

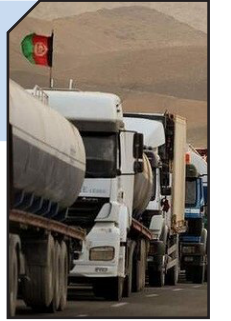


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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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## Biden Seeking Responsible End to Afghan War

US President Joe Biden is committed to bringing a responsible end to the conflict in Afghanistan, says a White House official.

The president wanted to remove US troops in Afghanistan from harm's way, Press Secretary Jen Psaki told a media briefing on Friday.

Biden wanted to ensure that Afghanistan never again became a safe haven for terrorists who could threaten the United States or any of its allies, she said.

Asked about the May 1 deadline for US troop pullout, she responded: "He wants to make that decision in close consultation with partners around the world..."

The president would take a decision in line with advice from his national security team in a way that ensured we are the safety and security of US troops, she explained. ... **P2**



## Azerbaijan, Afghanistan Discuss Expansion of Cultural Cooperation

Azerbaijan's Ministry of Culture Anar Karimov has met with the Afghan ambassador to the country Amanullah Jayhoon to discuss the expansion of cultural cooperation between the two countries.

The minister said the people of Azerbaijan and Afghanistan were bound up by the common historical and cultural values. He hailed Azerbaijan-Afghanistan relations, including cooperation in the field of culture.

Karimov emphasized the importance of organizing joint cultural events, festivals, as well as mutual cultural days.

The minister also thanked Ambassador Jayhoon and the Afghan state for supporting Azerbaijan's just cause during the Patriotic War, as well as adopting resolutions, recognizing Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. ... **P3**

# Khalilzad in Kabul as Govt Prepares for Turkey Conference



US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad arrived in Kabul on Saturday and held a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, head of the High Council for National Reconciliation, and the leadership committee of the council, to discuss the peace process, the reconciliation council

said. Khalilzad also met with President Ashraf Ghani and according to the Presidential Palace statement, they discussed the peace process and the upcoming Turkey conference. Khalilzad's trip comes as the reconciliation council has wrapped

up the review of at least 25 peace proposals, including the plan proposed by President Ghani, by a 15-member committee of political leaders and high-ranking officials. Various proposals and views will be presented as a unified plan at the upcoming Turkey conference

on Afghanistan, according to the reconciliation council.

According to the statement, the committee is scheduled to hold its last meeting on Saturday to review the views offered.

The date for the conference has not been made public so far, but sources told TOLONews last week that Khalilzad has shared the details of the event with negotiators of the Afghan republic and the Taliban.

Ned Price, a spokesperson for the US Department of State, said at a press briefing on Thursday said that the Turkey conference will complement the ongoing peace talks between the negotiating teams representing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban and that the United States will be aimed at accelerating the Afghan peace efforts.

Price said that US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad remains in Doha and that he continues to engage with the parties on this very task, helping the parties, supporting the parties in this Afghan-led, Afghan-owned process to reach a political settlement and comprehensive ceasefire.

## Nearly 700 Explosives Found in Afghanistan Firing Ranges

Nearly 700 unexploded ordnance and war remnants have been found during the New Zealand (NZ) Defence Force's clearing of firing ranges used by New Zealand soldiers in Afghanistan.

An Organization for Mine clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation (OMAR) has been employed by the NZ Defence Force to clear the firing ranges in Bamyan province used by NZ forces, after a Stuff Circuit investigation in 2019. NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern had in 2012 promised complete withdrawal of NZ from ... **P3**



## Chinese Investors Attend Expo, Seek Investment in Afghanistan

Chinese investors at a joint expo in Kabul on Friday said they are willing to invest in Afghanistan if they are provided the environment by the Afghan government, according to the private sector representatives and organizers of the event.

The organizer of the event, Yuming Hui, a Chinese citizen who has lived in the country for the last 20 years, said he has invited eight investors from China to attend the exhibition so that they are encouraged to invest in Afghanistan.

