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Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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Moscow Says No Direct Threat to Russia from Taliban in Afghanistan

Russian ambassador to Afghanistan Dmitry Zhirnov said Monday that there is no direct threat to Russia from the Taliban activities in Afghanistan, Russia's TASS news agency reported on Tuesday. "There is no immediate direct threat [to Russia] from the Taliban," Dmitry told Rossiya-24 television channel when he was asked whether the Taliban's activities could threaten Russia directly. Tass also reported that according to Zhirnov, the Taliban is not strong enough to seize Kabul and other big cities in the country. In his words, the situation in Kabul is quite tense. "There is an increased terrorist threat here, and it is clear that this..." **P3**



Taliban Accuses Govt of Not Being Interested in Peace Talks

The Taliban's spokesman in Doha, Qatar, Mohammad Naeem, on Tuesday accused the Afghan Republic's negotiating team of not being interested in moving peace talks forward. In a video message Tuesday, Naeem said: "Although the two sides had held a number of joint meetings after Eid, the government delegation was not interested in talks and was probably looking forward to [President Ashraf] Ghani and [High Council for National Reconciliation Chairman Abdullah] Abdullah's visit to the US." Naeem also accused the government's delegation of leaking information about the peace discussions to the media, and of passing on details around the talks between contact groups to foreign countries. He said this gave the wrong impression that the Taliban was not interested in talks. According to Naeem, the Taliban see the peace process as a responsibility, but stated the Afghan Republic was using it as a propaganda tool... **P3**

Mobilization Forces Will Be Recruited In the Form of Local Armies



The joint spokesperson for the security forces announced on Tuesday that the people's mobilization forces would soon become part of the regular military

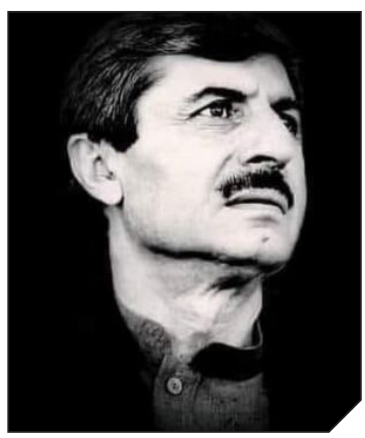
framework and would operate in the form of a local army alongside the security and defense forces. Ajmal Omar Shinwari, the spokesperson for the security forces, at a news

conference said that the people's mobilization forces are an achievement for the people and the country's security forces, and that they will soon be integrated with

small local army units. According to Shinwari, regular military formations have already been set up for popular mobilizations, and security agencies have taken into account the training conditions of these forces. Shinwari added that the regional army, after professional training at the military tactical level, will operate alongside the security forces under the command of the army's tactical commanders. He also clarified that the Ministry of Interior will build the reserve units for the high security and emergency situation of the 4,000 existing forces of this ministry. These units are led by retired generals and officers. Meanwhile, 33 Pakistani militants have been killed and nine others wounded in the past month, according to figures released by the spokesman for the country's security and defense agencies. There have also been 1,906 operations across the country by security forces against the Taliban.

MoIC: Road in Kabul to Be Named After Osman Kakar

In the meeting of Road Naming Commission, chaired by Taher Zuhair Acting Minister of Information and Culture was decided to name a road in Kabul after the famous politician and fighter Osman Kakar. Acting Minister referring to the civil activist's lawsuit to secure the rights of Pashtoons across Durand Line and his stand against the killing of innocent people in Afghanistan, said he deserved a road in Kabul to be named after him. Osman Kakar was a Pashtoon civil rights activist and a famous politician who lost his life in a suspicious incident at his home.



