



Page 2 | NATIONAL
America can't stay in Afghanistan forever, but it matters how we leave

Proponents of forever war in Syria can't answer one question: Why?

Before Robert Gates stepped down as secretary of defense after a five-year tenure, the veteran national security hand offered ...

Page 3 | ECONOMY
Afghanistan, Czech & Slovakia Establish a Joint Chamber of Commerce



Kabul
 8 / -1



Herat
 12 / 2



Nangarhar
 19 / 7



Balkh
 9 / 1



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10 afs



Afghanistan's Future Arrangements Should Be Broadly Inclusive: China

A Chinese UN envoy has said that Afghanistan's future arrangements should be broadly representative and inclusive.

"In our view, Afghanistan's future arrangements should be broadly representative and inclusive, so that all parties, ethnic groups, and religious sects in Afghanistan can participate on equal footing and share state power," Geng Shuang, China's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, told the Security Council meeting on the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

"The international community should fully respect the will of the Afghan people, and ensure the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned negotiation process," said the envoy.

"No external forces should be allowed to impose their will or seek gains," Geng added. ...

P3



Parliamentary, provincial polls in Ghazni next year

The parliamentary elections in the central province of Ghazni that was delayed in 2018 due to "security issues and other problems" as well as the provincial councils' elections will be held next year in October, the election commission said.

Hawa Alam Nuristani, the chairperson of the Independent Election Commission, said the problems that happened in the previous elections will be prevented in the upcoming elections.

Officials of the commission, who addressed reporters at a press conference on Saturday, said the election has been estimated to cost \$19 million. Nuristani said the provincial councils' elections that were supposed to be held with the last year's presidential polls will also be held next year.

According to IEC officials, the provincial councils' elections will cost \$80 million. The parliamentary election was held in October 2018, but it was not held in Ghazni due to security issues.

Rise in violence puts peace process at risk: Gen. Miller



US and NATO forces commander in Afghanistan Gen. Scott Miller has said the increasing violence instigated by the Taliban is putting the peace process at risk.

Talking to reporters in Kabul, Gen. Miller said he believed the opportunity for peace should not be squandered.

He also called the infrastructure

damage by the Taliban as sad, saying the infrastructure was something that affected the Afghan people.

US Chargé d'Affaires Ross Wilson

on the occasion said the higher violence was an unbearable burden on Afghan armed forces and society. "And it also adds to the isolation of provincial centers like Lashkargah. You can't get there, leaving aside the matter of armed forces movements."

When asked about the motive behind the increased violence, Gen. Miller: Clearly, the Taliban use violence as leverage. It's a tool they've used for a long time and it's one they're loathing to abandon. We press them pretty hard on violence. You know, we have been pressing them since 1 March 2020." To another question he said the Afghan security forces were absolutely essential to the peace process. "They have to hold. They have to hold terrain. They have to protect the people. We talk about that routinely. They certainly have our support to build sustainable security institutions. But they have to hold. We are making sure they know we're still there from an air support standpoint and able to help and protect them during combat operations."

Rockets Strike Main U.S.-NATO Base in Kabul

province, north of Kabul, on Saturday, with no immediate word on casualties and extent of damage.

The spokesperson of Parwan governor, Wahida Shahkar said that 12 rockets had been placed in a vehicle, five of which had been fired at Bagram Airport in Parwan province.

The remaining seven rockets had fallen into the hands of Afghan security forces before being fired, she added.

No group or individual has claimed responsibility for the attack, but in recent days the US military has launched airstrikes in Kandahar against the Taliban. Taliban also warned that they would retaliate such a move if US airstrikes continued.



UNSC extends mandate of team monitoring Taliban-related sanctions

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Friday took the decision to extend for 12 months the mandate of the team monitoring sanctions against individuals and entities associated with the Taliban and emphasized its serious concerns about ongoing violence in Afghanistan.

The 15-member Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2557 (2020) and directed the Monitoring Team to gather information on instances of non-compliance with the measures and to facilitate, upon request by Member States, capacity-building assistance.

In a statement issued by the UNSC, the Council welcomed recent efforts by the Afghan government and the Taliban in facilitating intra-Afghan negotiations and highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Monitoring Team receives the



necessary administrative and substantive support to effectively fulfill its mandate in a safe and timely manner. This comes after Afghanistan's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Adela Raz addressed the Security Council briefing on the situation in Afghanistan on Thursday and said the work of the Monitoring Team

assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee is invaluable in tracking the Taliban's activities, especially in overseeing the fulfillment of their commitments for peace, including their pledge to end all relations with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. "We need to make sure that these commitments are reflected in the Taliban's actions and that ...