"You can see that eight Chinese investors are here (at the exhibition) to do consultations and find out which areas they can invest in and what type of investment and factories are required in Afghanistan," he said.

The private sector representatives said that such events will encourage foreign investors to invest in Afghanistan and that it will boost



the job market in the country. "Our Chinese friends have planned to establish three factories in the country," said Rahimullah Samandar, the CEO of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries. "They have already imported machinery for two of them."

The business community suggested that China's visa issuance to Afghan investors should be eased as it

would boost trade relations between the two countries.

"We ask China's government to ease the issuance of visas for us," the deputy head of the chamber, Mohammad Yunis Mohmand, said. An official of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce said that such exhibitions will support the private sector in many ways, including in providing them a vast ... **P2**

## Chinese...

environment for investment. "They (Chinese investors) will support the private sector in different areas, including investment, industrial parks and providing investment opportunities in various areas," the head of the exhibitions department of the ministry, Ehsanullah Pazir, said.

Afghanistan exported \$60 million worth of goods to China last year while it imported goods and commodities worth \$1 billion during this period, according to figures by the chamber of commerce and industries.

The private sector said there is a huge trade balance deficit between Afghanistan and China but suggested that it can be reduced by expanding trade and economic relations between the two countries.

## Biden Seeking...

At the same time, the press secretary added, the Biden administration remained serious about diplomatic negotiations with the Taliban. "So he has been clear that it is operationally challenging to get troops out by May 1st, but I certainly expect you will hear from him on what his decision is in advance of that period of time."

In response to a question, she insisted Biden's approach to pullout from Afghanistan was responsible as he seeking advice from members of his military and diplomatic teams.

The president was also consulting US partners and friends around the world as he prepared to make his decision on bringing the US forces home from Afghanistan.

By Afrasiab Khattak

# Tribal Area Residents Call for End to Taliban Sanctuaries

During the last few years, Waziristan—both the southern and northern districts with this name—have been in the news for their residents' powerful agitation against the government's security policies (mostly on social media and international media, as Pakistan's military has banned any mention of the area in the "mainstream media").

The area came into prominence in early 2018 when it emerged as the center of a bold indigenous political uprising against the "three Ds policy" (Death, Destruction and Dislocation) of the federal government toward the seven districts of what was known as the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), and six subdivisions in the adjoining districts known as the Frontier Regions (FRs).

The said area, which holds about 10 million Pashtuns, is ruled under draconian colonial laws dating to the British period and has mostly been used as a launching pad for war in Afghanistan for the last four decades. But the area known as FATA saw the most brutal repression of its entire history between 2002 and 2014 when it was ruled by the syndicate of terrorists who launched a new war against the US-led international forces and the forces of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

For Pakistani generals, the Taliban's war in Afghanistan was important to achieve their old objective of "strategic depth." Ten million Pashtuns living in FATA were thrown to the wolves as terrorists killed thousands of tribal elders with impunity. And that wasn't all: military operations launched by the Pakistan army to convince the international community that the nation was serious about the war on terror would also inflict death and destruction on the local population.

About three million people had to leave their homes and hearths and become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in other districts and even other provinces where they faced humiliation, discrimination and racial profiling.

Thus the worst victims of terrorism were portrayed as its perpetrators. The main towns of what was then FATA were destroyed in the devastating armed conflict that went unabated in the area. Large bazaars and houses were looted by each warring side. Most of the political parties, threatened by the wrath of the Pakistani military, did not raise their voices for the oppressed Pashtuns of that area.

From this political vacuum a youth-led popular uprising calling itself the "Pashtun Tahafuz (Security) Movement (PTM)" emerged to challenge the brutal and oppressive policies of the Pakistani military. Today, they draw massive crowds who protest the use of their area for war in Afghanistan.

However, the security institutions, instead of changing their policies, labeled the new movement "anti-state" and claimed it was working for hostile intelligence agencies.

The security establishment did go through the motions of "reforming" the area by merging it with Pakhtunkhwa province, but without fully opening it to civil society or transferring its governance to civil administration, as legally required by the Constitution.