Tashkent: No Military Solution to Afghan Crisis

Uzbekistan Foreign Minister Aziz Kamilov said there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict, reiterating that the Taliban must sit down for talks with the Afghan government. "We have different visions here in the region... We must know about the Afghan crisis that there is no military solution," Kamilov said in an interview with Dennis Wholey on This is America and the World on June 25. He said that "Afghanistan must be an integrated part of Central Asia, one single common region." "It is necessary to have a regional and international common approach towards the peace process in Afghanistan," he said. He said that Uzbekistan supports any format for negotiations, whether they take place in Doha, Turkey or elsewhere, adding that Uzbekistan was the first country to establish direct contact with the leaders of the Taliban. "The question is what will be the political system in Afghanistan," he said, reiterating that Uzbekistan will not accept the return of a government like the Taliban's in the late 1990s. "Of course, we cannot accept something which



Afghanistan had in the 90s, an Islamic emirate of Afghanistan, but at the same time we think that this problem must be solved on the basis of mutual compromise between the government - the existing government - and between the military opposition, Taliban and others," he said. However, he affirmed that Islamic values must be respected. Kamilov noted that the international community should have both sides reach an agreement on peace. He emphasized the importance of connectivity in the region and said "our idea is to connect this region through Afghanistan." He said that the Taliban is not a terrorist

organization outside Afghanistan because the group has no record of terrorist attacks beyond Afghanistan's borders. "Sometimes people say the Taliban's movement is a terrorist organization. Of course, maybe they had some contacts within Afghanistan with different extremist organizations, but at the same time, we cannot give an example of the Taliban over the past 40 years organizing some terrorist attack beyond the national borders of Afghanistan, neither in Central Asia, nor in Europe or somewhere else," he said. He added that he does not see the Taliban as a terrorist organization because the group has signed a peace deal with the United States.

By Abdullah Muradoglu

Why Did Biden Ask for Putin's Help in Afghanistan?

The peace deal Donald Trump's administration struck with the Taliban in February 2020 included the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. Joe Biden, who was elected as President in November 2020, also declared that the pullout would be completed by September. As the American withdrawal continues, the U.S. is pursuing its quest for military bases in countries close to Afghanistan, primarily Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. However, it would be wrong to say that the U.S. has made any headway on this matter. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that his country would not provide a military base to the CIA for the Washington administration's possible operations in Afghanistan. Pakistan and China are in cahoots. India, on other hand, which is at loggerheads with China, is strengthening its relations with the U.S. It's not a government secret that the U.S. wants to kill China's New Silk Road project, which it announced under the name of One Belt - One Road. Asian territory is once more at the center of a "Great Game." The U.S. is attempting to surround China in the Indo-Pacific. We had previously mentioned that certain strategies and scenarios have been developed to drive a wedge between China and Russia. Thus, this has to be one of the reasons Biden played nice with Putin during the Geneva summit on June 16. Both the Russians and the Europeans were expecting the Biden-Putin meeting to unfold like a boxing match. However, quite the opposite came... **P3**

By: SEEMA SIROHI

Pakistan's Games in Afghanistan

The Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, had no option but to remain stoic and exude calm as they made the rounds of Washington against the background of America's definite departure, a shrinking lifeline and Taliban's stunning territorial gains. They discussed Afghanistan's future with President Joe Biden, Congressional leaders, and defence officials—a future that is tangled up in a "peace agreement" in which they have a few cards to play. The United States (US) is also in a similar state since it gave up most of its leverage early on to get what was essentially a safe departure deal. Now, US officials are hanging on to the hope that the Taliban won't attack troops as they withdraw. The White House meeting with Ghani was meant to signal US support for the government but Biden was clear and unsentimental in stressing that it was now up to the Afghans to forge unity and take responsibility. He said he would do his "best" to give the Afghan government the "tools" it needs to keep fighting. The White House meeting with Ghani was meant to signal US support for the government but Biden was clear and unsentimental in stressing that it was now up to the Afghans to forge unity and take responsibility. He said he would do his "best" to give the Afghan government the "tools" it needs to keep fighting. Supporting the Afghan security forces is critical—both financially and materially—to prevent a civil war that may now engulf the country. The Taliban has registered remarkable successes and control nearly a third of Afghanistan. They hold 142 of the country's 407 districts, more than 60 of them captured since Biden's April announcement of a complete US withdrawal by September 11. The Biden administration's diplomacy in and around Afghanistan is struggling—the peace conference in Turkey is yet to materialise, the intra-Afghan talks have floundered, and the Taliban are ostentatiously violent

