

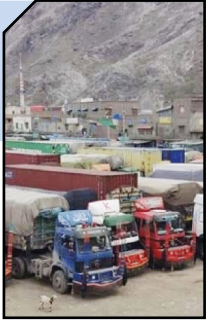


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# Heart of Asia

*Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region*

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## Senate wants Doha talks moved to Afghanistan

The Meshrano Jirga or Senate on Tuesday supported the government's proposal to shift the next phases of peace talks to Afghanistan, believe the move would reduce foreign influence on the peace process.

Earlier, National Security Advisor (NSA) Hamdullah Mohib and President Ashraf Ghani had asked for shifting next phases of peace talks to Afghanistan.

Intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government started about three months ago in Doha, Qatar and the two sides were only able to agree on procedural rules during 80 days of discussions and they now are working on the agenda of negotiations.

A day earlier, both the teams announced that they would resume talks after a three-week break for consultations.

The Meshrano Jirga or upper house of parliament today discussed the peace process. ...

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## Kabul Deputy Governor killed in magnetic IED explosion

At least four people were killed and wounded in a magnetic IED blast in Kabul city early Tuesday, Police confirmed.

The Ministry of Interior (Moi) spokesman Tariq Arian said, "A Land Cruiser type vehicle of the Kabul deputy governor, Mohibullah Muhammadi was targeted by an IED in Macrorryan Char area of PD9 at around 09:40am on Tuesday morning."

According to Arian, Muhammadi along with his secretary were killed and two of his bodyguards were wounded in the incident.

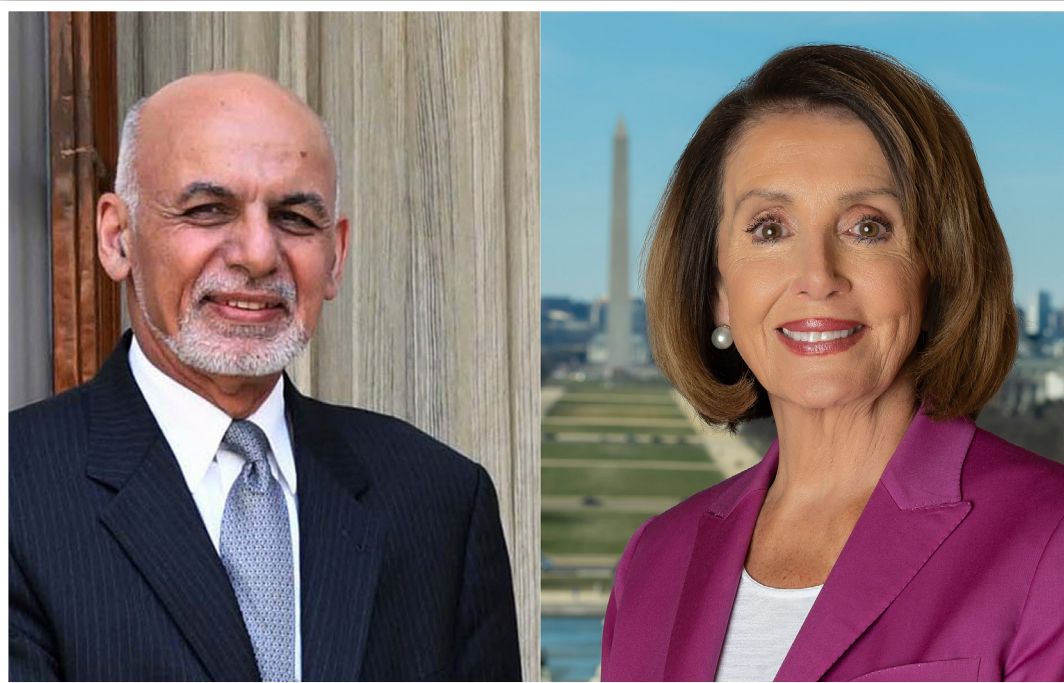
No group has claimed responsibility for the incident so far.

Over the past months, major Afghan cities, including Kabul, have witnessed a spate of terror attacks by Taliban insurgents and the Islamic State.

The deputy head of the Ghor Provincial Council Abdul Rahman was ...

