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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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**7 Security Forces Killed, Wounded in Taliban's Attack in Kandahar**

Local officials say Taliban militants launched attack on the center of Arghistan district of Kandahar province after two explosions on Saturday. Local media reported that at least three Police forces were killed and four more were wounded in the attack. According to the reports, the first explosion happened near Police HQ in the district at around 11:00am on Saturday. The Kandahar Police chief, Ghorzang Afridi said the two explosions were caused by car bombs. He added that Commandos and Police Special Unit have been deployed to the area and clashes are still underway.



**Delay in US Forces' Withdrawal from Afghanistan to Harm Reconciliation Process: Kabulov**

A delay in withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan can negatively affect the Afghan settlement, but will not stop this process, Russian Special Presidential Envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov said Friday, commenting on the US claim that it will have trouble withdrawing all force by May 1. "There is nothing good [about it]. Everything will depend on how the Taliban react to it. Most likely, [it will react] negatively, but this does not mean an end to this story. The Americans will have to look for resolutions and compromises with the Taliban, so that they could treat this with understanding," Kabulov said. This comes as the Taliban group has warned to resume attacks against foreign troops in Afghanistan if they did not meet the May 1 deadline to withdraw. If the May 1 deadline was not met, the Taliban would be "compelled to ... continue its Jihad and armed struggle against foreign forces to liberate its country", the group said in a statement on Friday.

## With New Peace Proposal, Taliban Faces Inevitable Crossroad



For months, the Taliban has managed to both talk peace and wage war across Afghanistan. The strategy appeared to appease the hard-liners within the militant group who want an outright military victory to end the 20-year conflict and moderate members of the movement who would accept a political solution.

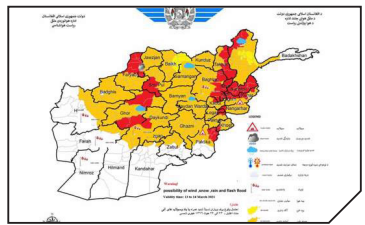
But the new, aggressive U.S. push for a peace deal has brought the Taliban to an inevitable crossroads: Accepting a place in a power-sharing government, as proposed by the United States, would bring the group one step closer to its ultimate goal of retaking full control of the country and establishing an Islamic government — and yet any path to

power that prevents Afghanistan from again being labeled a pariah state will require compromise at odds with the core beliefs of the militants' rank and file. A deadline looms. The Biden administration has until May 1 to withdraw troops from the country, under a U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February 2019, or negotiate

a new arrangement. What the Taliban does could signal where the balance of power lies within the movement and what its vision is for Afghanistan's future. So far, Taliban leadership has said little publicly to reveal the specifics of what kind of government it would accept, beyond one ruled by Islamic law. "The intra-Afghan dialogue is progressing. There is no doubt there are some difficulties along the way, but this is the agreed framework," said Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's senior political leader at a meeting in Moscow last week. Baradar appeared to push back against signals from the Biden administration that it may delay withdrawing troops and the proposal of a power-sharing government in a leaked draft peace plan. Both moves would be departures from the U.S.-Taliban agreement signed last year, a document prized by the militants. "The Doha deal is the best and most effective way to resolve issues and move forward," he said. "The responsibilities of both sides are clearly written in the peace deal known by the entire world." ... **P3**

**Rain, Snow, Flash Flood Warning Issued for 18 Provinces of Afghanistan**

The Afghanistan Meteorological Department has issued a rain, snow and flash flood warning for 18 provinces for today and tomorrow. According to a warning posted on the AMD's website, the department stated between 15 and 30mm of rain forecast for a number of provinces. The provinces include Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Samangan, Baghlan, Balkh, Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, Faryab, Badghis, Ghor, Bamiyan and Parwan. The AMD also warned of the possibility of heavy snow in Panjshir, Kapisa, Laghman, Nuristan, Kunar and the Salang Pass.



