

(1) Afghan President...

There was a visit in the works around the time of last year's UN General Assembly in September but plans were ultimately scrapped by the White House which said the timing did not work.

At the time, State Department officials said that the timing had not worked for the Afghans either given their upcoming elections, implying that both sides wanted to delay.

Earlier this week, the US special representative for Afghanistan said the US and the Taliban had agreed in principle for a framework to talks that could end the nearly 20-year war.

In comments given to the New York Times and confirmed to CNN by the US Embassy in Kabul, Zalmay Khalilzad said the framework for peace would see the insurgent group vow to prevent the country from being used as a hub for terrorism in return for a US military withdrawal. "We have a draft of the framework that has to be fleshed out before it becomes an agreement," Khalilzad told the Times on Monday. "The Taliban have committed, to our satisfaction, to do what is necessary that would prevent Afghanistan from ever becoming a platform for international terrorist groups or individuals." The plan has been criticized by some who call for a different approach or sustained US presence there, and former US ambassador Ryan Crocker wrote a Washington Post op-ed saying the framework for talks had "delegitimized" the government of Afghanistan.

In an extended tweet thread on Thursday, Khalilzad said talks are not complete, but progress was made.

"You can't eat an elephant in one bite! And a forty year old war won't be resolved in one meeting, even if that meeting runs for close to a week," he wrote. "This is a moment for Afghans to begin to heal old wounds and chart a new course for their country. There are many players, many issues, and many moving parts. But we are on the right path, together."

According to a US defense official in December, the American military has received orders to commence preparations to pull about half of the US troops from Afghanistan.

The Pentagon is currently discussing a withdrawal along those lines, but the plan hinges on talks between the Afghan President and the Taliban, according to Trump administration officials.

The US has about 14,000 troops in the country, most of which are present as part of a larger NATO-led mission to train, advise and assist Afghan forces. (CNN)

(2) Muslimyar Denounces...

years and hoped that they would never reach their nefarious designs. He said Afghan army was strong, national institutions had grown and army had full potential to protect and defend the country.

Senate chairman expressed his concern over ongoing peace talks between the US and the Taliban and said Afghanistan wanted a peace which ensure stability and prevent the possibility of internal conflicts.

He said the sacrifices of security personnel and their families should not be degraded in the peace talks and they expect their sacrifices shall be admired and honoured.

Muslimyar said they believed on intra-Afghan dialogue and added peace talks should be conducted between the Afghan nation and the Taliban representative.

He called on political leadership of the country to put aside difference and support the current government in its efforts for peace and stability in the country. (Pajhwok)

(3) UAE Envoy to India...

have very good views about finding a solution to the problem in Afghanistan," said former Taliban commander Akbar Agha on Thursday.

However, Albanna told reporters during a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday: "Qataris are hosting terrorist and exporting terrorist from their country. Terrorist are graduates of Guantanamo."

These remarks come just days after Khalilzad thanked Qatar for its help in holding the talks on the Afghan peace process.

"Thanks to the Government of Qatar for their constructive engagement and their facilitation of this round of talks. Particularly the Deputy PM and FM @MBA_AIThani_ for his personal involvement," Khalilzad tweeted on January 6.

UAE and Qatar have so far hosted several rounds of talks between the US and the Taliban.

"Qatar managed to provide the Taliban at least homes, residency and determine the way for peace. I think Qatar has been successful in its efforts so far while Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates have failed. So it is better that Saudi and UAE should also cooperate and help the Afghan peace process to be expedited further," said Entezar Khadim, a political analyst.

"I think manipulating skepticism around the issue of who is supporting terrorism and who is fighting it, such an approach will pose serious harm to the peace process in Afghanistan," said political analyst Abdul Shokor Salangi. Meanwhile, Albanna was quoted by Wionews as saying: "In order to implement our vision, we are a country that would like to see peace in the region and will do our utmost to eliminate terrorist groups or reaching out that can ease of problems in the region. UAE has created a unique position. We have taken action and we are a major player in the implementation of certain policies in the region."

