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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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1,566 New Cases of Covid-19, 30 Deaths Reported in Afghanistan

The Ministry of Public Health on Monday reported 1,566 new positive cases of COVID-19 out of 5,032 samples tested in the last 24 hours.

The ministry also reported 30 deaths and 181 recoveries from COVID-19 in the same period.

The new cases were reported in Kabul (482), Balkh (144), Kandahar (151), Herat (22), Nangarhar (47), Takhar (54), Baghlan (7), Kunduz (66), Faryab (13), Nimruz (103), Parwan (199), Helmand (14), Paktia (14), Maidan Wardak (31), Badakhshan (19) Laghman (19), Kapisa (53), Bamiyan (8), Ghazni (20), Daikundi (6), Panjshir (34), Badghis (1), Zabol (2), Ghor (9), Uruzgan (3), Khost (5), Sar-e-Pul (29), Paktika (8) and Jawzjan (20) provinces.

Deaths were reported in Kabul (19), Balkh (2), Nangarhar (2), Baghlan (1), Helmand (1), Maidan Wardak (1), ... **P3**



If Pakistan Continues to Restrict Afghan Flights, Afghanistan Will Do Same: Officials

To prevent the spread of the coronavirus in Afghanistan, Pakistan cut 80 percent of Afghan flights to Islamabad. However, the Afghan Civil Aviation Authority said that the decision was unilateral and contrary to the terms of a previous agreement between the two countries. Mohammad Naeem Salehi, spokesperson for the agency, said that talks would be held with Pakistan this week to resolve the issue. "If Pakistan insists on its unilateral decision, Afghanistan will do the same. The Civil Aviation Authority is following up with the other side, Pakistan, this week. If there is no positive response, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Government of Afghanistan will do the same. That means the flight of PIA planes will also be reduced," he said.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Kabul and Islamabad, ... **P3**

Peace Should Be National, Not A Foreign Project: Karzai



Stressing that it is necessary for all stakeholders of the intra-Afghan talks to understand that peace is "national" and not a foreign project, former president Hamid Karzai said on Monday

that the talks have failed as it is not being owned by the people. The former president called on the government and the Taliban to take the peace talks out of the "project" mode and turn it into

a national and Afghan process, so that they can be concluded sooner.

He was speaking during the "Kabul Peace Symposium" organized by the Nation Party

and added that Afghan people have been "pitted" against each other. "Let's go to Bamyan. We have good hotels and the weather is good and there is no need for air conditioning," he added.

Hamid Karzai also mentioned other provinces and said that these provinces could be the venue for negotiations. Karzai added that if the peace process is transformed from a project to a national process, the talks will be concluded as soon as possible. According to him, after securing peace, Afghanistan will be able to talk to its neighbors and the world with determination and independence.

The former president referred to the experiences of peace talks, including the World War II, and noted that large-scale wars such as the World War II ended in a short period of intensive negotiations and that Afghanistan peace talks should take place within a month or less. Other speakers at the meeting also stressed on the need to "nationalize" the peace process.

Parliament Ratifies Iran, Afghanistan Rail Cooperation Agreement

Iran's Parliament on Monday passed Iran-Afghanistan Rail Cooperation Agreement that allows rail connection between the neighboring countries.

Iran and Afghanistan agreed to make direct connection through railroad to transfer passengers and goods.

According to the agreement, the two sides have agreed to provide rail vehicles and services and implement sanitary supervision in accordance with international rules, ... **P3**



UK Plans Quick Relocation for Over 3,000 Afghans

More than 3,000 Afghans, including family members, may be allowed to move to the United Kingdom, the BBC reports.

In line with government plans to relocate the former Afghans interpreters with the British military and government, they will be joining 1,300 others who have already settled in Britain.

The UK decision comes weeks after the former interpreters gathered in Kabul and expressed grave concerns about their security.

The British defence secretary called the decision the right move towards resettling the Afghan translators who were under threat of attacks from the Taliban.

Ben Wallace said current or former locally employed staffers under serious threat to life would be given priority in terms of



relocation to the UK.

Home Secretary, Priti Patel described the decision as "a moral obligation" towards the Afghans who put their lives in danger while working for UK troops in Afghanistan. British troops ended combat operations in southern

Helmand province in 2014, leaving the interpreters in a grave security environment.