Why? Because what is at stake is the future of the "Taliban project," which the Pakistani security state has pursued consistently and with great determination.

The Taliban's "invincibility" has largely been made possible by the vast sanctuaries the group has enjoyed in Pakistan since its inception in 1994. Ideologically trained (brainwashed) in any of the 36,000 religious seminaries

established in Pakistan during—or after—the 1980's war in Afghanistan (also called the Afghan Jihad), the Taliban could depend on base camps on the eastern side of the Durand Line even after their worst defeats inside Afghanistan.

Even after 9/11, the Pakistani security state allowed the Taliban to not only enter Pakistan after their Emirate was overthrown by the US in Afghanistan, but to regroup in 2003 (along with other components of an international terror syndicate) and restart a new war in Afghanistan from their bases in Pakistan. The US did put pressure on Pakistan to act against the core of Al Qaeda, which threatened US security, but the US has always regarded the Taliban as a local/regional problem.

Recently, new momentum has been witnessed in protests against Taliban sanctuaries in the former FATA in general and in Waziristan in particular. The large-scale regrouping of the Taliban for their "plan B" in Afghanistan is a major concern. The local population, in light of their horrific experiences of the last two decades, is worried about a new cycle of violence threatening their area.

Targeted killings of locals by terrorists are on the rise, and people are also getting killed in the punitive actions of the Pakistan army.

Large public meetings held by the PTM in Miran Shah, Wana, Bannu, Peshawar and other places have demanded the dismantling of Taliban sanctuaries that bring bloodshed to their homes. Manzoor Pashteen, the main leader of the PTM, and his comrades including Ali Wazir, Mohsin Dawar, Abdullah Nangial, among others, have been leading the huge gatherings.

It is not just the PTM giving voice to the demand of the local population against the militant sanctuaries. Recently,

large tribal conglomerates have come out with clear demands for ending the aforementioned sanctuaries. In February, the Utmanzai Jirga, an umbrella organization representing all tribes of north Waziristan, passed a clearly-worded resolution against what they called the "good Taliban" (a term coined by Pakistani intelligence agencies for the Taliban who go to fight in Afghanistan and who aren't involved in fighting on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line).

Last week, on two occasions, in Jani Khel and in Miran Shah, thousands of people carrying the dead bodies of locals killed by the so-called good Taliban tried to march on Islamabad to press their demand to dismantle the Taliban sanctuaries. On both occasions the government tried to pacify the protesters by promising to clear their areas and to stop providing sanctuary. Also last week, a grand Jirga of Ahmadzai Wazir, another large tribal conglomerate, categorically demanded that sanctuaries for the "good Taliban" be done away with, as they are spreading death and destruction in their area.

Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar, the two young elected parliamentarians from Waziristan, as independent members of the National Assembly, have repeatedly raised the issue on the floor of the House.

Ali Wazir has been incarcerated at the Karachi Jail for the past several months for an allegedly seditious speech, but his supporters believe that the main reason for his being detained is his categorical stand against Taliban sanctuaries.

It is worth mentioning that seventeen members of his immediate and extended family, including his father, brothers and cousins, have been murdered by the Taliban.

By GMF

## What Role Can Turkey Play in The Afghanistan Peace Process?

Since Turkey joined NATO in 1952, its relationship with the United States has been of a strategic nature. The 9/11 terror attacks against the United States by Al-Qaida reinforced their cooperation in the fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, with Afghanistan another theatre where the two have been comrade-in-arms. They have worked side by side in all operations and missions in Afghanistan, and this will be the case in the coming years too. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the Biden administration has asked Turkey to host a summit meeting on Afghanistan next month.

From the outset Turkey and the United States put their soldiers in harm's way in Afghanistan. At every critical stage they enhanced their cooperation to achieve a lasting peace. Turkey led the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) twice and supported it until it expired. It also undertook the Kabul Command as part of Resolute Support Mission as well

as the operation of the Kabul International Airport.

