

(1) NATO, US...

before the operation," as Afghanistan still lacks "strong and stable central authority."

He also emphasized that, failing to defeat the Taliban by military means, the ISAF's current policy of national reconciliation de-facto envisions their participation in the new political power structure of Afghanistan.

Kabulov drew attention to the fact that the ongoing "Decisive Support" training mission, which the US and their allies in Afghanistan are currently conducting, has also shown very little result. The program aims to improve the combat readiness of the Afghan army and police, enabling them to independently secure stability and order.

According to Kabulov, Afghan governmental forces "show inability to affect the situation due to a lack of arms and equipment, as well as an insufficient level of training and low morale."

With the Taliban bearing down on different parts of the country, Western troops have been forced to directly engage in combat, leaving them less time to focus on training Afghan soldiers, Kabulov said.

Meanwhile, according to the Russian President's special envoy, the situation in Afghanistan remains tense, with "high or extraordinary" security threats present in 27 of the 34 Afghan provinces, as Taliban militants intensify their activities in different parts of the country.

On December 11, the insurgents assaulted the Spanish embassy guesthouse in the Afghan capital. The militants also killed six US soldiers in a suicide bomb attack on the Bagram air base; RT reported. (Monitoring Desk)

(2) Concerns Rise...

production have been registered by the organization and 598 suspects have been arrested in connection with these cases during 2015.

"Nearly 4.5 tons of heroin, 16 kilograms of morphine, 24.5 tons of opium, over 158 tons of hashish, 13,107 liters of alcoholic beverages, 136 light and heavy weapons and 275 vehicles were confiscated in nine months of this year," said Ahmad Khalid Moahid, a spokesman for CJTF.

According to the CJTF, Logar, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Nimroz, Kabul, Helmand and Badakhshan are among the top provinces where drugs are produced and smuggled.

Meanwhile, Daikundi, Khost, Kapisa, Bamiyan and Panjshir are the provinces where no incidents related to drugs production and trafficking were reported during the nine months of 2015.

The CJTF officials meanwhile called on the international community to help Afghanistan overcome the drugs problem.

"Drug [trafficking and production] poses a similar threat as terrorism. International institutions should help Afghanistan to overcome this problem," they added.

A number of analysts meanwhile believe that the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan has affected the Afghan government's counternarcotic campaign during the past year. (Tolonews)

(3) Pak, Afghan ...

said Wednesday.

On Sunday, Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Gen. Raheel Sharif met with the Afghan leaders in Kabul. The sides agreed to jointly fight against terrorism and establish the hot line to connect land forces commanders with the aim to coordinate their actions.

Afghanistan is in a political and social turmoil, with the Taliban and other extremist factions such as Daesh (Islamic State, outlawed in Russia) taking advantage of instability in the country. Islamabad has been an active mediator in Afghan peace talks. In July, Pakistan hosted a first round of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban insurgents, which were followed by a number of reconciliation meetings, but stalled later. (sputniknews)

(4) 200,000 Afghans...

civilian casualties to the highest level since a U.S.-led coalition ousted the Taliban regime in October 2001, the United Nations has said.

Ranked least developed in Asia in a recent U.N. report, Afghanistan is already one of the poorest countries on Earth with an estimated annual GDP of \$20.84 billion in 2014 and a per capita income of less than \$700.

FILE - An Afghan refugee seeks shelter in a phone booth during a rainstorm in Victoria Square, where hundreds of migrants and refugees sleep, in central Athens, Greece, Sept. 21, 2015.

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While no official tracking of the financial consequences of irregular emigration is available, it appears that in 2015 more than \$1 billion was exchanged between human traffickers and Afghans trying to reach Europe.

High price to pay
Landlocked Afghanistan is nearly 4,000 kilometers from Greece, and many emigrants pay traffickers handsomely to get there.

"On average, a migrant pays smugglers about \$7,500 to be taken to a European destination," Islamuddin Jurat, a spokesman for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations, told VOA.

Often, there is more money exchanged before settlement.

"I've spent \$6,500 to make it to Hungary and my destination is Belgium," Dawajan Sahil, a young Afghan, told VOA in Budapest in August. "I'll pay more to get to Belgium."

