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Heart of Asia

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Taliban Assures Afghan Interpreters on Their Safety

The Taliban said that those Afghans who worked with international troops should not fear and should continue living a peaceful life in the country. Amidst foreign troops withdrawal, thousands of Afghan interpreters and staff members have expressed concerns about threats against them, but the Taliban in a statement said on Monday that the Afghans can continue their normal life, and that they will not face any threat.

"The Islamic Emirate will not perturb them but calls them to return to their normal lives and if they do have expertise, in any field, to sever their country. They shall not be in a danger on our part," a statement by... P3



Taliban Meets with EU Peace Envoy, Pledges to Ensure Safety of Foreigners

In a statement issued by the Taliban's spokesman, Mohammad Naeem, the Taliban welcomed Niklasson's appointment and said it was "a good step towards further strengthening relations between the Taliban and the European Union.

The meeting discussed the current peace process, the withdrawal of foreign troops, EU humanitarian aid and the security of diplomats and foreign staff.

"The Board of the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) once again assured the health and safety of diplomats and staff of human sectors and added that the safety of diplomats and staff of human sectors is part of the national interests of our country and is our responsibility," their statement read. The statement comes amid growing concerns for the safety of foreign missions, diplomats and international organizations and their staff once US and NATO troops withdraw.

Last month, Australia announced it was closing its embassy in Kabul, citing security concerns.

A number of other embassies in the Afghan capital have sent home non-essential personnel, warned their nationals against travelling to Afghanistan and urged those already in the country to consider leaving.

CIA Scrambles for New Approach in Afghanistan



The rapid US withdrawal from Afghanistan is putting intense pressure on the CIA to find new ways to gather intelligence and conduct counter-terrorist attacks in the country, but the agency has few good options.

The CIA, which has been at the center of a 20-year US presence in Afghanistan, will soon lose its bases in the country from which it has conducted combat missions and drone strikes, closely monitoring other groups such as the Taliban

and al Qaeda. Islamic State. Agency analysts are warning of ever-increasing risks of a Taliban takeover.

United States officials are making last-minute efforts to secure bases close to Afghanistan for future operations. But the complexity of the ongoing conflict has led to thorny diplomatic talks, according to US officials and regional experts, as the military pulled out all forces by mid-July, long before President Biden's September 11 deadline.

One focus has been Pakistan. The CIA used a base there for years to launch drone strikes against terrorists in the country's western mountains, but was forced out of the facility in 2011, when US ties with Pakistan were exposed.

Any deal now has to work around the uncomfortable reality that the government of Pakistan has long been backing the Taliban. In discussions between US and Pakistani officials, Pakistanis have demanded a variety of sanctions

in exchange for the use of a base in the country, and effectively required them to sign off on any target the CIA or military would like. According to three Americans familiar with the discussion, struck inside Afghanistan.

Diplomats are also exploring the option of gaining access to bases in former Soviet republics that were used for the Afghanistan war, although they expect Russian President Vladimir V. Putin to strongly oppose it.

Recent CIA and military intelligence reports on Afghanistan have been increasingly pessimistic. He has highlighted gains by the Taliban and other terrorist groups in the south and east, and warned that Kabul could fall into Taliban hands within years and become a safe haven for terrorists intent on attacking the West, As estimation according to many familiar people.

As a result, US officials see a need to gather intelligence over longer periods of time – in addition to military and CIA counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan – after the deadline Mr Biden set for troops to leave the country. But the scramble for bases shows that US officials still lack a long-term plan to address security in a country where they have spent trillions of dollars over nearly two decades and... P3

British Government Reveals Cost of War in Afghanistan

As per the British government, the war in Afghanistan has cost taxpayers £22.2billion for the 20-year deployment, with the UK supporting the US War on Terror triggered by the September 11 terror attacks in 2001. The revelation comes as the final British troops prepare to leave the war-ravaged nation. The final cost is likely to be even higher because the bill disclosed by Defense Minister James Heappey only counts cash from a special Whitehall pot for the conflict.

Revealing the cost in a... P3



Ministry of Health Reports 1,582 New Cases of COVID-19



The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) on Monday reported 1,582 new positive cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the last 24 hours.