In 2013, the Taliban opened their first official overseas office in the Qatari capital, Doha, and the group at the time said the main of this was to "meet Afghans". (Tolo news)

(4) Russia to Host...

President Ashraf Ghani's running mate in the July elections.

He said Khalilzad's statement that "the key for peace is in Kabul" was a shallow evaluation - of the peace process.

"The determination and will for peace has always been in Kabul but the key to peace has always been held hostage in GHQ/Rawalpindi," Saleh tweeted.

He said Afghans have been victims not culprits; therefore, "a package to re-victimize a victimized nation and condemn it to humiliation is not practical or sustainable".

Mohammad Mohaqiq, who has retained his post as second deputy to the CEO, despite being sacked by the president earlier this month, also voiced his concern and said Khalilzad should be given time to solve the "Afghan problem" but warned that current efforts will not end proxy wars in Afghanistan if there is no regional consensus on peace.

Mohaqiq said Afghanistan's crisis will be prolonged if Khalilzad's efforts to end the 17-year conflict in Afghanistan fail.

Mohaqiq meanwhile is one of the Afghan politicians expected to travel to Moscow for the talks, Reuters reported.

"It is good to give Khalilzad time and Khalilzad should consider the issue that the problem will not be solved with visiting only UAE or Saudi Arabia or Pakistan; there are many other interested countries in the region; ignoring them might result in another problem for us (Afghanistan). This move should continue both from inside (the country) and from outside as well," Mohaqiq said.

Reuters reported that Mohaqiq along with other Ghani critics, Mohammad Ismail Khan, a prominent member of Jamiat party, and Atta Mohammad Noor, former Balkh governor, will attend the Moscow summit.

The latest move comes after the Moscow summit on Afghanistan's peace in November last year where representatives of the Taliban and envoys from 11 countries including the United States participated.

A delegation from Afghanistan's High Peace Council (HPC) also attended the meeting - but once again the Afghan government was not represented. (Tolo news)

(5) Khalid, Miller...

in Maiwand and Ghorakdistricts as well as the operations which will be launched in other areas in the near future," said Khalid.

Khalid assured Kandahar residents that the security forces will maintain security and will defend Afghanistan "against the enemy".

He also said that efforts are underway to address the challenges that Afghan forces are facing in Kandahar.

Although security departments are insisting on military pressure on Taliban, but findings of the Special Investigator General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) show that currently the Afghan government control only 53 percent of Afghanistan soil, which show a decrease.

The report also said the number of Afghan security forces is shrinking.

In their last quarterly report to congress, SIGAR reported that the personnel strength of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) as of October 31, 2018, was 308,693 personnel - the lowest it has been since the Resolute Support mission began in January 2015.

According to the report, the ANDSF strength decreased by 3,635 personnel in the previous quarter, and by 3,983 since the same period in 2017. SIGAR reported that according to the Department of Defense, the ANDSF's total goal was 352,000 personnel - which meant the last quarter's strength was only at 87.7 percent - 43,307 personnel short. (Tolo news)

(6) Trump Insists...

Trump abruptly tweeted plans in December to withdraw half of the 14,000 US forces from Afghanistan.

This announcement by the US president met with mixed reaction by Afghan and United States politicians.

The New York Times said in a report on Jan. 30 that in a letter to Donald Trump, President Ashraf Ghani has asked him to slow down the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and suggested cutting costs for the US where possible.

According to the New York Times, the letter was confirmed by three officials and described by one who had seen its contents.

The Times reported the letter was sent to Trump on Tuesday via Alice Wells, the principal deputy assistant secretary for South and Central Asia, who had been visiting Kabul.

The New York Times quoted a senior Afghan official who spoke on condition of anonymity as saying that the language of Ghani's letter was broad - asking for teams from both sides to discuss details of where costs could be reduced, and how the troop levels could be brought down from the current 14,000 to a "more efficient level."