Wallace said: "With Western powers leaving Afghanistan, the threat is increasing and has increased, including targeted attacks by the Taliban."

China Allows...

the hand of authorities. "If things stay the same, China is heading for a looming demographic crisis. This has been on the minds of analysts and experts when it comes to China's population for decades. And that's why we did see the 2016 change allowing couples to have two children "But it seems the two-child policy has failed to produce the result the Chinese government was hoping for," Yu said. China's gender balance has also been skewed by decades of the one-child policy, and a traditional social preference for boys which prompted a generation of sex-selective abortions and abandoned baby girls. Although the policy has been relaxed in the last few years, this has not prompted a baby boom as policymakers had hoped. Falling marriage rates in recent years have played out in slower birth rates, as have rising costs of living and increasingly empowered and educated women delaying or avoiding childbirth. The demographic shift in China has significant economic and political implications for the world's second-biggest economy. A third of Chinese people are forecast to be elderly by 2050, heaping huge pressure on the state to provide pensions and healthcare.

Danish...

the NSA to spy on the Danish foreign and finance ministries as well as a Danish weapons manufacturer. The FE also cooperated with the NSA on spying operations against the US government itself. Following the discovery of the extent of the US-Danish secret service cooperation, the Danish government forced the entire leadership of the FE to resign last year.

What Does the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan Mean for Central Asia?

On May 1, 2021, the United States began formally withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan. With the new Biden administration, the U.S. and NATO military presence on Afghan soil will come to an end by September 11 as it opens up a new dimension of regional affairs.

The fear of potential aggravation of the political situation and worsening of security in Afghanistan, as well as the expansion of instability, is a matter of great regional concern. The power struggle between interest groups and political factions inside the Afghan government, as well as the Taliban's growing power, has the definite potential to change the U.S.-secured power equilibrium in Afghanistan. This, in turn, may give momentum to external players seeking to fill the vacuum in pursuit of their own geopolitical or geo-economic interests.

The official withdrawal of U.S. troops is of particular importance for the countries of Central Asia, given their proximity to Afghanistan, and may lead to a number of strategic consequences. In this context, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's meeting on April 23 with the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan under the C5+1 framework was an attempt to ensure U.S. commitments to the region and signal to other regional actors that Afghanistan is still on the radar of Biden's foreign policy. Consequently, the early May visit by Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation, to Tashkent, Kabul, and Dushanbe dovetailed with new discussions about possibly basing U.S. troops in Central Asia. All these factors may suggest the shaping of a new narrative for U.S. policy toward the region.

However, it is critically important to analyze the consequences of the U.S. withdrawal for Central Asia through various angles, with the economic angle especially important.

First, although we are talking about issues of ensuring regional security, the political and economic factors related to the development of regional trade and energy infrastructure are critical. The weakening of the central government and the potential rise to power of representatives of radical groups could set back Afghanistan's development by decades and lead to new problems that will be much more difficult for the world community to solve in the future.

For the countries of Central Asia, such a scenario already carries many challenges. The deepening of internal conflict in Afghanistan may lead to a weakening of control over the country's northern borders. For Tajikistan, this could lead to an unprecedented increase in the flow of contraband and drug trafficking. Turkmenistan may have to provide additional protection for important infrastructure facilities, such as mineral deposits and international gas pipelines, which are of strategic importance not only for the region, but also for major external partners, primarily China and Russia, as well as South Asian countries.

It is obvious that the presence of the U.S. military and its allies in Afghanistan played a crucial role in the fight against armed groups. At the peak of the Afghan campaign in 2011, more than 98,000 American troops and about 41,000 coalition troops were deployed in the country. More than 300,000 representatives of the defense forces and the Interior Ministry of Afghanistan supported them. In addition, during the same period, about 120,000 private contractors worked in Afghanistan, of which almost 23,000 were employees of U.S. private military contractors (PMCs), as well as PMCs cooperating with the U.S. Department of Defense. According to various sources, the total cost of the military campaign alone ranged from \$750 billion to \$1 trillion, excluding reconstruction programs.

These forces undoubtedly prevented strengthening of a number of extremist groups, two of which pose a particular threat to regional and international security: the Taliban, and in more recent years, the regional Islamic State branch, often known as ISKP (Islamic State- Khorasan Province).