as they wrest more territory from the government's control. Veiled US threats of international isolation and offers of a sanctions review created barely a ripple in Taliban's world. Pakistan: A thorn on the side But no one is pointing at the real problem at hand: Pakistan's support for the Taliban and its relentless proxy war against Afghanistan. Biden may have decided to end America's "forever war" after 20 years, but he said not a word about forcing an end to Pakistan's forever war, the mother lode of violence and mayhem in the region. Biden knows the Taliban are Pakistan's protégés, secure in their safe havens, launching attacks in Afghanistan, and returning home to headquarters. The leaders even use Pakistani passports to travel around from capital to capital. Biden must also know that Pakistan is the reason America lost the war or didn't win, whichever way he may want to characterise the outcome. Biden knows the Taliban are Pakistan's protégés, secure in their safe havens, launching attacks in Afghanistan, and returning home to headquarters. The leaders even use Pakistani passports to travel around from capital to capital. Biden must also know that Pakistan is the reason America lost the war or didn't win, whichever way he may want to characterise the outcome. None of this is a secret and hasn't been for decades despite occasional Pakistani denials. Yet president after president in the US has felt compelled to maintain the lie on Pakistan and pretend the gains were bigger than the losses, including the loss of more than 2,300 US military personnel. Former president Donald Trump did try to change the dynamics by putting pressure on Pakistan but decided quickly that getting the US troops out was a more productive re-election strategy. Biden came into office already convinced and his impatience showed even as his top officials searched for ways to change the balance in favour of Kabul and cajole Rawalpindi to allow limited access for future operations. As Gen. David



Petraeus, the Former Commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, has repeatedly said, the US will regret the decision to withdraw troops and conclude that it should have maintained a credible presence on the ground to help the Afghan security forces. Pakistan understands the pressures of American politics, the impending mid-term elections, the short timetable for Biden to accomplish his domestic agenda and his limited foreign policy goals. However, reforming Pakistan is not one of them. Pakistan understands the pressures of American politics, the impending mid-term elections, the short timetable for Biden to accomplish his domestic agenda and his limited foreign policy goals. However, reforming Pakistan is not one of them. The progressive wing of the Democratic Party doesn't want to call Pakistan out—many are straight out apologists while others don't want to complicate their liberal beliefs by allowing reality to interfere. They don't issue statements on Pakistan-supported Taliban or Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in Kashmir. The entire Washington ecosystem—barring a few notable exceptions—is complicit in whitewashing Pakistan's dangerous role and softening the edges. You can read "smart" analysis on Afghanistan's grim future, its

scabbling leaders, its rampant corruption, and never see Pakistan mentioned. Both The Washington Post and The New York Times gave the floor to Imran Khan—he is pretty much a regular now—before and during Ghani's visit to mouth inanities and play victim. The PR gamble was obvious but it paid off. The fact that Pakistan plays this "partner-for-peace-in-Afghanistan" with every change in the US administration is lost in the shuffle. As C. Christine Fair, a South Asia Expert and Professor at Georgetown University, says, "We went to war in Afghanistan with a "partner" whose own interests were at odds with those of the United States. Throughout this process of negotiation, the US government wants us to believe that the Taliban are independent actors capable of bringing peace to Afghanistan. This is fiction." Unless the US is able to break free from the web Pakistan has spun around it for decades, no real peace can materialise in South Asia. Just as the American mind has clarified on China after decades of supporting and selling technology to Beijing and engineering its rise, it needs to defog on Pakistan; now that standard excuses don't apply—the US will no longer be dependent on Pakistan for supplying US troops since they are withdrawing from Afghanistan.

By: Ishaan Tharoor

Biden's Lose-Lose Game in Afghanistan

President Biden hosted his Afghan counterpart, President Ashraf Ghani, at the White House at the end of last week. The visit came on the heels of Biden's April announcement of the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan after a two-decade-long war. Biden's assurances of continuing support, and the atmosphere of comity surrounding Ghani's meetings in Washington, could do little to hide the fears of many leading officials about what may follow. Just before the arrival of Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, his governing partner in Kabul, news broke of a U.S. intelligence assessment that suggested the Afghan government could fall within six months of a U.S. military withdrawal. The assessment "highlights an increasingly stark picture as the U.S. military sends home troops and equipment: The Taliban continues to take control of districts across the country, and Afghan military units are either laying