Another young man, Bahram Ghafoori, said he paid a smuggler \$10,000 to take him to Germany, where more than 80,000 Afghans sought asylum in 2015. The immediate economic impact of the Afghan irregular emigration is unclear.

In the eyes of Afghans, however, the exodus is a major setback.

"We lose young men who can be very helpful in developing the country and they [emigrants] waste millions of dollars which could be vital in rejuvenating the economy," said Khan Jan Alekozai, who serves on the Afghan Chamber of Commerce in Kabul. Servitude, prostitution, death Many emigrants gamble their hard-earned savings, sell off their properties or borrow money to pay human traffickers, according to Thomas Ruttig, a senior researcher at Kabul-based research institution Afghanistan Analysts Network.

FILE - Afghan refugees are wrapped in blankets after spending the night at a collection point in the truck parking lot of the former border station on the Austrian side of the Hungarian-Austrian border.

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While most emigrants pay traffickers in cash or installments until they reach a final destination, some resort to loans, credits and even modern forms of slavery, often plunging into debt bondage, servitude and prostitution, according to U.S. State Department human trafficking reports.

Irregular emigration is also extremely dangerous. The government of Afghanistan does not officially tally the number of its citizens who die on risky routes to Europe, but the rate is reportedly high.

Overwhelmed by the influx of too many asylum-seekers, some European countries have launched public awareness campaigns inside Afghanistan to warn potential emigrants of the serious risks on the way to Europe and the uncertainty in getting residence approvals.

Stopping Afghan emigrants from entering Germany was a point of discussion between Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in December. After the meeting, Ghani told Deutsche Welle that Afghans leaving their

country were opting to become "dishwashers" in Europe — a derogatory remark which many on social media called insulting.

"The high number of Afghans becoming refugees is definitely worrying and represents a brain drain, but also reflects a drain of confidence in the current government and its ability to successfully tackle the multiple crises Afghanistan is facing," Ruttig said. (VoA)

(5) More Troops...

The Taliban have already dealt some stinging blows to Afghan forces, including a short-lived takeover of the northern city of Kunduz. (AFP)

(6) Security Forces ...

large-scale operation.

"The [security] personnel has a strong morale; this is the weakness of our commanders of military units [that has resulted in fall of parts of Sangin to Taliban]. Such people should be punished," said a commander of the Public Order Police in Sangin, Shinkai Qarabaghi.

TOLOnews reporters Abdul Wali Arian and Abdullah Hamim, who are embedded with security forces in Sangin, report that the Taliban are hiding out in civilian houses, which is proving a challenge for security forces.

Arian said however that reinforcement troops have arrived in the district and have joined security forces. However, bad weather, including rain, is having an impact on air support as air strike operations are not always possible.

He said the reinforcement troops had to break through tough Taliban defense lines in their bid to reach the Sangin troops.

"The convoy successfully made its way to our colleagues in Sangin and we had no casualties," said a Public Order Police member who was part of the reinforcement troop contingent.

Arian said however, that the Taliban's tactic of hiding in houses is a problem as troops have come under attack through this. In addition, the Taliban also planted mines along the main route to Sangin.

"Taliban started shelling from inside houses. They use houses as shields, but they failed. When we attacked them back, they entered people's houses. Hence, we stopped our attack [to save civilians lives]," a member of the Public Order Police said.

Meanwhile, a number of Sangin residents from areas under Taliban control said people are being oppressed by the militant group. "They [Taliban] do not harass people a lot, but they ask for food and other things — forcibly," a resident of Sangin said. (Tolonews)

(7) US Warns....

immediate danger: the increase of actions by the Taliban and the IS on Afghan soil.

The newspaper also revealed yesterday that Washington plans to establish a permanent base in Afghanistan for the US Forces for Special Operations (FSO), which will remain there after the withdrawal of US troops in the first three months of 2017.

Such enclave will be used to direct the growing missions of such elite units from the Pentagon and the activities of the intelligence services in central and southern Asia.

The FSO are elite units composed of the Green Berets of the US Army, the Seals groups from the Navy and others in the Marines, and the Air Force, subordinated to the Joint Special Operations Command of the Pentagon, which main seat is in MacDill, Florida. (Monitoring Desk)

(8) Afghan Businessman...

September to 10 months in prison and a year of supervision after his release. Kline was convicted in November and is due to be sentenced in January.