P2

# Ghani, Pelosi concerned at escalating violence



President Ashraf Ghani and US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi have discussed the peace process in Afghanistan. Ghani and Plosi also conferred on the Afghan-Afghan relations via a video conference on Monday night, the Presidential Palace said on Tuesday.

The video conference was also attended by First Lady Rula Ghani, Vice-President Amrullah Saleh, Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar, National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib, and Chief of Staff Dr. Fazal Mahmood Fazli. Afghanistan's Ambassador to the

United States, Roya Rahmani was also connected via the video conference, a statement from Ghani's office said. Both sides expressed concerns over the escalation in violence across Afghanistan despite holding peace negotiations in Doha.

The United States' continued commitment to Afghanistan, the peace process and next steps came up for discussion.

The protection of women's rights and a ceasefire agreement were underlined during the video conference.

However, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Peace Process Zalmay Khalilzad has called for resumption of the intra-Afghan talks on January 5.

On his twitter handler, the US envoy said: "Given how much is at stake, it is imperative that there is no delay in resumption of talks and they must resume on Jan 5 as agreed."

He said: "Tragically, the war continues. The need for a political settlement, reduction in violence, and a ceasefire remain urgent."

Earlier, the Afghan and Taliban negotiating teams had said that talks on agenda related items would be resumed on January 5.

Khalilzad said: "The two Afghan negotiating teams announced in Doha they will take 20 days off to "consult on the agenda items."

## Qatar's deputy PM, Stanikzai talk peace parleys

The Afghan government's chief negotiator and Qatar's deputy prime minister have discussed latest developments in the peace talks.

On Monday, Qatar's Deputy Premier Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al-Thani met the head of Kabul's negotiating team, Massoum Stanikzai.

The two sides reviewed the latest developments in the peace negotiations and ways of ensuring the success of the peace negotiations. Stanikzai conveyed the Afghan government's appreciation ...

P3



## Khalilzad, Gen. Miller, Pakistan's COAS Discuss Afghan Peace, Security Situation

As the Afghan sides in Doha announced a 20-day long break in the ongoing peace talks amid rising violence in Afghanistan, United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad together with Commander Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan General Austin Scott Miller arrived Pakistan, and held consultations with the country's military leadership on the situation.

Ambassador Khalilzad and General Miller arrived on Monday from Doha, and held a meeting with Pakistani Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa.

According to the Pakistani Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), matters of mutual interest including overall regional security



situation with particular reference to ongoing Afghan reconciliation process were discussed during the meeting.

"COAS appreciated role of RSM for peace and stability in Afghanistan and assured that Pakistan will continue to play its positive role for peace and stability in the region," the ISPR stated in a statement. It added: "the visiting dignitary

appreciated Pakistan's untiring efforts for facilitating the process towards the mutual objective of peace in the region."

The visit took place a time when the Kabul and Taliban negotiations teams in Doha agreed on a 20-day long break in the ongoing intra-Afghan negotiations to apprise their respective leadership of the progress that has been made ...

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### Zarif condemns...

on 24 October 1813, which was signed after the first full-scale 1804-1813 Russo-Persian War, what is now Dagestan, eastern Georgia, most of the Republic of Azerbaijan and parts of northern Iran were ceded to the Russian Empire.

However, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called Zarif on Saturday evening to assure him that his country respects the Islamic Republic of Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

During the phone conversation, Cavusoglu underlined the close and friendly relations between Turkey and Iran, and highlighted Ankara's definite policy of good neighborliness.

He also assured Zarif that Erdogan fully respects Iran's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Cavusoglu explained that President Erdogan had not been aware of the sensitivities surrounding the lines he recited in Baku and associated the poem only with Lachin and Karabakh, which is why he recited it in the recent event in Azerbaijan.

### Kabul Deputy...

killed on Tuesday afternoon in an explosion in the provincial capital.

Local government officials confirmed the incident and said Rahman died after a magnetic IED was detonated against the car he was traveling in.

Another member of the council Abdul Rahim Raza Zada, who was also in the vehicle at the time, was wounded, officials confirmed.

The incident happened close to the provincial council buildings shortly before 1pm local time.

This was the second such incident on Tuesday.