P2

UNSC extends...

the Taliban are not engaged in any terrorist activity and are not working with or supporting any international terrorist group," she said.

Raz stated however that reports from Afghan security and intelligence agencies, and the Monitoring Team state otherwise.

"The Taliban have increased their levels of violence and continued their relationship with international terrorist groups. As such, any leniency and flexibility on the sanctions against the Taliban, without real progress and reciprocity from them, will be counterproductive and detrimental to the peace negotiations," she said.

Raz noted that as clearly outlined in the Secretary-General's report, the security situation in Afghanistan remains highly volatile for civilians. Despite progress towards peace, the situation is indeed "worsening".

The Report of the Secretary-General notes 10,439 security-related incidents during the reporting period, representing an 18 percent increase against the same period in 2019.

Raz said it must further be stressed that "anti-government" elements conducted 92 percent of all security-related incidents and 95 percent of armed clashes.

"The Taliban are engaging in targeted killings, attacks against public infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and bridges and have deliberately used people as human shields - actions that are in clear violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. This is unacceptable and reinforces the urgency of the government's call and Secretary General's call, for a comprehensive and immediate ceasefire," she said.

By Gayle Tzemach Lemmon

America can't stay in Afghanistan forever, but it matters how we leave

As President Trump seeks to draw down US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, some have argued the decision is about bringing an end to America's endless wars. But the real issue is how to create enduring stability. Now is an important time to talk not about endless war, but rather about lasting peace.

In Afghanistan, Taliban talks (which the US initiated) hang in the balance, and Afghans see their lives become the fodder for a negotiated peace. That is especially true for women, who were shuttered indoors by the Taliban in 1994 and who continue to face violence from the Taliban today. As America looks to leave, the situation is fragile.

"The question is whether the people of America are ready to support surrendering the fate of 15 million Afghan women and girls to a violent extremist group that facilitated the 9/11 [attacks] in the US," says Afghan activist Wazhma Frogh. "This is a question Afghans girls are asking today from the people of America."

No one wants Americans to remain in Afghanistan forever.

As Afghanistan's government negotiates over a process for dialogue with the Taliban, the on-the-ground reality for Afghans spans from difficult to deadly. In the last months, bombings killed students at Kabul University, and attacks targeted Afghan security forces. From the beginning of July through the end of September, "average daily enemy-initiated attacks ... were 50% higher compared to last quarter," according to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. According to a 2019 US government report, only 53.8% of Afghan districts were under the control or the influence of the Afghan government, with 33.9% contested and 12.3% under the Taliban's control or sway.

President Trump has ordered a drawdown that would bring the total number of US troops in Afghanistan from 4,500 down to 2,500 by Jan. 15. And it is true that a large American presence in Afghanistan—US troop levels peaked at around 100,000, in 2011—would not be sustainable.

But the question of how the US draws down and goes home—and what it leaves in its wake—matters a great deal to keeping the war ended. No one wants US forces to head home only to have to turn back, as happened in Iraq in 2014, when US forces returned to fight ISIS after withdrawing from the country in 2011. Keeping a limited number of US troops in Afghanistan, to continue to train Afghan security forces while political



talks progress, would mean both helping Afghan troops who are fighting extremists and supporting Afghan women and men fighting for their own futures.

Some may say that it is high time Afghans provided for their own security. That is true. What is also true is that Afghans have been fighting, dying and risking their lives for their own futures for years. In 2020, young people have been blown while studying in at university, they have been killed as they reported on their country and they have been slaughtered in its hospitals shortly after giving birth.

And yet, Afghans endure and push for peace.

No doubt Afghanistan continues to suffer from poverty, illiteracy and corruption. But less known is that the country can point to progress. Cell phone usage is up. Girls' education is endangered but increased from 2001—even at university levels. Journalism is vibrant, even while journalists risk their lives to do their jobs. As Afghan President Ashraf Ghani noted recently, "The rate of access to electricity has increased from 8 percent to more than 30 percent; maternal mortality rates declined threefold between 2000 and 2015; and for every 1,000 births, 142 more children lived to the age of five in 2018 than they did in 2007. This progress can be attributed to development aid."

Every Gold Star family is a tragedy and a loss for America. But it is also important to note that thousands of Afghans in uniform who have died serving their country and given their lives in unsustainably high numbers. The question now is what comes next.

