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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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## UNHCR to Facilitate Biometric Verification of 1.4m Afghan refugees in Pakistan

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would facilitate the biometric verification of the documents (smartcard IDs) of 1.4 million Afghan refugees from Pakistani government during the current year. 'UNHCR has a plan to facilitate the Afghan refugees (POR – proof of registration cardholders) – by verifying and receiving new biometric documentation (smartcard IDs) from the Government of Pakistan by 2021.' Revealed a document of UNHCR, Pakistan.

The document revealed the UNHCR's key plans for ensuring the betterment of the Afghan refugees during the current year through several initiatives relating to health, education, and others. ...

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## Uzbekistan Foreign Minister to Visit Kabul This Week

Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov will make a working visit to Afghanistan on February 23, the country's Foreign Ministry said.

According to Uzbek media reports, the upcoming talks will address the current bilateral cooperation in different areas and its prospects.

The views will be exchanged concerning opportunities of expansion of regional trade, implementation of the joint transport and communication projects linking Central and South Asia.

The Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan has not said if Foreign Minister Kamilov will meet with President Ashraf Ghani. Last week Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov visited Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, where he met with the Presidents of these countries.

# President Ghani: Afghanistan 'Not Vietnam'



President Ashraf Ghani talking to the BBC on Monday said that Afghanistan is "not Vietnam" and that the government will "not disintegrate," and he emphasized that the future of the country will be made by its people, not by those pushing "dreams."

President Ghani said that any future government setup should

be formed after an election. Ghani said that he was "delighted" with his relationship with the new US administration, and a new "coherence" among the international community's approach to Afghanistan's future. "The force of coherence is what I'm counting on to avoid the tragedies. There's so many fears of collapse

into civil war," Ghani said in the interview with the BBC.

But he dismissed fears of a Taliban military victory. "This is not Vietnam. The government is not collapsing."

Meanwhile, addressing the 46th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council, President Ghani said, "targeted killings are the sharp

edge directed against men and women representing the profound transformation of Afghan society during the last 20 years."

"The Afghan people and the government have the commitment, conviction, and courage to demonstrate the sense of urgency required in such open moments," Ghani said. "Difficult choices will have to be made to move from being a battlefield of unrestricted warfare to a platform of an Asian roundabout and an international cooperation," Ghani said.

While all sides are looking forward to the completion of the Biden administration's review of the Doha agreement, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said in an interview with the BBC that they are in the middle of the review of the deal.

Blinken emphasized the importance of the implementation of the deal, especially a cut in the Taliban's ties with al-Qaeda.

"We're in the midst of a very rigorous review of the policy toward Afghanistan and in particular, we need to review carefully ...

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## Armenia Cuts the Number of its Peacekeepers in Afghanistan

Armenia has reduced the number of its peacekeeping troops in the NATO-led missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo, Armenian Defense Minister Vagharshak Harutyunyan said in an interview with the Russian RIA Novosti news agency.

"During the hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, we significantly cut the number of our peacekeeping contingent in Afghanistan from 121 to 58 troops and from 40 to 2 in Kosovo," he said.

Regarding the humanitarian ...

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## Parliament Approves Draft Budget for 1,400 Fiscal Year



The Lower House of Parliament on Monday approved the draft budget for the 1,400 fiscal year with majority of votes after two times being rejected.

On Sunday, MPs and the Finance Ministry officials agreed on almost all 19 disputed points, but they still have not agreed on the allocation

of the budget for the High Council for National Reconciliation as well as over the reduction in the number of development projects. There were disagreements on a 15 million Afs allocation for Afghanistan Oil and Gas Regulatory authority, this issue was solved in the third draft, and the estimated

budget for the year 1400 is nearly \$6 billion about 473 billion Afs. About \$4 billion is allocated for the regular budget and the rest is for the development budgets.

In the approved draft 105 million Afs that make \$1.3 million was shifted to the regular budget from the development budget.

### Spain: 160...

difficult for police to pass but also causing widespread damage.