The complaint said Green first spoke with Shadman in January 2009 outside an office at Kandahar Air Field, saying he thought the trucking company owner had paid other soldiers and asking if he could receive money as well. It lays out the steps according to an account by Green, say-

ing Shadman agreed to pay and followed through a few days later.

"When Green visited as instructed, Shadman pulled from his clothing a plastic bag containing \$50,000, all in \$100 bills. Shadman handed the bag to Green," reads the account.

More payments followed between that one and the last in April to the total of \$140,000 in cash. In return, Green steered what the U.S. Justice Department said were 40 contracts to Shadman's company that together were worth about \$3 million.

Kline at the time served as Green's superior officer, and the complaint said he asked Green to see if Shadman would pay him as well: "In the course of his cooperation with the government, Green described that, at Kline's request, Green spoke to Shadman who agreed to pay Kline \$50,000. Green stated he accompanied Kline to Shadman's compound where he witnessed Shadman give Kline a stack of cash which Green estimated to be approximately \$50,000."

The document says Kline understood that in return, he would use his position to award future contracts to Shadman's company.

As a result of the criminal complaint, a judge issued an arrest warrant for Shadman on December 23. His current location is not clear.

The U.S. has been trying for several years to get some kind of justice related to the schemes involving inflated trucking contracts. In November 2012, the Justice Department filed a civil lawsuit seeking the forfeiture of \$70 million held by Shadman's company at the Afghan National Bank in Kabul. That suit is still ongoing at the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C. (VoA)

(9) Over 1 Million...

further into Europe.

On 21 December, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said the total number of migrants arriving by both land and sea had reached more than 1,006,000.

Many migrants are still making the journey to Europe despite winter weather. The influx has caused tension within the EU, with some states putting up fences and re-imposing frontier controls.

Last week, the EU agreed to increase the number of Frontex agency staff in Greece, where most migrants arrive before travelling further into Europe. Germany says it has received more than a million refugees and migrants, the largest number of any European country, but this includes a large number from the Balkan states who are not counted in the sea arrivals. (Tolonews)

(10) 402 Women ...

to come build our country. We can do it ourselves."

Under this program, USAID has trained more 25,000 skilled workers in mid-level positions—36 percent of whom are women—in different market-based skills such as financial and project management, information communication and technology, sales and marketing, and construction.

Over 15,600 of those trained have been placed in jobs, or have received promotions in their current job that carried a salary increase of at least three percent.

AWDP is currently being implemented in five major cities across Afghanistan: Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Kandahar.

The American people, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, have provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for more than 50 years." (Wadsam)

(11) 22 Militants...

in Afghanistan this year, seizing entire regions and killing both national and foreign personnel.

A US Department of Defense report published in December noted a deteriorating overall security situation in Afghanistan in the second half of 2015. (Sputnik)

(12) Security...

who visited Surobi on Saturday, met with officials who said the insurgents also prey on locals and extort money from them.

Fakhruallah, an army commander, said: "They [militants] have centers [hideouts] in upper areas such as Qala-e-Sorkh and Diwana Ha areas, and from there they organize a number of attacks on Kabul [city]. They get to the capital city through different ways." Sources say Ozbin is a good income source for the Taliban as they allegedly extort money from locals, especially for electricity.

Meanwhile, the district chief of Surobi, Fahim Musazai said they plan to establish local police in Ozbin area in order to maintain law-and-order.

"Tribal elders have said they are ready to help government to establish local police in the area. We have shared the issue with the Interior Minister and he vowed to provide us with the facilities for this," he added.

A number of residents of Surobi meanwhile said the presence of militants has created many problems for locals.

"The people are faced with lots of problems, including violence against women, poor economy, family problems and others, therefore they need psychologists and counseling centers — particularly for women," said Jan Agha, head of a youth training center in Ozbin.

"We have several students in schools and we have tried a lot to improve their knowledge, but we are faced with a lack of professional teachers," said Momen, the head of a training center in Surobi. (Tolonews)

(13) Army Defuses...

according to military officials. Afghan security forces have assumed the full security charges from NATO and U.S. forces after the NATO-led troops completed their combat mission in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, after 13 years of military presence in the country. (Xinhua)

(14) Thousands Set...