By Sahar Ghumkhor

# Australian war crimes and racist fantasies in Afghanistan

Last week the distressing details of a four-year inquiry into the Australian Defence Force's war crimes in Afghanistan were finally released to the public. The country grappled with the scale of the violence: at least 23 deadly incidents; 39 Afghan civilians, including children, killed; at least 25 Australian soldiers of the Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) involved.

The report described a savage practice of "bleeding", where young special forces soldiers were instructed by senior commanders to make their "first kill" and a "culture of secrecy", where witnesses remained silent and murderers covered up their crimes by planting weapons and radios on dead bodies.

While the details of the crimes have been widely reported on, there has been a curious reluctance in Australia to explain the violence and trace its racist origins. The local media coverage of the revelations had a defensive tone.

Military, academic and mental health experts appeared on Australian TV screens to buffer the allegations by speaking of the integrity of the military and concerns over the impact on the image and morale of the defence forces. Australian officials and commentators tried to present the war crimes as an act of a few "bad apples" just as their American counterparts did with the uncovered torture and murder at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Even when the horror of the war crimes was on full display and the sheer scale of the war crimes and depraved practices undeniable, white innocence was still desperately gasping for redemption.

But what struck me the most as an Afghan living in Australia watching this fiasco unravel was how the coverage of the inquiry on Australian TV ended with the promotion of a mental health helpline for members of the military and their families. This, in a year of protests against uniformed men terrorising civilian populations and basking in impunity taking place around the world.

The tone deafness was incredible and the narcissism – diabolical. Absent in the media coverage was any concern for the victims and the feelings of Afghans and Afghan Australians. Many of us carry the scars of war and many were certainly retraumatized by these findings.

Army Chief Angus Campbell did offer an apology to Afghans on the day of the report's release. But he also curiously repeated the report's conclusion that these



crimes did not occur in the "heat of battle". That is, we have 39 illegal murders and an untold number of others which must be "legal", as they occurred in what the Australian army decided was the "heat of battle". This is how the spellbinding fog of the so-called "war on terror" transforms civilians into "collateral damage" or suspect terrorists, monsters into heroes, freedom fighters into terrorists and terrorists into Muslims. The racial economy of the "war on terror" has made Black and brown lives cheap, disposable, not worth acknowledging or grieving. More than half a million people have been killed in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq in the "heat of battle", but the gruesome details of their murders will not make it into any report.

This normalisation of violence by the West in certain parts of the world creates spaces where practices like "bleeding" – the merciless murder of civilians and detainees as a rite of passage – flourish. It is where the slaughter of defenceless people as a bonding ritual to make white men into warriors is deemed acceptable. It is where white men, drunk on their own saviour fantasy, come to see themselves as all-powerful, as untouchable.

But why "bleeding"? There is something primal about the word. It has a dehumanising effect, reducing locals to animals to be sacrificed for a higher purpose – a manifest destiny – in a coming-of-age ritual. "Bleeding", "warrior culture" and "Zulu" – the name

some SAS units adopted – are steeped in histories of colonial violence.

Australians should be intimately familiar with these themes. After all, this nation has a prolific history of "bleeding" rituals, dispossession and naked violence against native populations.

Today the white men return to the former imperial frontier to pursue boyhood ideals of adventure, discovery and unbridled aggressions. Afghanistan is not a graveyard of empires as the mythology insists, it is where the imperial imagination is set free to act out its darkest fantasies with no legal or moral restraint. And just like in colonial times, when white men went after trophies, including human ones, today they collect body parts of dead Afghan civilians and their prosthetics to use as drinking vessels.

The desire for possession of body parts, even plastic ones, is a dark pathology, especially when they are snatched from a land covered with landmines and inhabited by so many broken bodies, where prosthetic parts are inaccessible to many. I wonder about the Australians who witnessed the theft of a dead Afghan man's prosthetic leg or knew where it came from, but nevertheless, relished drinking beer from it.

I think about the mutilated face of Aisha Mohammedzai, the Afghan girl who appeared on the front cover of Time magazine in 2010, who was then flown to the US and offered a plastic nose. ... **P3**

By James R. Webb

## Was General Mark Milley speaking truth to power?

This month Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Mark Milley addressed the Brookings Institution on the subject of the war in Afghanistan. Overall, he framed 20 years of U.S. involvement in the country as having achieved a "modicum of success" resulting in a "stalemate" on the battlefield. More presciently, he told the virtual crowd that, in effect, the Afghan government could not survive without U.S. military support, concluding rather bluntly that the "only solution is a negotiated settlement."