The ministry also reported 56 deaths and 376 recoveries from COVID-19 in the last 24 hours.

The total number of cases now stand at 82,326, while the number of reported deaths is 3,251 and the total number of recoveries is 58,988.

According to the Ministry of Public Health, the cases of coronavirus and related deaths in the country

has increased unprecedentedly. It has called on the people to take precautionary measures.

Concerns about the shortage of beds for patients in hospitals and oxygen have also increased as the country's third wave of the coronavirus spreads rapidly.

Dozens...

removing the debris," he said. "Equipment and paramilitary forces are there to remove the debris."

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was "shocked" by the crash, and ordered Railways Minister Azam Swati to reach the site of the accident on Monday.

"Have asked railway minister to reach site and ensure medical assistance to injured and support for families of the dead," he tweeted. "Ordering comprehensive investigation into railway safety faultlines." The Pakistani military said it had dispatched rescue helicopters, ambulances and specialized search and rescue crews to the site of the crash. "Engineer resources moved to carry out necessary relief and rescue work," said a military statement. "Army special Engineer Team [for] Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) being heli-lifted from Rawalpindi to incident site to speed up relief and rescue efforts."

Pakistan's aging railway system has seen numerous accidents and crashes in recent years, with successive governments investing little in maintaining the tracks and signal systems.

In 2019, at least 73 people were killed after a gas canister blast and fire on board an overcrowded passenger train near the town of Liaquatpur.

By: Shokrullah Amiri

Threats and Opportunities Amid U.S. NATO Withdrawal from Afghanistan

When U.S. President Biden's decision to end "America's longest war" made headlines in Afghanistan, people in the country were alarmed and reacted in different ways. Most Afghans believe that the U.S. withdrawal of troops is a serious threat to their future and increases the possibility of civil war. Here are some key questions that require answers: Does the U.S.-NATO troop withdrawal from Afghanistan mean a discontinuation of security and financial assistance? Will this withdrawal lead to the collapse of the Afghan state and a complete takeover by Taliban militants? Will there be civil war?

It seems that the withdrawal does not mean the end of assistance to Afghanistan. This belief is based on two assumptions. First, the U.S. acts according to its strategic culture and will try to prevent rival powers from infiltrating Afghanistan. The second assumption goes back to the U.S. president who has made it clear in a White House press statement that the withdrawal does not mean a weakening of U.S. backing for Afghanistan. "We will continue to support the strengthening of the Afghan security and defense forces," Biden told Ashraf Ghani. This is clearly evidenced in an Aryana News report that the U.S. defense budget proposal for 2022 includes \$3.3 billion in aid for Afghanistan. Also, the U.S. did not rule out deploying airstrikes from outside the country, and NATO will most likely continue training Afghan forces in Jordan (NYT). However, many Afghan politicians, as

well as most citizens, are concerned about their future and see the military withdrawal as a serious threat to their country. But if one looks at it broadly, the withdrawal is both an opportunity and a threat.

Threats

As the removal of foreign troops from Afghanistan continues, we have been witnessing growing violence and territorial gains by the Taliban. The insufficient level of foreign air support for the Afghan forces can hurt them on the ground.

Afghan politicians believe that there is a possibility of a civil war. Mir Rahman Rahmani, the speaker of parliament, has warned as much. An all-out internal conflict would reverse all the progress made in human rights and development. It will also provide the ground for the resurfacing of constrained Al-Qaida and IS-K terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

There is also a buildup among anti-Taliban militant groups whose confrontation under the Northern Alliance denied the Taliban a complete takeover in 1999. Stars and Stripes reports that Ahmad Massoud, the son of late commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, claims over 100,000 fighters and supporters have so far pledged support to his movement named "Resistance 2.0," adding to the deepening divisions that create conditions for a civil war.

Afghans have long been living in a fragile and broken state. The withdrawal of U.S.-NATO troops has added to the complexity of their



plight. Afghans are indeed used to these situations but what now matters most is the scenario of civil war and the collapse of the political system built with the sacrifice of over 69,000 soldiers and 47,000 civilians (AP).

