that more than 17 million people in Afghanistan were living below the poverty line.

Bringing Our...

that, to receive care, you must sign a contract accepting that you can be hospitalized at his discretion "because military spouses go psychotic during their husband's deployments." You walk away.

Child care support of some kind is needed more than ever now that your spouse is in such distress. Because you moved posts recently by military order, the Navy tells you that you're at the back of the local line for financial child care assistance. You're in your own hell on earth and in that you're typical of so many other military spouses.

PERSPECTIVES ON SERVICE FROM A COASTAL ELITE

And you also turn your gaze to the citizenry of this country that, in the world of the "All Volunteer" military, generally ignores us. Before I became a military spouse, I grew up in an affluent part of New Jersey. I remember how war veterans were ignored or even mocked (including by me). In the 1990s, I used to vacation at the Jersey shore and sometimes, from the front porch of our house, my family and I would catch a glimpse of a middle-aged man in military uniform, marching like a metronome up and down the island's main boulevard. The glazed, far-off look on his face with its telltale ruddiness signaled, I know now, someone who probably drank too much, too often. Back then, we would just refer to him as "the soldier" when he passed and laugh at him, once safely out of earshot. Of course, he was undoubtedly suffering from some form of mental illness without the sort of care that might have helped him make sense of things. My family and I had no idea that it was normal for war-traumatized soldiers to have difficulty distinguishing the past from the present, that it wouldn't have been strange for him to see lines of summertime beach traffic and think "convoy" or hear a car engine backfire and think "sniper!"

Later, when I was living in San Francisco, a friend who worked at the Department of Housing and Urban Development told me about a veteran of the Afghan War, on leave between deployments, who called their office to request that a military tent village be set up in a popular city park to house homeless and mentally ill veterans like himself. My friend and I laughed about that over drinks, imagining the eyesore of an instant military base suddenly arising in the middle of a popular San Francisco tourist destination. Some 15 years later, I think: How appropriate it would have been to remind Americans having fun of just what they were invariably

missing—their military and the forever wars that go with them that all of us pay for endlessly but ignore. Maybe it finally is time to create spaces meant for US troops and veterans right in the middle of everything.

A TASK LIST

President-elect Biden, I'm hoping against hope that you'll read these thoughts of mine and take steps to support such priorities when you take office, so that our soldiers and our veterans don't find themselves in ever deeper holes as their service ends:

1. Give those who serve and military veterans, as well as their families, real choices about where to go to get health care, whether primary care, physical therapy, specialized surgery, psychological therapy, or dental care. The Veterans Choice Program, first rolled out in 2014, should have been a decent start in expanding that sort of access, but in practice few providers have received authorization to participate because of low reimbursement rates and excessive wait times for approval and reimbursement. Anything your administration could do, including ensuring that there's just one less form to fill out or a few more dollars in reimbursement, would make a difference.

2. Sponsor large-scale studies on the health of military spouses and children. Evidence of the effects of military life on such families is scattered at best, but doesn't look good, particularly during and immediately after deployments. The needs of spouses and children who deal with veterans for health care, vocational training, and protection from family violence appear high and badly unmet.

3. Advocate making training on the issues faced by our troops and their families central to continuing education requirements among health care providers and the staff supporting them, especially the military insurance contractors who are the gatekeepers to care. Urge such providers to place veterans and their families first in line. Make sure therapists, including those focused on children and adolescents, know about the special challenges faced by military kids after parents return. Fund and support off-base family therapy for soldiers and their families, since Department of Defense therapists too often prioritize the needs of the soldier or of the mission above the needs of the family.

4. Teach everyone to stop "thanking" the troops for their service, which effectively ends any conversation instead of beginning one. Teach them instead to ask about what service

in the US military in the forever-war era is really like. Believe me, that would start a conversation that wouldn't end soon.

