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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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**U.S. Secretary of State, UN Chief to Stay in Close Touch on Afghanistan**

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres discussed the situations in Afghanistan, this week and agreed to remain in close contact on the issues, Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday. "Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday to discuss Afghanistan. On Afghanistan, Secretary Blinken thanked Secretary-General Guterres for his commitment to helping advance talks on a just and durable political settlement and permanent and comprehensive ceasefire," Price said in a statement. Price said that the top U.S. diplomat thanked the global body chief for his commitment to move forward talks on a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire in Afghanistan.



**Afghan Foreign Minister to Visit Delhi on March 21**

Afghanistan Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar will travel to India on March 21 for talks on Strategic Partnership as well as the recent developments on the Intra-Afghan dialogue led by the U.S. and Russia, sources confirmed. The visit is significant as it will come days after a conference in Moscow, which would include envoys from the U.S., China, Pakistan, Qatar and the Afghan and Taliban leadership, but doesn't include India as a part of the "Extended Troika" mechanism. A U.S.-initiated proposal for intra-Afghan dialogue, facilitated by Turkey, is expected to take place in the first two weeks of April in Istanbul, while dates are awaited for another American proposal, outlined by U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in a letter to Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani, for a United Nations-led regional dialogue that includes the U.S., Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and India. ... **P3**

## Govt Will Attend Turkey, Russia Meetings on Afghan Peace: Officials



National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib on Saturday the Afghan government will participate in the UN-led conference in Turkey – proposed by the US – and the Moscow conference on Afghanistan's peace.

Mohib said that the Afghan government is working on a delegation for the two events. The Turkey conference was proposed by the US in a letter by Secretary of State Antony Blinken to President Ashraf Ghani and

Abdullah Abdullah, the chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, this month. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Friday said the UN-led meeting on Afghan peace "is planned to be held in Istanbul in

April." "We were one of the few countries invited to this signing ceremony, and we are one of the most important actors in Afghanistan," the Turkish minister said as quoted in a report by Anadolu Agency. Politicians from Afghanistan, including President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah as well as foreign envoys and the Taliban representatives, are expected to attend the meeting in Moscow on March 18 to discuss the Afghan peace process, the reconciliation council's spokesman Fraidoon Khwazoon said last week. "When it comes to participation, we will participate in the meetings," Mohib told a press briefing in which he was joined by the country's security chief, but he added that an interim government – that has been proposed as a solution to move the peace process forward – "will take the country to nowhere." Interior Ministry Maj. Gen. Massoud Andarabi said the Afghan forces have made "special preparations" over the last three months to face the Taliban on the battlefields in a possible new fighting season. The fighting season is expected ... **P3**

**Rain, Snow, Flash Flood Warning Issued for 30 Provinces of Afghanistan**

The Afghanistan Meteorological Department has issued a rain, snow and flash flood warning for 20 provinces from today to tomorrow. According to a warning posted on the AMD's website, the department stated between 10 and 40mm of rain forecast for a number of provinces. The provinces include Herat, Badghis, Faryab, Ghor, Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, Balkh, Samangan, Kunduz, Bamiyan, Daikundi, Uruzgan, and Ghazni provinces. The AMD also warned of the possibility of heavy snow on the Salang pass and Wardak, Logar, Paktia, Parwan, Panjshir, Kapisa, Laghman, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Badakhshan, Kunar, Kabul and parts of Helmand and Farah provinces.



**Russia Invites Qatar to Meeting on Afghan Peace**



Russia has invited Qatar as an honorary guest to a meeting on Afghanistan in Moscow, the country's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said on Friday. A multi-nation meeting on the Afghan peace process will take place on March 18 at the level of the special envoys, Maria Zakharova said at a news conference in Moscow. Russia, the US, China and

Pakistan will attend the meeting. "A delegation from the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Supreme Council for National Reconciliation, prominent Afghan political figures, the Taliban, and, as an honorary guest, Qatar, are also expected to attend," she said. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will address the

gathering, she said. "During the meeting, it is expected to discuss ways to advance the inter-Afghan talks in Doha, reduce the level of violence and end the armed conflict in Afghanistan, and establish this country as an independent, peaceful and self-sufficient state, free from terrorism and drug crime," Zakharova said.