Women who have been part of forging their nation's future have been speaking about what should come next. Afghan Parliamentarian Fawzia Koofi, who

faced a recent assassination attempt, noted in an interview recently that "the enemies of the prosperity of Afghanistan do not want to see this country being led and represented by the best version of its citizens." And truly, that is what this is about. Afghanistan in 2020 is very different from Afghanistan in 2001 following the American invasion. The country still faces poverty, illiteracy, crime and war. But it does so with a generation that is keen to be connected, increasingly educated, even outside Kabul, and desperate for peace. These are America's allies in the fight to keep the Afghan war ended. They are ready to go to work to ensure stability. Of course, the Institute of War and Peace Studies (IWPS) also noted that "there is a strong possibility that the Taliban sees the talks in Doha as merely an alternative to a military path to victory. If this is the Taliban's calculus, it would be extremely high-risk for the Afghan government to accede to the Taliban's narrative."

Trump has also announced a drawdown from Iraq, where US soldiers have fought, off and on, since 2003. That country has seen similar fragility since US troops left in 2011—fragility that brought US troops back two and a half years later.

In Iraq, the presence of US forces has been crucial to stopping the Islamic State, whose unique brand of terror seized headlines from 2014 until it was finally stopped in March 2019.

I have visited Syria seven times since 2017 and have seen for myself that the US is the Oz-like presence in the region, rarely seen, but frequently felt. This presence ensures a very fragile stability, and it allows the forces who served as America's ground force ...

P3

By Dan DePetris

Proponents of forever war in Syria can't answer one question: Why?

Before Robert Gates stepped down as secretary of defense after a five-year tenure, the veteran national security hand offered one more piece of wisdom to impart. Speaking to a roomful of Army cadets at West Point in February 2011, Gates made the pointed but astute observation that the U.S. military needed another Iraq and Afghanistan-like conflict like it needed a hole in the head. "In my opinion," the outgoing SecDef advised that day, "any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should 'have his head examined,' as General MacArthur so delicately put it."

The U.S. national security community has taken Gates's words to heart, to a point. While the U.S. military has avoided the kinds of large-scale deployments that characterized the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the United States itself is still very much a nation at war. The fully-resourced counterinsurgencies of yesteryear have been replaced by smaller-scale but indefinite military campaigns

in Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq that may cost less to the U.S. taxpayer, but are in many ways as strategically bankrupt as the interventions of the recent past. While there may be fewer U.S. military personnel on the ground, the missions those personnel are ordered to execute are just as vaguely defined and unattainable as the Bush administration's democracy building project in Iraq. The Foundation for Defense of Democracies would appear to disagree. In an article titled "America's Small but Effective Presence in Syria," David Adesnik and LTC Robert L. Green write that current U.S. military operations in Syria should be representative of how Washington fights wars in the future. Working with local partners on the ground like the Syrian Kurds, they argue, the United States can achieve miraculous results at very little cost and risk to its own forces. To be fair, part of their argument is not necessarily wrong. The U.S. military campaign against the Islamic State in Syria depended heavily on local forces to do the brunt of the fighting, which meant

Americans weren't the ones clearing neighborhoods and dodging booby-trapped houses like they were in Fallujah, Iraq in 2004 or Marjah, Afghanistan in 2010.

The combination of U.S. special forces, Kurdish and Arab-led proxy units, and U.S. airpower proved to be a deadly one for the Islamic State. By the time major operations concluded, tens of thousands of ISIS militants lay dead and its territorial caliphate was squeezed until the day it finally collapsed in the dusty, nondescript Syrian village of Baghouz. It goes without saying that far more Americans in uniform would have died if Americans rather than Syrians did the bulk of the combat.

This argument, however, is ultimately one about military tactics. The more important discussion is about strategy. On this, the authors underestimate the risks of a perpetual U.S. presence in Syria, overestimate Washington's ability to sculpt Syria to its liking, and expand U.S. objectives in the country to such an extent that it practically ties down U.S. military forces in this Arab state for ...

P3

Afghanistan Bans PUBG, Joins India, China in Gaming Regulation



The Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority has announced that PUBG was banned in the country after an assessment of the battle royale's content.

This includes consulting with psychologists, civil activists, and parents, as well as with PUBG players themselves.

"The decision was taken to block this game on a temporary basis considering social and security perspectives," ATRA chairman Omar Mansoor Ansari said.