down their arms or are being routed in bloody clashes," my colleagues reported. Citing these concerns, Republican lawmakers have urged Biden to delay the departure. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said the administration has "chosen to abandon the fight" against the Taliban "and invite even greater terrorist threats"—no matter that Biden is carrying out exactly what President Donald Trump also promised. For his part, Ghani played the stoic statesman, insisting he and his government "respect" Biden's decision, did not feel abandoned and will "manage the consequences." But he invoked a troubling metaphor, suggesting that Afghanistan was experiencing its own "1861 moment"—a nod to the start of the U.S. Civil War. "The then-young republic of the United States was under attack, and unity, determination, and ensuring that an exclusionary agenda was not allowed — [this] is the type of

moment for us," Ghani told reporters Friday. In remarks before his meeting with Biden, he said: "We're determined to have unity, coherence, [a] national sense of sacrifice and will not spare anything." Such a proclamation should already be ringing alarms. The United States has spent two decades waging war and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. It has lost more than 2,000 servicemen and women in the process and sunk trillions of dollars into its war effort and attempted nation-building projects. But now, just as it's poised to exit, Afghanistan's president believes an existential conflict in his country is about to begin. To be sure, Ghani attempted to sound a note of confidence, declaring that his country was "rallying to the defense of the republic." Biden offered reassurance, repeating his pledge to maintain significant support to the weak central government in Kabul,

albeit mostly in the form of rhetoric and cash rather than American hard power. "The senseless violence . . . has to stop, but it's going to be very difficult," Biden said. "But we're going to stick with you, and we're going to do our best to see to it you have the tools you need." The Taliban, though, appears to be licking its chops already. The group is now believed to control roughly a third of the country's districts and is battling for many more. Its advances span a vast stretch of territory, from the rugged northern borderlands near Tajikistan to areas close to Kabul. "In the past week, fighters have reportedly seized more than 20 districts and attacked more than 80," wrote my colleagues, who reported on the emergence of irregular militia units to help buttress the flagging Afghan army. "In Kunduz province, a critical gateway to the northern border, militia fighters have swarmed the capital city to help besieged government troops,

but the fighting has continued unabated and the surrounding districts are in Taliban hands." Still, the U.S. imperative to leave remains strong. According to various polls, a majority of Americans at least somewhat approve of withdrawal. While a generation of lawmakers in Washington have presided over the conflicts that sprawled across Afghanistan and the Middle East in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, they know there's little public appetite for further interventions of the sort seen in Afghanistan — where the United States toppled a Taliban government that had given safe haven to terrorist group al-Qaeda, only to find itself marooned in a costly struggle against a Taliban insurgency it found impossible to defeat, not least because of the difficulties posed by a weak Afghan government riddled with corruption. Skeptics of the White House's present strategy contend that leaving in current circumstances — and thereby boosting a resurgent Taliban — is wrongheaded... **P3**

Afghanistan, India Trade Stand at \$1.33B

Afghanistan's fresh fruit export to India increased by over 250 percent in 2020, an official said on Tuesday. Consul General of Afghanistan in Mumbai Ms. Zakia Wardak made the remarks during Afghanistan's fruit virtual business matchmaking event held in Mumbai India. "Last year, overall trade increased by five percent, Afghanistan's fresh fruit exports to India increased by over 250 percent in 2020. Fresh and dry fruit contribute over 50 percent of Afghan exports to India. By hosting these types of business matchmaking events, we are determined to increase the trade between both sides to US\$ 2 billion in upcoming years." Among those already experienced in international trade; 46 Indian importers and 36 Afghan exporters participated in the session, a statement from the Afghan

diplomatic mission in Mumbai said. The Consulate General of Afghanistan in Mumbai, in association with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), US Department of Commerce's Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP), World Trade Center Kabul, World Trade Center Mumbai, Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment, and Indian Chamber of International Business (ICIB) hosted the event. During the keynote address, Shah Masood Arghandabi, Director of Export Promotion, Minister of Industry and Commerce from Afghanistan, remarked, "Last year, trade between both sides reached nearly US\$ 1.33 billion (with India's exports to Afghanistan worth US\$ 858 million, and imports from Afghanistan worth US\$ 514 million). Significant progress has come as a



result of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements signed between both countries. Afghanistan annually produces over 1.5 million metric tons of fresh fruit, including apples, apricots, pomegranates, grapes, cherries and melons. India, as the

world's fastest growing economy, is the best market for Afghanistan quality products." The Consulate of Afghanistan in Mumbai is planning a similar virtual dry fruit business matchmaking event towards the end of August 2021.

