



If Afghanistan Falls

On July 2, the US military handed control of the vast Bagram Air Base to the Afghan government. US troops and their NATO allies...



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Situation Is Bad in Afghanistan, Out of Pakistan's Control: Islamabad

Fearing a civil war in Afghanistan, Pakistan National Security Adviser Dr Moeed Yusuf has painted a bleak picture of its neighboring country, which may result in the Taliban slipping into Pakistan as refugees. Yusuf made these remarks during a briefing to the country's Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, convened to discuss the current Afghan situation, The Express Tribune reported. Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was also present at the briefing. Presenting a pessimistic picture of Afghanistan, Yusuf said, "The situation is bad and out of Pakistan's control." This comes as Joe Biden administration earlier this week announced that the US military will pull out of Afghanistan till the end of August. Meanwhile, the Taliban has continued with its offensive and claimed to have captured 85 per cent of the territory in the country. According to a prominent Afghan expert, the Taliban would... **P3**



FM Atmar to Take Part in SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group Meeting

Afghan Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar will take part in the meeting of foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) - Afghanistan Contact Group on July 14, Russian Special Presidential Envoy for SCO Affairs Bakhtiyar Khakimov said in an interview with TASS. "We expect that it will be the [foreign] minister. Anyway, Tajikistan's chairmanship has assured us that a confirmation was received from Afghanistan," he said. Tajikistan's capital of Dushanbe will host a meeting of the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers on July 13-14.

Negotiators in Doha Held Talks on Five Key Issues: Sources



Peace delegations from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban held a series of talks over the past few days with the talks reportedly focused on at least five key issues, including a future constitution, ceasefire, political roadmap and the political participation in the transition period, sources familiar with the process said. Najia Anwari, a spokesperson for the State Ministry for Peace Affairs also said

that serious discussions are taking place between the Afghan Republic and the Taliban negotiators in Doha in the past few days. "These meetings are held after every single night between the two sides and the discussions are focused on a number of important issues," she said. The Taliban so far has not said anything about the topic. Meanwhile, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad has

said that he was surprised by recent advances by the Taliban. However, he added that a military takeover was not the solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. "I'm not surprised that the conflict has intensified, but I am surprised by the progress that the Talibs have made and I'm hoping that the Afghan forces with help from their friends will find their bearing and push back. But again, I repeat, there is no military solution," said Khalilzad who

architected a peace deal between the US and the Taliban in Doha last February. "The Taliban know that they need to be accepted as part of the future of Afghanistan, not to be a pariah. To invade Kabul and impose a government will put all the things they want internationally at risk. We will not recognize a government in Afghanistan that is imposed by force," Khalilzad said. The US State Department said that Khalilzad has started a new series of his trips to the region for Afghan peace. "One of the key reasons for the situation that we face today is the unconditional withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan," said Mir Haidar Afzali, the head of the parliament's defense committee. Moreover, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken after holding talks with his Pakistani and Qatari counterparts said that all these countries have a key role to play with regard to peace in Afghanistan. "Without reaching an agreement with the Taliban, it would be difficult to bring peace in Afghanistan," said MP Nematullah Karyab. In the meantime, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said that based on agreement with the US and NATO, Turkey will take responsibility of providing security to the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.

Ghani Appeals to Taliban to Work with Govt and Not with 'Foreigners'

President Ashraf Ghani has called on the Taliban to engage in peace talks "if you accept Sharia [Islamic Law]." Addressing an event during the inauguration of Khost International Airport on Saturday, Ghani implied that the Taliban are fighting for foreigners' interests. "Do you [Taliban] accept Sharia? Then come sit [for talks], But they say no and prefer US agreement [US-Taliban deal]," Ghani said. "Is US deal superior to Islamic Law?" Ghani asked Taliban. "Now that... **P3**



Pakistan, US Desire Lasting Peace in Afghanistan

Pakistan has renewed its call for a lasting, comprehensive and inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan. In a phone call with US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken on Friday, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi asked all Afghan stakeholders to work together for stabilising their homeland. Achieving peace in Afghanistan was the shared responsibility of all stakeholders inside Afghanistan as well as key regional and international players, he said. During the call made by Blinken, the diplomats conferred on bilateral relations and important developments in the region, said the Foreign Office in Islamabad. Following the call, the secretary of state tweeted that they underscored their "desire for a stable and sustainable bilateral relationship. He secretary wrote: "I look forward to continuing cooperation on the