On March 7, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken sent a letter to President Ashraf Ghani emphasizing the urgent need to achieve peace in Afghanistan. He clarified that the Biden administration's policy is still under review, but the peaceful settlement of the conflict remains a priority. The letter informed Ghani of the plan to hold a UN-facilitated conference in Turkey, in which international and regional stakeholders will try to reach a negotiated settlement and an agreement on an immediate ceasefire. Attached to the letter was a roadmap for power-sharing, and notably for a "peace government." Turkey's government subsequently announced the conference would be convened in April.

On March 18, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed the veteran French diplomat Jean Arnault as his personal envoy on Afghanistan and regional issues. On the same day, an Afghanistan peace

conference was held in Moscow, hosted by the extended "troika" of Russia, the United States, China, and Pakistan, in the presence of the representatives of the two conflicting sides as well as Turkey and Qatar as observer countries.

Following this recent momentum, the conference may allow a power-sharing arrangement to be ironed out. Given its deep historical bonds with Afghanistan and regional outreach, as well as its membership in NATO and partnership with the EU, Turkey is uniquely positioned to help facilitate a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan.

The U.S.-Taliban Peace Deal In the past decade, when reconciliation emerged as an exit strategy from Afghanistan for the international community, the Taliban consistently refused direct negotiations with the government. Instead, it was always adamant on talking directly to the United States. In 2018, the Trump administration decided to negotiate directly with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, the

venue of its political office. After almost two years of talks, the U.S.-Taliban accord was signed in February 2020. The Taliban was to sever ties with Al-Qaida and enter into direct talks in good faith with the government to reach a political settlement, while the United States would withdraw its forces by May 1, 2021.

After intense negotiations, the deal included an agreement to release up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners held by the government in exchange for up to 1,000 members of the Afghan National Security Forces captured by the Taliban before the start of direct talks. Finally, last September the direct talks between the government and the Taliban began. So far there have not been any encouraging results.

The Biden administration is now reviewing the deal and the United States' Afghanistan strategy. Three distinct views have emerged in Washington: almost complete adherence to the deal including withdrawal, incremental withdrawal of U.S. forces, and remaining in Afghanistan to avoid squandering achievements of the last two decades. The administration has made it clear

it will consult with its NATO and European allies before taking a final decision. This explains in part the meeting in Turkey.

Turkish-Afghan Relations For Turkey, Afghanistan has never felt distant, historically or socially. Centuries ago, Turkic peoples migrated to Anatolia from Khorasan, the ancient region covering today's Afghanistan and beyond. Today these ties are still alive. People-to-people affinities and state-to-state relations have remained strong. The Turkish people made important contributions to Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion and after 9/11. Since the 9/11 terror attacks and as part of the ensuing initiatives by the international community, Turkey once again chose to help Afghanistan build a better future in peace and stability. Aid to the country is the largest in Turkey's history and it is sustained in each cycle of donor conferences. Ankara provided \$75 million in aid for the next two years at the 2020 Geneva Conference on Afghanistan. Turkey has trained over 5,000 military personnel and about 10,000 police officers in Afghanistan in the framework of NATO's Train, Advice, and Assist mission. ... **P3**

# Tehran: Value of 11-Months Export to Afghanistan Hits \$2B

The value of Iran's export to Afghanistan reached \$2 billion during the period from March 20, 2020 until February 18, 2021, the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) shows.

This amount of exports indicates the high potential of the neighboring countries' markets for importing Iranian products.

Back in January, the director general of the Asia-Pacific Office of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) had said that a preferential trade agreement with Afghanistan was going to be signed in the near future.

Speaking in the fourth meeting of Khorasan Razavi-Herat Joint Trade Committee in Mashhad, Reza Seyed-Aqazadeh said: "Necessary coordination has been made with the Ministry of Commerce of Afghanistan." He mentioned previous tariff

agreements between the two countries and said: "Previously, in 2015, the tariffs for the imports of five commodity items from Afghanistan including the imports of sesame were reduced; the tariffs on sesame imports were reduced from 10 percent to five percent."

