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Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

Issue No. 941

www.heartofasia.af

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#### **Khalilzad Met Marshall** Dostum, Discussed **Afghanistan Peace Summits**

US Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad met with Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum, the leader of Hezb-e Junbish Mili Afghanistan in Ankara on Sunday night.

The Deputy of High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) Enayatullah Babur Farahmand has said that the two sides discussed Moscow peace summit, the current process of peace talks in Moscow, the current process of peace talks and joint efforts to ensure lasting peace in the country.

According to Farhahmand, progress in the peace process and the holding of a peace summit in Afghanistan hosted by Turkey have also been the focus of talks between the two sides.

Khalilzad, meanwhile, began a new round of regional trips since last week and is currently in Turkey.



#### Afghan, Tajik **Presidents Sign Bilateral Agreements**

Afghanistan and Tajikistan on Monday signed a number of memorandum of understandings during President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, the office of Tajikistan's president said in a statement.

According to the statement, the memorandums was signed between Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon during a ceremony. Ghani is in Dushanbe to attend the two-day 9th Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) meeting.

Foreign Ministers and representatives from around 50 countries are expected to attend the conference, where ways to strengthen regional consensus for peace and development in Afghanistan will be discussed.

Tajikistan President's office said that the following documents were signed between the two leaders: ...

# **Heart of Asia Conference Gets Underway in Tajikistan**



The city of Dushanbe in Tajikistan on Monday hosted the ninth "Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process" ministerial conference that will continue for two days, which will focus on building regional consensus around Afghan peace.

On the first day of the conference that was attended by senior officials of member nations, the Deputy Afghan Foreign Minister Mirwais said international terrorist groups and drug traffickers undermine efforts for peace in Afghanistan.

He called on Afghanistan's regional and international partners to exercise their influence on Taliban for a ceasefire.

He noted that the Afghan peace process is a chance for all to vision a new future for regional cooperation and connectivity.

President Ashraf Ghani who arrived in Dushanbe on Monday morning

will attend the meeting on its second day, March 30, and will join representatives from at least 50 countries and international organizations, according to officials. The meeting is expected to have a significant impact on the ongoing peace efforts for Afghanistan.

The meeting is held two weeks ahead of the upcoming peace conference in Turkey, which is expected to change the direction of the ongoing peace

The participants will issue a statement at the end of the conference.

The Heart of Asia conference was launched in 2011 as an initiative by Kabul and Ankara to help Afghanistan achieve peace. 15 countries are members of the conference and host it once every year.

The conference was not held in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

#### PTM Leaders **Released After Detainment by** Pakistani Police

Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) leaders Manzoor Ahmad Pashteen and Mohsin Dawar (Dawar is also a member of Pakistan's National Assembly) were released on Monday following their arrest by Pakistani  $police\,the\,day\,before\,as\,they\,traveled$ to attend a rally.

Media reports indicate that hundreds of demonstrators from the Jani Khel area marched toward Islamabad on Sunday to protest what they called the brutal murder of four Pashtun youth hailing from Bannu ...



## Wolasi Jirga Calls for Alipoor's Arrest

Some lawmakers in the lower house of the Afghan Parliament on Monday called for the arrest and prosecution of Alipoor, a local commander in Behsud district in Wardak, who is accused of downing an army helicopter in the district.

The Wolesi Jirga speaker and some members said that the second vice president, Mohammad Sarwar Danesh, released Alipoor on bail three years ago, and that now Danesh should respond to the families of nine people who were killed in the downing of the helicopter in Behsud this month.

"Alipoor was released on bail by the second vice president. The helicopter of the Defense Ministry crashed, but unfortunately, Massoud Andrabi was removed



(as interior minister)," Parliament Speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani

"Mr. (Sarwar) Danesh is with you (President Ghani). You should pay for the \$35 million helicopter whether he sells his home or other capital," said Shahpoor Hasanzoi, an MP from Logar.

who is behind this incident--we want justice for this," said Mahdi Rasikh, an MP from Maidan Wardak.

amounts were invested, were

sacrificed in Behsud. They were

sacrificed for discrimination

and hatred in Behsud. Anyone

The MPs also criticized civilian "Our dear pilots, for whom big casualties in recent ...

March 30, 2021 Heart of Asia

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By SYED FAZL-E-HAIDER

# Afghanistan: To Leave

or Not to Leave

and cultural cooperation; Action Plan for the implementation of the Agreement on cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Ministry of Interior Affairs of the

Afghan, Tajik...