The Times report stated that the official said the possibilities they had envisioned could save as much as \$2 billion a year for the United States, drawing from areas such as maintenance contracts, and reducing the level of American troops to as low as 3,000.

An Afghan military affairs analyst Saleh Registani told TOLONews on Friday that President Ghani is "struggling for his survival" with such offers.

Saleh said President Ashraf Ghani knows that "he is the 'main loser' of peace talks and by such letters he wants to struggle for his survival". He added that "no doubt, a hasty withdrawal will open the way for another civil war."

Other analyst and university lecturer, Musa Fariwar, said that opposite to Afghan leaders, Trump is mostly thinking about his country's interests. (Tolo news)

(7) Women's Participation...

women's participation in the elections non-Islamic.

"During the previous (post-Taliban) elections in Afghanistan, women's participation as voters stood at 41 percent, 40 percent, and then 39 percent. Now this level has dropped to 33 percent," Barakzai said.

The FEFA official urged the commission to be impartial in the process and scrutinise complaints against corrupt employees and deal with charges of rigging and irregularities in a timely manner.

On the other hand, Afghanistan Human Rights Commission Chairperson Seema Samar described women's inadequate rights to freedom, movement and creation of parties as the main problems facing half of Afghanistan's population.

The human rights campaigner added developed and democratic countries always ensured equality between women and men in the decision-making process.

Samar stressed women's participation in political, economic, cultural and social activities, saying the principle of equality was a foundation of

civilian life.

"One indicator of progressive and democratic countries is equality between women and men and women's participation in the decision-making process," she concluded. (Pajhwok)

(8) Preliminary Presidential...

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, Seyyed Noorollah Jalili, Inayatullah Hafez, Faramarz Tamanna, Shahab Hakimi, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, Noor-ul-Haq Ulumi, Ahmad Wali Masoud, Mohammad Ibrahim Alokozay, Shaida Mohammad Abdali, Noor Rahman Lewal, President Ashraf Ghani, CEO Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Ghulam Farooq Najrabi have registered their candidacies. (Pajhwok)

(9) Senate Opposes...

Trump had initially called for a 30-day timeframe to complete the pull-out, but after meeting with South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, Trump agreed to delay completion of the withdrawal.

Thursday's Senate action marked the second time in two months that the Republican-led Senate has supported a measure going against Trump's foreign policy, although legislation to change his policies has yet to become law.

Trump's decision to withdraw 2,000 US troops from Syria is on the grounds that ISIS no longer poses a threat.

The President has argued that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan can eradicate what is left of ISIS in Syria after US troops leave. (Reuters)

(10) Puma Helicopters...

mission daily, in all conditions. "The Pumas are in Afghanistan to provide support to the NATO forces stationed there, conducting ongoing training and advisor missions with Afghan Security Forces. (Agencies)

(11) Govt to Adopt New...

Members of the Mandawi Market Traders Union, a big market in the center of the city, said the firefighting department lacks the facilities to address incidents on time.

"The firefighters are striving hard but equipment at their access are old and out of use; therefore, they cannot address incidents properly," said Haji Sekandar, head of the union.

Figures by the union show that at least 450 shops caught fire in the incident on Sunday which totally inflicted almost \$20 million loss to investors. (Tolo news)

(12) Final Decision...

Japan, Korea and Italy in coordination with UNESCO participated in a gathering to take decision regarding the rehabilitation of the statues.

After their meetings in 2015 and 2016, four million dollars were allocated by the UN agency for rehabilitation of the historic statues.

But then vice president Mohammad Karim Khalil had said India had pledged to offer one million dollars for rehabilitation of Buddha statues. But since it is not known either the government of Afghanistan did not follow the matter or India reconsidered its decision.