Afghan peace process, tackling Covid-19, supporting regional stability and other key issues." For his part, Qureshi stressed the need for pushing all Afghan parties to constructively engage in achieving an "inclusive, broad-based and comprehensive" political settlement. Pakistan would remain a reliable partner for peace in Afghanistan, where the security

situation has nosedived in recent months, the minister assured his US counterpart. He claimed there was a "fundamental convergence" between Pakistan and the United States on the need for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. The two sides stressed the need for continued close coordination and cooperation to ensure meaningful progress in the Afghan peace push.

By: JACQUELINE FELDSCHER

Afghanistan is 'Not a Winnable War,' White House Says as Taliban Storms Country

The conflict in Afghanistan—which the United States is preparing to hand over to the government in Kabul—is “not a winnable war,” White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Friday, dismissing Republican calls to reverse the withdrawal from the 20-year conflict hours before President Joe Biden met with his Afghan counterpart in Washington. At the White House, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani capped a week of meetings, including with several members of Congress and defense officials at the Pentagon. After hearing Ghani talk about the security situation in his country, several Republican lawmakers asked Biden to reverse his decision to withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan no later than Sept. 11. The military is on track to complete the drawdown much sooner. Ghani said he respects America’s decision to withdraw and rejects any “false narrative of abandonment.” Still, he painted a grim picture of the security situation in Afghanistan, comparing it to the United States in 1861, when the Civil War that ultimately killed more than 600,000 people began despite President Abraham Lincoln fighting to unite a bitterly divided nation. “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 the press after his meeting with Biden... **P3**

By: Fahd Husain

The New Afghanistan Challenge

FLAMES from the Afghanistan violence have begun to inch closer to our borders. In one recent incident, a number of troops from the Afghan National Army abandoned their post near the Pakistan border when the Taliban attacked. These ANA soldiers, in a bid to save their lives, crossed over into Pakistani territory where they were duly apprehended. However, they were later handed back to their authorities. This episode is just one of many that is indicative of the spillover of the conflict that may be about to hit Pakistan. Are we ready?

The state should be asking this question of itself. The last few weeks have suddenly seen an uptick in activity pertaining to this issue and there is growing concern in power circles that we may be about to enter into a very dangerous, unstable and unpredictable situation. In the maiden meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Friday, chaired by PPP’s Sherry Rehman, National Security Adviser Dr Moeed Yusuf described Pakistan’s broad policy framework on Afghanistan in clear terms: first, efforts being made to facilitate a power-sharing arrangement between the Afghan Taliban and the Kabul government; and second, to take steps that minimize the spillover of instability — and the influx of refugees — from Afghanistan into Pakistan. The first one is not looking too promising. “We don’t control what is happening inside Afghanistan,” he said, adding “the ground situation is overtaking everything else.” High-level sources have confirmed that in their most recent meetings with Pakistani officials, the Taliban leadership have shown some flexibility in terms of a dialogue but on one thing they are refusing to budge. They have reiterated and re-emphasised, according to these sources, that they will convert Afghanistan into an Islamic emirate and not continue with the democratic structure — whatever it is worth — that is in place

now. Pakistan’s political leadership has so far not provided any definitive answers to the Afghan crisis. It is the second aspect — impact on Pakistan — that has now become the focus of the government’s efforts. The marathon meeting of the parliamentary committee of national security — the one briefed by army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and DG ISI Lt Gen Faiz Hameed — spent eight hours on discussing Afghanistan, but many people who participated in that meeting agreed that no solid recommendations emerged from it. The meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Friday saw Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and NSA Dr Yusuf share details of the various policy initiatives on Afghanistan but yet again there was nothing that the committee members added to the existing discourse, and the dilemmas that surround it. On the issue of refugee’s various government officials are saying there is a broad consensus that Pakistan should not allow them to meld into the population as was done in the 1980s. However, the specifics are still being worked out. The following proposals are on the table: (1) Convince the international humanitarian agencies to make camps for the displaced persons on the border with Pakistan but on the Afghan side (2) By keeping them on the Afghan side, let the international organizations give them the status of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and not refugee status (3) Allow them inside Pakistan but keep them confined to designated camps (4) Block them from coming into Pakistan regardless of the situation (border fencing, patrolling). The more realistic assessment is that once the refugees start to converge in the tens of thousands, it would be extremely difficult for Pakistan to block them. The ‘Iranian model’ of keeping them in camps is now a favoured option but even that is not easily accomplished. There is another aspect. Dr Moeed Yusuf