Equally important are the economic consequences of the presence of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan. Over the past 18 years, the U.S. and a number of other donors have provided more than \$143 billion in reconstruction aid to Afghanistan. The allocated funds were supplied to finance the government of Afghanistan, the Afghan army, the Interior Ministry, and the state national security services. In addition, significant amounts were allocated by major international organizations such as the World Bank (about \$6 billion in soft loans over 19 years). Investments in the IRA Recovery Fund amounted to more than \$13 billion. External investments had a

significant impact on Afghanistan's GDP, which, as of 2019, was about \$19.29 billion.

It is clear that international financial and humanitarian support is as important to Kabul as military support. It was a vital factor for economic growth and social stability. The development of the economy made it possible to create additional jobs and gave the population the opportunity to receive a high-quality education. This, in turn, has a complex influence, and arguably limited the replenishment of the ranks of the militants with new members by providing alternate economic and social pathways. Foreign investment and financial support provided Afghanistan with additional opportunities to develop trade and economic relations with external partners, including with the countries of Central Asia. For example, for Kazakhstan, Afghanistan is an important trading partner and a major importer of Kazakhstan's agricultural products and petroleum products. In 2019, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to more than \$401 million. Should the situation in Afghanistan deteriorate, countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan risk losing an important market for their products.

Over the past 20 years, the U.S. has viewed Central Asia through the prism of its military and geopolitical interests in Afghanistan. After the completion of the withdrawal of the U.S. military, the region will eventually be of less interest to Washington. The U.S. will initially continue to provide some financial and advisory support to the Afghan government, and may continue to promote the integration of Afghanistan with Central Asia, but the Central Asian countries themselves should prepare for a long-term decline in U.S. interest in the region as a whole. The share of American investment in the region has never been high, but against the backdrop of the developing economic crisis, any decline in financial flows will be felt.

In this context it is not entirely correct to take into account only the current level of trade and economic relations between the countries of the region and Afghanistan. Global trends such as protectionism and deglobalization, which are being exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, must also be taken into account. It is strategically important for the Central Asian states that do not have direct access to the sea to organize trade routes ... **P3**

By: Elizabeth Abbott

Girls, Again, will Be the Losers When U.S. Leaves Afghanistan

U.S. troops are finally leaving Afghanistan after 20 years, a decision recently announced by President Biden. It's time to end the "forever war," Biden said, a conflict responsible for at least 2,448 American deaths and the wounding of 20,772 soldiers.

Bring the troops home. Heck, who doesn't like that idea? Do we really need to shed more American blood in Afghanistan, a dusty, tumultuous country that has historically resented foreigners? Why spend the money? Why spend the time? "What's the downside of leaving?" I imagine one of the Washington, D.C., decision makers asking.

I picture them sitting around a highly polished table, coolly assessing the pros and cons of pulling the plug on American military support, a dicey proposition given a resurgence of Taliban violence right now. Maybe there's a woman or two in this group of high-level officials, but in my mind, it's

predominately male. And I'm probably right.

"Women might lose some of the freedoms they have won in the last 20 years," one answers. "How bad could it get?" "Unclear."

Oh really? Unless you've had a bag over your head for the last two decades, you should have a pretty good idea of what will happen once the United States and its NATO allies depart. You remember the Taliban, don't you? They're the guys who think women shouldn't show their faces in public. When they controlled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, girls weren't allowed to go to school and women weren't allowed to work. Women could also be stoned or flogged for so-called morals offenses, male-defined, of course.

A newly declassified U.S. intelligence report essentially predicts that women's rights will slide without American military support, whether the Taliban regains control or not.

But, in explaining his decision, Biden said the U.S. had met its objective of rooting out Al Qaeda's terrorist training camps, which helped to spawn the 9/11 attacks on this country. He vowed American troops would depart by Sept. 11 of this year, 20 years to the day the twin towers collapsed, offering a tidy, almost Hollywood-like ending to a conflict that has been anything but.

The gains Afghan women have made in the last 20 years — such as the right to hold elected office, go to school and work outside the home — received one line in Biden's April 14 speech, a vague pledge to support their rights with "significant" humanitarian and development assistance. So, too, Afghanistan's current president, Ashraf Ghani, has vowed to protect the progress made by women, at the same time his government is negotiating with the Taliban for an end to their protracted... **P3**

Afghan Team Arrives in Qatar for World Cup 2020 Qualifiers



Afghanistan's National Football Team arrived in Doha from the UAE on Monday for the second round of the Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and the AFC Asian Cup China 2023.

