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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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**Mol: 11 Narcotic  
 Drug Smugglers  
 Detain in 5 Provinces**

Counter-narcotic drug police personnel reported that 11 narcotic drug smugglers were arrested from 5 provinces.

Tariq Arian spokesperson for Ministry of Interior told BNA correspondent, the smugglers were arrested during separate military operations conducted by counter-narcotic drug police personnel in Kabul, Samangan, Helmand, Parwan and Bakhshayan provinces.

Some narcotic drugs type of hashish, heroin, tablet "K", a Kalashnikov and a pistol have been seized from the arrested smugglers, Arian added.

According to another report, three people were arrested accused of stealing gold and vehicle in Sancharak district, Samangan province and Doshi district, Baghlan province.

However, Over 18 Taliban fighters were killed following clashes with Afghan security forces in Ghazni province late on Sunday. ...

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**UAE Keen to  
 Enhance Cooperation  
 with Afghanistan**

Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence and the Afghan ambassador discussed the distinguished relations between the UAE and Afghanistan and stressed the importance of boosting cooperation between the two friendly countries in all fields to mirror the overall strategic partnership.

According to UAE media, the Meeting was held on Sunday at Sheikh Nahyan's palace where he received the Ambassador of Afghanistan to the UAE Javid Ahmad.

Sheikh Nahyan said that the UAE, led by President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, is keen to develop cooperation and ties with countries throughout the world to boost tolerance, coexistence and solidarity, as well as expand the principles of human fraternity, which are the values that the UAE adopts in its relations with all countries.

## U.S. to reduce its troops to 2,500 by mid-January: Miller



The U.S. and NATO forces commander in Afghanistan, General Scott Miller said in an interview with Ariana News on Sunday that Washington will reduce its troops in

Afghanistan to 2,500 by January 15. According to Miller the remaining troops will continue to support Afghan forces in the country. This comes after critics have blasted

the Taliban for not sticking to their agreement signed in February with the U.S. on reducing the levels of violence in the country. "I have been ordered to reduce the

U.S. military presence to 2,500, a part of this is in line with the U.S.-Taliban agreement; we downsize our troops in accordance with the conditions," said Miller.

"Important for the Afghan people to understand is that we have discussed this with the Afghan security forces."

Miller, however, said that he has discussed the high levels of violence with the Taliban in Doha and said it's hoped the group will ease back on violence.

He also warned that the historic opportunity for peace will be missed if the violence continues.

"I have talked to Taliban about this, violence is too high; Taliban's violence needs to come down. We have had many discussions about this; we have reaffirmed to a historic opportunity in the ongoing peace process," said Miller.

According to him the troops that stay behind will fight al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations in Afghanistan and will support the Afghan forces.

Currently the U.S. has 4,500 troops in Afghanistan under the Resolute Support Mission.

**Int'l Community  
 Agrees on Persevering  
 Republican System in  
 Afghanistan: Atmar**

Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar, speaking at the house of representative Monday, said the world has not voted for any peace; expect the one preserves the republican system, the country's constitution and the achievement of the past 19 years.

Addressing the recent Geneva Conference on Afghanistan, he said the international community is in favor of a system in Afghanistan where democracy is respected.

Atmar exclaimed there is no disagreement among the international community ...

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**Ghani calls for talks to be held in  
 Afghanistan and not at 'luxury Doha hotels'**

President Ashraf Ghani said Monday he wants the next round of intra-Afghan talks to be held in Afghanistan as the people have the right to be kept up-to-date on progress around negotiations and on topics being focused on.

Addressing a cabinet meeting, Ghani said the Taliban are also Afghans and should therefore agree to talks to be conducted in the country.

He said "wherever they (Taliban) want the talks in Afghanistan, the Afghan government is ready to negotiate [there] with them."

"We would prefer to hold the second round of peace negotiations inside Afghanistan," Ghani said.

"If the Taliban claim themselves as Afghans and from Afghanistan; so why then do they refuse to negotiate on Afghan soil?" Ghani



asked. Ghani stated that Afghans could hold peace talks at a tent "even in cold weather."

