

A Weakened Taliban Unlikely to Overmatch ANSF



Gen. Campbell

WASHINGTON - Even as the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) has some work to do to increase its strength and capabilities, a weakened Taliban is unlikely to "overmatch ANSF" this year, a top US commander based in Afghanistan told lawmakers on Thursday.

"It is unlikely that the Taliban will be able to overmatch the ANSF on the battlefield in 2015. Nonetheless, the Taliban will still endeavor to frame localized, tactical successes (albeit temporary) into strategic victories through the ... (More on P4)...(2)

Afghanistan Rules out Pakistani Operations on its Soil

KABUL - Kabul would neither allow any foreign country in any circumstances to carryout operations on its soil nor had the country conducted any joint operation with Pakistan inside Afghanistan, a statement from the Presidential Palace said Friday. Earlier, a number of Pakistani media quoted the country's Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan as saying that Pakistan in collaboration with NATO and Afghan forces conducted joint operations in Afghanistan.

Khan's statement sparked political outrage in Afghanistan but Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "these reports are inaccurate."

A statement from the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: "The Minister (Khan) had referred to the ... (More on P4)...(5)

President Scraps Logar Chromite Deals

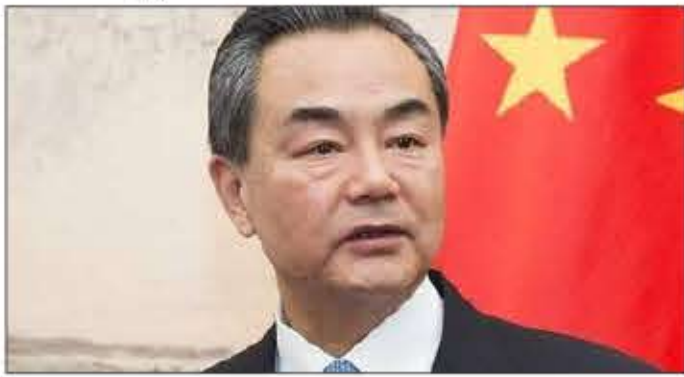
PUL-I-ALAM/KABUL - President Ashraf Ghani on Thursday paid a surprise visit to central Logar province and terminated contracts with two foreign mining companies involved in extraction of chromite, the acting governor said. Niaz Mohammad Amiri said the president arrived on an unannounced visit and inspected the Mes Aynak copper reservoirs. He said the president scrapped contracts with the two foreign firms, but he had no idea why. He ... (More on P4)...(1)



Chinese FM

Support Needed in Four Areas to Resolve Afghanistan Issue

ISLAMABAD - Support is needed in four areas to resolve the Afghanistan issue, visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said after his meeting with Sartaj Aziz, Adviser to the Pakistani Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs. With the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Afghanistan has entered into an important period of transition, Wang told a joint press conference with the Pakistani official. For a long time, Afghanistan endured ... (More on P4)...(3)



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US Officials Signal Support for Flexible Troop Withdraw Strategy



WASHINGTON - Chaired by U.S. Senator John McCain, a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing in Washington D.C. included testimony by seasoned American diplomats and national security officials unanimously advocating for a continued U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan post-2015 and a willingness to adapt policy based on how the country security situation evolves.

The men who gave testimony were Ambassador James Cunningham, who was the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan until December 2014; Ambassador Ryan Crocker, the former Ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries; Admiral Eric Olson, the former Commander of Special Operations Command; and Micheal Leiter, the former Director of National Counterterrorism Center.

The committee hearing, and the thrust of the testimony provided, falls in line with comments made by White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest, during a press briefing on Wednesday. Mr. Earnest said that President Barack Obama favors "a phased withdrawal" of U.S. troops from ... (More on P4)...(7)

Pakistan Calls for Greater Shift in Ties with Afghanistan



ISLAMABAD - Amid stepped-up diplomatic contacts between Kabul-Islamabad, the advisor to Pakistani prime minister on foreign affairs and national security said his country needed a major shift in ties with Afghanistan, Iran and India to ensure regional peace and stability. Speaking at a seminar: "Crossroads Asia: Dynamics of Peace and Progress," ... (More on P4)...(4)

PCMs Protests Persist as Oversight Rights Remain in Question



KABUL - Provincial Council Members (PCM) from around Afghanistan once again descended on the capital and blocked the entrance of Hamid Karzai International Airport for hours on Thursday, demonstrating their dissatisfaction with what they characterize as the disempowerment of Provincial Council's role in government oversight. The protesters, which included Provincial Council members as well as others, demand complete governmental monitoring rights, which nearly two weeks ago were dissolved by Parliament through its approval of four new articles of the national election law. "All the members of the Provincial Councils have decided that they want complete monitoring rights and we hope that they answer us soon," Parwan Provincial Council Chair Bahauddin Jelani told TOLONews. ... (More on P4)...(8)

UN Calls for Urgent Action to End Use of Child Soldiers in Conflict



NEW YORK - The United Nations on Thursday called for urgent action to end use of child soldiers in conflict as children are increasingly vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups.

In a joint press release marking the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, appealed to all parties of conflicts to meet their obligations under international law and end grave violations against children including their recruitment and use by armed groups.

"While governments of the world have made progress to recognize children have no place in their armies, the recruitment of child soldiers is still a huge problem, especially with armed groups," said Zerrougui.

"Out of 59 parties to conflict identified by the Secretary-General for grave violations against children, 57 are named because they are recruiting and using child soldiers," she added.

According to the UN, tens of thousands of boys and girls are associated with armed forces and armed groups in conflicts in over 20 countries around the world. Many have been ... (More on P4)...(9)

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