## US Intelligence Warns Biden Against Troop Pullout

The Taliban could largely retake Afghanistan within two or three years if American troops leave without the warring sides reaching a power-sharing deal, intelligence agencies have told US President Joe Biden. A rushed US exit from Afghanistan without finalized peace terms between Taliban insurgents and the Kabul government could end bitterly, American intelligence agencies have warned. The New York Times on Saturday reported that US President Joe Biden has been told that the Taliban could overrun most of the war-ravaged country within a couple of years and would potentially allow al-Qaida to regroup. The intelligence assessment was originally compiled last year for the Trump administration. Some 7,000 international troops, including 3,500 US soldiers, remain



in Afghanistan — 20 years after the US-led invasion — with the Taliban warning it will resume attacks if the foreign troops do not depart by May 1. That deadline was part of a Trump-Taliban agreement signed in Doha, Qatar last year. However, talks are still dragging on between envoys of the Sunni Muslim insurgents and the Kabul

government of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Taliban made peace promises Last year, the Taliban vowed that if all US and international forces were withdrawn by May it would enter into such intra-Afghan peace talks and cut ties with al-Qaida. At his first White House news conference on Thursday, Biden said it would be hard to comply with ... **P3**

## More than...

been steadily rising as authorities grow more forceful with their suppression of opposition to the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The coup reversed years of progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule.

Up through Friday, the Association of Political Prisoners had verified 328 people killed in the post-coup crackdown.

Junta chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing did not directly refer to the protest movement when he gave his nationally televised Armed Forces Day speech before thousands of soldiers in Naypyitaw. He referred only to "terrorism which can be harmful to state tranquility and social security," and called it unacceptable.

This year's event was seen as a flashpoint for violence, with demonstrators threatening to double down on their public opposition to the coup with more and bigger demonstrations. The protesters refer to the holiday by its original name, Resistance Day, which marks the beginning of a revolt against Japanese occupation in World War 2.

## Iran, China Sign...

between Mr. Larijani and Mr. Yi, which took place on Saturday morning, the two sides consulted with each other about the expansion of bilateral relations.

This very important political document contains strategic, regional and international cooperation.

Abdul Naser Noorzad

## Peace in Afghanistan; from the Current Stalemate to the Start of intra-Afghan Talks

The United States and the Taliban reached a political agreement in February 2020. The purpose of the agreement was to reach a political solution and reduce the US military presence in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the agreement will pave the way for peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban to bring about a lasting peace and an end to decades of violence. But the process still faces challenges such as the release of all Taliban prisoners held by the Afghan government, as well as the release of Afghan soldiers held as a captive by the Taliban, whose release has already been cited as a key precondition for the primary talks, which paves the way for the next steps toward starting intra-Afghan dialogue. The formation of a negotiating team from both sides is also one of the important issues that should be addressed as soon as possible. Therefore, in this article, in order to provide realistic and practical solutions, we will first briefly remind the existing challenges to Afghanistan's peace process and then, will present the desired solutions in the short and strategic term. Providing suggestions and creating a suitable atmosphere for successful talks to reach a secure political solution and accepted by all parties, will be other parts of the article which will separately address. But first, the causes and factors of the delay in the talks must be reminded. The current peace process, which in several cases has led to the delay of peace talks and has posed a major challenge to this process, are as following:

1. Deep ideological contrast between the Afghan government and the Taliban: The Afghan government, in view of decades of violence, considers the current achievements, which are the result of twenty years of active presence of the international community, important and strives to use the existing political system as a "Republic", protecting the political structure accepted by all of Afghanistan. While the Taliban, based on their own thinking, want to change

the political system from the republic to the emirate. In the system of the Emirate, the right to vote and self-determination, which are among the basic rights of citizens, are taken away and the situation is such that the Emir of the Emirate is the sovereign owner of the country and is accountable to no authority. There is no separation of powers and the limits of competence are not clear.

2. Lack of independence by the Taliban in the negotiation process to conclude the talks: The Taliban in the negotiation process, like the Afghan government, do not have sufficient authority to decide on important issues. The countries that support them have each taken full authority from the group, taking into account their own interests, which on the one hand has challenged the peace process and on the other hand has delayed the peace negotiations.

3. Conflicting interests of countries in the region and the world in the peace process: Different countries pursue different interests. Conflicts of interest and the development of the situation from proxy war to proxy peace have made it difficult for peace negotiations to succeed. This conflict of interests has various roots, from intellectual differences to economic and political interests.

4. Lack of political consensus within Afghan society: The Afghan government and its supporting groups, political parties and movements are largely unanimous in securing peace in Afghanistan, but they face serious differences with the Afghan government in how to achieve it. According to the Afghan government opposition, the Afghan government is only seeking the interests of its intergroup and has remained indifferent to the interests of the majority. This has created tensions between the Afghan government and its political rivals.