After more than 18 months of inactivity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Group E is now ready to resume matches.

According to AFC, the battle for top spot looks to be between Qatar and Oman while Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh fight it out for the automatic places in the third round of qualifying for the AFC Asian Cup. While Qatar holds a four-point lead going into the final phase of matches in the second round of qualifying for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and the AFC Asian Cup China

2023, the side has played one game more than second-placed Oman.

But having dropped just two points so far — in a 0-0 draw with India just eight months after being crowned Asian champions — victory for Qatar over the Indians plus a draw in their meeting with Oman on June 7 would be enough to guarantee top spot and confirm that berth in China in two years' time.

Should Qatar win the group, the runners-up will be in a battle with the other second-placed teams across the eight groups in the second round hoping to have a good enough record to advance to the next phase of FIFA World Cup qualifying, AFC reported.

With seven group winners advancing to the third round, five of the best... **P3**

Ministry of Agriculture Lends 1.1B Afghanis to Over 14,000 Farmers

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock has announced that it will lend 1.1 billion afghanis to 14,300 farmers in two three-and five-year terms.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Sunday by Emal Arman, President of the Agricultural Development Fund, ADF, and officials from First Micro Bank, Access Afghanistan, Finca Afghanistan and Tarh-e-Naw, financial institutions providing agricultural loans.

Minister of Agriculture Anwarul Haq Ahadi also spoke at the signing ceremony. Under the MoU, 1.1 billion afghanis is to be lent to the four institutions to provide small loans to farmers.

According to the terms of the memorandum, the four institutions must provide smaller loans to farmers



and agricultural activities.

According to Anwarul Haq Ahadi, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, four specific sectors of agriculture will benefit from these loans. Of 1.1 billion Afghanis, 500

million will be given to the first small loan bank, 3 million Afghanis to Access Afghanistan, 100 million to FINCA and about 200 million Afghanis to Tarh-e-Naw. The Ministry of Agriculture has said that 14,300 farmers are

benefiting from these small loans in the country. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agricultural Development Fund has lent 13.2 billion Afghanis to 104,066 farmers in 32 provinces since its inception.

Parliament Ratifies...

while domestic rules are valid where an issue occurs outside of international conventions.

The agreement also states that the two sides must treat passengers and goods from the other side the way they treat their own. This applies to free access to destination points, providing space for cargos in terminals, unloading and uploading of cargos, onboarding and offboarding passengers, and using international railroad services. Islamic Republic of Iran Railways and Afghanistan Railway Authority have been chosen in the agreement as qualified authorities to supervise implementing the agreement and to solve disagreements.

Iran and Afghanistan linked their railway through Iran's Khaf and Afghanistan's Herat.

If Pakistan Continues...

Kam Air Airlines flies to Islamabad five times a week, and Pakistan Payai Airlines flies to Kabul five times a week.

However, Afghanistan's Civil Aviation Authority said that Islamabad had canceled four Afghan flights a week to Pakistan without consulting and informing them, contrary to the terms of the MoU, because of what it said was to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

On the other hand, Suleiman Omar, Commercial Officer of Kam Air Airlines, said that the Afghan Civil Aviation Authority should pave the way for the resumption of the company's flights to Islamabad, "The rights of Afghan companies must now be protected and defended. The situation during COVID-19 is critical. We need to work together and try to get our flights back on track," he added. Afghan officials have previously said that Pakistan has not always adhered to its commitments and, in addition to political issues in economic and trade matters, has acted unilaterally and in its own interests. Two years ago, as political tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi escalated, Pakistan blocked its airspace for several weeks in the face of Afghan flights to India.

Afghan Team...

second-placed finishers would join them in going through.

AFC reported that the Oman side is already in a strong position to claim one of those spots should they not manage to climb over the Qataris, with 12 points from five games and matches against Qatar, Afghanistan and Bangladesh remaining.

However, the Afghan team presents the closest challenge to Oman but, with eight points separating Anoush Dastgir's team from the Gulf side, the chances of overhauling them are slim. Instead, Afghanistan's focus

will be on securing third spot in the group and guaranteeing themselves a place in the third round of qualifying for the AFC Asian Cup China 2023.