Opportunities

The military withdrawal could nevertheless present several opportunities for Afghanistan. The Taliban's brutal attacks against the security forces and civilians even during the U.S.-NATO presence are against human and Islamic values, and the withdrawal of foreign soldiers will weaken the religious-moral justification for continuing a "holy war" in Afghanistan. Over the years, the Taliban have legitimized their inhumane violence under the slogan of "Jihad against Infidels." In contrast, the U.S.-NATO withdrawal will help Afghan forces attract more religious support and recognition from the local and international community. The Taliban

would hate to see this happen, and it might force them to seek a peace deal with the Afghan government.

The U.S.-NATO withdrawal will strengthen the desire for "self-reliance" among the citizens of Afghanistan. By using local values and national spirit, one can dream of a free and prosperous Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, foreigners can intervene or withdraw whenever they want, depending on their interests. Therefore, the U.S.-NATO withdrawal can convince Afghans that they have no choice but to stand on their own feet, which in the long run can be beneficial for the nation's development.

Afghanistan's geopolitics and geoeconomics have a special appeal to the great powers. The assumption is that if Afghanistan enters a new crisis in the absence of the United States, there are others who can side with Afghanistan and help manage the transition. One can mention Russia, China and Turkey.

Inida...

But experts believe that both figures have been severely undercounted and could be a few times higher than the official number.

'Step in Right Direction'

Authorities in the western state of Maharashtra, home to Mumbai, allowed businesses to run until late afternoon, staffed with half their employees, and opened gyms, salons and spas, though cinemas and malls are to stay shut.

Maharashtra, India's richest state,

eased restrictions based on infection rates and hospital bed occupancy. In Mumbai – where the caseload soared to 11,163 in early April – there were just 794 new infections on Sunday. Malls were allowed to reopen in the city with restrictions, but were reopened fully in cities with lower infection rates such as Nagpur and Aurangabad.

"This is a step in the right direction," said Rajendra Kalkar of Phoenix Mills, which manages three shopping centres in Maharashtra.

"Businesses at our malls are coming

back slowly. This is a very welcome step for thousands of mall staff and retail employees."

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India estimated that more than two million jobs were lost during the Maharashtra lockdown.

"We are very happy to open our doors again today," the restaurant manager of the Mumbai branch of popular eatery Social, who gave his name as Malay, told AFP.

Experts warn that while the crisis has eased in major cities, the disease is still spreading in rural areas and

some southern states.

The reopening of some cities came as authorities struggle to vaccinate the population of nearly 1.4 billion in a strategy officials say is the only way to limiting a third wave of infections. But tight supplies have meant that fewer than 5 percent of 950 million adult Indians have received the mandatory two vaccine doses.

The pressure to resume some economic activity has grown as millions depend on daily wages to pay for food and rent.

"I have opened my shop after 40 days," a tea vendor, Monu Yadav, told Reuters news agency's partner ANI in the northern city of Varanasi, adding that only a fraction of his customers had returned.

Last week, the central bank cut its forecast for economic growth to 9.5 percent from 10.5 percent for the fiscal year 2021-22.

The second wave had "impaired the nascent recovery that was under way", but "not snuffed it out", said Shaktikanta Das, the governor of the Reserve Bank of India.

By: Jonah Goldberg

The People We Owe in Afghanistan

I think Joe Biden's decision to fully withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan is a mistake. It's mistaken on strategic and moral grounds. I hope I'm wrong. But when even administration officials, and experts who favour the decision, concede that our pullout – of a very small contingent of troops – could result in a Taliban takeover it seems a safe bet that it will happen.

But that decision has been made and there's no point arguing about it anymore. But there's still one thing the United States can do – and morally must do: Get the people who signed up to work, and fight, with us out of there.

Over the last 20 years thousands of Afghans worked with U.S. and NATO forces as interpreters, cultural advisers, etc. They chose to do so knowing that they put their lives and the lives of their families at risk. The Taliban knows who

most of them are, and will find out about the rest soon enough.

Scores have been assassinated over the years. The Taliban has lists of people it plans to kill. Interpreters are at the top of the list, but so are countless others who worked with Western organizations and governments to stand up a (sadly corrupt) democratic government, as well as schools and other civil society projects.