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is also expected to be in attendance. Gov. Andrew Cuomo went to Lemm's wake on Tuesday. (Fox News)

(15) Pakistani...

Board of Revenue (FBR), Ministry of Science and Technology and representatives of provincial food departments of Sindh and Punjab.

In the meeting, Punjab government sought federal government's intervention to regain the market as Pakistan has huge quantity of surplus wheat and flour.

Four reasons were singled out in the meeting affecting the market of Pakistani flour in Afghanistan. Non-availability of fortified wheat, a lobby is actively spreading propaganda against Pakistan's wheat, all time high prices of flour/wheat and certain taxes on both sides of the border. (KP)

(16) Hollande...

have excluded themselves from the national community," Valls wrote on Facebook.

But experts say the measure has little chance of deterring jihadists who are often willing to give up their lives, let alone their passports. (AFP)

(17) Iraq Tells...

protect our sovereignty, people and resources."

The Islamic State group seized much of northern and western Iraq, including the second largest city, Mosul, in the summer of 2014. The extremists have declared a caliphate in the areas of Iraq and Syria under their control and have imposed a harsh and violent version of Islamic law.

On Monday, Iraqi forces backed by U.S.-led airstrikes drove IS militants out of the city center of Ramadi, the capital of the western Anbar province, and raised the Iraqi flag over the main government complex there.

IS had seized Ramadi in May, in its biggest advance since the start of a U.S.-led air campaign in August 2014. (AP)

(18) US Monitored...

take long for administration and intelligence officials to realize the NSA was sweeping up their conversation content.

U.S. President Barack Obama maintained the monitoring of Netanyahu on the grounds that it served a "compelling national security purpose," the paper reports. (Xinhua)

(19) Russia Rejects...

ternational last week issued a damning report claiming that the Russian raids had killed hundreds of civilians, many in targeted strikes that could constitute war crimes.

Russia's defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov had dismissed the report, saying it was made up of "cliches and fakes".

In the past two days, Russia's air force conducted 121 combat sorties and struck 424 targets in many parts of Syria. (AFP)

(20) India Successfully...

air defense capabilities". "All our future warships will be equipped with this missile," a spokesperson for the Indian Navy told the media.

The Barak-8 is developed jointly by state-owned Defense Research and Development Organization and Israel's Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure. It is aimed at defending against any short-to-long range airborne threats, including planes and drones.

The missile is equipped with state-of-the-art multi-mission radar, two-way data link and a flexible command and control system. (Xinhua)

(21) Iraq Risks...

problem," he said. Nearly 14,000 teachers have fled northern Iraq where large swathes of land are held by Islamic State (IS) militants, who swept across the Syrian border in mid-2014, declaring a "caliphate" to rule over all Muslims.

Hawkins said gaining greater access to Iraqis living in areas held by Islamic State was another top concern for 2016.

UNICEF, along with the Iraqi health ministry, vaccinated up to 600,000 children against measles and polio in IS-controlled areas in 2015 but progress on humanitarian access remained "very, very slow", he added. (Reuters)

(22) Burundians...

permission would violate its sovereignty.

Nkurunziza also reiterated the government's position that any opposition members who had taken part in a failed coup in May should be barred from participating in peace talks, which kicked off this week in Kampala, Uganda.

"We saw them the other day in Kampala as government opponents," he said. "We can't accept this. They must be arrested... Instead of bringing them to talks, they should instead bring them to the court."

The talks, brokered by the East African Community regional bloc, were expected to reconvene in Tanzania next month, but it remains unclear if Burundi's government will participate if they do not agree on which individuals represent the opposition. (Reuters)

(23) IS Leader...

was the first to leave for Syria, in June or July 2013. The other two left about two months later. He paved the way. What I don't understand is that (al Mouadan) missed police check-ins for two months and no one reacted, no one went after the other two."

Lagarde said he did not personally know al Mouadan but that he knew Amimour's family. "What Amimour's family told me is that he (al Mouadan) seemed to be the leader of their group of three people," he said, and the family had said al Mouadan rose in Islamic State ranks more than the other two. While some French media have said they were childhood friends, Lagarde said he had heard that al Mouadan and Amimour did not meet before becoming radicalized in 2011. (Reuters)