## Biden Pushes...

COVID-19," he said.  
"The Quad, at the end of the day, is now a critical part of the architecture of the Indo-Pacific. And today's summit also kicks off an intensive stretch of diplomacy in the region," added Sullivan.  
Shortly after the meeting concluded the Quad said in a joint statement that member states would work to bolster vaccination in the Indo-Pacific region "in close coordination with the existing relevant multilateral mechanisms including WHO and" the UN's vaccination program, the White House said in a statement.  
"Drawing on each of our strengths, we will tackle this complex issue with multi-sectoral cooperation across many stages of action, starting with ensuring global availability of safe and effective vaccines," it said.

## Minneapolis...

that's what I commit to do," Jenkins continued.  
The \$27m settlement also includes a \$500,000 contribution from the Floyd family to the neighbourhood where Floyd died. Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, died on May 25 after officer Derek Chauvin, who is white, knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes while Floyd pleaded "I can't breathe" and bystanders implored the officers to let him go. Along with Chauvin, two other officers held Floyd to the ground while he was handcuffed. Floyd was arrested on suspicion of his using a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes at a Minneapolis grocery store.  
Floyd's death sparked protests in Minneapolis and across the US and led to a nationwide reckoning on racial justice.

By Imran Malik

# President Biden and Afghanistan

President Biden's reset of US' Asia policy will primarily determine the future contours of Sino-US relations. It will address the massive Chinese ingress into the various Asian sub-regions like the Greater Middle East, South-Central Asia and Indo-Pacific as major policy objectives/compulsions. Will President Biden bluntly confront China as President Trump did; will he co-opt it for larger bilateral and universal benefit or will he just try to contain and manage its rise? Regardless, he will block all Chinese challenges to the US' singular position as the sole economic power and hegemon of the world.

US' Afghan policy, a subset of its overall Asia policy, will determine the strategic direction/fate of its Afghan campaign.

President Biden will only continue with the Afghan Campaign if it contributes directly to achieving his major policy objectives in Asia of, at the least, containing and managing the rise of China; the strategic implication being stemming the BRI-CPEC—China's economic juggernaut! Could there then be a paradigm shift in the objectives of the US Afghan campaign—from counter terrorism to containing China and its BRI-CPEC? If so, then the badly mis-firing Afghan campaign might yet get rejuvenated and reinforced; else President Biden might just cut his losses and make a clean break.

Afghanistan is located at the confluence of the three Asias—West, Central and South. This central position affords any power (currently the US) occupying it unblemished spheres of influence and strategic reach into these regions. Geopolitically, by egressing Afghanistan the US will lose these and other geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic advantages. China will be left unopposed in the region. The resultant vacuum will cause the regional powers—China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan (CRIP), to gravitate purposefully towards Afghanistan; even peripheral India will have pretensions. China will be keen to incorporate Afghanistan into its BRI-CPEC and create an interconnected and economically interdependent network between the three Asias through it. Afghanistan could potentially become the BRI's fulcrum, it's pivot in this region. Russia too will re-engage Afghanistan. Pakistan and Iran will remain crucial to Afghanistan's prosperous future. Geo-economically, leaving Afghanistan will



deny the US close oversight on the BRI-CPEC and its East-West and North-South trade corridors across the region and the fossil fuel reserves of Iran and the CARs; also, the plentiful mineral resources of Afghanistan (reportedly between USD1-3 trillion), CARs and Pakistan's Baluchistan. Russia and the CARs however, seek access to the Makran Coast-Gwadar through Afghanistan for trade. Geo-strategically, the US will lose intimate oversight on Iran's and Pakistan's nuclear-missile programs and a very advantageous position to envelope the Makran Coast from, were it to ever get militarized. Most importantly, it will lose the ability to threaten the BRI-CPEC from its most dominant central position amongst the three Asia's.