According to the official, balancing international trade, especially with Afghanistan is one of the major strategies of Iran in foreign trade, and TPO's goal is to establish a balanced trade between the two countries.

Special strategies have been adopted by the Trade Promotion Organization for balancing trade with Afghanistan and for resolving problems in this field, he said, adding that the issues and demands of Afghan businessmen will also be reviewed in a special working group in this organization to take the necessary measures and resolve



their issues. Having shared historical, cultural, political, and economic backgrounds, Iran and Afghanistan have been allies for many years and the strategic cooperation between the two countries has been broadened especially over the past two decades. As stated by the TPO head, Iran is capable of doubling non-oil exports

to its neighbors in two years. Hamid Zadboum has said that considering the future capacities, the TPO has planned increasing non-oil exports to the neighboring countries to about \$100 billion in a two-year time span, in a way that Iran's share of the regional markets will significantly go up.

### Nearly 700...

Afghanistan. NZ in March this year withdrew its last six personnel from Afghanistan and promised to clear the war-ravaged country of all "remnants of war" ending its 20-year deployment there. Since June 2020, at least 684 unexploded ordnances or explosive "remnants of war" have been discovered and destroyed by OMAR.

The cache comprises mostly Russian explosives, the organization added. Of the 684 ordnances, 490 were deemed of Russian origin, 171 were of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military origin (a figure which includes the possible New Zealand ordnances), 20 found were of Chinese origin, and three were Iranian.

The NZ Defence Force briefing, obtained under the Official Information Act, said despite Covid-19 delaying the start of the clearance effort, OMAR was now ahead of schedule. Work on four of the five ranges to be cleared was 39 per cent complete as of October 31, 2020, ahead of the expected 32 per cent. The clearance of the fifth range was yet to begin.

### Azerbaijan, Afghanistan...

The Afghan ambassador noted that deep historical, religious, and cultural ties between the two countries paved the way for strengthening cultural relations between the two states.

Congratulating Azerbaijan on the victory in the Patriotic War, the ambassador said that Afghanistan would always stand by its brotherly nation.

Touching upon his visit to the liberated territories, Jayhoon said that he was horrified by Armenia's vandalism and the scale of destruction he saw in Fuzuli district.

They also exchanged views on cultural cooperation, including museum studies, launching the national corners at the National Libraries of both countries, as well as organizing joint exhibitions and events to mark the 880th anniversary of Azerbaijani great poet and thinker Nizami Ganjavi.

### What Role Can...

Last December, it decided to extend the term of its military contingent deployed in the country for 18 months until the end of June 2022, well beyond the deadline set for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Any adjustment in NATO troop numbers in Afghanistan will not affect the Turkish presence. The decision by the Trump administration to reduce the number of U.S. troops was a setback for NATO-led stability efforts and contravenes the principle of "in together, out together." It has left the alliance walking a tightrope over how to adjust its presence, in contrast to the transition from ISAF to Resolute Support, which was the subject of intensive consultations within NATO.

Turkey's Role in the Peace Process

Afghanistan is unfinished business, requiring attention from the region as well as the international community. But the U.S.-Taliban deal is an important milestone toward a free country, at peace at home and abroad. That goal is hard to achieve at a time when radical segments of the Taliban continue to stage violent attacks in Afghanistan. Utmost vigilance, therefore, must be exercised throughout the ongoing process. All actors involved should be on guard to maintain the momentum achieved in the past two decades. The fragility in Afghanistan persists and pockets of instability remain. It is in Turkey's interest to fully support the Doha process and keep alive all channels of dialogue within the country at the coming meeting. Its diplomacy can reach out to all of Afghanistan's neighbors to address in earnest how to surmount the challenges impeding peace and stability in the country. That broader dialogue could be complemented by a new effort

to build a regional cooperative scheme. The 2011 Istanbul Process served its purpose; now is the time to build a new and more robust cooperative framework for lasting peace. It is, therefore, incumbent upon Turkey and Afghanistan to immediately start consultations to achieve that end.