Moscow...

is the capital city of a country in a state of war. Nevertheless, no serious changes for the worse have been observed in Kabul since May," Zhirnov said. "Russia's, US, China's and Pakistan's representatives are working on the settlement of the situation in that country via the Extended Troika mechanism," he said adding that "we are pursuing a policy to push the conflicting parties to result-oriented talks that would put an end to the civil war." His comments come after at least 17 Afghan forces fled to Tajikistan on Sunday after a group of Taliban launched an attack on a border checkpoint in Afghanistan's Kaldar district in Balkh province, Tajikistan's state news agency reported. The forces entered Tajikistan through its Shahrtuz border outpost. The Shahrtuz district is in the very southwestern corner of the country, where the border intersects with Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

Taliban Accuses...

He accused government of issuing false "poisonous" propaganda that was contradictory to the peace process. Talks got off to a good start in September last year but within weeks had all but stalled. In the ensuing months, small groups from both teams have met but no real progress has been achieved.

China Accuses...

of the two countries said on Monday. In an online meeting on the 20th anniversary of the 2001 Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship, the two leaders agreed to extend the pact for another five years. The Chinese spokesman also slammed Japan for calling to "protect the island of Taiwan as a democratic country." "China urged Japan to provide clear clarification to ensure that such a mistake won't happen again," Wang said. China claims Taiwan is a breakaway province, while the latter insists on its independence since 1949.

Biden's...

and may haunt Biden and future administrations. "In many ways, the costs of staying seem shorter-term and borne by the United States, while the costs of leaving will be predominantly borne by Afghans over a longer time horizon," wrote Madiha Afzal of the Brookings Institution in a Washington Post op-ed earlier this month. "Yet, even if those costs seem remote now, history tells us that they will be blamed on the United States." But Biden's decision to withdraw reflects a widespread strategic impatience with the U.S. mission. "We have provided the Afghan people the blood of thousands [of] our finest men and women, hundreds of billions of our citizens' dollars, and nearly 20 years for the Afghan government to have gotten its house in order and forged a negotiated settlement with the insurgents," wrote Daniel Davis, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant

Why Did...

to pass. It is being said that Biden was on the lookout for some blind spots the U.S. could use in disrupting Russian-Sino relations, and that, at times, he was questioning Putin to this end. Putin, for his part, didn't fall for this and gave the U.S. a big fat nothing, according to the grapevine from behind the scenes. On the other hand, there are rumors flying around that Biden asked Putin for help to form a "temporary" military base in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. He justified a new base with the pretext of facilitating American troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan and sustain its military aid to the Afghan government. Putin apparently informed Biden that building a military base in two countries adjacent to the Chinese border would be perceived as an hostile act by the Beijing government. Putin also noted that using these bases for a military operation in Afghanistan could bring the Taliban and Tajik and Kyrgyz forces face to face in a conflict. In a nutshell, Putin's answer

colonel who deployed twice to Afghanistan. "They have squandered that opportunity." Afghans may counter that the price they have paid in blood is far steeper — and that heavy-handed U.S. military action has, on numerous occasions, added to the civilian toll. What is clear is that the United States is a party to cycles of conflict in the war-ravaged country that long predated 9/11 and will continue after the United States withdraws its main troop presence. The Biden administration will push for a negotiated peace between Ghani's government and the Taliban, but diplomatic efforts remain stalled as the Taliban press their battlefield advantage. A diverse set of regional powers — including China, Pakistan, India and Russia — may all variously attempt to help broker some sort of reconciliation between the ultraconservative Taliban

and the Afghan government. Absent that, chaos looms. Even American advocates of withdrawal recognize the commitment that ought to remain. Andrew Bacevich, president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, which advocates foreign policy restraint, argued that the Biden administration must make good on promises to resettle tens of thousands of Afghans whose collaboration with U.S. forces in the country now leave them vulnerable to militant reprisals. He added that the United States and U.N. agencies should be prepared for a new Afghan refugee exodus should the Taliban manage to take over Kabul. "Nothing was to be gained by prolonging an undertaking that has definitively failed," Bacevich wrote. "Yet ending America's longest war does not absolve the United States of responsibility for what may happen next."

