

(1) MPs Summon...

has been contacted to use all resources to suppress Daesh in their quest to reach their objectives," he said. But he said security forces have defeated Daesh in Zabul, Farah and Helmand, adding that government is itself committed to root out the group in the country. "Since its formation, the National Unity Government has been determined to combat Daesh effectively, government is committed to eliminate Daesh in Nangarhar province as well," he added. "We have prepared a strategy to eliminate the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Daesh and other terror groups from central Asia who intend to take a foothold in Afghanistan. The security forces have formulated inclusive programs to deal with the issue," Ulomi said.

"Anyone who takes up arms against the system has the status of an enemy to us and will be suppressed, because their action is against the constitution and the system. Such elements would be the target of the security forces of the country," acting defense minister Stanekzai told the lawmakers on Saturday.

"The strategy is not acceptable to the people, the security institutions must form more inclusive strategies and share it with the parliamentary commissions on security," the speaker of the Wolesi Jirga Abdul Rauf Ibrahim said. (Tolnews)

(2) Ghani Extends ...

the Office of Administrative Affairs, Nematullah Sayer, read the presidential decree regarding the extension of the term of appointed members of the Afghan Senate, the statement said, adding that the decree was issued after the members of the Senate requested President Ghani to extend the term of the appointed members in accordance with the enforced laws of the country.

According to the decree, the appointed members of the Senate House will continue to their work until the end of 16th period of the Lower House of the Parliament and appointment of the new members as per the article 84 of the Afghan constitution.

This comes as the government extended the term of the lawmakers in the Lower House of the Parliament (Wolesi Jirga) in June last year, saying the term of the parliament has been extended until the parliamentary elections are conducted and results are announced.

Meanwhile, the Presidential Palace announced late in December last year that the government is prepared for the Parliamentary and Provincial Councils elections between summer and fall seasons of next year.

The Afghanistan Independent Election Commission (IEC) Chief Yousuf Nuristani announced Wednesday that the schedule for the Parliamentary and District Council elections will be announced next week.

Speaking during a press conference in Kabul, Nuristani said the elections will likely bear a cost of around 63 million US Dollars, citing the estimations of the election commission. (KP)

(3) China, US ...

stepped up attacks. Pakistan hosted a meeting of Kabul officials and Taliban representatives last northern summer, but the process collapsed after the announcement of the death of longtime Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. (AAP)

(4) U.S. in ...

security for the most part, unless American forces take it from them unintentionally.

"This is a combat situation, but they are not in the lead intentionally," said Cook, referring to the special operations forces. "They're in support of these [Afghan] forces that the United States is trying to provide [with] additional support — training. We're trying to bolster those forces so they can conduct these operations on their own and secure their own country." Asked whether he had any reservations about saying that the U.S. troops are in combat in Afghanistan, Cook reiterated that the Helmand operation "was clearly a combat situation in which U.S. forces that were accompanying Afghan forces, who are in the lead, found themselves in a very difficult, dangerous situation. Another reporter pressed, "These troops are in combat. You don't dispute that?"

"This was clearly a combat situation," emphasized the spokesman. "Their mission ... is to assist the Afghan forces - to train, advise, and assist. They can accompany, they play a support role, but they're there able to defend themselves and are at risk as we have seen painfully in this par-

ticular instance."

The Pentagon press secretary suggested that DOD may not always know what the estimated 10,000 American service members currently deployed to Afghanistan have been tasked with doing.

A reporter told Cook, "I just want to kind of put on record that as of now, we don't know what's being asked of U.S. troops in Afghanistan." (Monitoring Desk)

(5) NDS Conducted ...

southern Helmand provinces. In regards to threats posed by the emergent loyalists of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group in Afghanistan, Andarabi said the Afghan security institutions are closely working to ascertain the roots of the terror group, insisting that the extremist group has links outside the country.

The remarks by Andarabi comes as the loyalists of the terror group have recently increased their insurgency activities and anti-government propaganda besides terrorizing the residents of eastern parts of the country as they aim to establish a regional base in eastern Nangarhar province. Meanwhile, the acting defense minister Masoom Stanekzai said last week that a battalion consisting of 750 personnel of the Afghan army has been formed to suppress the insurgency activities of the ISIS loyalists in the country. (KP)

(6) Pakistan-Kabul...

Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) did not receive any feedback. To resolve the issue, Afghan authorities handed a copy to Pakistani officials in a recent meeting. In the absence of any treaty on avoidance of double taxation between the two countries, Kabul has decided to tax Pakistan International Airlines. (Monitoring Desk)

(7) AAF to Receive ...