5. Early announcement of the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan: This has led the Taliban, including its leadership, to conclude that the withdrawal of US troops, as



the strongest supporter of the Afghan government, is a good opportunity to seize the power by force and by doing so wait and by time, which itself has delayed peace talks because, they think that the Afghan government will fall quickly after their withdrawal and there is no need to hold peace talks. That is to say, the tactic of the Taliban is to pave the way for power seizing through military pressure. Historical experience, on the other hand, shows that such calculations are only appropriate in a particular time frame. Accordingly, the agreement to release 5,000 prisoners from the Afghan government's prisons is contained in the text of the agreement between the United States and the group.

### Challenges that have slowed this process:

There seem to be a number of complex factors involved in the failure of the peace process in Afghanistan that have slowed the process and prevented the start of peace talks, some of which are mentioned below. If the factors are not taken care of and the obstacles are not removed, the peace process will not lead to a practical result, at least in the short term:

1- Non-nationalization of peace talks: The truth is that Afghan politicians and currents; involved in the country's affairs have different,

and even contradictory views on the peace process and there is no political consensus on how to negotiate. There is no rate of participation of the armed opposition in the political process, how to deal with the crimes and actions committed by armed opposition, and so on. In addition, the people have been left out in the peace process and it is clear that this trend has taken ethnocentric, project-oriented, instrumentalist and ... approaches. There is no doubt that peace in Afghanistan is unimaginable until the peace process in the country is not nationalized and a comprehensive consensus is reached.

2. Foreign Involvement: As the Afghan government has repeatedly stated, and in particular President Ghani has repeatedly and explicitly spoken of foreign interference in the process, current events in Afghanistan confirm that the peace process and the security process in Afghanistan depend on the countries that have the greatest interests in Afghanistan and need insecurity as an excuse to be present and intervene in the region. The secret meetings of the intelligence agencies of some foreign countries with the representatives of the Taliban show that there are many hands behind the insecurities in Afghanistan with different motives and goals, and ... **P3**

By Muradoğlu

## How Afghanistan Became America's Second Vietnam

The Biden Administration sent a letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, saying that negotiations for a peace agreement with the Taliban could begin. The letter called for bringing the parties together for a conference sponsored by the United Nations (UN).

According to an agreement between the Trump Administration and the Taliban Leadership, U.S. troops were expected to withdraw from Afghanistan by early May. Trump's initiative was met with a bipartisan opposition in the U.S. Congress. Although there are many within the Democratic and Republican parties who think that the United States should put an end to the "Endless Wars", the attempt to actually withdraw troops has not been fully successful until now.

Foreign policy elites associated with

the "American Military-Industrial Complex" played an important role in the continuation of the "Endless Wars". Foreign policy elites exert huge influence on both parties. U.S. President Barack Obama's Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes labeled the pro-endless war foreign policy elites as "The Blob," in reference to one popular 1958 science fiction horror movie of the same name. Starring Steven McQueen, the movie tells the story of the panic caused by the mysterious alien monster that looks like a giant jelly drop and grows by swallowing everyone in its path.

Known as the "Graveyard of the Empires", Afghanistan was also occupied by the Soviet Union in 1979. The 10-year occupation of Afghanistan played an important role in the dissolution of the Soviet

Union. According to the Americans, Afghanistan had become "the Vietnam of the Soviet Union." The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001, citing the 9/11 terrorist attacks as a pretext. Joe Biden, who was elected Senator in 1972, assumed several leading position since then, including Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee until 2009. Biden, who served as the Vice President of the U.S. until 2017, played an important role as an effective Senate member and VP when it came to all these processes that led to this.

In 2001, Americans did not expect the Afghanistan Invasion to last 20 years. The then U.S. President George W. Bush replied confidently to a journalist's question, "Would it possible to fall into a Vietnam-like quagmire in Afghanistan?" Bush

then replied: "We have learned very important lessons in Vietnam." As for the timetable for withdrawal, he said, "It could happen tomorrow, or a month later, it could take a year or two. But we will win." The occupation of Afghanistan has lasted until today on the pretext of the so-called "nation building." Hence, the reason why the terms "Endless Wars" or "Neverending Wars" gained popularity.

At this point, it is obvious that the U.S. has failed. The Taliban controls more regions than it did before the 2001 invasion. However, as in the case of Vietnam, the foreign policy elites, or the Blob, along with the Generals have been spinning success stories since 2001, hiding the facts from the American public. In December 2009, thousands of pages of documents published by the Washington Post blew the cover on the failure of the Afghanistan invasion.