"It is not time to [demand] luxury hotels as pre-conditions to all. Is it not more important that all people witness how the negotiations are going? What topics do the talks focus on and why?" Ghani asked.

This comes during a three-week break that both sides called last week, following three months in Doha.

Despite having started talks on September 12, the talks soon hit a deadlock until two weeks ago when they made a breakthrough after agreeing on the rules and procedures.

### Mol: 11 Narcotic...

Eimal Momand acting in-charge of publication in 203 Tandar army corps told BNA correspondent, the militants had plan to launch attack on Afghan security forces' checkpoints in Mullah Nough region, Andar district of the province, which were faced with full resistance of Afghan security personnel.

Eighteen anti-government militias were killed and 12 more were wounded following the conflicts, Momand added.

Some military equipment and 12 motorcycles belonged to the terrorists have been destroyed during the clashes, Momand concluded.

### Brexit: Negotiators...

Sharma said the UK was "not going to be walking away from these talks," although the UK would not continue negotiations beyond the 31 December deadline.

However, he added "quite significant progress" would be required in a number of areas for an agreement to be reached.

Speaking at an event on Monday, Mrs von der Leyen said there had been "movement" in the talks and negotiators had not exhausted all options.

She added that the issue of the level playing field was the "one and only important question", if UK should continue to have access to the EU's single market. "They have either to play by our rules, because this is a matter of fairness for our companies... or the other choice is there is a price on it, and the price is border and tariffs."

Labour's shadow Cabinet Office minister Rachel Reeves welcomed the continuation of the talks and said the worst outcome would be to "crash out with no deal whatsoever on 1 January".

By Andrew McCormick

# Don't Cheer Trump's 11th-Hour Troop Withdrawals

Last Friday, the Pentagon announced that nearly all US military forces in Somalia, by order of the president, will leave the country by January 15. The announcement came on the heels of a similar decision in November to halve America's military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, to about 2,500 personnel in each country. Together, the moves amount to a last-minute attempt by Trump, who will be replaced in the White House on January 20, to make good on his pledges to scale back foreign wars.

Even to the president's most vigorous critics, this may come as welcome news. America's military is overcommitted in too many corners of the globe, and our wars have gone on more than long enough. I participated directly in the conflicts in Afghanistan and East Africa, as an intelligence officer with special operations units between 2013 and 2015, and that was my first reaction to the announcement: Fine. Good.

On further thought, though, the details of the announcement didn't add up. Trump may grandstand about bringing the troops home, but for many reasons—the hurried nature of the withdrawals, especially—it struck me that the president's moves have much more to do with his own interests than the nation's.

To explain, let's get one thing straight from the get-go: Trump is no peacemaker. This year has seen more air strikes targeting Al Shabaab militants in Somalia than in the entirety of the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations combined. Because the Trump administration has loosened restrictions preventing casualties, civilian deaths from air strikes have seen a considerable uptick, as documented by journalists and advocacy groups. In Afghanistan, meanwhile, civilian casualties increased by 330 percent between 2016 and 2019, according to a new report by the Brown University Costs of War Project; in 2019 alone, 700 civilians were killed by air strikes, more than in any year since the beginning of that war in 2001.

Anyway, it's not clear that the Trump administration's withdrawal of forces from



Somalia will end this violence. The Pentagon's statement indicated that many of the roughly 700 troops deployed to Somalia—mostly representing special operations units—would be relocated to neighboring countries (so not even brought back to the States) and available for cross-border counterterrorism operations. The statement didn't mention air strikes but stated vaguely that the US "will retain the capability to conduct targeted counterterrorism operations in Somalia," meaning strikes are likely to continue.

Trump's rhetoric about costly foreign interventions aside, the withdrawal begins to look like a surface technicality. As the defense department said itself: "While a change in force posture, this action is not a change in US policy."

In any case, for some, regardless of partisan allegiance, how America gets its troops out of various foreign combat zones might seem to matter less than the simple fact of doing it. Certainly, the strategic shifts and careful balancing of military and diplomatic efforts that preceded Trump did little to rein in America's out-of-control war on terror.