Program of practical actions (Roadmap) between the

Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the basis of political, security, trade, transport, transit, energy,

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism, transnational and organized crime, drug trafficking, and other crimes in 2021-2022.

#### Wolasi Jirga...

clashes between government forces and the Taliban and called on the government to pay attention to the lives of the people.

"Which country are we living in that its government kills its people?" asked Ramazan Bashardost, an MP from Kabul.

The government did not comment on either issue raised by the MPs.

#### PTM Leaders...

District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"We have been released earlier in the morning," Dawar said in a tweet on Monday. "We appreciate the resilience of the participants of the Pashtun long march to Islamabad who successfully stood unified against the state's strategic depth policy."

to be scrapped if the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization unilaterally decide to stay in Afghanistan beyond 1 May, the withdrawal deadline set in the agreement. With a presence of around 10,000 troops, including a remaining 2500 American troops, the 30-nation NATO has indicated it is likely to continue its mission training Afghan security forces in

Afghanistan. Last week, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced that member state defense ministers have deferred their decision on troop withdrawal. "Our presence in Afghanistan is condition-based, and the Taliban has to meet their commitments," he said.

Many NATO member countries have publicly expressed reservations about the deadline, with some in favor of prolonging their stay.

Stoltenberg added, "We will only leave when the time is right, and the focus now is on how we can support the peace talks."

US President Joe Biden's administration is currently reviewing the terms of the Doha accord. In a report released earlier this month, the Afghanistan Study Group, established by the US Congress, recommended extending the deadline, noting that withdrawal should not be based on an inflexible timeline but on fulfillment of commitments to peace by all parties, and the US should not simply hand a victory to the

The Taliban has already warned the US-led forces against extending their presence and demanded they stick to the Doha agreement. Any unilateral decision by the US and NATO could escalate tensions and restart conflict with the Taliban, derailing the already fragile peace process in the country. The agreement includes commitments by the Taliban to prevent al-Qaeda and other groups from "using the soil of Afghanistan to



threaten the security of the United States and its allies", as well as to join the so-called intra-Afghan dialogue with the government of Afghanistan. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said, "No doubt that if the Doha deal is not implemented there will be consequences, and the blame will be upon that side which does not honour the deal." A unilateral extension would strengthen the hand of spoilers inside the Taliban who have long sought to expel foreign forces from Afghanistan. "Our expectations are also that NATO will think to end this war and avoid more excuses for prolonging the war in Afghanistan," Mujahid said. Consultation with the Taliban around extending the 1 May deadline is therefore the only likely way to salvage the peace process. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has urged US officials to consult the Taliban before deciding whether to maintain its presence for longer, noting that "to present this [troop extension] as a fait accompli, I think, will only create difficulty." Pakistan was a primary facilitator of the US-Taliban negotiations that led to the agreement.

It took almost two years to reach the deal, after 18 years of fighting failed to bring peace to the country. Former US president Donald Trump was primarily concerned with the political mileage to be gained from bringing troops back home, clinching an exit deal rather a genuine peace deal with the Taliban. Political settlement of the Afghan issue was of little concern to the Trump administration. The Afghan government had no role in finalizing the terms of the Doha deal with the Taliban, and it has welcomed the review by the Biden administration.

Following a conversation with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani last week, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated US support for a ... P3

#### By Daniel R. DePetris

### Will Biden Make the Right Choice on Afghanistan?

The war in Afghanistan is the problem that never seems to go away. Every U.S. president since George W. Bush has tried to find the magic formula to Afghanistan's success. And every president has come up empty handed. They failed because Afghanistan is, indeed, an unsolvable problem.

Former Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump could not have been any more different in terms of ideology and personality, but the two had a common experience very early on in their tenures.

Obama came into office with the war in Afghanistan at a low point. The Taliban insurgency at the time was chipping away at the Afghan government's territorial control. The U.S. war strategy was geared toward sustaining a stalemate on the ground. After a nearly year-long inter-agency policy review, Obama—surrounded

by heavy hitters like Defense Secretary Bob Gates. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mike Mullen and commander Stanley McChrystal—was reluctantly convinced (some would say, pressured) to deploy an additional 30,000 American soldiers to clean up a conflict that was going badly, quickly. Hundreds of U.S. casualties and hundreds of billions of dollars later, the end result was depressing but familiar: more stalemate.

Trump, too, couldn't resist the recommendations of his more hawkish national security advisers. The 45th president of the United States came into the White House highly skeptical there was anything

Washington could do to make Afghanistan a more stable place.