In short, the nation's highest ranking military officer said publicly that there is no pathway to military victory in Afghanistan. Yet we're still there, and Congress is set to pass the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which includes an unprecedented measure that would make it more difficult to bring U.S. troops home from the 20-year Afghanistan conflict.

General Milley's comments recall an infamous World War I song familiar to British troops on their way to the trenches. Sung cynically to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne," it simply went, "We're here, because we're here, because we're here." This subtle but powerful protest remains an illuminating souvenir of a war

that became famous for its seemingly senseless carnage.

Historically, implicit protests such as that song typically emerge when troops who carry the burden of executing policy become disenchanted with the direction set by the political "leadership." Similarly, the term "Mickey Mouse" was used by American servicemen in Vietnam to express these sentiments. The film "Full Metal Jacket" closes with U.S. Marines marching into Hue singing the theme song of the "Mickey Mouse Club."

General Milley's comments were far more subtle, and on first pass sounded like a somewhat banal acceptance of the status quo by the leadership, which is still letting the rank and file do all the killing and dying. However, when reconsidered, his remarks almost beg us to read between the lines.

Simply put, the military executes the mission set by the civilian leadership. Directly and publicly criticizing policy would be a career killer, just as Gen. MacArthur found out nearly 70 years ago. It could be inferred that Milley's public comments were in fact about as bold as an active-duty member of the military can be when talking about policy. Particularly striking was his point

that, "There's a strong argument to be made that we have forces in places they shouldn't be."

One should remember that the initial invasion in 2001 – before it became a near-textbook case of mission creep – was focused on eliminating al-Qaida, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. By virtually all metrics, this initial mission was a success. By 2009 it was estimated that fewer than 100 al-Qaida members remained in Afghanistan. In 2011, U.S. Special Operators killed the head of al-Qaida, Osama Bin Laden (albeit in Pakistan). By 2018, the Department of Defense reported that "[t]he al-Qa'ida threat to the United States and its allies and partners has decreased and the few remaining al-Qa'ida core members are focused on their own survival."

Yet these successes were replaced by other missions, which cost substantial blood and treasure. Central to this idea was the ridiculous expectation that somehow Afghanistan, despite no history of centralized rule, could be molded into a thriving Jeffersonian democracy. General David Petraeus and his band of "COINistas" convinced then-President Obama that the strategy of "clear, hold, and build," directly lifted from ... **P3**

### Khalilzad, Gen. Miller,...

so far and consult them on the agenda for the next round to be resumed on January 5, 2021.

Before leaving for Pakistan, Khalilzad took to Twitter to give his response over the break in the intra-Afghan negotiations, and urged both the sides to resume the talks as agreed.

"The two Afghan negotiating teams announced in Doha they will take 20 days off to "consult on the agenda items"... Tragically, the war continues. The need for a political settlement, reduction in violence, and a ceasefire remain urgent," Khalilzad asserted.

Insisting on resumption of the peace talks, the special US envoy stated: "Given how much is at stake, it is imperative that there is no delays in resumption of talks and they must resume on Jan 5 as agreed."

The intra-Afghan negotiation started in Doha on September 12, 2020 and after months of debates and consultations the two sides reached an agreement on the procedure of the negotiations recently which was also welcomed by Pakistan.

### Putin finally...

in the hope he would take a softer line with Moscow.

In November, asked why in 2016 Putin had congratulated Trump soon after he had won the Electoral College and beaten Democrat Hillary Clinton, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there was an

obvious difference this time around. "You can see that there are certain legal procedures that have been announced by the current president. That is why the situations are different and we, therefore, think it appropriate to wait for an official announcement," said Peskov.

# Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan suspended

Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan through Torkham have been suspended following a strike by customs clearing agents.

The clearing agents went on strike on Monday to protest what they called lack of facilities at the crossing and the authorities' refusal to meet their demands.

The strike would continue until the government met their demands, warned Torkham Customs Clearing Agents' president Hazrat Umar.