Much the same will apply for fourth-placed India, who have picked up three points from three draws in a disappointing campaign so far for Igor Stimac's team, while Bangladesh will be looking to challenge the Afghans and Indians in a quest to avoid last place and the requirement to enter the playoffs for the third round of qualifying for the AFC Asian Cup. Afghanistan's captain, Farshad Noor has meanwhile been

singled out as a player to watch as, according to the AFC, Noor provides a strong, technical presence at the heart of the Afghanistan midfield.

The 26-year-old headed in his side's first goal in the second phase of qualifying for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2023 when he netted the only goal of the game against Bangladesh in the nations' meeting back in September 2019.

The Afghan team, which has just wrapped up a 10-day training camp in the UAE, will face Bangladesh on Thursday and play Oman on June 11 and India on June 15.

What Does the...

connecting Central and South Asia, and open direct access to the markets of Pakistan, India, and the Middle East. The deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan could affect the fate of various infrastructure projects, such as the construction of international power lines and new railways and highways, as well as the TAPI gas pipeline, which if completed could change the energy map of all of

South Asia. The strengthening of the Taliban's position in Afghanistan and the possible aggravation of the domestic political crisis will certainly scare off foreign investors and partners. Thus, for Central Asia, the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, apart from triggering new security threats, will lead to economic consequences as well. To date, it is not clear how long, and to what extent, external support

for Afghanistan will remain after the completion of the withdrawal. It is also unknown whether any of the external players will be able or willing to fill the resulting security vacuum in the region. After all, this is not just about material support for the central Afghan government, but about ensuring the security of infrastructure projects in the country's regions, as well as control over borders and illegal trade flows.

Girls, Again,...

war. But the Taliban, and other fundamentalist creeps in Afghanistan, like the Afghan branch of ISIS, have never disguised their feelings about women and girls. The younger generation claim to be more open-minded, and in some places they control have even allowed girls to go to school — until puberty that is. But, in general, their actions belie their words. In May 2020, gunmen

attacked a maternity ward in Kabul, killing 24 people, among them five women in labor, 10 who had recently given birth and three children.

No group claimed responsibility. Then, just to make their intentions perfectly clear, bombs exploded earlier this month at a girls' high school, killing at least 50 people, many of them poor, teenage girls. As the New York Times reported, "The scale of the killing and the

innocence of the victims seemed further unnerving proof of the country's violent unraveling, as the Taliban make daily gains..." So, back to the decision makers in Washington: No doubt they, and President Biden, had a difficult decision to make. But they shouldn't pretend they don't know whom they're sacrificing in their determination to get out of Afghanistan. The victims will be innocent lambs. Girls again. When will it end?

1,566 New...

Logar (1), Ghazni (2) and Jawzjan (1) provinces. The ministry reported that the cumulative total of known COVID-19 cases is 73,256, the total number of reported deaths

is 2,974, and the total number of recoveries is 57,630. So far, 474,132 samples have been tested in government centers and there are 12,652 known active COVID-19 cases in the country, data by the ministry

indicates. According to Johns Hopkins University, the number of deaths from COVID-19 globally is more than 3,541,881 and the number of known global coronavirus cases is 170,377,345.

Exchange Rates

78.3	\$	78.4
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109.1	£	109.2
496	Rp.	497
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China Allows Families to Have 3 Children in Major Policy Shift

China has relaxed its family planning policy to allow couples to have three children after a census showed its population is rapidly ageing, state media reported, in a major policy shift to boost birthrate in the world's most populous nation.

For nearly 40 years, China enforced a controversial "one-child policy" – one of the strictest family planning regulations worldwide – which was relaxed in 2016 to a "two-child policy" due to widespread concerns about an ageing workforce and economic stagnation.

Despite government efforts to encourage couples to have children, China's annual births have continued to plummet to a record low of 12 million in 2020, the National Bureau of Statistics said last month.

That threatens a demographic crisis that has alarmed the ruling Communist Party, headed by President Xi Jinping, booking in a shortage of

young workers to drive an economy that experts say will have to support hundreds of millions of elderly by 2050.

"To actively respond to the ageing of the population ... a couple can have three children," Xinhua said, citing a Monday meeting of China's elite Politburo leadership committee hosted by President Xi.

China's fertility rate stands at 1.3 – below the level needed to maintain a stable population, the National Bureau of Statistics revealed.

The once-in-a-decade 2020 census results published last month also showed that China's population grew at its slowest rate since the 1960s, reaching 1.41 billion.