He had long bemoaned the U.S. war effort there as a waste of lives and taxpaver dollars, a failed investment full of sunk costs and shoddy returns. Yet despite his instincts to pull out, Trump agreed to a try a mini surge off his own, dispatching close to 4,000 additional troops and increasing the use of airpower against the Taliban. The objective: To level the playing field and pound the Taliban into a peace negotiation with the Afghan government. The verdict: The beginning of a low, slow and moribund intra-Afghan peace process coexisting alongside the same old war that has been proceeding on an endless loop since early in the century....

## Taliban Still Mulls US Plan, No **Date Set for Istanbul Conference**

The dates and the agenda for the Turkey conference, which many consider to be a significant event for Afghanistan's future, have not been finalized, but it is expected that the summit will be held in early April.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has reiterated that there has to be "some kind of political settlement in Afghanistan" and that it should be done by Afghans themselves.

"It was also very important to try to accelerate the diplomacy because ultimately everyone recognizes that there is no military solution to Afghanistan," Blinken said in an interview

Blinken noted that the event will be held in the upcoming weeks.

He said that the US and NATO have been clear on their approach towards Afghanistan.

"We went in together, we've adapted to circumstances together and we will come out together when the time is right," he said.

"One of the things that was important was not only to share our thinking as we're going through this review, including the May 1 deadline but to listen, to hear from our partners who are so invested: their ideas, their thoughts, their analysis," Blinken said.

A Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem said the group is still reviewing a US-proposed peace



plan and that they want to reach an acceptable and practical result in this respect.

"Our discussions are underway so that there is an acceptable and practical outcome," Naeem

The Afghan parliament speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani was in Turkey last week and met with his Turkish counterpart, emphasizing the importance of the meeting for Afghanistan.

"We discussed the high level of violence, targeted attacks, the intra-Afghan peace negotiations and efforts for a political settlement," Rahmani said.

"Why are women not present in the negotiations and the meetings that are held?" asked Aziza Jalis, an MP.

91

491

## **Despite Ongoing Challenges Pashdan** Dam is Close to Completion

The Afghanistan National Water Affairs Regulation Authority (NWARA) said Friday at least 85 percent of construction work on the Pashdan Dam has so far been completed.

The dam, which made the news earlier this month after being attacked by Taliban, is one of the National Water Affairs Regulation Authority's key projects for this solar

Work on the dam, on the Hari River in Karkh district of western Herat province, started 10 years ago. Once complete it will hold 40 million cubic meters of water and will generate 2MW of electricity and irrigate at least 13,000 hectares of land

Plagued by problems, construction work at the site stopped for three years before being resumed last year but in November, reports indicated that Taliban insurgents had warned officials and workers at the dam to stop work on the project.

The group reportedly told dam officials the project had not been



approved by the Taliban, so work should be stopped – which did not

But earlier this month, Taliban attacked the dam, killing three security personnel, and wounding one other. Four security personnel are still missing.

NWARA officials meanwhile said that once the dam is complete, water will be fed to Herat city, where it will be used to irrigate the greenbelt around

the city and supply potable water to

The Afghan government is funding the \$117 million (8.9 billion AFN)

This is one of a number of dams currently under construction in the country – to not only provide water to local communities but also to help increase power supply.

Earlier this week, another key dam was inaugurated by President Ashraf Ghani and his two deputies Amrullah Saleh and Sarwar Danish. The Kamal Khan dam in southern Nimroz province, was widely welcomed by residents who will also benefit from irrigation canals to help water crops.

generate at least nine megawatts of electricity for the local community but will also irrigate over 180,000 hectares of land.

#### **Exchange Rates**

77.35

91.1

105.2 105.1

492

20.9

1060 1070

#### **Contact Numbers**

Kabul Police -119

Kabul Ambulance - 112

Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital

0202301360

Ata Turk Hospital

0202500312

Corona call center - 166

#### **UAE Launches...**

public in December.

G42 has previously said it has distribution and manufacturing agreements with Sinopharm and hopes to provide the UAE and other states in the region with

The deal was launched during a two-day visit to the UAE by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi which ended

The joint venture also includes a purpose-built research and development hub for life sciences, biotechnology and vaccine production in KIZAD. "Our joint venture is also actively looking to bring our

capabilities to new markets around the world," G42 CEO Peng Xiao said.

The UAE has said its trials showed the vaccine has 86% efficacy, while Sinopharm reports 79.34% efficacy based on interim results.