Ansari added that there will be a continued investigation to find a

more permanent solution.

The Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority looked at the gaming industry as a whole after discussing PUBG.

The board ended up identifying games that they believe have "negative impacts" on younger players.

As has been the case with organizations in some other countries that have taken similar actions, the ATRA also took the country's culture and religious values into consideration when deciding what games are inappropriate.

Afghanistan, Czech & Slovakia Establish a Joint Chamber of Commerce

Afghan Ambassador to Czech Republic Shahzad Aryubi said a joint chamber of commerce has been established with Czech and Slovakia republics. This is part of the Afghan government's efforts to strengthen economic ties with other countries, said Aryubi in phone interview with Radio Liberty. He added that the Chamber of Commerce will help remove barriers to trade with the two Eastern

European countries. "Our aim is to bolster ties with these two countries. The Czech Republic government has warmly welcomed this effort and is willing to bring relations with Afghanistan to the level it existed in the past," Radio Liberty quotes Aryubi. According to Aryubi, Czech and Slovakia are interested in finding markets for Afghan carpets, dry and fresh fruits, minerals and other Afghan products.



Biden's priorities...

and win-win cooperation" with other countries. - 'Rebuilding mutual trust'

Without naming anyone, Wang, however, said some countries were doing strategic miscalculations by targeting China.

"They insist China is the main threat [but] it is wrong," he asserted, adding: "Taking on China is going in a wrong direction, China is not, was not and will not be a threat." Referring to the targeting of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Wang said: "Attack on CPC is an attack on 1.4 billion Chinese people. It is not going to succeed... it is doomed to fail."

According to Wang, the systems in the two countries "are chosen by their people and are deeply rooted in historical and cultural traditions [of the respective nations]."

"China was once buoyed by western powers [but] those days are long gone," he said criticizing what he termed as an "attempt to build an international coalition against China."

Brushing aside criticism over the rights situation in Uyghur Muslims-dominated Xinjiang region and Buddhist-dominated Tibet, he described them as false narratives. Referring to trade-related US restrictions, the Chinese minister called for dialogue and said that the market not imposed deals drive the trade.

"There are no winners in trade wars. Pressurizing others with tariffs will only hurt oneself in the end. The two sides need to remove man-made barriers," he said.

Washington and Beijing increased tariffs on goods last year as Trump wanted to balance the \$560 billion bilateral trade.

-China will grow

"China will continue to grow... It is a matter of time when trade imbalance is eased," the Chinese top diplomat said urging the US to stop "overstretching notion of national security".

On maritime issues in the South China Sea, Wang said: "We need to turn frictions into cooperation in the region". He said China will continue to work with other countries to maintain freedom of navigation under international law. He added that China will speed up cooperation with the ASEAN nations.

Meanwhile, in a separate statement, China insisted that Beijing is "committed to the principle of non-interference" terming any claims about "influencing US presidential elections are completely fabricated."

"I reiterate that China is committed to the principle of non-interference. Claims about China influencing U.S. presidential elections are completely fabricated," the country's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Wenbin told a news conference on Thursday.

Proponents of...

a generation.

Adesnik and Green observe that "U.S. operations in Syria have demonstrated that long-term efforts are sustainable, requiring the commitment of modest military assets deployed in a largely supporting role." But one has to ask the following-up question: to what end? And how can we be certain that the long-term, "by, with, and through" campaigns they are so idealistic about don't proliferate into totally different missions far removed from the reason U.S. troops were deployed in the first place?

Unfortunately, Americans are already witnessing this phenomenon play out in Syria. Indeed, if U.S. policy in Syria was really about defeating ISIS — a mission Washington accomplished over a year and a half ago — U.S. troops would already be back with their families to celebrate the holidays. But alas, the Trump administration's Syria policy is not so much about fighting terrorism as it is about degrading Iran's influence and pressuring Bashar al-Assad to resign, two objectives that are about as inconceivable as climbing Mt. Everest with a t-shirt and shorts. But don't take my word for it. Listen to the words of former Syria envoy James Jeffrey, who admitted earlier this month that U.S. Syria policy is nothing

but a subsection of its broader maximum pressure policy on Iran.