Even if you're not compelled by the moral argument, telegraphing to the world that it's not worth working with Americans is a strategic blunder of monumental proportions. And an utterly foreseeable one.

America told these interpreters that we'd get their back. We created a Special Immigrant Visa program in 2008 to expedite asylum for these people, many of whom have saved American lives on the battlefield. And the program has

been an unmitigated bureaucratic catastrophe.

In 2009 there were 1,500 slots created for asylum seekers. Three were granted. Today there are 18,000 people waiting for an SIV, not including families. The vetting process is supposed to take nine months. It always took longer. But under the Trump administration the average wait time was three years. There are understandable reasons for the backlog. Vetting translators is difficult. The Taliban has in the past embedded sleepers in such positions so as to attack Americans or provide intelligence. No one wants to import a terrorist to America. It's also a complicated and expensive task to resettle whole families and our resettlement agencies have been taxed for a very long time.

But even people who have literally killed Taliban on the battlefield have been denied visas or been stuck in limbo. American officers who have served side-by-side with these allies

have offered to take them into their homes. If they're willing to vouch for them, that's good enough for me.

More importantly, there's no one of any importance out there arguing that we shouldn't prevent the slaughter. Republicans and Democrats alike agree that we need to do this.

The British understand this, which is why they've just announced an all-out effort to rescue as many of their interpreters as possible before the images of allied Afghans clinging to helicopters get beamed to the world. There's a bipartisan effort to do something similar here, but it's been slow to start and time is running out. The White House told CBS News that there is an "intensive policy process to improve and surge resources, including adding capacity to process applications at Embassy Kabul, while continuing to ensure the integrity of the program and safeguard national security."

That sounds great and I hope this "process" produces something more

concrete than more than years of bipartisan failure.

But the fact that the White House seems to have been surprised that this might be a problem doesn't inspire confidence. In neither the administration's briefing of Biden's decision to withdraw nor in his address to the nation, did Biden mention that we would help those seeking asylum. This is probably because to acknowledge that this might be necessary in the first place is to acknowledge that our withdrawal could be very bad for Afghanistan.

But it could also be because the administration didn't think this through as it sought to check a political box for domestic consumption.

Regardless, the decision to admit defeat in Afghanistan is a done deal. Hopefully it's the right decision. But betraying these people would be the wrong decision, and a stain on our national honour, no matter how it works out for us or Afghanistan.

Afghanistan-Turkmenistan Agree to Sign Agreement on Marble Export

While discussing Afghanistan's extent of marble exports to Turkmenistan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Haneef Atmar and his delegation provided comprehensive information to Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov and his delegation on the \$200 billion worth of resources and rare stones in Afghanistan, and called the export of the stones significant in strengthening and expansion of trade between Kabul and Ashgabat.

Highlighting the construction projects for building new cities in Turkmenistan, the Turkmenistan delegation discussed their requirement for marble and expressed Turkmenistan's full

readiness to procure marble from Afghanistan. The two sides emphasized on the importance of marble supply and demand in the two countries' trade expansion and agreed to sign an agreement on Afghanistan's marble export to Turkmenistan.

The two ministers also discussed the importance of implementation of the Torghundi-Herat railway project within the framework of the two countries' joint perspective on regional connectivity.

Considering the implementation of this project a good start for the implementation of related railway projects in Afghanistan, they stressed



on the need for starting practical work on the project. The two sides agreed to continue negotiations between the sectoral entities of the two countries

on the acceleration of the project work as well as conducting practical and comprehensive studies in line with the international standards.

British...

written parliamentary answer, Heapey said: "As at May 2021, the total cost of Operation Herrick to HM Treasury Special Reserve is £22.2billion." Herrick was the Ministry of Defense's codename for the deployment of British soldiers to Helmand Province in 2006 - five years after UK troops were first sent to Afghanistan with allies.

While the financial cost is huge, the impact on some UK servicemen and women has been devastating - with the UK government confirming the latest grim toll of dead and injured. "There were 457 fatalities on, or subsequently due to, Op Herrick. Of which 403 were due to hostile action. Op Herrick ran between January 1, 2006 and November 30, 2014, during which there were 10,382 UK Service personnel casualties. Of these 5,705 were injuries, and the remainder being illness or disease," said Heapey.