to Biden was NO. Another problem plaguing the Biden government is what will happen to Afghan civilians working for the U.S. military once troops have fully withdrawn. It is expected that the Taliban will continue advancing and that the Afghan government will collapse shortly after. A similar situation transpired after the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam. The U.S. had signed a peace deal with the forces of North Vietnam in 1973. Even though the south Vietnam administration objected to this deal, the U.S.'s approach did not change. Panic ensued in 1975, when U.S. troops were evacuated from the country. The capital, Saigon, quickly fell into the hands of the Northern forces. Hundreds of thousands of Southerners wanted to flee with the U.S. military, fearing that Northern forces would exact revenge. Many southerners hanging on the tails of evacuation planes perished, and these movie-like scenes were imprinted in minds for many years to come. Now, tens of thousands of Afghans providing translation, guidance

and logistics services to the U.S. army in Afghanistan are waiting to be rescued. American media is saturated with personal stories of civilian Afghans and the visa problems they are experiencing. It is being said that the number of Afghans who want to go to the U.S. with their families is over 70,000. U.S. legislation, on the other hand, limits this number to 26,500 under the scope of the "Special Immigrant Visa." Special Immigrant Visa procedures are complex and extremely slow. Sometimes it can take up to 3 years for the visa application to be processed. First, the Afghans employed by the U.S. military need to be transferred to a safe zone as soon as possible. The program to bring people serving the U.S. military to America is extremely competitive. Thousands of applications have already been rejected. The same problem exists for other partners of the Military Coalition, of course. The evacuation of American soldiers will continue until September, but there is already a "Vietnam syndrome" being experienced in the U.S. and Afghanistan.

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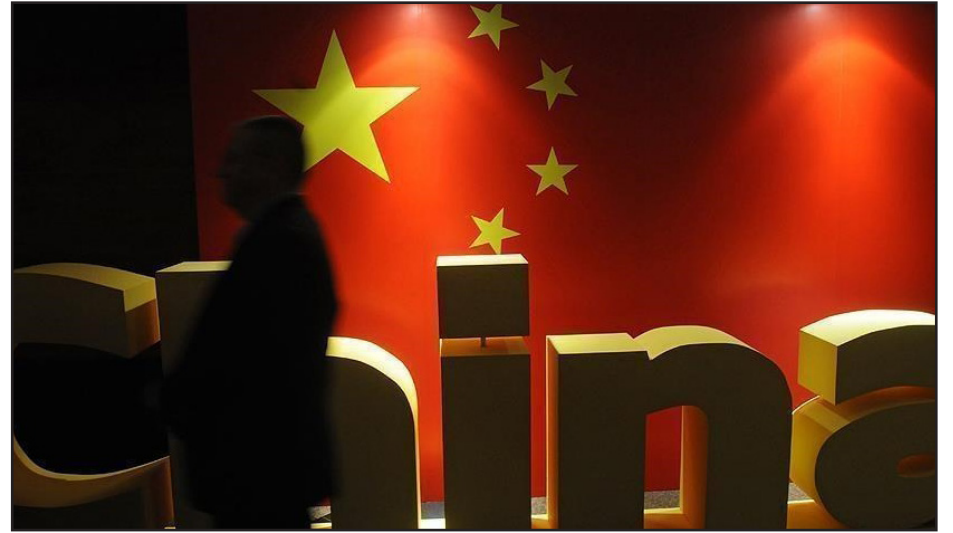
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China Accuses US of 'Destroying' World Order