On this front, it's worth unpacking how exactly

American troops function in Somalia. This is not, as some might imagine, a case of American troops wandering the streets and kicking in doors with impunity, à la Iraq and Afghanistan. Overwhelmingly, service members in Somalia are there supporting Somali security forces and those of the African Union Mission in Somalia, or AMISOM, a peacekeeping force comprised of soldiers from African nations including Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Burundi, and Sierra Leone. This so-called "advise and assist" mission can take the form of training, intelligence sharing, tactical advisory, and material support; direct participation in combat is very rare, though not unheard of.

Whether these efforts have been effective is fairly a matter of debate. On the one hand, US support has enabled the Somali government to reclaim Mogadishu, the country's capital, and other important population centers. On the other, Al Shabaab retains large swaths of territory and over the years has executed a steady stream of high-profile attacks across the region—in 2013, an assault on a Nairobi, Kenya shopping center that killed 63; in 2015, an attack on a ... **P3**

By Isabella Bjorkman

## How Can Afghanistan Reduce Its Aid Dependency?

While violence escalated across the country, the intra-Afghan peace talks were stalled for weeks because of difficulties agreeing on procedural issues. It has been argued that it was unlikely to see any significant progress anytime soon because neither side "has an incentive to compromise before the incoming Biden administration lays out its policy."

A recent Rise to Peace article discusses the meaning of the United States presidential election on the Afghan peace talks and indeed, it could have a big impact depending on President-elect Joe Biden's Afghanistan policy.

However, just a few days ago, the Afghan government and the Taliban announced that they had made a major breakthrough in the talks. They reached a preliminary deal — their first written agreement in 19 years of conflict — which

allows for discussions on more substantive issues, including talk of a ceasefire.

The 2020 Afghanistan Conference

As the peace talks are taking place in Doha, Qatar, governments of Afghanistan and Finland, with the United Nations, co-hosted the 2020 Afghanistan Conference, which is a ministerial level pledging conference aiming to set out the development priorities and financial support for Afghanistan for the upcoming four years. It took place on November 23–24 in Geneva, Switzerland, and saw participation from more than 70 nations and organizations.

The issue of dependency on foreign aid is of great importance for the future of Afghanistan since the country has been dependent on foreign aid for a very long time. Regardless of the outcome of the ongoing peace talks "Afghanistan will remain

highly dependent on foreign aid for the foreseeable future."

The US alone has, since 2001, appropriated an amount almost equivalent to what the US spent on rebuilding Western Europe in the aftermath of World War II. Moreover, the country depends on donors to fund at least half its annual budget, something which is unlikely to change anytime soon.

The 2020 Afghanistan Conference demonstrated the international community's commitment to Afghanistan and donors pledged at least US\$ 3.3 billion for the first year of the upcoming quadrennial with annual commitments expected to stay at the same level year-on-year. It remains clear that foreign aid is important for the future development of Afghanistan with regards to politics, peace, and security in the country. In addition, it can be a way for donors to place pressure ... **P3**

### EU to discuss...

called on the United States and EU governments to stop being influenced by what he called anti-Turkish lobbies but, in an unusually conciliatory tone, said he believed issues could be solved through dialogue.

Tensions have flared over Turkey's decision to send oil-and-gas drilling ships to waters off southern Cyprus where Greek Cypriot authorities have already awarded hydrocarbon exploration rights to Italian and French companies.

Turkey says it is operating in waters on its own continental shelf or areas where Turkish Cypriots have rights. It has also repeatedly accused Greece of avoiding bilateral talks over their conflicting maritime claims and has accused the European Union of being biased towards Greece and Turkey. The EU exported only 45 million

euros (\$54.53 million) worth of arms and ammunition to Turkey in 2018, including missiles, according to EU statistics office Eurostat, but sales of aircraft amounted to several billion euros.

The United States, Italy and Spain were the top exporters of arms to Turkey from 2015-2019, according to the Sweden-based Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a leading conflict and armaments think tank.