The flaming barricades have damaged roads and nearby buildings and even melted traffic lights. In Barcelona alone, the damage to public property has been pegged at around \$1 million.

The protests have also given way to direct clashes between police and protestors. Protestors often hurl objects at police, while police freely charge crowds with batons and vans.

Several people have been seriously injured, including a young woman who lost her eye after being shot with a rubber bullet.

Outside of Catalonia, protestors have also been arrested in Madrid, Bilbao, Granada, and Pamplona.

More protests have been called for Monday night in Barcelona, set to mark seven straight days of clashes in the Catalan capital.

### Germany Urges...

In Germany Navalny had been recovering from being poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent. Navalny said Russian state security agents had put the poison in his underpants, something the Kremlin denied.

Pressure for sanctions has grown since Moscow infuriated European countries on Feb. 5 by expelling German, Polish and Swedish diplomats without telling the EU's foreign policy chief, who was in Moscow for a visit.

Still, Maas said he believed the EU needed to keep up some kind of diplomacy with Moscow.

"At the same time we need to talk about how to keep up a constructive dialogue with Russia, even as relations certainly have reached a low," Maas said.

By Wang Yu, Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan

## China Actively Upholds Multilateralism, Jointly Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind with Afghanistan

The world today is caught between a pandemic of the century and momentous changes never seen in the last one hundred years. Human society is going through the most serious pandemic in the past century, and the world economy is witnessing the worst recession since the end of the World War II. Unilateralism, protectionism and acts of bullying are becoming rampant, and the deficit in governance, trust, development and peace is widening instead of narrowing. What has happened to the world and how should we respond? The whole world is reflecting on this question.

On January 25th, Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the World Economic Forum Virtual Event of the Davos Agenda via video link and delivered the special address entitled "Let the Torch of Multilateralism Light up Humanity's Way Forward", which reflects deeply on the four major tasks facing people of our times, precisely points out the problems of global development and incisively explains what multilateralism is about, setting out the direction, targets and steps of upholding multilateralism under the new situation, and expressing China's determination to firmly uphold multilateralism and stand united and work together with other countries. It also answers the major questions at a new crossroads of history such as "how to see" and "what to do", and provides China's proposition and strength for human development, which has been highly acclaimed by all parties in the meeting. Under the theme "A Crucial Year to Rebuild Trust", "multilateralism" became the high frequency word in the meeting, and President Xi Jinping's proposition has been widely recognized by the international community of upholding multilateralism and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Upholding multilateralism is also becoming the consensus and the direction of joint efforts between China and Afghanistan. Since the beginning of the Afghan issue, China has been standing for international justice, making tireless efforts with international community to push for solving the Afghan issue and realizing peace and stability in Afghanistan at an early date. Since the start of the



peaceful reconstruction in Afghanistan, China has been supporting the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), pushing for and supporting the passage of various resolutions on the Afghan issue by UN General Assembly and Security Council, actively participating in different discussions in the Security Council and different multilateral mechanisms on the Afghan issue, as well as upholding and implementing the principle of "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned". President Ghani especially emphasized the importance of multilateralism at the general debate of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly last year, calling on UN to play the important role in solving different problems facing Afghanistan. Currently Afghanistan is at a critical stage of the peace and reconciliation process. How can China and Afghanistan draw wisdom from the spirit of multilateralism and push for solving the Afghan issue at an early date? I think the special address by President Xi Jinping is very enlightening and meaningful in this regard.

The first is to stay committed to openness and inclusiveness. President Xi Jinping points out that we should act on the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, uphold the common values of humanity, i.e. peace, development,

equity, justice, democracy and freedom, and make the mechanisms, principles and policies of our cooperation as open and inclusive as possible. As Afghanistan's most trustworthy neighbour, China is more willing than any other country to see its realization of peace, stability, reconstruction and development. Besides, China has long been enhancing the cooperation with Afghanistan within the framework of "One Belt, One Road" initiative, remaining Afghanistan's third largest trading partner for many years, making full use of sub-regional cooperation mechanisms such as China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, making the most of Afghanistan's geographical advantages, enhancing connectivity and promoting its social & economic development as well as the improvement of Afghan people's livelihood. Facing the epidemic of COVID-19 and at the request of the World Health Organization, China is determined to provide 10 million doses of vaccine for COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), which is mainly for developing countries in urgent need including Afghanistan. China is promoting high-standard opening up, establishing a "dual circulation" development pattern in which domestic economic cycle plays a leading role while international economic cycle ...