President Biden has three basic options to choose from. He could adopt President Trump's current policy and withdraw from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021, regardless of how the Intra Afghan dialogue fares. The CRIP expects the US to make a responsible withdrawal from Afghanistan. It would rather have Terrorism Central (IS, Al Qaeda, TTP, JuA, IMU, EMIT etc) caged and destroyed within Afghanistan prior to the US' departure. An injudicious withdrawal will condemn Afghanistan to serious infighting, chaos, inevitable implosion and balkanisation. The region will be severely destabilized. The Afghan Taliban would welcome US' egress as it would hasten their move on to Kabul while the NUG will be petrified

to lose US patronage. Terrorism Central and India will exploit the anarchy to their advantage, with the latter's state sponsored terrorism into Pakistan continuing to thrive!

Option two could be to continue pursuing the Afghan campaign with renewed vigor. This would entail a further surge in US and Allied troop numbers in pursuit of an apparently indefinite, even unattainable objective. It would tantamount to reinforcing utter failure. CRIP would rather see the US leave the region in a responsible manner. However, Pakistan could again come under relentless US pressure to ditch the Taliban and eliminate their so-called safe havens on its territory. The Taliban will consider it a breach of its agreement with the US and will promptly revert to its ferocious, militant ways. The NUG will relish staying in power, while the RAW-NDS nexus will continue its diabolical state sponsored terrorist attacks into Pakistan. Unless attacked, terrorism central will flourish in these environments.

The third option is for a responsible US withdrawal. The US could delay its egress by a year or so. This may give the intra-Afghan dialogue better chances to reach a peaceful and effective closure. The US (or a Special Representative of the UNSG) could act as an honest broker between the two parties. Without effective moderation-arbitration the very serious issues of the form of government ...

P3

By EVE OTTENBERG

## Leaving Afghanistan by May 1? Alas, Not Likely

Will the U.S. military ever leave Afghanistan? The answer appears to be no. When the U.S. military comes it stays. It's been in Germany since the 1940s, and now has expanded, with its attack dog, NATO, from there throughout Eastern Europe to menace Russia. The Afghan adventure has so far lasted 20 years and cost two trillion dollars. Afghanistan provides a convenient, imperial base from which to threaten China. The U.S. military, realistically, will never want to give that up.  
Trump left office with plans in place for the remaining 2500 U.S. troops to depart Afghanistan by May 1. Not a word about the 18,000 contractors, aka mercenaries, who have long outnumbered U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan. Like those soldiers, these mercenaries' lives are at risk. They are also a geopolitical liability. If one gets killed, as happened not too long ago in Iraq, the U.S. retaliates. That could ignite war at any time.  
Trump's attempt to remove U.S. commandos from Afghanistan was a grudging concession to reality: the Taliban control most of the

country and, if things continue on their current trajectory, will sooner rather than later rule all of it. They are a battle-hardened force, regard Americans as invaders and certainly don't need the much ballyhooed and likely phony bounties from Russia as an incentive to attack U.S. troops. (Western media also accused the Chinese, those copy-cats, of putting bounties on U.S. soldiers, but somehow that frenzied fabrication never caused the hullabaloo that the Russian one did.) The Trump team therefore negotiated with the Taliban, who did not cease harassing U.S.-backed and financed Afghan government forces throughout this process. Biden quickly applied the brakes to the Trump disengagement vehicle.  
Biden must know that by staying longer or adding troops, he ensures U.S. casualties. The military knows it. But that's a price our generals appear willing to pay. After all, the Taliban and the U.S. military have been killing each other for 20 years. What's another 20? U.S. generals have referred to this war as a "generational" conflict. Apparently,