Bamyan Governor spokesman Abdul Rahman Ahmadi told Pajhwok Afghan News the decision regarding reconstruction of the statues had been finalized in a recent meeting of specialists in Germany, but the question how to build them remained.

He said pieces of the big Buddha statue would not be lost but rehabilitation work was not an easy task and it needed a special strategy.

Ahmadi said budget for rehabilitation of the historic statues had not been determined but it would definitely need a massive amount if the statues had to be reconstructed to their original form.

Abdul Hameed Jalya, director of Bamyan heritage sites, said rehabilitation of Buddha statues would be a difficult task in available resources until there was a decisive strategy and determination.

He said over 50 pieces of the Salasala statue were kept in a separate place near the original site and they would be helpful for the technical team in its rehabilitation.

Ismael Zaki, a civil society activist, believed that the government remained negligent towards the development of Bamyan and had ignored the rehabilitation of Buddha statue as well.

"If one of these statues is rehabilitat-

ed, Bamyan would become a centre of tourism in the region, it would attract tourists," he said.

Deputy Bamyan Governor Mohammad Asif Mubalegh said expert views were needed for rehabilitation of the Buddha statues.

He added decision on Buddha statues was not solo concern of Afghanistan but experts and global organizations were involved in this regard. (Pajhwok)

(13) Afghan Clerics...

US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad on Saturday said the key for peace is at the hand of Afghans as he acknowledged that progresses have been made in the peace process.

Balkh clerics said showing willingness for peace is a sign of "surrender" to the will of the Almighty Allah; therefore, the religious scholars said, the Taliban should not have any fear from joining peace.

They called on the Afghan government to make public "details of peace talks" with the people.

"The religious scholars here at this gathering and religious scholars in general are in favor of any option which is used for achieving peace whether it is an interim government or a transitional government. We accept all of them. We hope that government and Taliban accept this option for the sake of peace," said Sayed Abdul Wakil Akhundzada, a religious scholar in Balkh.

The clerics called on government to protect people's rights in the peace talks.

"There are 'complicated' ambiguities about peace because Afghanistan is a common land for everyone and all the people have the right to know about this process. A real peace is when justice is served, when everyone get their rights and when values are not violated," said Mohammad Haidar Fayaz, member of Balkh Provincial Council.

According to the religious scholars, peace cannot be achieved by "begging" and that government should enter the talks from a strong position.

"Islam says peace should be with dignity and mutual respect should be ensured. There is Afghan government at one side with some demands and there is Taliban on the other side with some demands. The two sides should hold face-to-face talks on the table of negotiations so that their demands are shared with each other," said Shujauddin, a religious scholar.

The remarks come a day after President Ashraf Ghani said that the key to peace is in Afghanistan because the Afghan government has a roadmap and a plan for peace.

He made the remarks at a gathering of at least 2,500 youths, from 300 districts, where they discussed peace and the role of youths in this process. "The key to peace is in Afghanistan because we have the scheme, plan and roadmap for peace, but the key for war is in Islamabad, Quetta and Rawalpindi," Ghani said. (Tolo news)

(14) Security Forces...

commander along with two armed men was currently in the detention of security personnel.

According to the statement no powerful individuals could harass and torture common people in the future and the law would be equally implemented on all people.

But Rahim Rahmani, the relative of Commander Zabihullah, termed his relative detention a conspiracy and added the check-post he established was officially recognized and financially supported by the government. He alleged Commander Zabihullah was detained because of his strong resistance against the Taliban. (Pajhwok)

(15) Drinking Water...

remaining was offered by the UNICEF.

He said with the launch of the project 635 families in Jat Sangbar, Luqmanabad, Shaheedan, Ulya, Baidak Jalal and Hawaranur would be able to get access to clean drinking water. Mohammad Khan, the provincial council member, was overjoyed with the implementation of drinking water projects and said: "Earlier the use of unhealthy water spread different kind of diseases among children but with the completion of these projects the issue of drinking water is resolved." (Pajhwok)