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By Kamran Yousaf

## Afghanistan: The Graveyard of Empires

On February 17 and 18, the defense ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) held a virtual conference. One of the key items on the table was to assess the current situation of Afghanistan. The NATO defense ministers had to decide whether or not to leave Afghanistan by May 1 as part of the U.S.-Taliban February 29 deal. "Defense ministers had a thorough discussion on the situation in Afghanistan. We are faced with many dilemmas and there are no easy options. At this stage we have made no final decision on the future of our presence," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told a news conference after the two-day meeting. The reason the U.S. and NATO forces are facing a dilemma is that they don't have a clear exit strategy. If they don't withdraw by May 1, as the U.S. had agreed with the Taliban, the foreign forces risk being attacked by the insurgents. If they withdraw by this summer without any political agreement among the different Afghan groups, the gains of the past 19 years may be undone.

The Biden administration is still undertaking a review of the peace deal and that is perhaps the main reason that NATO could not take a final call on their presence in Afghanistan.

Since the new administration took charge in the U.S., a number of officials made it

clear that the U.S. troops' withdrawal is dependent on the Taliban implementing the Doha Accord. The U.S. feels that the Taliban have failed to take steps agreed in the Doha deal. The key element was the reduction in violence and cutting ties with terrorist groups. Both the U.S. and NATO believe that the Afghan Taliban have yet to fulfil those two promises fully. They have since been insisting that the troops' withdrawal is condition-based.

The Taliban, meanwhile, put out a series of statements recently, giving both reconciliatory as well as threatening messages. The insurgent group has denied it violated the Doha Accord. It has listed a number of steps it took to implement the agreement. To back up their claims, the Taliban insist not a single American soldier was killed since the deal was signed. Instead, they accused the Afghan government of violating the peace accord. The most important message the Taliban conveyed in their statements include the possible restart of the attacks against the U.S.-led foreign forces in Afghanistan if they extend their stay beyond the May 1 deadline. The U.S. and other international forces were reminded of the fate the former Soviet Union forces met in the past.

The developing situation suggests that the U.S.-Taliban deal, which was dubbed as historic when it was signed a year ago, is on the verge of collapse. This is not an encouraging sign for Pakistan, a key stakeholder that facilitated and brokered the peace deal as well as the intra-Afghan dialogue. The U.S. is likely to come with a new "wish list" for Pakistan once it is done reviewing the Doha Accord. The readout of the latest telephone call between President Ashraf Ghani and the U.S. Secretary of State suggests that the U.S. wants visible reduction in violence, if not an all-out ceasefire, before it commits to the drawdown plan. This may put added pressure on Pakistan, which would be asked to push the Taliban to reduce violence. Islamabad, meanwhile, is consulting other regional players. The recent visit of Russian special envoy in Afghanistan to Islamabad was seen as significant. Russia, unlike the U.S. and NATO, thinks that the Taliban are fully implementing the agreement. Moscow has rather accused the other side of not adhering to the deal. This shows the situation is getting even murkier with regional players looking at U.S. intentions with suspicion. Against this backdrop, the odds are not in favour of peace returning to Afghanistan in the near future.

### Bringing China-U.S....

being fixated on remodeling, suppressing or even defeating the other. Such attempts have not succeeded, and never will. They will only cause unnecessary problems and even conflicts," said Wang.

Wang added that China and the United States should not interfere in each other's internal affairs. Only with true mutual respect can China-U.S. relations achieve steady improvement and growth in the long run.