they don't mean just one generation. "The consequences of unilaterally ignoring the May withdrawal deadline will be the dissolution of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, placing U.S. soldiers back in the crosshairs of the Taliban," wrote Adam Weinstein recently in Responsible Statecraft, "and an end to intra-Afghan negotiations." Weinstein argues that those intra-Afghan talks may fail to produce a peace agreement, "but it is dead on arrival if Washington chooses to ignore the deadline altogether. An endless U.S. war effort will be the only remaining option." Altogether 35 governments currently have soldiers in Afghanistan. According to World Beyond War, these troop numbers range "from Slovenia's six to the U.S.'s 2500. Most countries have fewer than 100." Meanwhile, Ireland, Canada, Jordan, Croatia, New Zealand and France have removed their soldiers altogether. It's a safe bet that were the U.S. to honor its deal with the Taliban and leave, those other 34 countries would follow suit.  
That is the wise course. "Militarily the war against the Taliban has

long been lost," according to Moon of Alabama on February 23. "Even with the 100,000 western troops the Obama administration had sent, there was no way to win it." But of course, if the U.S. finally departs, the current Afghan government may very well fall. Talks resumed on February 23, but the Taliban still resist a ceasefire; they still kill Afghan government troops, and plenty of other Afghans.  
In late February, Secretary of State Antony Blinken "proposed a United Nations-led peace conference," in a letter, MSN reported, to form "an inclusive Afghan government with the Taliban and establishing a three-month reduction in violence leading to a ceasefire." Blinken suggests convoking the foreign ministers of Russia, the United States, China, India, Pakistan and Iran to put together a peace proposal. This longshot actually seems like a good idea; it worked with the Iran nuclear deal, until Trump came along. Let's just hope the U.S. never has another such loony leader, determined to rip up every treaty that doesn't have his very own signature on it.  
Meanwhile a ceasefire. Such a truce is what's needed, argues Dexter Filkins in the New Yorker – a promise from the Taliban to stop its attacks. But there's no clear path

to getting that before May 1, even with Blinken's offer – and it may not exist any time after that, either. Still, Washington appears to want to delay the withdrawal deadline, which the Taliban will not agree to. In an aside exposing the cruelty, dysfunction and absolute power of empire, Filkins describes how the U.S. transferred Taliban leaders from Guantanamo, where many had been tortured and all had been isolated for nearly 20 years, to luxury apartments with their families in Doha, so they can negotiate ending the war. Filkins mentions that some of these Taliban seem dazed and unfocused after so many years in prison. From the lower depths to opulence, in the time it takes for one plane trip. "We tortured you for years, but now we need you," is the peculiar message from U.S. negotiators, whom these Taliban must regard with a jaundiced eye, to say the least, that is, those of them who still have the unbroken mental capacity to consider their circumstances.  
Western money sponsors the Afghan government, which clings to power and has stalled negotiations on occasion. "Without financial pressure," Moon of Alabama writes, "there is no chance that the Afghan government and the Taliban will ever reach a ...

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## Pakistan Allows Cotton Import from Afghanistan

Pakistan has allowed import of cotton from Afghanistan through Torkham border as the country is facing a lower domestic cotton production. According to sources from Pakistani, the country's cotton harvest has declined considerably as farmers are switching over to other lucrative crops. Pakistan's textile sector consumes around 12 million bales (170,000 kg) of cotton per annum but production

has fallen short of the requirement over the past one and a half decade. (Source: Tribune) Cotton is at its lowest production level in decades in Pakistan. The cotton harvest target has been set at 10.89 million bales, but the output has been estimated at only 7.7 million bales. The government pressured the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) to permit imports from Afghanistan and Central Asian States.



### Govt Will Attend...

to start in days if peace efforts fail to reduce violence in the country.

Andarabi added that they remain hopeful for peace in the country but if the peace efforts fail, the government forces are ready to defend the country. In his letter, Blinken puts forth suggestions to the Afghan government to accelerate the peace process, including convening a UN-facilitated conference with international stakeholders, proposals to facilitate discussion between the two sides to form a negotiated settlement and ceasefire, a meeting in Turkey between both sides to finalize a peace agreement, and a revised proposal for a 90-day reduction in violence.