5. Remove needless barriers to military families receiving child care, whether they're active duty and awaiting their next assignment or settling for good in communities where they'll begin their lives as civilians. NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

In all such things, take your cues from soldiers, veterans, and their families. Nationally, what about creating a presidential commission that represents such groups in equal measure and in as diverse a way as possible? Let it investigate violations of the rights of military personnel and their families when it comes to health and safety in military commands and on bases across the country and around the world.

Often when I talk about changes like these, I'm met with skeptical looks from family members and friends. Where will we get the money for such changes, since we're already reimbursing providers at higher rates for accepting military insurance?

The striking thing is that there's no ceiling when it comes to putting money into disastrous weapons systems, the US nuclear arsenal, or the Pentagon generally. But when it comes to putting money into us, it's another matter entirely.

How about, as a start, cutting down on waste and fraud? Money that could have done us some good has disappeared into gas stations in the middle of nowhere and other corrupt construction projects in our distant war zones. Tens of millions of dollars or more have been lost to waste and fraud in some of those unfinished foreign reconstruction projects. As economist Heidi Garrett-Peltier has pointed out, US federal defense spending accounts for more than half of all of our government's discretionary spending, with piles of taxpayer dollars going to expensive contractors who provide services like cleaning, meals, and security guards on bases in those same war zones. Instead of spending \$100 more on a single bag of laundry in Iraq, how about spending it on a therapy session for a veteran struggling with postwar trauma here at home?

It's long past time to end America's fruitless post-9/11 wars. But if we don't start reexamining our basic priorities, bringing our troops "home" will just create a new crisis, involving what, in the long run, will be millions of sick, grieving, and injured Americans who will lack the safety net of adequate health care.

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Print: Waygal Printing .Co - +93 - 202512626

EU foreign policy is entirely US-centered — Lavrov

The European Union has given up attempts to play the role of one of the centers in a multipolar system and is entirely US-centered, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told a video conference meeting of the Russian International Affairs Council on Tuesday.

“One of the conclusions that I would like to make today - we are still working on the evaluation of this phenomenon - is this: there is every sign the European Union has given up attempts to be one of the poles in a multipolar system, which is emerging objectively, and is entirely oriented toward the United States,” he said.

Lavrov stressed that Germany had been following precisely that policy in many respects lately, while laying claim to the position of the European Union’s indisputable leader. “France’s policy is somewhat different, but the main trend is that of the European Union giving up attempts at taking the position of a pole in a multipolar world

system,” Lavrov said.

He remarked that the West put forward a concept of a world order based on rules as “intellectual justification” of its policy. “Rules are being invented on the fly, at various get-togethers. Just recently the EU heard words of praise from [US Secretary of State Michael] Pompeo for approving the generic mechanism of the introduction of sanctions for human rights abuse following the adoption of the mechanism of sanctions for alleged chemical and cyber hacking violations, which [the sanctions] the EU creates within its narrow circle without taking the trouble to address universal bodies established under the UN auspices,” he said.

Lavrov said that the West was trying hard to discredit international organizations or subjugate them by means of “privatizing secretariats,” the way it happened to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.



“Or, when such attempts fail, it takes the discussion outside the UN framework and the level of universal conventions and then dictates decisions it finds most convenient as the ultimate truth and the sole correct version of multipolarity,” Lavrov said.

“This is the gist of the rules-based concept

of a world order and a concept of effective multilateralism, which the Germans and the French thought up and which they keep advancing. They argue that this position and initiative of the European Union is not subject to any analysis, let alone doubt, but must be used as an example for all others to follow,” he said.

A look at the world

Sheikh Sabah reappointed Kuwait PM

Kuwait’s Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Sabah has reappointed Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid al-Sabah as prime minister following parliamentary polls in the Gulf Arab state, which is facing its worst economic crisis in decades.

Sheikh Nawaf asked Sheikh Sabah to nominate members of a new cabinet for approval, state media said on Tuesday.

While the emir has the final say in



state matters, the prime minister traditionally helps navigate the often tense relationship between the government and Parliament, where opposition candidates made gains in Saturday’s legislative vote.