It comes alongside a sharp drop in the number of working-age people, once again raising fears of a looming demographic crisis.

Al Jazeera's Katrina Yu, reporting from Beijing, said the release of the census data forced ... P2



A look at the world

Iran Says Talks with Saudi Arabia Ongoing

Iran said Monday that talks were ongoing with regional rival Saudi Arabia and were taking place in a conducive atmosphere. Iran "hopes to reach an understanding with Saudi Arabia," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh said in a press briefing cited by private Tehran Times newspaper.

"We hope that the talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia will end successfully," he added.

Khatibzadeh also noted that the two countries had reached a "first" agreement regarding the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage season.

In a televised interview late last month, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin



Salman said that his country "aspires to have a good and distinguished relationship with Iran", remarks that were received well by Iran as a "change of tone" from Saudi Arabia.

Early May, Iraqi President Barham Salih announced that his country has recently hosted more than one round of dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Pertinently, the two regional countries severed diplomatic ties in January 2016 following an attack on the Saudi Embassy in Tehran after Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr was executed by the Saudi authorities.

Relations between the two rivals deteriorated further after Iran in September 2016 accused Saudi authorities of deliberately causing the death of around 400 Iranian pilgrims in a 2015 stampede in the holy city of Mecca.

The two sides have since then been engaged in a strong regional rivalry, often accusing each other of proxy war for regional influence.

The rivalry between the two countries has manifested itself through their support for opposing sides in the Yemen war, which has resulted in a catastrophic situation.

Russia to Set Up 20 New Military Units in Country's West in Response to NATO's Activity



Russia's Defense Ministry will establish about 20 new military units and formations in the country's west in response to the activity of the US-led NATO bloc in the western strategic area, Russian Defense Minister Army General Sergey Shoigu said at the ministry's board meeting on Monday.

The military threat in the western strategic direction continues growing: the NATO member states led by the United States are ramping up the intensity of their strategic aircraft flights, and the presence of combat ships with cruise missiles and the number of their drills is increasing, the defense chief said. "Our Western colleagues' actions are ruining the world security system and forcing us to take appropriate measures in response. We are constantly improving the troops' combat structure. About 20 military formations and units will be set up in the Western Military District by the end of the year," the defense minister said.

These organizational measures will be "synchronized with the delivery of advanced armaments and military hardware," he specified

"This year, about 2,000 weapon systems are planned to be delivered to the District's troops," Shoigu said.

Apart from setting up new military formations and delivering advanced armaments, the Russian Armed Forces are constantly improving the training of personnel and military authorities, the defense chief said.

"The Baltic Fleet's warships have boosted the intensity of practicing combat training tasks by 30%. Over 200 exercises involving various types of armaments have been fulfilled. The District's aircraft have increased their flight time by 4%," Shoigu said.

Danish Intelligence Agency Helped US Spy on German Leaders

Denmark's intelligence agency helped the American National Security Agency (NSA) spy on European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German news outlets reported on Monday.

The revelations that Washington had been eavesdropping on its European allies first emerged in 2013, but it is only now that German journalists have gained access to inside reports about the role of the Danish Defense Intelligence Service (FE) in providing support to the NSA.

The report indicated that Germany's northern neighbor and EU partner cooperated actively with the US on spying on German leaders.

According to the report, the then-chancellor



candidate for the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), Peer Steinbrück, was also on the American spying list.

Reacting to the spying affair, Steinbrück told the Deutsche Welle broadcasting network: "Politically, I consider this a scandal."

Steinbrück added while he accepted that western countries require functioning intelligence services, the fact that Danish authorities had been spying on their partners showed "that they are rather doing things on their own."

A spokesperson for the chancellor said neither Merkel nor Steinmeier had "any knowledge" of the spying operations carried out by leading Danish government officials.

The German official added the chancellor had been informed of the revelations.

The Danish government came to know about the involvement of the country's secret service in the NSA scandal by 2015 at the latest. The authorities began to collect information on the FE's cooperation with the NSA between 2012 and 2014 in the secret Dunhammer report following the disclosures by the former NSA employee and whistleblower, Edward Snowden, Germany's NDR television reported. The information they collected proved that the FE had helped the NSA spy on leading politicians in Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and France, as well as Germany. Denmark's secret service also helped ... P2



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