"Between January 1, 2006 and March 31, 2021, there were 645 UK Service personnel who were categorized as very seriously injured, seriously injured or who sustained a traumatic or surgical amputation due to Op Herrick. This includes any amputations in recent years that were elective or necessary during treatment as a result of previous injuries sustained," he added.

British combat troops left in 2014 and the UK's remaining 750 troops in Afghanistan - Black Watch soldiers who are involved in training local forces after - started to pull out of the country last month.

Millions of pounds worth of gear is expected to be left in Afghanistan because it is too expensive and tricky to ship it back to Britain. Heapey said, "The majority of UK military equipment will be returned to the UK. Some equipment may be de-militarized and disposed of in theatre should it be deemed uneconomical to recover to the UK."

On Sunday, it emerged dozens of RAF transport planes will be sent to fly 3,000 Afghan interpreters and their families from Kabul to the UK amid fears for their safety after allied troops leave.

CIA Scrambles...

lost more than 2,400 soldiers. Have given.

CIA Director William J. Burns has accepted the challenge facing the agency. "When the time comes for the US military to withdraw, the US government's ability to collect threats and act will diminish," he told senators in April. "It's just a fact."

Mr Burns made an unannounced visit to Islamabad, Pakistan in recent weeks to meet with the head of the Pakistani military and the head of the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence, the country's military intelligence agency. According to US officials familiar with the talks, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III has had frequent phone calls with the Pakistani military chief about seeking the country's help for future US operations in Afghanistan. According to people briefed about the meeting, Mr. Burns did not raise the issue of Aadhaar during his visit to

Pakistan; The visit focused on comprehensive counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries. At least some of Mr Austin's discussions have been more direct, according to people who have been privy to him. Two decades of war in Afghanistan has helped turn the spy agency into a paramilitary organization: It conducts hundreds of drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan, trains Afghan commando units and a string of CIA officers in a string of bases on the border. Has a great presence. Pakistan. At one point during President Barack Obama's first term, the agency had several hundred officers in Afghanistan, the largest increase of personnel in a country since the Vietnam War.

These operations have come at a cost. The nightly raids by CIA-trained Afghan units left a trail of abuse that increased support for the Taliban in parts of the country. Sometimes misguided drone

strikes in Pakistan have killed civilians and increased pressure on the government in Islamabad to withdraw its quiet support for the CIA's operations.

Douglas London, the former head of CIA counter-terrorist operations for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said the agency is likely to rely on a "staying behind" network of informers in Afghanistan who will gather intelligence on the stability of the Taliban, al Qaeda, the central government and the United States. Government and other subjects. But without a large CIA presence in the country, he said, conducting intelligence investigations would be a challenge.

In the short term, the Pentagon is using an aircraft carrier to launch fighter jets into Afghanistan to support the troop withdrawal. But the carrier's presence is unlikely to be a long-term solution, and military officials said it likely won't be redeployed long after the last US military departure.

Taliban...

Taliban reads. The Taliban said that those Afghans who worked with international troops should not fear and should continue living a peaceful life in their own country.

"If they are using the danger as an excuse to bolster their fake asylum case, then that is their own problem," Taliban said.

US President Joe Biden announced in April to withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan by Sept. 11. The announcement was followed by concerns about the political future of Afghanistan.

As US and NATO troops continue withdrawing from Afghanistan, dozens of Afghan workers who have partnered with foreigners over the past 20 years are concerned about the situation and are seeking protection.

Concerned about the approach of September 11

- the deadline for all foreign troops to leave Afghanistan - these translators and employees said their lives would face serious threats after all foreign troops including France leave the country.

The workers say that staying in Afghanistan is like a nightmare for them because they receive constant threats because they worked with coalition forces.

Meanwhile, another group of Afghans who have worked with Canadian forces in Afghanistan gathered in front of the Canadian embassy in Kabul and called on the Canadian government and the United Nations to help them find asylum in Western countries as foreign troops, including Canadians, are leaving the country by September 11.