warned on Friday that it would be impossible to figure out who are genuine refugees and who may be TTP or other terrorists coming into Pakistani territory along with them. This poses a grave danger to Pakistan as an influx of these terrorists can once again revive violence that was eradicated with such an effort a few years ago. In the meeting of the parliamentary committee on national security, the military leadership had framed three key policy questions on the Afghanistan situation for the political leadership to consider. (i) What should be our policy regarding the influx of Afghan refugees? (ii) Should we recognise the Taliban government when they capture Kabul or follow the international community’s decision? (iii) Should we allow US drones and aircrafts to use our airspace to launch attacks on Afghan territory? The political leadership has so far not provided any definitive answers. One reason perhaps is that the political parties have not internally debated these questions, and there has been no such debate in parliament. Events are gathering pace and before we know it the answers to these three questions may be forced on to Pakistan. The National Assembly is in session but on Friday it debated

matters pertaining to education and exams. The Senate is convening next week. There are no indications yet that the Upper House will attempt to debate these key policy issues on Afghanistan. To complicate matters further, the relationship between Pakistan and the United States has become testy. Although Secretary of State Antony Blinken had a phone conversation with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Friday, officials in Islamabad acknowledge there is a strain between the two sides. The speech by Prime Minister Imran Khan on the floor of the National Assembly, in which he used strong words to describe US policy in the region, has ruffled many feathers on the other side. Officials have also said that President Joe Biden’s decision not to call PM Imran Khan at this crucial juncture has not been appreciated by Islamabad. There is a sense in relevant quarters here that now if Biden does make a call, there’s really nothing much to talk about on Afghanistan because events have taken a life of their own. The situation is deeply complex and requires a serious national debate. Instead of bemoaning its irrelevance in strategic matters, the elected leadership from both sides of the aisle should grab the initiative and take centre stage.

By: Djoomart Otorbayev, Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan

If Afghanistan Falls

On July 2, the US military handed control of the vast Bagram Air Base to the Afghan government. US troops and their NATO allies are now on track to leave Afghanistan by mid-July, well ahead of US President Joe Biden’s September 11, 2021, withdrawal deadline. According to a new analysis by researchers at Brown University, America’s two-decade war in Afghanistan cost it nearly \$2.3 trillion. Now, Afghanistan’s neighbors – Pakistan, Iran, China, India, and the Central Asian countries – are wondering just how much it will cost them to maintain security after the United States is gone. In late June, the US intelligence community concluded that the Afghan government could collapse within six months of the US withdrawal – a stark downward revision of its earlier,

more optimistic assessment. As the Taliban has swept through northern Afghanistan, capturing dozens of districts and major cities, Afghan security forces have often surrendered without a fight. According to a June report from the United Nations Afghanistan Sanctions Monitoring Team, the Taliban now exercises direct control over more than half of the country’s regional administrative centers, and controls up to 70% of the territory outside urban areas. The tremors from these Taliban victories are already being felt across the region. Fierce fighting has occurred a mere four hours from Tajikistan’s capital, Dushanbe. On June 20, Taliban militants operating in northern Afghanistan surrounded government forces in Kunduz, the country’s sixth-largest city (population 300,000). Then,

on June 22, the Taliban captured the Afghan-Tajik border outpost of Sher Khan Bandar without a fight. Meanwhile, Tajikistan’s border service reported that 134 Afghan servicemen had received asylum at the crossing. Another 53 Afghan border troops and local militiamen retreated from a Taliban onslaught in Afghanistan’s Shortepa district by crossing into Uzbekistan; and on July 5, more than 1,000 Afghan soldiers reportedly fled across the border from Badakhshan Province into Tajikistan. A complete Taliban takeover of the Amu Darya and Panj Rivers dividing Afghanistan from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will likely occur within weeks. Since this outcome would allow the Taliban to control Afghanistan’s international borders along this front, the risk of large refugee flows from Afghanistan into Central