"Since the establishment of diplomatic ties, China has all along respected the choices made by the American people, welcomed the strong growth momentum of the United States, and never interfered in its internal affairs. We have no intention to challenge or replace the United States. We are ready to have peaceful coexistence and seek common development with the United States. Likewise, we hope the United States will respect China's core interests, national dignity, and rights to development. We urge the United States to stop smearing the Communist Party of China and China's political system, stop conniving at or even supporting the erroneous words and actions of separatist forces for 'Taiwan independence', and stop undermining China's sovereignty and security on internal affairs concerning Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet. Only with true mutual respect can China-U.S. relations achieve steady improvement and growth in the long run," said Wang. (CCTVPlus)

## 60% of Intl Aid Not Included in Budget: Arg

President Ghani, speaking at an event on Thursday focused on the 2020 Geneva conference follow-ups and implementation of commitments, said that 60 percent of the international aid to Afghanistan was not included in the government's budget allocations for the coming year. The budget is currently still being debated between the Finance Ministry and a Parliament committee.

"60 percent of aid has gone out of the national budget; it is not the fault of the international community. Make the budget effective, make the state institutions accountable, the money will return," said Ghani.

Ghani said that the main reason was the challenges that exist in the Afghan government, but stated that

this aid could be brought into the structure of the country's national budget if there was transparency and accountability among the state institutions.

Ghani emphasized that budget reform and implementation will play a key role in fulfilling Afghanistan's commitments at the Geneva Summit. Ghani said that he strongly supports the Ministry of Finance's bringing significant amendments to the budget.

Ghani described corruption as the biggest weak point of the government and emphasized the need to combat the endemic corruption in a resolute way.

President Ghani added that without a change in the current administrative culture, it would not be possible to



achieve the goals that Afghanistan committed to at the Geneva summit. "The Ministry of Finance has my full support in this respect. Also, the digitalization process is underway to help digitalize Afghanistan's govt, economy and there is a digital

society," said Ghani. Ghani also said: "We will inherit a strong government, a dynamic market, lasting and just peace, and a unified nation for present and future generations, and this will not happen without building infrastructure."

### President Ghani:...

the agreements that have been reached between the United States and the Taliban and that the work that we've done with the government of Afghanistan and all of that work is ongoing," Blinken said. Moreover, Michael McCaul, a top US Republican, has said in an interview with CNN that President Biden needs to keep US troops in Afghanistan to prevent the Taliban from taking over.

"I think Afghanistan can be very important. I hope that the Biden administration I can work with them on this and talk to Secretary Blinken and the national security adviser about leaving a residual force there to protect the homeland and not allow the Taliban to take over their country," the US congressman said.

Among all these, President Ghani's special envoy for Pakistan, Mohammad Umer Daudzai, is set to travel to Islamabad on Wednesday where he will call on the Pakistani government to bring the Taliban back to the table of negotiations.

"I hope that they (Pakistan) use their influence effectively and logically to bring the Taliban back to the table of the negotiations and resume meaningful talks," Daudzai said.

The negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban negotiators are stopped for the last 36 days, during which they were expected to hold meetings at working group levels to finalize the agenda of the talks.

### UNHCR to Facilitate...

According to the report, (UNHCR) has a plan to facilitate around 58,000 Afghan refugees, living in Pakistan, to ensure their return home by 2021.

UNHCR would enroll 61,500 refugee children during the year 2021, providing them an access to primary education. The children would impart education in 137 schools of 54 refugee villages set up across the country, UNHCR Pakistan document added.

### China Actively...

remains its extension and supplement, and is willing to continue the joint building of high-quality "One Belt, One Road" initiative with Afghanistan, promoting the stable enhancement of economy and trade between the two countries as well as further economic development and improvement of people's livelihood in Afghanistan.