Afghan National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar to New Delhi.

Meanwhile, the Afghan government has stepped up efforts to build the capabilities of the Afghan Air Force with the soaring Taliban-led insurgency across the country.

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani met with a delegation of the US senators in Kabul last week and urged the US Congress to assist Afghanistan in building an efficient Air Force.

He said Afghanistan needs to complete the inventory of its Air Force by acquiring aircraft and helicopters, urging the US Congress delegation to assist Afghanistan in this process. (KP)

(8) US Confirms ...

hopes that peace can be attained. But he said Pakistan's record on Afghanistan calls for caution and sustained pressure. "Whether or not there is concrete progress by the start of the next fighting season in late March will be an indicator of Pakistani intentions," Khalilzad wrote in an opinion piece in Newsweek along with veteran U.S. diplomat James Dobbins.

"Pakistan's interest in a negotiated settlement to the Afghan war seems real enough, but the Pakistani military has never been willing to take the very steps most likely to advance the process, which are to close down Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network operations in Pakistan and imprison any of their leaders not actively negotiating peace with the government in Kabul," read the article.

According to Khalilzad and Dobbins, Pakistani authorities also fear that if they put too much pressure on the Afghan Taliban, it might join forces with the Pakistani Taliban in the latter's effort to overthrow the Pakistani government and introduce a radical Islamist regime.

They said after years of flatly denying that it harbors insurgents, Pakistan admitted to maintaining contacts with the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network, and offered to act as a conduit between the Taliban and the United States and Afghanistan.

Pakistan convened one symbolic meeting between the Afghan government and the Taliban—which occurred in the presence of U.S. and Chinese observers—but failed to persuade the Taliban to reduce its military operation against coalition and Afghan forces. "In fact, military pressure on the Afghan government and civilians escalated and no follow on meetings have taken place since," read their article.

In reality, the Taliban has advanced in the south, east and northern areas of Afghanistan. The announcement last year of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar's death two years earlier has in addition caused a split within the group - making genuine peace negotiations difficult.

Khalilzad and Dobbins said: "This suggests that Washington and Kabul should focus less on fostering talks and more on persuading Pakistan to take action against those engaged in terrorism and violence. While opening peace talks could be a positive step, it will only yield fruit if Pakistani authorities also begin to close down Afghan Taliban military operations."

"Without Pakistani initiative, talks with the Taliban are unlikely to succeed. Perhaps with Pakistani consent and support the Taliban will continue to push their advantage on the ground. Alternatively, given ground realities, the Taliban might demand that the United States and Afghanistan cede provinces in the east and the south to them," they said.

But, territorial demands in particular would prove unacceptable to Washington and Kabul, as they would create a new terrorist sanctuary and serve as a launching pad for insurgents to divide Afghanistan and seize Kabul, stated Khalilzad and Dobbins.

They said: "At this juncture, sustained and intensified pressure on Pakistan offers the only viable path to advancing the reconciliation process in a way that does not turn Afghanistan into a launching pad for terrorism and extremism."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Afghan High Peace Council, Shahzada Shahid, said: "We have received the green light which certifies approval of the talks by the opponents, however the conditions which they are stressing upon would be cleared step by step." (Tolnews)

(9) Russia Raids ...

coalition has expelled regime forces from Idlib province.

The Britain-based Observatory has an extensive network of sources inside Syria and identifies casualties by the type of aircraft flown and the munitions used.

Syria's conflict first erupted with anti-government demonstrations in March 2011 but quickly morphed into a war that has left more than 260,000 people dead. (AFP)

(10) US Unveils...

winter underscored the need for the United States and our partners in the international community and the private sector to deny violent extremists like ISIL fertile recruitment ground," it added, using the acronym for the militant group Islamic State (IS). IS is responsible for the massive terror massacre in Paris, France on Nov. 13, in which 130 people were killed and more than 350 others wounded in a series of well-coordinated shooting and bombing attacks.

On Dec. 2, an armed U.S. couple believed to be radicalized by IS launched a shooting attack in a social services center in San Bernardino, California, killing 14 people and wounding 21 others.

A suspected gunman who shot and seriously wounded a police officer in the U.S. city of Philadelphia Thursday night confessed that he had pledged allegiance to IS, U.S. police said Friday.

The U.S. government has listed attacks perpetrated by homegrown extremists, especially those who are inspired by the radical groups abroad like IS, as one of the major security threats it is facing.