Asia, and then on to Russia and Europe, has sharply increased. After clandestinely supporting the Taliban as a means to undermine the US war effort, Russia now fears broader destabilization in Central Asia and beyond. In response to recent developments in Afghanistan, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu says that: “By the end of this year, the command of the Central Military District will have to re-equip two aviation regiments with modernized Su-34M fighter-bombers and MiG-31BM fighter-interceptors.” These reinforcements of Russian airpower in the region “will significantly increase the district’s capabilities to engage the enemy with fire and combat cruise missiles in the Central Asian strategic direction.” Similarly, after having made nice with the Taliban, China also now fears the greater regional instability that the US withdrawal may incite. In addition to disrupting Chinese

President Xi Jinping’s Eurasia-spanning Belt and Road Initiative, a revitalized Taliban could re-energize the Islamist extremist threat in China’s western Xinjiang province. The prospect that Afghanistan will become a source of deepening poverty, mass migration, and instability is quickly becoming everyone’s problem. But it is Central Asian governments that will be on the front lines. Still, many regional officials remain surprisingly optimistic. Following a recent visit to the US to discuss Afghanistan and regional security, the Uzbek foreign minister, Abdulaziz Kamilov, gave an extensive interview in which he argued that only Afghans, including the Taliban, can resolve Afghanistan’s problems. “We have some optimism,” he explained, “Because the situation has changed. First, the two sides began direct contact for the first time in 40 years. The Taliban... **P3**

UAE Bans Entry from Indonesia and Afghanistan

The UAE will ban entry for travelers coming from Indonesia and Afghanistan as of July 11, except for transit flights heading to both countries, the official news agency WAM reported on Saturday. The decision, linked to coronavirus concerns, also includes suspending the entry of travelers who were in these countries in the 14 days prior to coming to the UAE, Reuters reported. The UAE will also prevent its citizens from traveling to Indonesia and Afghanistan, with the exception of diplomatic missions, emergency medical treatment cases, official delegations and previously authorized economic and scientific delegations, said the news agency citing the General Civil Aviation Authority and the National Emergency Crisis and Disasters Management Authority.



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not engage in a dialogue with Ashraf Ghani's government as long as the Pakistani military and intelligence continue to give sanctuary to terrorists. In an interview with German's DW, Ahmed Rashid, a journalist and best-selling foreign policy author of several books about Afghanistan, said that the chaotic situation in Afghanistan "can suck in the neighboring countries." "If that happens, that will be the end of Afghanistan," he said. "Why should they when their leaders and their families are safe? If Pakistan wants to show its sincerity, it needs to immediately force the Taliban leaders to either compromise or leave their sanctuaries in Quetta or in Peshawar," Rashid said. On Saturday, Afghan President Ghani said he sees the Taliban responsible for the ongoing violence in the country in which at least 200 to 600 people are killed every day. "The Taliban is responsible for the continuation of the war," Ghani said, as quoted by TOLONews. "Taliban should be asked whom they are fighting for? Who will benefit if Afghanistan is ruined and if Afghans are killed?"

Ghani Appeals to...

the US have gone, with whom will you [Taliban] agree: who do you think can release your prisoners?" Ghani asked. Ghani blamed the Taliban for the ongoing war across the country and called on the Taliban not to recognize the Durand Line as an international border. "I ask the Taliban, who are you fighting for? Are you fighting for Afghanistan or do you want Afghanistan to be controlled by others," Ghani stated. "If you [Taliban] love Afghanistan then show your commitments that you have not recognized the Durand Line. Make sure you do not turn Afghanistan from a crossroads [of economic and trade] into a one-way street, make a commitment for not being a servant of others," he added. Ghani also called on the Taliban to stop offensives and destroying infrastructure. "We want peace with everyone...if 200 to 400 or 600 people are being killed, if buildings are being burned and the infrastructure is being destroyed on daily basis, who will benefit?" Ghani said.

Afghanistan...