He complained they had long been demanding round-the-clock opening of Durand Line for swift trade with Afghanistan.

Other demands of the strikers are the abolition of the scanning condition for all types of exports and a separate place for the examination of goods.

He also called for a stop to the clearance of goods except fresh food items after 5pm and exempting clearing agents' vehicles from security checks.

Umar blamed the government for failing to honour its promises of providing better Internet and electricity services at the time of goods clearance.

According to Dawn, the strike also affected the import of fresh fruits and other items from Afghanistan.



Hundreds of loaded vehicles remained stranded on both sides of the crossing. Pakistan's main exports to Afghanistan via Torkham are cement, fresh oranges and retail goods border. Slow custom clearance and electronic scanning of export items have affected exports to Afghanistan.

### Senate wants...

Gulali Akbari, a senator from Badakhshan province, pointing to the three-week break in talks, hoped that the negotiations would resume the talks on the agreed date of January 5. She said it would be better if future phases of negotiations were held inside the country and the government would ensure security of Taliban negotiators wherever they choose a venue. The talks inside the country would not be under influence of any foreign pressure or interference, she said. Anarkali Hunaryar, another Meshrano Jirga member, also supported the government's suggestion and said, "We hope the next stages of talks would be shifted to the country, we want the international community to press the Taliban to agree on ceasefire."

She also asked the administrative board of the house to call the government's negotiating team to the house for providing information about developments in peace talks. A number of other members demanded reconsideration of the composition of the government's negotiating team. Zalmai Zabulai, a senator from Zabul province, said, "This team needs to be changed because it has failed to convince the Taliban that their opposite party is the Afghan government, the Taliban still call the government as Kabul Administration."

Mohammad Hashem Alokozai, another senator, held similar views and said that the government's negotiating team had no achievements over the last three months.

He called the team a failure and said its members should be able to properly argue with the Taliban.

Meshrano Jirga chairman Fazal Hadi Muslimyar told senators to have patience and let the government's team continue their part.

He said the government's negotiating team had strongly represented the government and people of the country and they needed more chance to continue the talks.

Muslimyar supported the government's suggestion for shifting next parts of talks to the country and said that Afghanistan was a common house for all its people and the Afghan public's demand was talks inside the country. The house agreed on the transfer of negotiations from Qatar to Afghanistan.

### Qatar's deputy...

of Qatar for its endeavors during the first round of negotiations. A credible source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Afghan government's peace negotiating team would return from Doha for Kabul Yesterday (Tuesday) afternoon.

### Was General Mark...

his "success" in Iraq would work in Afghanistan. But the Afghans, much like the Iraqis before them, didn't want the product Washington was selling.

General Milley addressed both points concretely with his comments. He said the United States went into Afghanistan "to ensure that Afghanistan never again became a platform for a terroristic strike against the United States," adding that "at least to date, we have been successful in preventing that from happening again."

Further, he noted, "The government of Afghanistan was never going to militarily defeat the Taliban, and the Taliban, as long as we were supporting the government of Afghanistan, was never going to militarily defeat the regime." In short, we came, we did our job as prescribed after 9/11, and the rest (predictably) didn't work.

But, Congress isn't listening. A poll commissioned in April of 2020 by Concerned Veterans for America found that 73 percent of veterans and 69 percent of military households support

withdrawing from Afghanistan. These numbers were up 13 and nine percentage points, respectively, from similar polling in 2019. However, it would appear that Washington is headed in the opposite direction.

Included in the House version of this year's NDAA is a provision, known as the "Crow-Cheney" amendment, which would require the president to retain troop minimums in Afghanistan. Historically, as in Vietnam and Iraq, Congress has set "troop caps" which set ceilings, rather than floors on the number of U.S. troops to be deployed to a given foreign battleground. This awkwardly, and without precedent, forces the executive to continue making war even at the risk of making peace harder to achieve.

Strategically, it runs the risk of not only keeping the U.S. in an unwinnable war, but continuing to stretch our resources where they could be better placed elsewhere and to beef up readiness for real threats that may emerge elsewhere.

General Milley appears to have

spoken as much truth to power as one on active duty can, short of resigning in protest. While acknowledging the accomplishment of our primary mission in 2001 — eliminating al-Qaida in Afghanistan — and then tactfully laying out the reality on the ground, he provided policy-makers and Congress the information and space to bring the conflict to an honorable and expedient close.