The second is to stay committed to consultation and cooperation. President Xi Jinping points out that we should reject the outdated Cold War and zero-sum game mentality, adhere to mutual respect and accommodation, enhance political trust through strategic communication, and stick to the cooperation concept based on mutual benefit. As to the Afghan peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan, we call on all parties in Afghanistan to set store by the greater national interests, and reach a widely representative and inclusive political framework at an early date through internal negotiations, which allows all political parties, ethnic and religious groups to participate on an equal footing and share the state power. As Afghanistan's sincere friend, China will, as always, remain the supporter, mediator and facilitator for its peaceful reconciliation process, while calling on the international community and countries in the region to adhere to

fairness and morality and jointly support Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction, in which different multilateral mechanisms on the Afghan issue should play a positive role.

The third is to stay committed to keeping up with the times. President Xi Jinping points out that the world is undergoing changes unseen in a century, and now is the time for major development and major transformation, and that to uphold multilateralism in the 21st century, we should promote its fine tradition, take on new perspectives and look to the future, responding to global challenges as they arise, and reforming and improving the global governance system on the basis of extensive consultation and consensus-building. Terrorism is the common enemy of mankind, and both China and Afghanistan are its victims and are in the front line of global fight against terrorism, with international terrorist groups such as "East Turkestan Islamic Movement" (ETIM) being the common threat to the two countries. China opposes terrorism in all its forms and proposes that both the symptoms and root causes of terrorism shall be addressed and international cooperation shall be strengthened for the anti-terrorism cause. Hopefully close coordination could be made by the international community to promote

Afghanistan's security capacity building and keep enhancing the capability of the Afghan Armed Forces to fight terrorism as well as its military literacy. China calls on foreign troops to withdraw in an orderly and responsible manner to prevent terrorist groups from taking any chance to create turmoils and to ensure a peaceful transition in Afghanistan. China opposes any attempt to make Afghanistan the battlefield of international competition, especially the attempt to arbitrarily launch "new Cold War" and proxy war in Afghanistan which threatens the interests of other countries. China is willing to deepen anti-terrorism cooperation with the international community including Afghanistan and jointly safeguard peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.

"We believe that when the interests of the entire humanity are at stake, China must step forward, take action, and get the job done." The powerful address by President Xi Jinping demonstrates China's solemn promise to the world and willingness to take up its responsibilities as a major global power. China will, as always, firmly uphold multilateralism and work together with other countries towards win-win cooperation, providing certainty for the world undergoing changes and playing a more constructive role in Afghanistan at the critical crossroads of history.

### Armenia Cuts...

mission in Syria, he noted that Armenia will continue its mission there "because the Syrian people today are at the forefront of countering global terrorism, and it is our duty, especially that there is a thousand-strong Armenian diaspora in that country."

'Our humanitarian mission, based on close cooperation

with the Russian military, will certainly continue in Syria, and I must note that even after the Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh in autumn last year, we did not suspend our peacekeeping activity in Syria," he said.

Harutyunyan said also that Armenia is also involved in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. (UNIFIL)

with 33 troops, and has also one serviceman in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

In early February 2019, the Armenian Ministry of Defense announced the dispatch of the first group of 83 Armenian specialists to Syria, comprising humanitarian demining and medical personnel.

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# COVID-19: WHO Official Says Pandemic to End at Beginning of 2022

The World Health Organization (WHO) regional director for Europe said Sunday he believes the coronavirus outbreak will end in early 2022. Hans Kluge told Danish state broadcaster DR that COVID-19 will still be prevalent in 2021, but it will be more manageable than in 2020. Stating that the worst scenarios are now over, Kluge said there is more information concerning the virus compared to 2020, when it first began spreading.

He cautioned, however, that no one can know the future of the COVID-19 pandemic in advance.

"There will continue to be a virus, but I don't think restrictions will be needed. This is an optimistic message," he said.

Kluge said mutations are normal and the virus is trying to adapt to the person infected, but

the rapid spread of the mutations is a concern for them.

Adding that the WHO is closely monitoring the effectiveness of vaccines developed against COVID-19 due to the fast-spreading types of the virus, he said vaccines can be altered based on the new mutations if necessary and there is no need to produce them from the ground up. He said mutations will not make the virus out of control but noted that countries whose health care systems are already under pressure could come under even more pressure, which makes it necessary to take the mutations very seriously.