"The support for the republic is intense, immense, and across the board." Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., after meeting with Ghani on Thursday, said that the Afghan government is being left "alone" to handle a security situation that is "grave and growing worse," the same day a new U.S. intelligence assessment found that the Afghan government could fall as soon as six months after American troops depart, according to the Wall Street Journal. Ghani said he did not ask the president to change his plans for U.S. troops, during their meeting. "This is a sovereign U.S. decision. We respect that decision. Our course is to manage the consequences and to ensure that the people of Afghanistan rise to the challenge," Ghani said. Asked to respond to the pleas on Capitol Hill, Psaki said Biden made his decision based on the mess he already faced in Afghanistan when he first took office, pointing to decisions made by the Trump administration to cut the number of troops in the country and negotiate an agreement with the Taliban to withdraw all troops about three months after Biden's inauguration. "It's important to take a step back and remember what we inherited," Psaki said. "That's the hand we were dealt. The president made a decision, which is consistent with his view that this was not a winnable war, to bring the U.S. troops home." "Are there challenges to it? Of

course," Psaki continued. "Will we continue to be engaged, as today is evidence of, with the government about how we can continue to provide humanitarian [and] security support? Yes, we will." Part of that support includes leaving about 650 troops in the country to protect the U.S. embassy in Kabul, officials told the Associated Press on Friday. As a senator in the wake of 9/11, Biden supported the war in Afghanistan. But according to several reports, Biden privately pressed President Barack Obama to limit the size and scope of the United States' surge, in 2009. When Biden announced his decision to withdraw U.S. troops, in April, he said his position on the war changed in 2008, when he realized on a trip to Afghanistan that "only the Afghans have the right and responsibility to lead their country, and that more and endless American military force could not create or sustain a durable Afghan government." Even after that trip, however, Biden did not publicly advocate for the United States to withdraw its troops during his eight years as vice president. The Obama administration sent an additional 17,000 troops to Afghanistan to increase training capacity, and the administration's 2009 policy review on the conflict, which was drafted while Biden was vice president, did not push for a drawdown. Instead, Biden argued for a smaller troop presence more focused

on counterterrorism. Friday's meeting between Biden and Ghani was expected to be a symbol to the world of continued American support for the Afghan government. But Ghani did not receive the same treatment as other foreign leaders who have visited Biden at the White House. Biden and Ghani did not conduct a joint press conference following the meeting. Instead, Ghani later held a solo press conference at a nearby hotel. It's a departure from the precedent Biden has set so far. The president held joint press conferences with both other foreign leaders he has welcomed to the White House since January, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga in April, and South Korean President Moon Jae-In in May. President Barack Obama also held a joint press conference with Ghani when he visited Washington in 2015. Ghani is returning to a country in trouble. The Taliban controls 144 districts in Afghanistan, according to the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. More than 170 districts are contested, and the government has control over just 83 districts. Amid the growing violence, Ghani is facing political pressures and is seen as out of touch with a dwindling number of allies, Al Jazeera reported. His future political career is also at risk. He won just over half of the vote in September 2019, and he has proposed holding another election within six months.

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also want direct negotiations to reach a peaceful agreement." While stressing that he is no defender of the Taliban, Kamilov pointed to an official publication on the group's website where it claims to want to build an independent, sovereign Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan without any outside interference. In this new

country, the rights of women, girls, and minorities would supposedly be guaranteed. It is hard to believe that a seasoned diplomat like Kamilov would fall for such honeyed words. Yet, in also arguing that Afghanistan should be more deeply integrated into the Central Asian economy, he is on sound strategic footing. Even the Taliban would be attracted to

the idea of a renewed "Greater Central Asia" that could recreate some of the economic dynamism of the glory years of the Great Silk Road (1100-1600 AD). With China determined to deepen its trade, investment, and infrastructure ties across Eurasia, this vision has a chance of becoming reality. But first, peace must prevail, above all within Afghanistan.

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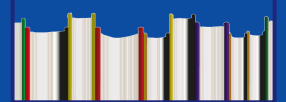
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Over 3.39B Coronavirus Vaccine Shots Administered Worldwide

More than 3.39 billion doses of coronavirus vaccines have been administered worldwide, according to figures on Our World in Data, a tracking website affiliated with Oxford University, on Saturday. China leads the global count with more than 1.37 billion jabs, followed by India with 368.99 million. The list continued with mostly Western countries, with the US having administered 332.97 million shots, Brazil 112.77 million, Germany 81.33 million, the UK 80.07 million, France 59.12 million, and Japan 57.35 million. Turkey ranked ninth on the list with over 57.33 million doses, followed by Italy, Indonesia, and Mexico. The country with the most doses administered by population is the United

Arab Emirates (UAE), with 160.41 doses per 100 people. Following the UAE are the island nations of Malta with 158.58 doses per 100 people and Seychelles with 141.98, Iceland 132.44, San Marino 131.59, Bahrain 128.13, Israel 126.09, Chile 123.96, Uruguay 122.86, Mongolia 118.6, the UK 117.95, Qatar 117.45, and Canada with 110.91. Most COVID-19 vaccines are administered in two doses, so the number of shots given is not the same as the number of individuals fully vaccinated. Since December 2019, the pandemic has claimed over 4.02 million lives across the world, with more than 186.17 million cases reported worldwide, according to the US' Johns Hopkins University.