Simply put, our efforts to drive al-Qaida from Afghanistan have worked, while our efforts to create a democratic and viable state in a country without a history of centralized government have not. Meanwhile, Congress — detached as ever from public opinion — seeks to use federal law to permanently entrench U.S. troops in the country.

For what purpose? If Congress refuses to process the remarks of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the opinions of those who have been fighting this war for nearly 20 years, it would seem they just want us there, for the sake of being there, because we're there.

### Australian war...

Plastic body parts are powerful commodities in Afghanistan: white men can give them as a gift and can take them away as punishment.

Perhaps the even more insidious part of this story is how the white men can kill at will, mutilate corpses, steal body parts and still come away feeling like heroes.

Indeed, despite the reports of war crimes piling up and murder of civilians spiking, the overarching Western narrative of the Afghan war has continued to present Western armies as saviours.

The war in Afghanistan has been considered the "good war", unlike the invasion of Iraq which some eventually denounced as the "bad war", the one built on lies. One has to wonder, however, how the anti-war movement came to believe that the same people who lied to us about Iraq somehow had the best of intentions in Afghanistan.

There is nothing that makes Westerners feel more powerful than the official rationale for the invasion of Afghanistan: going

to war for the sake of Muslim women, to protect them from Muslim men.

But people forget that the original justification was not the protection of Afghan women. The US and its allies initially declared they were invading as an act of self-defence because Afghanistan was harbouring al-Qaeda and its leader Osama bin Laden, who was accused of ordering the 9/11 attacks.

But none of the conditions for self-defence were sufficiently met to secure legal approval. There was no ongoing armed threat against the US by the time of the invasion, the Security Council did not meet in time to sanction it, Afghanistan was not an aggressor nation, harbouring bin Laden did not warrant a military intervention and the Taliban was actually open to negotiate.

Once the war began, America and its allies were in murky legal territory and they knew it. The motives for the war quickly shifted from self-defence to defending Afghan women and removing the Taliban. The new paradigm of militant humanitarianism (responsibility

to protect) became the cover-up narrative for the illegal origins of the war.

This humanitarian pretence has disarmed Afghans of the right to self-defence and self-determination. The idea of the "good war" has been so tenuously guarded that the plight of Afghan women has become dogma and Afghan political will that does not align with the humanitarian paradigm and its vision for the future of the country has been automatically labelled a threat. As evidence of horrendous war crimes mounts, Westerners, including Australians, continue to hold on to the racist fantasy that they are fighting a "good war" in Afghanistan, that they have the moral right to demarcate the boundaries of the battleground, that they can decide who is a civilian and who is Taliban.

In "the heart of darkness", these delineations do not really mean anything, they are mere cloaks for monsters and the nations that birth them. For many Afghans, this is the real revelation of the Australian inquiry.

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# Putin finally congratulates Biden on winning US presidency

Russian President Vladimir Putin has congratulated Joe Biden on his victory in the US presidential election, after Biden won the state-by-state Electoral College vote that officially determines the US presidency, the Kremlin said.

The Kremlin had said it would wait for the official results of the election before commenting on its outcome, even as other nations congratulated Biden on the win in the days after the November 3 vote.

"For my part, I am ready for interaction and contact with you," the Kremlin cited Putin as saying in a statement.

"Putin wished the president-elect every success and expressed confidence that Russia and the United States, which have a special responsibility for global security and stability,

could, despite their differences, really help to solve the many problems and challenges facing the world," the Kremlin said.

Putin was one of the last leaders of world powers to have held back on congratulating Biden. Officials in Moscow, including the country's elections chief and foreign minister, had earlier criticised the US elections process, describing it as archaic and not representative of the will of the people.

Biden is expected to take a tougher stand against Russia compared with outgoing US President Donald Trump, who the Democrat slammed during the campaign for having "embraced so many autocrats around the world, starting with Vladimir Putin".

Russia was accused of interfering in the 2016 US election to help get Trump elected, ... **P2**



### A look at the world

#### Zarif condemns U.S. sanctions on neighboring Turkey

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has denounced the recent U.S. sanctions against Turkey, highlighting the fact that Iran attaches great importance to its neighbors.