To understand U.S. Syria policy today, one must recognize just how much the U.S. mission in the country has evolved. The phrase "mission creep" is often overused, but I can think of no better phrase to use in the Syria context. U.S. objectives in Syria have transformed from a relatively straightforward counterterrorism mission against ISIS into a quasi-stabilization campaign in Syria's northeast, where U.S. troops are being repurposed as protectors of Syria's decrepit oil fields in order to frustrate Iran's supposed ambitions and deprive the Assad government of desperately needed revenue. The U.S. objective is not so much anti-ISIS as it is anti-Iran and anti-Assad, a policy shift that wasn't debated openly and honestly in the Beltway, let alone authorized by the U.S. Congress.

Some, including the folks at FDD, make the case that it is both wise and appropriate to ensure Iran and Russia doesn't swallow Syria whole. But how important is Syria for the United States, really? Would a hostile Syria complicate Washington's ability to project power in the region if it needed to? Would a more entrenched Iranian and Russian presence in Syria reorder the entire Middle East

and transform the region into some joint Iranian-Russian colony?

Hardly. Those who engage in these histrionics have short-memories, apparently oblivious to the fact that Tehran and Moscow have had significant influence with the Syrian government going back to the Cold War era. Iran has served as the Assad family's most significant regional partner since the dawn of the Islamic Republic itself. Moscow and Damascus have had extensive military, economic and political connections with one another since at least the 1950s, so it is difficult to see how a victory by a Russia-friendly Syria would be some game-changing development in the regional order. If anything, Assad's consolidation of power would be a reversion to the status-quo as it has existed for decades.

It is increasingly popular for those who criticize U.S. military withdrawals to preface their arguments with a dollop of understanding for the other side. "We all want America's forever wars to end," they say, "but we can't just arbitrarily withdraw and leave space for our adversaries to fill." Yet very rarely, if ever, are these same analysts honest about what they are really proposing: open-ended military missions that tie U.S. military resources into knots for very little gain.

America can't...

Operation Inherent Resolve, the name for America's military campaign against ISIS across multiple countries. The Syrian Democratic Forces, the coalition of America's local partners who fought ISIS in Syria, said in March 2019 they had lost more than 11,000. This reality, that Syrians and Iraqis and Afghans are fighting

and dying today, while US forces train and equip and help support them as they work to protect their areas, is little understood. But as we discuss the future of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is critical to keep in mind. It is in America's interest to stand on the side of those who fight against extremism and for stability.

discussions with a higher level of difficulty. Both sides need to show more political wisdom and resolve. The international community needs to increase its attention and input," Geng added.

Afghanistan's...

Noting that the Afghan peace and reconciliation process "has now entered a period crucial to its future," Geng said that "China welcomes the first intra-Afghan negotiations launched in Doha

on Sept. 12 and congratulates both sides on reaching an agreement on the rules and procedures for negotiations a few days ago."

"The next stage of negotiation will feature substantive

discussions with a higher level of difficulty. Both sides need to show more political wisdom and resolve. The international community needs to increase its attention and input," Geng added.

Poorer nations...

doses of its AstraZeneca/Oxford candidate. It also includes a memorandum of understanding with Johnson & Johnson for 500 million doses of the Janssen candidate, currently being investigated as

a single-dose vaccine. Other deals include one with the Serum Institute of India (SII) for 200 million doses – with options for up to 900 million doses more – of either the AstraZeneca/Oxford or Novavax candidates. Richard Hatchett from The

Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) said it held discussions with US pharma company Pfizer and German biotech firm BioNTech and US drug-maker Moderna, to seek an agreement on distribution.

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Biden's priorities provide space for cooperation: Beijing

China on Friday said that three of the four priority areas, as set out by the US-President-elect Joe Biden, are providing space for cooperation. "The most pressing task at the moment is to jointly tackle the pandemic," China's State Councilor and Foreign Ministry Wang Yi told a virtual event hosted by the US-based Asia Society. Wang said the other two areas where the US and China can cooperate are economic recovery and climate change. The two countries are currently witnessing a historic low in bilateral relations. "China-US relations have spiraled down, to the lowest level since the establishment of diplomatic relations, 41 years ago which is not helpful, when global efforts are needed to overcome difficulties," Wang said. He said China-US confrontation would "spell disaster for humanity as a whole". The Chinese minister said the two countries

should focus on "cooperation and manage differences, rebuild mutual trust through dialogue to advance world peace and development". He insisted any progress in the bilateral relations would mean mutual respect. Wang said 2020 might have seen the "greatest damage to international relations" while calling out arbitrary foreign interference in internal affairs and the use of sanctions. "Protectionism is jeopardizing the global trade," he noted, urging "collaboration with each other and other nations". "China follows an independent foreign policy based on five principles of peaceful co-existence and we have no intention to compete for hegemony," Wang said. "We don't export our system or model nor do we seek influence [in other nations]," he added. The Chinese foreign minister said the country's focus is on "development of the nation ... P3