A look at the world

Police in India Bust Major Drug Haul of 354 Kg Heroin

Police in the Indian capital city have busted a major drug haul and seized 354 kg of heroin worth 335 million U.S. dollars, police officials said on Saturday. Four people affiliated with an international drug syndicate have been arrested in connection with the case. "Four people - three from Haryana and one from Delhi - have been arrested so far



in the case," a police official said, adding "this is one of the biggest consignment of drugs to ever be caught by the Special Cell (of the police) and one of the largest drug syndicates to be exposed." Neeraj Thakur of the police's Special Cell told a press briefing that the operation had been going on for months. The drugs, which had come from Afghanistan, were transported from Mumbai to New Delhi by the sea in hidden containers. They were to be further processed at a factory near Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh, he said. "The link operator was sitting in Afghanistan," he said. Last month, New Delhi's Narcotics Control Bureau also busted an international drug trafficking syndicate, arresting eight people and seizing 2.2 million psychotropic tablets and at least 245 kg of similar drugs.

US, Russian Delegations Expected to Discuss Cyber Security on July 16



Representatives of the United States and Russia may meet on July 16 to discuss cyber security issues, US President Joe Biden told reporters on Friday before his departure to Delaware. "We set up a committee — joint committee. They're meeting on, I think, the 16th. And I believe we're going to get some cooperation," Biden said. At the same time, he gave no details of the forthcoming meeting, including its location and format. When asked what he expected from Russian President Vladimir Putin, Biden replied: "It's not appropriate for me to say what I expect him to do now. But we'll see." White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Friday that the United States and Russia are set to hold cyber security talks next week. On Tuesday, Psaki said cyber security consultations at the level of experts are expected to take place soon. The presidents of Russia and the United States had a phone conversation on Friday. It was the first phone talk between Putin and Biden after their summit meeting in Geneva on June 16, when they spoke for nearly 3.5 hours. Before that, the two leaders spoke over the phone two times, on January 26 and on April 13. The president continued dialogue on issues of information security and the fight against cybercrime that began at the Russian-US summit in Geneva, the Kremlin said. "In the context of the recent reports about a series of cyber-attacks allegedly originating from Russia, Vladimir Putin noted that despite the Russian side's readiness for joint efforts to stop crimes in the information space, no inquiries on these matters came from the United States' security agencies in the past month," the Kremlin said.

Japan Foreign Minister Eyes Visit to Iran in August

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi is planning to visit Iran, possibly in mid-August, to build ties with its new government led by a conservative hard-liner, diplomatic sources said Friday. Motegi is expected to meet his Iranian counterpart as Japan aims to strengthen its traditionally friendly ties with Iran and discuss with the administration of President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, an anti-U.S. ultraconservative cleric, issues related to Tehran's nuclear program, the sources said. Raisi is set to assume his post in early August, following his election victory last month. It is the first time in eight



years that a conservative hard-liner has won the presidency, fueling concern about a flare-up of tensions between Iran and the United States. Iran's current Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, under the outgoing government of moderate Hassan Rouhani, is also likely to be replaced by a conservative hard-liner, according to the sources. Motegi's visit to Iran is expected to be part of a 10-day trip to the Middle East, which will likely also take him to Egypt and Turkey in a bid to help stabilize tensions in the Middle East, the sources said. It would be the first visit to Iran by a senior Japanese government figure since then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and then Foreign Minister Taro Kono made trips in June 2019. Motegi is also considering visiting Israel and Palestine, as Japan looks to build a relationship with the Israeli government under new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and offer assistance to reconstruct Gaza following the bombing by Israel in May, according to the sources. In Turkey, Motegi is planning to meet with his counterpart to discuss the anti-coronavirus response and stability in the Middle East. He is also likely to visit Jordan, Iraq and Qatar.



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