In particular, Turkey should seek to reengage Pakistan to the fullest extent possible. Pakistan itself suffers from religious extremism and inter-ethnic conflict, and it needs friendly support to overcome those challenges. To this end, Ankara should reenergize the Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral dialogue without delay. In the past, this effort yielded modest results. At this point a renewed initiative involving Pakistan across the board could be a good start.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan depend on successfully managing the sensitive internal balances among various ethnic communities. This necessitates a result-oriented regional dialogue. Without one, efforts to reach an enduring peace would likely be flawed. Hence the need for concerted efforts starting from within Afghanistan and extending across the region.

It is timely that Turkey finally decided this month that it will appoint a special envoy for Afghanistan. That person should be able to have access not only to authorities in Afghanistan but also in surrounding countries. The special envoy should see to it that efforts in Afghanistan are in sync with regional initiatives and international efforts outside the region.

Turkey could also ensure the Afghan challenge remains on the NATO agenda. That necessitates regularly informing allies of developments, including regional efforts. Afghanistan did not feature strongly in the

NATO 2030 Report. Given the potential withdrawal of U.S. forces, it is high time to flesh out more NATO's Enduring Partnership scheme. The ultimate objective here is clear: Not letting Afghanistan turn back into a safe haven for terrorism and creating the grounds for peace and stability. Before May 1, 2021, it is important for Turkey to engage the Biden administration with a view to limiting the potential damage Afghanistan may face as a result of an untimely U.S. withdrawal. The United States is already becoming more aware of the potential risks. Afghanistan could also be included as a standing item in Turkey's dealings with the EU. The plight of Afghan irregular migrants is an important matter it can raise with the EU, complementing Afghanistan's own contacts. Turkey might also explore options to treat Afghan migrants like the Syrians who have taken shelter in the country.

Turkey could also take the lead in helping Afghanistan increase its regional connectivity. Deepened cooperation on the Lapis Lazuli project to tie the country's landlocked economy to neighboring countries as well as to east- and west-oriented seaports would set a good example. This ambitious project will in the long run benefit not only Turkey and Afghanistan, but also their neighbors and the EU.

Turkey has pledged to maintain its presence in Afghanistan so long as Afghans want it. Its position rests on enduring bonds between the two countries embracing all segments of their societies without any discrimination. In 2021, Afghanistan is once again at a crossroads. Turkey and Afghanistan as well as the international community must again combine their efforts to attain lasting peace and stability in the country and the surrounding region.

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# India Has 'Concerns' with U.S. for Maritime Operation

India conveyed "concerns" to the United States after the USS John Paul Jones Navy guided-missile destroyer conducted a freedom of navigation operation near India's Lakshadweep Islands on April 7, according to a statement on Friday.

"The USS John Paul Jones was continuously monitored transiting from the Persian Gulf towards the Malacca Straits," said the Ministry of External Affairs. "We have conveyed our concerns regarding this passage through our EEZ [Exclusive Economic Zone] to the Government of U.S.A through diplomatic channels."

The U.S. 7th Fleet said on Wednesday that the USS John Paul, "asserted navigational rights and freedoms approximately 130 nautical miles west of the Lakshadweep Islands, inside India's exclusive economic zone, without requesting India's prior consent, consistent with

international law."

It went on to say that "this freedom of navigation operation ("FONOP") upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging India's excessive maritime claim."

The operation, however, triggered controversy in India, with maritime experts contending it was "not incidental" and was a clear violation by the U.S.

The statement on Friday noted that the government of India's stated position on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is that "Convention does not authorize other States to carry out in the Exclusive Economic Zone and on the continental shelf, military exercises or manoeuvres, in particular those involving the use of weapons or explosives, without the consent of the coastal state."



## A look at the world

### Myanmar: 20 Killed During Protests in Bago Region

At least 20 civilians in Myanmar lost their lives during protests in the region of Bago against the recent military coup that saw numerous elected government officials detained, local media reported on Saturday.