However, along with these proposals, Blinken made clear that the United States is considering all options regarding Afghanistan, including the May 1st deadline for full withdrawal.

Many Afghan political leaders have welcomed both conferences on Afghan peace with the hope that it will expedite the stalled peace process.

Former president Hamid Karzai in an interview with the Associated Press said that the US draft for a deal between the Afghan government and the Taliban is the best chance to accelerate stalled peace talks between the country's warring sides.

Karzai said that Afghans themselves "are in a hurry for peace."

Meanwhile, Russia has said that it is in favor of Afghanistan forming an interim government including members of the Taliban as new meetings are expected to be held on the Afghan peace process in Turkey and in Moscow.

"The formation of an interim inclusive administration would be a logical solution to the problem of integrating the Taliban into the peaceful political life of Afghanistan," Russia's WioNews reported on Friday quoting Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

Zakharova however added that the decision should be made "by the Afghans themselves and should be resolved during negotiations on national reconciliation."

### Leaving...

power sharing deal. Even if there would be an agreement, there is little chance that it will be upheld by all sides. The conflict would likely reignite and the Taliban would win." The most viable solution is a speedy U.S. departure. But anonymous officials have said that as far as the Biden team's concerned, a full withdrawal by May is off the table. In his letter, however, Blinken says it's still possible. One wonders how the U.S. government will prime the press to cover this likely extension of an utterly pointless war. Will it squawk "democracy!" as it has so often in the past? After the initial U.S. assault to root out al Qaeda in 2001, democracy-building was the watchword. Then came feminism, promoted by the unlikely trio of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld. Lately less of that. Instead, we get tired nostrums about "reducing the level of violence." Not to be a party pooper, but there will always be violence in Afghanistan. If we wait until perfect peace breaks out, we'll be there forever, which appears to be the plan. Just how badly the democracy venture was a bust is instructive. "Afghan officials have conspired

for more than 15 years to both multiply and ignore election fraud," wrote James Bovard recently in CounterPunch. "U.S. tax dollars poured into the coffers of Afghanistan's Electoral Complaints Commission (EOC) to safeguard voting. Alas - that agency was a prime source of the most brazen vote stealing." Tangled up with all these prevarications about why we're in Afghanistan is the heroin trade. Since 2001 Afghanistan has led the world producing opium, responsible for over 90 percent of the world's heroin. By 2017, according to Alfred McCoy in the Guardian a year later, Afghan opium production had reached 9000 tons. Money from the sale of that pays wages to Taliban fighters. McCoy explains how western intervention made Afghanistan "the world's first true narco state."

It's not too much of a stretch to say the Afghan struggle is a war for control of the country's opium profits. A teachable moment is provided by the case of one Afghan drug-kingpin, Haji Juma Khan who, targeted by federal prosecutors and the DEA, never went to trial. His lawyer noted evidentiary discussions of "several law enforcement agencies from

the United States approaching people in Afghanistan, including Mr. Khan, and requesting assistance...payments made, services requested," according to a 2018 article in the Intercept. Allegations of the CIA's enmeshment in Afghan drug trafficking percolated thorough articles, reports and books in recent years. The U.S. government investigated some of these claims. Suffice it to say, it would be shocking if the CIA were NOT involved in the Afghan heroin trade. It's simply too lucrative to resist. But even with the CIA's hand in this cookie jar, the Taliban appears to have that jar firmly in its grasp. Which means they have a steady source of income to finance their war indefinitely. The only question is when will Washington accept reality and either leave or admit that it intends to squander blood and treasure in Afghanistan ad infinitum? Or will the high council of ministers that Blinken hopes to convene somehow save the day? Chances are a much more prosaic course will prevail: The U.S. military will stay and gloss over its plans. Democracy, peace, women's rights. Take your pick of these excuses. They all mean the same thing - endless war.