Kluge indicated that the biggest problem will emerge when those who are vaccinated are in the same environment with those who are not, so scheduling is a very important factor.



### A look at the world

#### Spain: 160 Arrested over 6 Nights of Violent Protests

Over six nights of sometimes-violent protests triggered by a rapper's jailing, Spanish police have arrested at least 160 people.

Most of those arrested were protesting in rapper Pablo Hasel's home region of Catalonia, where major cities like Barcelona have seen six consecutive nights of protests and rioting.

Catalan police said Monday that 129 people in the region had been detained since last Tuesday.

The protests aim to free Hasel, who was sentenced to nine months in prison for



glorifying terrorism and insulting the Spanish monarchy and police in his song lyrics and tweets.

Amnesty International has decried the sentence. A group of around 200 Spanish artists, including film director Pedro Almodovar and actor Javier Bardem, signed a petition in his support, warning that Spain's free speech laws pose a threat to "all public personalities who dare to openly criticize the actions of state institutions." But the protests have gone far beyond peaceful demonstrations in favor of free expression.

On several occasions, protestors were seen looting shops and other businesses. On Saturday, rioters shattered the windows of Nike, Tommy Hilfiger, Versace and Diesel stores on the Barcelona shopping street of La Gracia, breaking in and taking whatever they could.

A favorite tactic of the protestors is forming barricades between themselves and police, using anything moveable on the street – large garbage containers, vehicles, street signs, or café tables. They pile them up and set them ablaze, making it more ... **P2**

#### Germany Urges EU to Prepare Sanctions on Russia over Navalny



German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on Monday urged his EU counterparts to give the green light to sanctions against Russian officials responsible for jailing Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and cracking down on pro-democracy activists.

Berlin's call paves the way for sanctions to be imposed next month in what the 27-member bloc says should be seen as a message to President Vladimir Putin that debate and protest must be allowed in Russia.

"I am in favour of ordering the preparation of additional sanctions, of listings of specific persons," Maas said as he arrived in Brussels. He said sanctions were pressing because Navalny had not only been sentenced to a prison term earlier this month, but also to serve this term in a labour camp.

Diplomats expect the EU to impose travel bans and asset freezes on allies of Putin next month, once experts have gathered evidence to withstand any legal challenges.

A group of EU foreign ministers met Navalny's chief of staff Leonid Volkov in Brussels on Sunday to build their case for punitive steps against Russia, which is already under Western economic sanctions after its 2014 annexation of Crimea.

EU foreign ministers will also hold a video call with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken later on Monday.

"We cannot turn a blind eye to blatant breaches of human rights violations in Russia," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said after Sunday's meeting.

Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korcok echoed the mood of many EU diplomats, saying on arrival in Brussels on Monday: "I do not see that the European Union is responsible for the confrontational course that Russia has taken." Navalny was detained after returning to Russia from Germany last month and jailed on Feb. 2 for violating the terms of parole on what he says was a politically motivated conviction. Moscow denies wrongdoing and accuses the EU of meddling in its affairs. ... **P2**

#### Bringing China-U.S. Ties Back to Right Track Calls for Mutual Respect: Chinese FM

Bringing China-U.S. ties back to the right track calls for mutual respect of both countries, and no interference in each other's internal affairs, said Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Monday.

Wang emphasized mutual respect in China-U.S. relations when delivering a keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Lanting Forum in Beijing, with



the theme of "Promoting Dialogue and Cooperation and Managing Differences: Bringing China-U.S. Relations Back to the Right Track."

Wang said that 50 years ago, Dr. Henry Kissinger made the ice-breaking visit to China, and with extraordinary political resolve, leaders of China and the United States jointly reopened the door of interaction which had been closed for decades. Fifty-years later, Wang said, both countries should make once again sensible and right decisions and have a sense of responsibility for the two countries and the world so as to bring bilateral relations back to the right track. "China believes that first of all, the two sides should respect each other and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs. This is a basic norm governing international relations. For major countries like China and the United States, there is a greater need to respect each other, rather than ... **P2**



# Shigal English Academy

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