Soldiers in the Ma Ga Dit district opened fire on demonstrators, leading to the deaths of at least 20 people, according to eyewitnesses.



It was reported that the soldiers gathered the bodies of those killed at a Buddhist temple in the county.

"Local media confirmed 20 casualties so far, but the civilians we contacted in the region claim that at least 60 people died. We heard that the clashes continued until midnight and that the bodies of the killed civilians were hidden in military vehicles," activist Keren Khin told Anadolu Agency.

In their desperation, the junta want to suppress the protestors by stepping up the violence as much as possible, Khin added.

Underlining that the army used heavy ammunition against the civilians, Khin said thousands of locals had abandoned their homes, with many more on the verge of doing the same.

Myanmar's military seized power on Feb. 1, ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and ending the country's brief experiment with democratic rule.

In response to the coup, civilian groups across the country launched a civil disobedience campaign with mass demonstrations and sit-ins.

### France: Macron Closes Elite School for Presidents



President Emmanuel Macron announced on Friday the abolition of elite postgraduate civil service college Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) and replaced it with a Public Service Institute (ISP) in an attempt to transform the image of French civil service.

"We must radically change the way we recruit, how we train, how we select our administrative elite, how we build careers," he wrote on Twitter. The creation of the ISP will invent a senior public service up to the challenges of our time, he said. "A senior civil service as close as possible to the field. A high civil service that will be the face of France." Macron made the announcement a day earlier in a videoconference to hundreds of senior officials. He first committed to the closure of the ENA in 2019, during the height of the "yellow vests" working-class social movement that challenged his presidency.

Founded by Charles de Gaulle in 1945 at the end of World War II, the school has been a symbol of French training ground for future leaders.

Over the years, the establishment came to be perceived as an overly elitist school filled with privileged students who would fill the ranks and occupy high chairs in the corridors of power. It has faced criticism for producing public officials who are disconnected from ground realities and hardships of common people.

Macron said students from the ISP must spend their "first years in the field, in contact with citizens, in touch with the difficulties of everyday life." Upon leaving the new ISP, students will join a single body: that of State administrators.

The new ISP, scheduled to open in 2022 in Strasbourg, will democratize training for public services and widen access for entrance.

It will admit students from 13 public service schools and follow a curriculum that is "more open to the academic world and to research, in France and internationally." The school has produced several high-profile French politicians and ministers, notably former presidents Jacques Chirac, Valery Giscard d'Estaing and Francois Hollande. The top crop in the current administration includes Prime Minister Jean Castex, Defence Minister Florence Parly, Minister of European Affairs Clement Beaune and Macron. As a graduating student in 2004, Macron was among the signatories to a pupil's report "ENA: the urgency of reform."

### Azerbaijani President Receives UN General Assembly Head

Volkan Bozkir, the Turkish diplomat currently heading the UN General Assembly, met Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in the capital of Baku on Friday, according to the Presidency of Azerbaijan.

Aliyev stressed the injustice experienced in sharing coronavirus vaccines around the world and noted that vaccine nationalism is on the world's agenda.

"Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to raise this problem. Today we are working to eliminate this injustice," he said.

He touched on the situation in Karabakh and indicated that historical, religious and cultural monuments of Azerbaijan were destroyed by Armenians during the occupation period.



He urged international organizations, especially UNESCO, to come to the region and see the destruction.

"Armenian brutality and Vandalism are obvious in the liberated lands," he said noting that more observation of international organizations means more information in the world public opinion about the conflict and what Armenia did during the occupation.

Bozkir said he was proud to visit Azerbaijan as the Chairman of the UN General Assembly and praised Baku's attempts to combat the pandemic and the success of the Non-Aligned Movement during the term presidency.

He also noted that all issues Aliyev mentioned are being carefully followed from New York. During a six week-conflict, which ended with a Russian-brokered truce last November, Azerbaijan liberated several strategic cities and nearly 300 settlements and villages from nearly three decades of Armenian occupation. Relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan -- 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.

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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