### President Biden...

(Islamic Sharia versus a secular, democratic, western style parliamentary system), the imposition of a viable ceasefire and the neutralization/elimination of Terrorism Central will be hard to achieve. This time delay might be acceptable to the Afghan antagonists and CRIP too. India's state sponsored terrorism into Pakistan however, would continue unabated. Terrorism Central could be neutralized/destroyed in this time period. This option will allow the aftermath of the US

withdrawal to be managed in a compelling and peaceful manner.

Were the US to leave arbitrarily then the CRIP must move in speedily to implement a regional solution to this seemingly intractable conundrum. The Moscow or Beijing process could be revived with Pakistan and Iran providing critical support. As fallback options the UN and/or the SCO fora could be considered too. Contingency planning thereto ought to be well underway. Under no circumstances should

this opportunity to bring peace and prosperity to Afghanistan and the region be lost.

Regardless of what President Biden decides it will have a massive impact on the future prospects of this region. The US and India have an ominous convergence of interests at disrupting, delaying and destroying the BRI-CPEC. It will be up to Pakistan and China to equalize the odds against it and secure it, regardless. Pakistan had better have its policy options worked out well, already!

### Afghan Foreign...

An Indian delegation led by Joint Secretary for Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan J.P. Singh in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) arrived in Kabul on Friday to prepare for Mr. Atmar's visit and for briefings on the coming dialogues in Moscow and Istanbul.

The Ghani government, which has thus far not spoken on the U.S. proposals for peace and

a power-sharing arrangement in Kabul, is understood to have accepted the invitation from Russia for the 'Troika-plus' meeting on March 18. Other Afghanistan leaders like former President Hamid Karzai, who will also attend the meeting in Moscow, is expected to travel to Delhi in April for the MEA's Raisina Dialogue conference. Mr. Atmar's travel to India will continue a series of

bilateral exchanges that indicate New Delhi's support for the Ghani government even as the U.S. pushes for a proposal to replace it with an interim or transitional government in Kabul as a part of a "draft agreement" to "jumpstart Afghanistan Peace Negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban" that has been leaked to the media this week.

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# UN Security Council Welcomes Libya Gov't Formation

The United Nations Security Council has welcomed the formation of a national unity government in Libya headed by Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh.

In a statement early Saturday, the Council stressed on the importance of the "unification of Libya's institutions, as set out in the roadmap agreed by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, held in Tunis, in November 2020".

The statement called on the Libyan government to take necessary preparations for setting Libya for "free and fair national presidential and parliamentary elections on 24 December 2021."

The Security Council also called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya. "The Security Council calls on all parties to implement the cease-fire

agreement in full and urges Member States to respect and support the full implementation of the agreement," the statement read.

In a majority vote, Libya's parliament granted a vote of confidence to Dbeibeh's new unity government on Wednesday with 132 votes of the 133 lawmakers who attended the session. Libyans hope it will end years of civil war that have engulfed the country since the ouster and killing of strongman Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011.

The war was exacerbated when warlord Khalifa Haftar, supported by several countries including the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Russia, and France, carried out a military onslaught to topple the Tripoli-based internationally recognized government for control of the North African country.



### A look at the world

#### Biden Pushes 'Free and Open' Pacific in China Counter

A "free and open Indo-Pacific is essential," US President Joe Biden said Friday in a near-certain reference to an increasingly assertive China.

Biden made the remarks during a historic meeting of the leaders of Japan, India and Australia, a group formally known as the Quad. Friday's session marks the first leader-level meeting since its inception in what is a sign of its growing importance.

"The United States is committed to working with you, our partners, and all of our allies in the region to achieve stability," Biden said in opening remarks as the virtual meeting began. "The Quad is going to be vital in our cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and I look



forward to looking closely to working with all of you in the coming years."

The Quad leaders announced in a joint statement issued shortly after their meeting concluded that they will meet for a second time later this year in what will be an in-person gathering.

Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security advisor, told reporters the leaders "addressed key regional issues, including freedom of navigation and freedom from coercion in the South East China Sea."