Close to 50,000 civilians died in Afghanistan between 2001-2020.

Children make up almost half of the casualties. According to official data, approximately 158,000 people died during the occupation period, including 2,400 American soldiers. During the occupation, \$1 trillion was spent from the pockets of American taxpayers. There are those who put the figure at \$2 trillion when accounting for indirect expenditures. U.S. military spending in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other regions has hit \$7 trillion. It is no secret that the invasion of Iraq, which was launched on false pretexts, has also ended disastrously.

Last December, the Chief of the U.S. General Staff General Mark Milley said, "After 20 years, two decades of consistent effort there, we have achieved a modicum of success." This 'modicum of success' story came at the cost of the lives of 158,000 people. Billions of dollars went into the coffers of the "Military-Industrial Complex" and "The Blob" just for the sake of a "modicum" of success.

# Pakistan's Exports to Afghanistan Decrease 13.59pc in 8 Months

Pakistan's exports of goods and services to Afghanistan witnessed a decrease of 13.59 percent during the eight months of financial year (2020-21) as compared to the corresponding period of last year, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported.

The overall Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan were recorded at \$629.324 million during July-February (2020-21) against exports of \$728.315 million during July-February (2019-20), showing a decline of 13.59 percent, SBP data revealed.

Meanwhile, on year-on-year basis, the exports to Afghanistan during February 2021 declined by 10 percent, from \$95.194 million against



the exports of \$85.674 million.

On month-on-month basis, the Pakistani exports to Afghanistan also dipped by 8.21 percent during

February 2021 as compared to the exports of \$93.341 million in January 2021, the SBP data revealed. Overall Pakistan's exports to other countries

witnessed a decline of 2.26 percent in eight months, from \$16.438 billion to \$16.065 billion, the SBP data revealed.

### US Intelligence...

that deadline, although he "could not picture" US troops still being present next year.

"We will leave. The question is when we leave," said Biden. The New York Times said Biden's officials were "jockeying" to influence the new president and his defense secretary, Lloyd Austin.

Austin, visiting Kabul last weekend, said only that America wanted a "responsible end" to Afghanistan's decadeslong warfare.

And at the United Nations earlier this week, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield warned that gains for Afghan woman, girls and health care would not be sacrificed.

"We will not give an inch on this point," she told the Security Council, echoing a key point in the US intelligence report.

Briefing the US Senate, General Richard Clarke, the head of US Special Operations Command, said capabilities provided to Afghan government forces were "critical to their success."

### With New Peace...

The U.S. proposal also calls for talks in Turkey next month to supplement talks in Doha, the establishment of an interim government and the drafting of a new constitution to be followed by elections.

The Afghan government has said it will attend the Turkey conference. The Taliban has not yet commented. At the conference, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani is planning to propose early elections to choose transition leaders, according to two senior Afghan officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press.

In addition, Naeem, the spokesman for the Taliban's political office in Doha, said Taliban fighters reduced violence following the Doha agreement. And as long as the United States fulfills its commitments to the deal and peace talks continue, he said, "there is no reason why [the violence] should escalate."

"After 40 years of war, negotiating is very difficult," Naeem said. "There is no time frame for the Afghan negotiations, so it needs time to continue."

### Peace in...

it does not seem that the peace process will get out of this situation.

3- Contradictory policies of the government: The release of Taliban commanders from prison who are accused of war, assassination, terror and terrorism, and the non-implementation of laws on militant and disruptive security groups, has led to ruthless armed opposition to continue their operations against the people and the security forces of the country, and on the other hand, to threaten and attack the security of the society in every sense. Prior to the release of Taliban prisoners, there were many assumptions that many commanders and members of armed opposition groups who, as soon as they are released from prison, resume destructive actions and kill Afghan citizens, and this process, in addition to causing despair and frustration of the country's security forces in the fight against, which came true. Based on statistics, recently released show that almost 60% of the released prisoners of Taliban, have returned to battlefield to resume their fighting against the Afghan government. It has made the people pessimistic and distrustful of government policies, and undermining the government's position in the peace process.