The translators and employees, who were employed by the Canada forces in Afghanistan, said

they have been repeatedly threatened with death and will not be able to live in Afghanistan after the complete withdrawal of foreign troops.

Thousands of Afghans have worked with foreign forces in Afghanistan as translators and workers since the coalition forces came to Afghanistan in 2001. The exact number of these locally-employed staff is not available.

Afghan translators and other employees who have worked with foreign forces in Afghanistan have been threatened by various groups for cooperating with these forces. Dozens have lost their lives while hundreds have been wounded.

Recently, the United States government announced that it would provide special immigrant visas to 18,000 Afghan translators and their families who backed US missions during the past 20 years.

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Dozens Killed as Two Trains Collide in Southern Pakistan

At least 40 people have been killed and more than 120 injured after a train collision near the southern Pakistani town of Dharki, officials say, with rescue work still under way to find survivors trapped in the debris.

The collision took place early on Monday morning near the town of Dharki, about 440km (273 miles) north of Pakistan's largest city of Karachi, officials say.

Senior Dharki police officer Umar Tufail said 40 people were killed.

The death toll was likely to rise as rescuers struggled to reach people trapped in several mangled compartments strewn across the tracks.

"One coach is under the engine, and we can see three bodies trapped inside," he told AFP

news agency.

"Two other bodies have been reported elsewhere too, so we fear that the death toll will rise," Tufail added.

Television footage from the site of the crash showed the mangled wreckage of the two trains strewn across the track, with rescuers using cranes and other equipment to try and reach those trapped inside.

The accident took place when eight compartments of the northbound Millat Express train derailed near Dharki, local official Razaq Minhas told Al Jazeera. The southbound Sir Syed Express passenger train then hit the derailed compartments, he said.

"Rescuers are still trying to get into at least two crashed bogeys, they are still... P2



A look at the world

India Reopens Major Cities as New COVID Cases Hit Two-Month Low



Capital New Delhi and financial hub Mumbai begin gradual easing of restrictions as lowest infections reported since April 6.

Key Indian cities have reopened for business, with long queues for buses in the financial hub of Mumbai while traffic returned to the roads of New Delhi after a devastating second wave of coronavirus that killed hundreds of thousands.

The 100,636 new infections of the past 24 hours were the lowest in the world's second-most populous nation since April 6, and well off last month's peaks of more than 400,000, allowing authorities to reopen parts of the economy.

"We have to save ourselves from infection but also bring the economy back on track," Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Twitter.

He ordered half the capital's shops to open on odd- and even-numbered days of the month respectively, in a bid to limit crowds, but allowed offices and the Delhi metro rail network to run at 50 percent of capacity.

But some curbs were retained, such as the ban on dining in restaurants and the use of theatres and gyms in a city still slowly recovering from a surge in the months of April and May that overwhelmed hospitals.

These ran short of beds and medical oxygen, and people died in hospital parking lots and homes, while crematoriums and morgues struggled to cope with an incessant flow of corpses.

India added 2,427 deaths overnight for a toll of 349,186, the health ministry said, down from more than 4,000 each day at the height of the crisis, while its tally of infections now stands at 28.9 million... P2

Kremlin Declines to Comment on Trump's Remark About Biden Being Mocked By Putin



Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on former White House occupant Donald Trump's remark that incumbent US President Joe Biden is being mocked by Russia.

"I don't think I should comment on Mr. Trump's remarks. You should ask him, what kind of mockery he was talking about. It's not our job to comment on such allegations," Peskov pointed out.

When speaking about Russia-US relations, the Kremlin spokesman noted that "the policy of sanctions continues,

over 90 restrictions have so far been imposed on our country."

"It is an endless vicious circle and in theory, we need to get out of it because sanctions don't make it possible to achieve any goals. They are never aimed at achieving anything, sanctions can't help achieve anything, it's not a tool that will work on Russia," Peskov emphasized. According to him, the only thing that works on Russia is dialogue based on mutual respect."

Trump said earlier that "Biden is being openly mocked by China's negotiators and Russian President Putin."

Volunteer announcement for the implementation of the following two separate projects:

- 1- The first project - food distribution project in 2021.
- 2- The second project - the sacrifice project of 2021.

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