China on Tuesday accused the US of being the "biggest destroyer" of the world order, a day after Russia slammed the rules-based order promoted by the West. "The US, by 'quitting groups' and wielding sanctions and military threats against others, is the biggest destroyer of world order," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Wenbin told a news conference in Beijing. "Its 'rule-based order' is a US-dominant hegemonic system; many of its allies don't agree with it." "World order is not hegemonic or made by a US-led clique. All countries should practice real multilateralism, push forward democratization of international relations and build a community with a shared future for mankind," the spokesman added. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had

said the rules-based orders lack any specific content, allowing for accusations of "rules breaking" when it is against the West's will. "The less specific they get, the freer their hand to carry on with the arbitrary practice of employing dirty tactics as a way to pressure competitors," Lavrov wrote in an article for the Russian daily Kommersant. Referring to the recent interaction between Chinese and Russian presidents, Wang said: "Under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, China-Russia ties have entered the best period in history with solid political mutual trust and mutual benefits." Ties between Russia and China are a "model" and an "example" of bilateral cooperation, the leaders... **P3**



A look at the world

Iran-Backed Militias Attack US-Controlled Oil Field in Syria

A missile attack was carried out Monday on the US-controlled Al-Omar oil field from Mayadin district in Syria's Deir-ez-Zor province, which is under the control of the Bashar al-Assad regime and Iran-backed militia groups. Al-Omar, Syria's largest oil field, where the US and YPG/PKK terror group are present, was attacked with Grad missiles, according to local sources. At least five missiles were launched from Mayadin district, where numbers of Iranian-backed armed



groups are increasing, and some of them struck close to a military base near the oil field where US forces are located. Meanwhile, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) also reported the missile attacks on the oil field. The previous night, the US carried out an airstrike on Iranian-backed groups in Syria's al-Bukamal district bordering Iraq. Parts of Deir ez-Zor to the east of the Euphrates River are under the occupation of the US-backed YPG/PKK terrorist organization, while the city center and east and west of Deir-ez-Zor are under the control of the Assad regime and Iran-backed groups. The YPG/PKK terror group had occupied Syria's largest oil field, Al-Omar, on Oct. 22, 2017. Continuing their support to the terror group, US forces currently have a presence in more than 10 bases and military points in the regions occupied by the YPG/PKK in the provinces of Hasakah, Raqqah and Deir-ez-Zor.

Turkish, Russian Foreign Ministers to Meet Today



The Turkish and Russian foreign ministers will meet in Turkey this Wednesday (today), the Russian Foreign Ministry announced. Mevlut Cavusoglu and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov will discuss the situation in the South Caucasus, Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Central Asia, Eastern Mediterranean, and Black Sea regions, as well as Syria and Libya, according to a statement on Monday. Stating that issues related to the development of commercial and economic cooperation between the two countries will also be discussed, the statement added this January-April, the bilateral trade volume shot up 22.5% compared to the same period in 2020, topping \$9 billion. Cooperation between the two countries in the field of military/technical and high technology will also be evaluated. The statement also said the two top diplomats will discuss issues related to the fight against COVID-19 and the use and production of the Sputnik V vaccine in Turkey.

Biden, Israeli President Discuss Ties, Regional Issues

U.S. President Joe Biden on Monday discussed bilateral relations and regional issues with visiting Israeli President Reuven Rivlin. Biden, at the beginning of their meeting in the Oval Office, reaffirmed U.S. "unwavering commitment" to Israel's self-defense, adding "Iran will never get a nuclear weapon on my watch." Biden said he would be hosting Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett at the White House "very soon," and voiced support for the normalization of relations



between Israel and other countries in the region. Rivlin is due to retire next month after the end of his seven-year term. The role of the president in Israel is mainly ceremonial with little executive power. The president of Israel is elected for seven years and cannot serve more than a single term. Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Rome on Sunday that "Israel has some serious reservations about the Iran nuclear deal being put together in Vienna," according to a statement issued by the Israeli foreign ministry. Lapid said on Monday that his country reserves the right to act against Iran's nuclear program "anywhere and anytime." Washington and Tehran have had six rounds of indirect negotiations in Vienna since April aimed at restoring the nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. A senior State Department official said last week that the two sides still have serious differences over the issue.



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