4- Peace process and extortionist groups: Experts believe that various groups and spectrums have attacked and threatened the process of stability and security in Afghanistan; Drug-related groups, Taliban remnants, military affiliates in the region, as well as individuals and groups who seize the opportunity to blackmail the government by creating insecurity. Through this, they have achieved great political and economic benefits. It is said that those who have joined the peace process in recent years are mostly related to such currents, which are in collusion and conflict with profiteers within the government apparatus.

5- Ignoring Afghanistan's economic trend: Afghanistan is the fifth poorest country in the world; Corruption, war, illiteracy, wrong economic policies, etc. have been among

the factors that have hindered the repair and reconstruction of the destroyed economic infrastructure of the country for more than four decades, and after twelve years of the new shift in Afghanistan, with billions of dollars in cash flowing in, is still struggling with a bad economic situation and is expected to worsen in the coming years. Fleeing of thousands of young people to different countries over the past decade as illegal migrants is a sign of poor economic conditions and disregard for the economy, which has ultimately thwarted security efforts, regardless of influential factors, including the economic factor.

6- Multiplicity and nature of the goals of the armed opposition groups: The armed opposition groups in Afghanistan have different multiple forms, which have finally taken up arms in the form of armed groups with the aim of achieving their demands in Afghanistan. The physical multiplicity of these groups, in fact, reflects the multiplicity and even the contradiction of their demands, and even the internal differences and conflicting goals that these groups pursue are themselves a major obstacle to the conclusion of the peace process in Afghanistan; Numerous internal conflicts of armed opposition groups in Afghanistan and their non-adherence to a single trend towards the situation in this country show that in order to achieve peace with each of these groups and with a separate process and approach, it must be resolved; This is very difficult and fragile.

7- existence of foreign fighters and taking the peace process as hostage: Various people from Central Asia, Europe, Pakistan, Arab countries, Africa, etc. are fighting in the ranks of armed opposition groups against the Afghan government, the most prominent of which are members of al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban. In addition to pursuing the idea of jihad in Afghanistan, these groups are aware of the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan and are trying to use Afghanistan's fragile situation as a bulwark against other parts of the world; The statements of some Afghan

leaders of the armed opposition also show that in fact a large part of the Afghan peace process is in the hands of foreign members of the armed fighters and these people are preventing peace talks between Afghan armed opposition groups and the government.

### Recommendations

But what is the solution, with what solutions can these problems be overcome and peace and stability achieved? Given the challenges and opportunities in the peace process, future solutions will be effective and useful in both the short and long term.

1. Efforts must be made to preserve the achievements of the last 19 years, which form the basis of the existing political system and its legitimacy. A constitution like a national guarantee that legitimizes the basis of a government's actions. Freedom of the press, which is an essential element of a democratic system, the legal rights and freedoms of women, including the right to education and employment, are very important. Elections and active participation in political processes, which is the legitimate right of every citizen, are also worth mentioning.

2. Emphasis on important national issues that protect the health of Afghanistan, that of territorial integrity, political system, strengthening the political system that represents all people. Creating a better environment for peaceful coexistence in the light of national values, etc., which is important for every single Afghan.

3. The strict supervision of the United Nations and the members of the international community who observe and guarantee this process should be implemented and the change of the bilateral mechanism to multilateral is to ensure and strengthen of this process, seems very necessary. By creating a clear and inclusive mechanism that determines the future of these talks, these recommendations are important for the continuation and survival of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. Otherwise, there is no guarantee of success for this process.

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+93 (0) 782 98 9696  
+93 (0) 202512626  
Dehbori Crossroads in Front of Park Kabul  
waygalprinting.co@gmail.com

## Heart of Asia

Chief Editor: M. Hamid Hamdard

Reporters: Safiullah Nasary, Shafiq Amirzay,

Jawad Temori & Hameedullah Hamidi

Graphic & Design: Arman

Phone: +93-202502100 - +93-777989696

Website: www.heartofasia.af

Email: heartofasiadaily@gmail.com

Address: Behind Rahman Baba High School

- Opposite to 3<sup>rd</sup> District,

Kabul - Afghanistan

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# Iran, China Sign Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement

The foreign ministers of Iran and China signed a previously-planned comprehensive cooperation agreement on Saturday afternoon in Tehran.

Iranian and Chinese Foreign Ministers Mohammad Javad Zarif and Wang Yi signed a comprehensive cooperation agreement between the two countries on Saturday afternoon at the complex of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran.

The two countries began consulting and work on the important cooperation agreement six years ago during President Hassan Rouhani's visit to China.