EU governments agreed in October 2019 to limit arms sales to Turkey but stopped short of a bloc-wide ban. The bloc currently bans arms sales to several states including Russia, Belarus, Syria and Venezuela. The European Union and NATO are planning to hold a summit with U.S. President-elect Joe Biden after he takes office in January.

### Int'l Community...

The 2020 Afghanistan Conference on about the peace process in which the republican system, the country's constitution and the achievements of the last 19 years are preserved. The international community will not always stay with Afghanistan; we must be fully prepared for such a situation, he concluded.

The 2020 Afghanistan Conference "Peace, Prosperity and Self-Reliance" is held on 23-24 November in Geneva, Switzerland, where the Afghan Government and the international community determined their shared commitments to the development and stability of Afghanistan through 2024.

# Lemon production on the rise in Nangarhar

According to the Nangarhar Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, the number of lemon orchards in the province has increased in recent years.

Inamullah Safi, director of agriculture in Nangarhar, said: "The soil, water and climate of Nangarhar are suitable for the cultivation of citrus trees and the number of lemon orchards in the province is increasing year by year." According to Safi, lemon orchards have been established in many districts of the province, which has resulted in a significant increase in this year's harvest.

Safi said that this year's harvest of lemons in Nangarhar is around 5,900 tons, compared to 5,100 tons last year.

Nangarhar lemons not only sold on



local markets but are also sent to markets around the country.

There are many lemon orchards in Nangarhar province and people have planted lemon trees in their gardens

at home and on farms in the last few years.

The Ministry of Agriculture has meanwhile also established some standard and commercial lemon

orchards in the province. The eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar in Afghanistan have a Mediterranean climate and a climate conducive to citrus farming.

### How Can Afghanistan...

reach an agreement in the current peace talks.

However, there is a risk that donors are expecting the Afghan government to do more than it is able to which might jeopardize future aid. In addition, the Taliban were not invited to participate in the Afghanistan Conference, which could turn out problematic since they are a major stakeholder in the peace talks as well as in Afghanistan's future. In turn, it might create problems should other actors appear committed to a particular Afghan administration. For the same reason, the current Afghan government might be under the impression that it does not have to compromise with the Taliban on certain points.

#### Addressing Corruption to Decrease Aid Dependency

A recent report shows that approximately 30% of money spent by the US on the reconstruction of Afghanistan since 2002 was "lost to waste, fraud, and abuse." With regards to corruption, in 2019, the country ranked 173/198 on the Corruption Perceptions Index and this has a negative effect as Afghanistan tries to move towards a more peaceful and just society. It is therefore vital to address issues like corruption which essentially undermine reconstruction and development efforts. Addressing it will, over time, help reduce Afghanistan's need for foreign aid.

Consequently, the parties involved in the peace talks must do more than agreeing to stop the violence. The talks can potentially be seen as an opportunity for a new start to "lay out a new vision for the country that can assure donors as well as the international community at large that things are going to be different in the post-settlement era."

As demonstrated, commitment from donor countries is important, but what is of significant importance is that Afghanistan increases its own contribution to national development to convert the rhetoric of self-reliance into reality which will enable the country to, eventually, stand on its own two feet.

### Don't Cheer...

Kenyan university that killed 148; and, in 2017, a truck bomb attack in Mogadishu that killed 587. Let us doubt America's own security interests in the region, recall that it was from East Africa in 1998 that Al Qaeda orchestrated attacks on the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania—precursors to the attacks of September 11, 2001. Al Shabaab swore allegiance to Al Qaeda in 2014 and is generally considered one of the terrorist group's most capable affiliates.

Let's entertain for a moment that Trump's drawdown could derive from an earnest philosophical disagreement with American misadventures and perhaps fear that the incoming Biden administration will perpetuate these conflicts. If that were the case, then why did the president not act sooner and with greater effort to alter the status quo?

What seems more likely is that Trump, ever on the lookout for Number One, needs some kind of policy victory, having precious little otherwise on which to construct his legacy. He has railed against America's costly wars, so perhaps now he can count "bringing home the troops" as a promise kept in the simplest of terms. Never mind the dangerous realities on the ground or any other context that might suggest a slower and better-managed exit from these countries. And never mind consequences for allies we spent years cultivating and whom we now abandon with no advance notice whatsoever.