Some people in the UAE failed to develop sufficient antibodies after a second dose of the Sinopharm vaccine and were given a third dose, the UAE health ministry said this month. It said the number was "minimal" compared to the number of vaccines administered.

On Sunday, a Sinopharm executive said the company will need to assess results from overseas Phase III clinical trials to decide whether its two-shot vaccine should be followed by a booster shot.

"Thanks to the close collaboration with the UAE, Sinopharm's vaccine has been now administered to millions of people in the country, the region, and the world," Sinopharm Chairman Liu Jingzhen said at a virtual launch also attended by UAE Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Heart of Asia

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**Chief Editor: M. Hamid Hamdard** 

Graphic & Design: Arman

- Opposite to 3rd District,

Kabul - Afghanistan

Website: www.heartofasia.af

#### Will Biden Make... Now it's President Biden's

turn. Like his immediate predecessor, Biden has never been enthralled with the notion of nation-building in Afghanistan.

During his earlier stint as vice president in the Obama administration, he was the principle bulwark against the Pentagon's counterinsurgency strategy in the South Asian country. Biden's doubts about what the U.S. can and cannot accomplish have not softened with age.

When asked by Margaret Brennan of CBS News a year ago whether he would hold some responsibility in the event the Taliban returned to power after a U.S. troop withdrawal, Biden was emphatic.

"Zero responsibility," Biden answered. "The responsibility I have is to protect America's national self-interest and not put our women and men in harm's way to try to solve every single problem in the world by use of force. That's my responsibility as president. And that's what I'll do as president."

It was a clear, passionate and level-headed response by the then-presidential candidate. Underlying Biden's answer was critical recognition that as powerful, wealthy and capable as the United States is, there are some issues Washington can't resolve. Whether Biden

will continue to be as cleareyed on this never-ending war now as he was then being still to be determined.

There are those in Washington who hope Biden will do what Obama and Trump did before him: defer to the national security "experts" and keep the U.S. military stationed in Afghanistan until the miracle of peace blossoms across the

Many of these people are former senior military officers who at one point in their careers commanded or at least had some responsibility for the war effort. One of the most recent efforts was led by Retired Gen. Joe Dunford, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who co-chaired the congressionally-mandated Afghanistan Study Group.

The core recommendation from the glossy 84-page report released last week: delay the May 1 U.S. troop withdrawal until the Taliban meets a series of strict conditions, such as reducing violence against the Afghan government. If convincing the Taliban to abide by its commitments isn't possible, keep U.S. troops on the ground and continue to support Kabul militarily, diplomatically and economically "for the foreseeable future."

The Biden administration has since said it would take the Afghanistan Study Group's report under advisement as it conducts its own policy review. The administration, however, would be better off ignoring its central conclusion, which practically allows the Taliban and the Afghan government veto power over when U.S. troops can come back to their families.

If the president is genuinely committed to closing the book on a two decadelong misadventure in Afghanistan—one whose narrow counterterrorism mission against Al-Qaeda quickly snowballed into an expensive and dangerous permanent babysitting gig on behalf of the Afghan political elite—he needs to resist the temptation of accepting the same, old advice.

One of the biggest myths that continues to hover over the U.S. foreign policy establishment like a dense fog is the notion that the U.S. will not be safe from transnational terrorism until Afghanistan is stabilized.

It's a myth that presumes the U.S. military needs a ground presence to protect itself and one that totally discounts the capacity of the U.S. counterterrorism apparatus to monitor and neutralize terrorist threats quickly and decisively. Joe Biden is now presented with an opportunity to puncture this myth. The only alternative is adding even more years on top of America's longest war.

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#### Afghanistan:...

peace deal that includes "a just and durable political settlement and permanent comprehensive ceasefire". So while the Biden

revise the deal, it also wants to end the war in Afghanistan. Any unilateral step by either party would be a violation of the agreement. Taking steps to consult the Taliban, rather breaching the accord, would

be in the best interest of peace in Afghanistan. There may be many questions to raise over the Doha deal, but there is no denying the fact that there is no military solution to the Afghan problem.

administration may look to

# **Biden Condemns Bloodshed** in Myanmar

US President Joe Biden has joined other world leaders on condemning the bloodshed in Myanmar, where people are protesting against the Feb. 1 military coup.

"It's absolutely outrageous and based on the reporting I've gotten, an awful lot of people have been killed totally unnecessarily," he told reporters on Sunday.

At least 141 people, including children, were shot dead by Myanmar's ruling military regime on Saturday in a violent crackdown on weeks of pro-democracy protests.