"U.S. addiction to sanctions and contempt for international law at full display again," Zarif tweeted on Tuesday.

"We strongly condemn recent U.S. sanctions against Turkey and stand with its people and government," he added.

It came a day after U.S. President Donald Trump implemented penalties against Turkey for its purchase of a Russian missile defense system more than a year ago. The sanctions, announced by the U.S.



Treasury, targeted Turkey's defense procurement agency, known as the Presidency of Defense Industries, and its senior officials, including its president.

Turkey acquired the missile defense system, known as the S-400, in July 2019. The purchase violated a sweeping sanctions law passed in 2017 in the House and Senate to push the U.S. government toward a tougher stance on Russia.

Zarif's rebuke of the U.S. sanctions came days after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recited a poem with separatist sentiments that caused anger among Iranians.

The poem implies that the Azeri-populated Iranian provinces of Azerbaijan were separated from the Republic of Azerbaijan. "Pres. Erdogan was not informed that what he ill-recited in Baku refers to the forcible separation of areas north of Aras from Iranian motherland. Didn't he realize that he was undermining the sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan? NO ONE can talk about OUR beloved Azerbaijan," Zarif wrote in a tweet on Friday.

Later in the day, the Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned Turkey's ambassador to protest Erdogan's controversial poem.

According to the Treaty of Gulistan ... **P2**

#### Israel signals openness to future joint missile defence with Gulf partners



Israel could be open to future cooperation on missile defence with Gulf Arab states that share its concerns over Iran, a senior Israeli official said on Tuesday.

But the official, Moshe Patel, who heads the Israeli Missile Defence Organisation which is part of the Defence Ministry, said it was premature to pursue any such deals, and Washington's approval would be needed if Israeli systems developed with U.S. technology or funding were involved.

"Things can be done, maybe in the future," Patel said when asked during a conference call with reporters if any of the systems might be offered to Israel's new partners in the Gulf or synchronised with comparable systems deployed there.

"From an engineering point of view, of course there is a lot of advantage, that information can be shared, like sensors that can be deployed in both countries because we have the same enemies."

The briefing was called to announce what Patel said was the successful testing of a multi-tiered Israeli missile defence system that could hit targets flying at different altitudes, such as cruise missiles or ballistic missiles.

Concerns over Iran were a driver of a U.S.-brokered pact on Sept. 15 formalising relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia encouraged the rapprochement, while holding off on having bilateral ties with Israel for now.

With U.S. backing, Israel has over the last decade developed a multi-layer air shield made up of the Arrow ballistic missile interceptor, the mid-altitude David's Sling interceptor and Iron Dome, which shoots down short-range rockets and mortar shells. Prior to the negotiations that led to the normalisation of relations with the UAE and Bahrain, a senior Israeli official had told Reuters that there would be no coordination on missile defence with Gulf countries.

#### Macron proposes French referendum to add climate change to the constitution

Emmanuel Macron has said he wants to hold a referendum in France on whether to change the constitution to reflect the fight against climate change and protecting the environment.

The French president, who was speaking to the Citizen's Convention on Climate, stressed the nation needed to "keep moving forward" now that the work is "even more urgent".

"Should we do more?" Macron asked, later answering: "Yes" to his own question.

The statement was a brief part of a four-hour discussion on Monday involving dozens of French citizens who had been randomly picked to propose ways to cut emissions.



The topic of amending the nation's constitution to include environmental commitments was first proposed by the Convention in June - and now appears to have presidential approval.

It would just need to pass votes in the lower house of parliament and the Senate to go ahead.

Macron also acknowledged that France was not yet doing enough to tackle global warming as the country had been missing its targets on the Paris Agreement. Much of these efforts have also been delayed until next year.

On Friday, EU leaders agreed to strengthen targets for 2030, now pledging to reduce greenhouse gases to at least 55% compared with 1990 levels. Previous targets were at 40%.

It also comes as US President-elect Joe Biden reaffirmed his focus on climate change, promising to re-join the Paris accord on his first day as president.

The last referendum to be held in France was in 2005, which asked citizens whether they supported the notion of a European constitution.

This was rejected in a defeat for then president Jacques Chirac.



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