In Somalia's case, according to BBC News, US inspectors in November recommended against a withdrawal from the country, because local forces likely wouldn't be able to suppress attacks

without support. To boot, a presidential election in the country is scheduled for February, which Al Shabaab will almost certainly seek to disrupt. As one Somali senator put it, speaking to the BBC, Trump's last-minute decision is "extremely regrettable" for his country.

The context in Iraq and Afghanistan is no better. In Iraq, the security situation is extremely volatile; as a result of their hurried exit, US military leaders fear an uptick in attacks by Iran and its proxies, not to mention the possibility of a resurgent ISIS. In Afghanistan, the Taliban is stronger now than in years, and Al Qaeda is perhaps stronger than we think, yet Trump has repeatedly forced forward negotiations with the Taliban. "It seems either arbitrary, so [Trump] can say he drew down forces, or maybe he doesn't care if things go off the rails," Ben Rhodes, a former Obama aide, observed on a recent episode of Crooked Media's Pod Save The World podcast. "There's no limit to Trump's cynicism, so you actually might need to consider the reality that he's going to leave circumstances almost deliberately more difficult for [Joe] Biden. He gets to say, 'I drew down troops,' and then he gets to blame Joe Biden when the ISIS problem gets worse." If that sounds conspiratorial, remember that the truth is often stranger than fiction with this president. It would hardly be the only wrench Trump is throwing in the gears on his way out.

Yet media reports, broadly, have taken Trump's troop withdrawals at face value, framing them as part and parcel of Trump's "America First" ideology, while also giving short shrift to the facts of missions and still salient threats. "Oh cool, Twitter

is trending a contextless headline about a war most Americans don't even know is happening," the journalist Jonathan Myerson Katz complained on the social media platform, referring to Somalia. "Twitter is not alone in this, of course," he added, referencing The New York Times' essentially credulous coverage of the announcement. "In four years, some people still haven't figured out how to pay more attention to what a lying president does than what he says."

To be clear, I'm not proponent of indefinite or ill-defined troop deployments, and in this magazine I've argued on multiple counts against forever war. I believe America should pursue every responsible option to leave Afghanistan and that a thorough review of our footprints in East Africa and elsewhere is long overdue. Drawdown shouldn't look like this, though. To our foreign partners, whom we have trained and fought with; to the people of these countries whom we have asked to trust America, even despite the enormous human tragedies war has wrought; and, speaking from just one veteran's perspective, to all the military men and women who have served and died in these conflicts over the years, America's leaders owe a great deal more than a slipshod, self-interested rush out the door.

The consequences of the president's actions will likely come back around in time. If and when they do, Trump and his allies will tell a simple story that he was the man who tried to end war. We, instead, should remember the context and complications he chose to ignore. Then we should insist on placing the blame squarely where it belongs.

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# Covid-19: Trump rejects plan for early vaccines at White House

US President Donald Trump says he has reversed a plan for White House officials to receive a coronavirus vaccine in the coming days.

Officials said senior members of the Trump administration would be among the first to get the Pfizer/BioNTech jab.

But Mr Trump later tweeted that people working at the White House "should receive the vaccine somewhat later... unless specifically necessary".

The US will begin its roll out of the vaccine on Monday.

The vaccine offers up to 95% protection against Covid-19.

The first three million doses are being distributed to dozens of locations in all 50

states across the US. The first shipment of those doses left a facility in Michigan on Sunday, with health workers and the elderly in line to receive the first shots.

News on Sunday that White House staff would be among the first to be vaccinated drew criticism on social media. It was not clear why Mr Trump decided to change the plans, or what effect it would have on the government's efforts to protect top officials.

Coronavirus deaths have been rising sharply since November in the US, with a world-record daily increase of 3,309 reported on Saturday.

The vaccine's rollout has been framed as a turning point in the coronavirus pandemic, which has taken the lives of almost 300,000 people in the US.