While China was not explicitly mentioned, it is squarely the target of the statement with its maritime policies in the region that have included manufacturing islands to expand its sovereign territorial claims at the cost of its neighbors', particularly Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam, as well as Taiwan.

The leaders also discussed North Korea's nuclear program, and the coup in Burma, according to Sullivan.

"The foreign leaders did discuss the challenge posed by China, and they made clear that none of them have any illusions about China, but today was not fundamentally about China. Much of the focus was on pressing global crises, including the climate crisis, and ... **P2**

#### Minneapolis Agrees to Pay \$27m to George Floyd's Family



The Minneapolis, Minnesota city council voted unanimously on Friday to pay \$27m to settle a lawsuit filed by George Floyd's family. The suit alleged the officers violated Floyd's rights when they restrained him, and that the city allowed a culture of excessive force, racism and impunity to flourish in its police force.

Floyd's sister Bridgett Floyd said in a statement that she and her family were "pleased that this part of our tragic journey to justice for my brother George is resolved." "While our hearts are broken, we are comforted in knowing that even in death, George Floyd showed the world how to live," her statement said, according to the Reuters news agency.

Ben Crump, the Floyd family's lawyer, said, "It's not just enough for America to say that George Floyd's life matters. We have to show that George for life matters by actions, is not just enough for America to say that Black lives matter. We have to show that Black lives matter by our actions."

"We applaud this responsible city leadership and we urge everybody to practise responsible leadership in remaining calm and engaging in peaceful protests for George Floyd," Crump added.

Al Jazeera's John Hendren, reporting from Chicago, called it "one of the largest settlements you could find. But the family says they aren't just looking for a monetary settlement." Hendren reports the family wanted reforms and justice in the cases of the four officers accused in Floyd's death.

"The settlement is not just historic because of the \$27 million paid out, but for the impact on social justice policy reforms and police reforms ... that affect all of us," Crump said. "This is a deeply traumatic event that, unfortunately, is a part of too many Black and brown families' realities," Council Vice President Andrea Jenkins said after the vote, according to the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

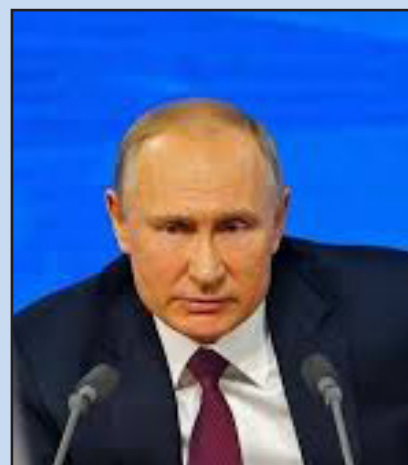
"There is no amount of money that can replace a brother, a son, a nephew, a father, a loved one but what we can do is continue to work towards justice and equity and equality in the city of Minneapolis and ... **P2**

#### Putin Speaks with Azerbaijani, Armenian Leaders

Russian President Vladimir Putin separately spoke over the phone with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Friday and discussed the latest developments in the Upper Karabakh region.

"It was noted with satisfaction that the cease-fire regime was fully complied with and that the situation in the region remained generally stable and calm," a Kremlin statement said.

Issues related to the unblocking of



economic and transport links in the South Caucasus were also discussed during the phone calls, the statement added.

Relations between the two former Soviet republics have been tense since 1991, when the Armenian military occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Upper Karabakh, a territory internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, and seven adjacent regions.

When new clashes erupted on Sept. 27 last year, Armenia launched attacks on civilians and Azerbaijani forces, and even violated several humanitarian cease-fire agreements.

During the six week-conflict, which ended with a Russian-brokered truce, Azerbaijan liberated several strategic cities and nearly 300 of its settlements and villages from Armenian occupation. The two countries signed a Russian-brokered agreement on Nov. 10 to end the fighting and work toward a comprehensive resolution.

A joint Turkish-Russian center was established to monitor the truce. Russian peacekeeping troops have also been deployed in the region.



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