The bloodshed came on Armed

Forces Day, an annual parade, when the ruling military regime was seen as showcasing its strength.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the regime's celebration of its armed forces was damaged by "a day of horror and of shame."

Turkey has also "strongly condemned" the crackdown, saying: "We follow with concern that the Military Regime in Myanmar has further increased the use of deadly force against civilians, ignoring the calls of the international community."



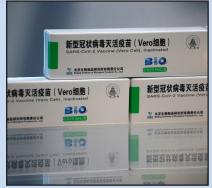
#### A look at the world

#### **UAE Launches COVID-19 Vaccine Production with** China's Sinopharm

A new factory in Abu Dhabi will start manufacturing a COVID-19 vaccine from Chinese pharmaceutical giant Sinopharm later this year under a joint venture between Sinopharm and Abu Dhabi-based technology company Group 42 (G42).

The project is an expansion of Chinese diplomacy in the Gulf region and helps the United Arab Emirates' quest to diversify its economy away from hydrocarbon production.

The plant, which is being built in the Khalifa Industrial Zone of Abu Dhabi



(KIZAD), will have a production capacity of 200 million doses a year with three filling lines and five automated packaging lines, a statement from the joint venture said on Monday.

The vaccine will be called Hayat-Vax when manufactured in the UAE, but is the same inactivated vaccine from the Beijing Institute of Biological Product (BiBP), a unit of Sinopharm's China National Biotec Group (CNBG), that the UAE approved for general use in December.

As part of the joint venture, interim production of Hayat-Vax has already begun in the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah under a deal between G42 and Gulf Pharmaceutical Industries PSC, the statement said.

That interim production line has an initial capacity of 2 million doses per month and no details were given about how long production will continue there.

The UAE, through G42, hosted Phase III clinical trials of the Sinopharm vaccine from July, which later expanded to other countries in the region including Bahrain. The UAE approved the vaccine for frontline workers in September before making it available to the general ...

#### Venezuela Accuses Facebook of 'Digital Totalitarianism'



The Venezuelan government slammed Facebook on Sunday after it froze President Nicolas Maduro's page for 30 days over "repeated violations" of its policies against spreading COVID-19 misinformation.

In a statement, Venezuela's Information Ministry denied any misinformation campaign by the president, arguing he is only promoting "content geared towards combating the pandemic."

The ministry declared that Facebook's actions are part of their "digital totalitarianism" against sovereign states. "We are witnessing a digital totalitarianism exercised by supranational companies who want to impose their law on the countries of the world," it said.

Facebook also took down a video from Maduro's page in which he promoted a medication called Carvativir. Maduro argues that the medicine can cure and prevent the virus.

Facebook argued that Maduro's statement regarding Carvativir is not backed by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Venezuela has registered 155,663 confirmed coronavirus cases, including 1,555 deaths and 144,229 recoveries, according to a running tally by US-based Johns Hopkins University.

Since originating in Wuhan, China in December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed more than 2.78 million lives in 192 countries and regions.

Over 127 million cases have been reported worldwide, with recoveries surpassing 72 million, according to figures compiled by Johns Hopkins.

The US, Brazil and India remain the worsthit countries in terms of cases.

#### **Australian Premier Announces Major** Cabinet Reshuffle

The Australian prime minister on Monday announced a major Cabinet reshuffle amid intense pressure to respond to allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment against women in Australian politics.

"These changes will shake up what needs to be shaken up while maintaining the momentum and the continuity and the stability that Australia needs as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and recession," Scott Morrison told a press briefing.

He named Karen Andrews as the new home affairs minister, while Peter Dutton has been appointed as the defense minister and leader of the government in the House of Representatives.



Michaelia Cash will be the new attorneygeneral and minister for industrial relations, while Christian Porter takes the portfolio for industry, science and technology.

Premier also announced a new task force, which will led by Marise Payne, the minister for women and foreign affairs.

"These appointments will be further enhanced... to drive my government's agenda and response to these key issues involving women's equality, women's safety, women's economic security, women's health and well-being," the premier said.

There were no changes in treasury, finance, health, and social services.

Earlier this month, tens of thousands of women across Australia turned out to protest against sexual misconduct and harassment in the country.

The protest began in response to recent allegations of sexual assault by Brittany Higgins, a former government staffer who claimed she was raped by a senior colleague inside a senior minister's office in 2019.

The allegations have sparked widespread concern and debate about the treatment and harassment of women in Parliament House. On Feb. 16, the prime minister apologized to Higgins for the way her rape complaint was initially handled.



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