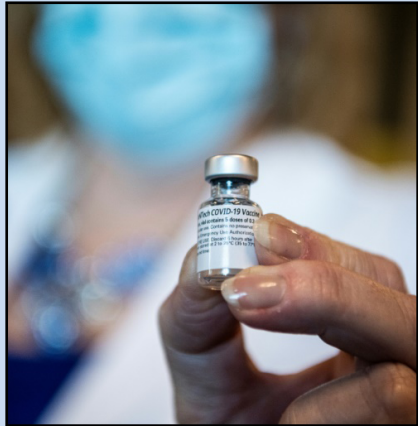
A look at the world

Poorer nations to get vaccines in 1st half of 2021: UN

While some wealthy nations have already started COVID-19 vaccination jabs, poorer countries will only get theirs in the first half of next year, the World Health Organization's chief said Friday.

WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus spoke at an online global gathering to promote an initiative to deliver 1.3 billion doses of approved vaccines next year to 92 eligible low- and middle-income economies. Both the UK and the US have started giving jabs of the Pfizer vaccine and the US looks set to approve the Moderna vaccine.

The WHO said that the COVAX facility, formed



to enable equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, is expected to begin delivery in the first half of next year, without naming specific countries. "We're proud to announce that COVAX has secured access to almost 2 billion doses of several promising vaccine candidates," said Tedros.

"These unprecedented agreements mean that all 190 countries and economies participating in COVAX will be able to access vaccines to protect vulnerable groups in their populations during the first half of next year," he added.

"The arrival of vaccines is giving all of us a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel," said Tedros.

"But we will only truly end the pandemic if we end it everywhere at the same time, which means it's essential to vaccinate some people in all countries, rather than all people in some countries.

"For most of the past year, we have been talking to world leaders and vaccine developers to ensure that once vaccines were available, they were available equitably to all countries," said Tedros.

The COVAX facilities continue talks with major pharmaceutical companies to enlist them into the program.

The agreement includes signing an advance purchase agreement with Anglo-Swedish company AstraZeneca for 170 million ... P3

2 Dead, Hundreds Fleeing Floods in Philippine Storm



At least two people were killed and hundreds forced to flee their inundated homes in the Philippines as torrential rain triggered flooding and landslides in the storm-battered archipelago, officials said Saturday.

Huge waves smashed into a coastal village on Lapu-Lapu island in the central province of Cebu on Friday night, wiping out dozens of houses and leaving around 290 people homeless, Mayor Junard Chan said on Facebook.

Photos posted online by the mayor showed piles of wood and bamboo near the few houses still standing after the region was drenched by heavy rain.

Rescuers retrieved the bodies of two elderly women who were killed when a landslide hit an area of Mahaplag town before dawn in the nearby province of Leyte, police officer Racquel Hernandez said.

A boy was also pulled from the rubble of his home and treated for his injuries, Hernandez told AFP.

About 1,500 people were forced to leave their homes on the major southern island of Mindanao as floodwaters engulfed 13 villages, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said. The Philippines is hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons every year, which typically wipe out harvests, homes and infrastructure in already impoverished areas.

The latest storm comes after a succession of typhoons in recent months pummeled the country, taking the lives 148 people, destroying hundreds of thousands of houses, wrecking cash crops and leaving swathes of the country without power.

Pompeo: Russia 'pretty clearly' behind massive cyberattack

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday blamed Russia for the massive cyberattack affecting multiple federal agencies and thousands of individual federal and private entities, saying it was "pretty clearly" behind the attack.

"I can't say much more as we're still unpacking precisely what it is, and I'm sure some of it will remain classified. But suffice



it to say there was a significant effort to use a piece of third-party software to essentially embed code inside of U.S. Government systems and it now appears systems of private companies and companies and governments across the world as well," Pompeo said on "The Mark Levin Show."

"This was a very significant effort, and I think it's the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity," he added.

Pompeo is the first major Trump administration official to attribute the hack directly to Russia, though the sophisticated large-scale attack has widely been presumed to be tied to the country.

Experts say the effort, which targeted third-party software contractor SolarWind, blindsided the U.S. government and reportedly affected numerous federal agencies, including the Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security, State Department and Treasury Department.



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