### A look at the world

#### Brexit: Negotiators to enter 'extra mile' talks

Talks over a post-Brexit trade agreement will resume later, after the UK and EU agreed to "go the extra mile" in search of a breakthrough.

It comes after the two sides agreed on Sunday there had been enough progress for negotiations to continue.

PM Boris Johnson has warned the sides remain "very far apart" in key areas, but "where there's life there's hope".

Time is fast running out to finalise an agreement before the UK's Brexit transition ends in just over two weeks.

The decision to keep talking came after Mr Johnson discussed the main sticking points with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Sunday.



A new deadline for a decision has not been set - but the ultimate deadline comes on 31 December, when the UK stops following EU trading rules.

Without a trade deal in place by then, the two sides would begin trading on World Trade Organization (WTO) terms, meaning taxes - or tariffs - would be introduced, potentially raising the cost of imported goods such as food.

Fishing rights, "level playing field" rules on how far the UK should be able to diverge from EU laws, and how any agreement should be policed remain the major stumbling blocks.

The EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier will resume talks with his UK counterpart Lord Frost later, after briefing ambassadors of EU member states.

According to an EU source, Mr Barnier is believed to have told them talks over a level playing field remained hard, but were moving towards an agreement.

He is also said to have told them a wider deal could fall into place if a route towards an agreement on fishing rights can be identified.

Ahead of the negotiators meeting in Brussels, Business Secretary Alok ... **P2**

#### Russia-US relations unlikely to be changed under Biden administration - diplomat



Relations between Russia and the United States are unlikely to be changed if Democrat Joseph Biden becomes president, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Sunday.

"Regrettably, we see no cardinal changes in terms of the improvement of bilateral relations after the change of, so to say, participants in all these electoral processes, after reshuffles in the White House," she said in an interview with the Fetsiov program on the Zvezda television channel. "We have no cardinal anticipations in terms of scene changes."

According to Zakharova, the United States' foreign policy towards Russia is still geared to its containment and the situation will not change under a new administration because it will be focused primarily on the domestic agenda.

The Russian diplomat noted that it matters little for Russia who becomes the US president after all, what matters for it is bilateral cooperation between the two countries. "Frankly speaking, it is not the person that matters for us. We have our own president. What matters for us is the Russian-US relations, bilateral cooperation on global matters," she explained.

The US presidential election was held on November 3. Major US media outlets project that the Democratic contender Joe Biden has presumptively won the presidential election, securing over 270 electoral votes. Incumbent US President Donald Trump is challenging the current outcome, claiming irregularities in the ballot processing in key swing states, and has filed lawsuits to fight his case in court. The US General Services Administration acknowledged Biden's win, formally informing him that they were ready to transfer the budget funds required to begin the transition process in the run-up to his inauguration. The inauguration ceremony is planned for January 20.

#### EU to discuss arms exports to Turkey with NATO and U.S., Merkel says

EU leaders plan to discuss arm exports to Turkey with NATO allies and Washington, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Friday, after Greece pushed for an arms embargo on Ankara.

Merkel spoke after a summit where the EU's 27 leaders agreed to prepare limited sanctions on Turkish individuals over Ankara's energy exploration dispute with Greece and Cyprus, but postponed discussions on any harsher steps until March.



"We ... spoke about how questions about arms exports must be discussed within NATO. We said that we want to coordinate with the new U.S. administration about Turkey," Merkel told a news conference. Many EU states are also members of NATO. Merkel's comments underlined a hardening stance on Turkey among EU governments, many of whom have in the past resisted punitive measures on Ankara, a NATO ally, candidate for EU membership and host to Syrians fleeing civil war who would otherwise seek refuge in Europe. But EU states have also grown increasingly critical of Turkey's involvement in Libya and its purchase of a Russian weapons system, among other flashpoints.

The United States is already poised to impose sanctions on Turkey over those Russian purchases, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Turkey's foreign ministry on Friday rejected what it called the EU summit's "biased and illegal" approach on the sanctions.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan ... **P2**



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