During Rouhani's visit to China, Iran and China issued statements announcing the promotion of the level of relations between

the two countries to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

At the time, the two sides declared that they were ready to negotiate a long-term cooperation document.

Later, Ali Larijani, the former Speaker of the Iranian Parliament went to China and took the lead on the consultations that led to the signing of the agreement today. Larijani was in charge of the talks with the Chinese side on the matter.

The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi arrived in Tehran late on Friday to hold meetings with his Iranian counterpart Foreign Minister Zarif and President Hassan Rouhani as well as the ex-speaker of the Iranian parliament Larijani. In the meeting ...

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### A look at the world

## Lebanon's Largest Christian Bloc Warns Against Sidelining President

Lebanon's largest Christian bloc, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), warned prime minister-designate Saad al-Hariri on Saturday against sidelining President Michel Aoun and other parliamentary blocs in talks over forming a cabinet.

Hariri and Aoun have been at loggerheads over the cabinet for months, dashing hopes of a reversal of Lebanon's deepening financial meltdown. Hariri has said Aoun's party is trying to dictate cabinet seats in order to gain veto power.



The FPM, which is headed by Gebran Bassil, who is also Aoun's son-in-law, accused Hariri of trying to orchestrate a majority for his own supporters.

"The political committee warns of the dangers of sidelining methods that the prime minister-designate is using when dealing with the president and concerned parliamentary blocs," an FPM statement said.

Veteran Sunni politician Hariri was nominated in October to form a cabinet after Hassan Diab's government resigned in the wake of the Beirut port blast, which killed 200 people and damaged large swathes of the city.

Diab's government has stayed on in a caretaker capacity.

On Monday, the 18th meeting between Hariri and Aoun failed to produce any concrete results.

Lebanon is in the throes of a deep financial crisis that is posing the biggest threat to its stability since the 1975-1990 civil war. A new cabinet is needed to carry out reforms that could unlock foreign aid.

## UN Extends North Korea Expert Panel, Approves Missile Probe



The UN Security Council on Friday reportedly extended the mandate of a panel of experts evaluating sanctions on North Korea, and asked for an investigation into the secretive country's ballistic missiles program.

The UN voted unanimously to approve the measures, The Associated Press reported, shortly after the North fired off a pair of short-range ballistic missiles earlier this week, and launched at least one other over the weekend.

The launches marked the first since US President Joe Biden assumed office in January. He issued a stern warning to the country on Thursday, saying "there will be responses" should Pyongyang choose to escalate while also offering an opportunity for talks.

"We will respond accordingly. But I'm also prepared for some form of diplomacy, but it has to be conditioned on the end result of denuclearization," he said at the White House.

North Korea is banned from developing ballistic missiles under Security Council resolutions and council members said the expert panel should investigate this week's launches, according to the AP.

The UN's North Korea sanctions committee held a closed session earlier Friday at the US's request.

Norway, which chairs the committee, said after the meeting it "condemns DPRK's recent ballistic missile launches. Sanctions need to be implemented."

"#NorthKorea must enter into meaningful dialogue and take concrete steps towards denuclearization," the country's UN mission said on Twitter.

## More than 90 Killed in Myanmar in One of Bloodiest Days of Protests

As Myanmar's military celebrated the annual Armed Forces Day holiday with a parade Saturday in the country's capital, soldiers and police elsewhere reportedly killed dozens of people as they suppressed protests in the deadliest bloodletting since last month's coup.

A count issued by an independent researcher in Yangon who has been compiling near-real time death tolls put the total as darkness fell at 93, spread over more than two dozen cities and towns. The



online news site Myanmar Now reported the death toll had reached 91.

Both numbers are higher than all estimates for the previous high on March 14, which ranged in counts from 74 to 90.

Figures collected by the researcher, who asked not to be named for his security, have generally tallied with the counts issued at the end of each day by the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners, which documents deaths and arrests and is widely seen as a definitive source. The Associated Press is unable to independently confirm the death tolls.

The killings quickly drew international condemnation, with multiple diplomatic missions to Myanmar releasing statements that mentioned the killing of civilians Saturday, including children. "This 76th Myanmar Armed Forces Day will stay engraved as a day of terror and dishonour," the European Union's delegation to Myanmar said on Twitter. "The killing of unarmed civilians, including children, are indefensible acts."

The death toll in Myanmar has ...

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