Sheikh Sabah, who had been foreign minister since 2011 before being elevated to the post of premier in late 2019, faces the urgent task of overcoming legislative gridlock on a debt law that would allow Kuwait to tap international debt markets in order to plug a growing budget deficit.

Frequent rows and deadlocks between cabinet and the assembly, the Gulf region’s oldest and most outspoken, have led to successive government reshuffles and dissolutions of Parliament, hampering investment and economic and fiscal reform in the cradle-to-grave welfare state.

The oil policy of the OPEC producer, which is set by a Supreme Petroleum Council, and foreign policy, which is steered by the emir, are unlikely to change under the new government.

Biden picks Lloyd Austin as secretary of defense



President-elect Joe Biden will nominate retired four-star Army general Lloyd J. Austin to be secretary of defense, according to four people familiar with the decision. If confirmed by the Senate, Austin would be the first Black leader of the Pentagon.

Biden selected Austin over the longtime front-runner candidate, Michele Flournoy, a former senior Pentagon official and Biden supporter who would have been the first woman to serve as defense secretary. Biden also had considered Jeh Johnson, a former Pentagon general counsel and former secretary of homeland defense.

The impending nomination of Austin was confirmed by four people with knowledge of the pick who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the selection hadn’t been formally announced. Biden offered and Austin accepted the post on Sunday, according to a person familiar with the process.

As a career military officer, the 67-year-old Austin is likely to face opposition from some in Congress and in the defense establishment who believe in drawing a clear line between civilian and military leadership of the Pentagon. Although many previous defense secretaries have served briefly in the military, only two — George C. Marshall and James Mattis — have been career officers. Marshall also served as secretary of state.

Like Mattis, Austin would need to obtain a congressional waiver to serve as defense secretary. Congress intended civilian control of the military when it created the position of secretary of defense in 1947 and prohibited a recently retired military officer from holding the position.

One of the people who confirmed the pick said Austin’s selection was about choosing the best possible person but acknowledged that pressure had built to name a candidate of color and that Austin’s stock had risen in recent days.

Austin is a 1975 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and served 41 years in uniform. ... **P2**

Romania’s PM resigns amid failure to achieve election goal

Romanian Prime Minister Ludovic Orban announced his resignation late Monday, after the ruling National Liberal Party (PNL) he leads failed to achieve its goal of scoring the best in Sunday’s parliamentary election.

President Klaus Iohannis soon signed the decree, accepting Orban’s resignation and appointing Defense Minister Nicolae Ciuca as interim prime minister.

The resignation of Orban is generally considered to also clear the way for his party to negotiate a future ruling alliance with other political parties.

“The decision I took has a very precise objective...the negotiations to follow must lead to a government formed by the center-right political formations to clearly support Romania’s Euro-Atlantic orientation,” Orban said after announcing his resignation.



Although the vote counting has not yet ended, the partial results have emerged and there will be no major changes. Not only did the ruling PNL fail to get first place in the general election, but the gap with its main opponent Social Democrats reached a significant five percentage points.

The partial results show that the PNL, with 25 percent of the votes, must form a ruling coalition with other future parliamentary parties with similar political concepts to ensure its continuation of the ruling. The USR-PLUS Alliance, with some 15 percent of votes, is indispensable in this regard, but the latter has repeatedly emphasized that it is impossible to participate in a cabinet led by Orban.

Soon after Orban announced his resignation, the USR-PLUS Alliance said that it would pick Dacian Ciolos, one of the two co-chairs of the alliance and former prime minister (between Nov. 2015 and Jan. 2017), as its proposal for Prime Minister for a future coalition government.

Romania held the parliamentary election on Sunday, with a total of 7,136 candidates competing for seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. According to the latest partial results released by the Central Electoral Bureau, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) has won the parliamentary election by 30.13 percent of the votes cast for the Senate and 29.69 percent for the Chamber of Deputies. PNL came second by garnering 25.58 percent and 25.18 percent, ... **P3**



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