Additionally, some senior officials from the White House and President Barack Obama's national security team, are meeting in Silicon Valley, California Friday with representatives from a number of leading technology companies, to follow up on Obama's call in his Dec. 6 address for the government and private sector to work together to combat terrorism and counter violent extremism online.

IS has been actively engaged in an online campaign aimed at recruiting young people overseas and inciting them to launch terror attacks against targets in the United States and other Western countries. (Agencies)

(11) Merkel Toughens...

means no. Keep away from our bodies," read one sign held by a demonstrator.

Merkel's conservative party said it wanted to reduce and control migration to Germany, and send those who had been refused asylum home promptly. (Reuters)

(12) Operations to ...

the strategically important Darqad district in last October have yet to make comment.

Meanwhile, the Afghan Defense Ministry in a statement released on Saturday reported killing 30 armed militants during cleanup operations elsewhere in the conflict-hit country over the past 24 hours.

According to the statement, 15 more

armed insurgents have been wounded over the period.

Defense Ministry in the statement also admitted that seven army soldiers have lost their lives during the crackdown against insurgents.

Militancy and counter-militancy have got momentum in the conflict-hit Afghanistan since last April when Taliban outfit launched its so-called spring offensive in the country.

Taliban militants who have been fighting to regain power in Afghanistan have marked the herald of 2016 with accelerating bloody offensives in the war-torn country.

Local analysts believe that the hard-liner Taliban would escalate activities mostly in the shape of suicide bombings ahead of the proposed peace talks and joining the peace process with Afghan government. (Xinhua)

(13) US to Deploy...

John Campbell, recently said the United States should at least maintain its current posture there for the foreseeable future.

"My intent would be to keep as much as I could for as long as I could," he said.

In Iraq, the soldiers will be tasked with advising and assisting Iraqi security forces as they prepare to fight Daesh.

There are about 3,500 U.S. troops deployed to Iraq, serving primarily as advisers to Iraqi forces. (Tolnews)

(14) Rights Groups ...

other recommendations from provinces and referred it to government leaders," Mohammad Fahim Hakim, a member of the peoples committee on peace said.

"Peace is a fundamental need and this is our main aspiration ... therefore we want the process to move in the right direction so that our issues are settled," rights activist Ghulam Ali Baryal said.

After months of strained ties, Afghan and Pakistani leaders once again agreed to ease tensions and take initiatives to resume stalled talks with the Taliban.

However, the Afghan government has in the past ten years tried on numerous occasions to get the insurgent group to the peace talks table. But efforts to date have failed.

After assuming office, President Ashraf Ghani tried to establish a dialogue process.

Meanwhile, women's rights advocates are also calling for female participation in the talks.

"The women constitute an important segment of society. We want the government to consider the achievements the country has made over the past decade and give a role to women in the process," rights activist Gulghutai Sahibyan said.

"Women are eager to play a role in the process, we strongly support peace efforts," another rights activist Sonia Aslami said.

Pakistan which wields influence on the Taliban hosted the first formal round of talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban last July, but the talks collapsed following the announcement of the death of the group's longtime leader Mullah Omar. (Tolnews)

(15) Alleged Al ...

last month that 17 detainees would be sent to other countries sometime in January. If it happens, that would leave 90 detainees - 59 of which have been deemed ineligible to be sent elsewhere.

President Barack Obama has repeatedly pledged to try to shutter the detention camp known as Gitmo, which has become a recruiting tool for terrorists who portray it as a symbol of America's disregard for human rights. Yet many Republicans have objected, including the prospect of transferring the 59 detainees (at least) to prisons inside the United States.

As to Kandari, legal transcripts indicate that he left Kuwait in late June 2001, spent two months in Pakistan, then headed to Afghanistan. The lawyer defending him, Lt. Col. Barry Wingard, claims that local Afghan officials advised Kandari to leave after the September 11, 2001, attacks but instead he was captured by the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance - along with many other Arabs - and "sold" to U.S. forces.

Kandari's family claims he went to Afghanistan to do charitable work, including helping reconstruct two wells and repair a mosque, having made similar trips in 1997 to the same country and three years earlier to Bosnia. But prosecutors didn't buy this story. (CNN)

(16) US Forces ...

years ago, and since then the Taliban have slipped back in.

So the Americans once again came to help. In the gun battle that killed McClintock on Tuesday, two other Americans were wounded, along with three Afghan troops.

"They are forward deployed with Afghan commando units and they are very much in the thick of these fights," says retired Lt. Gen. Dave Barno, who once led U.S. forces in Afghanistan and now teaches at American University. "Special operations forces are going to be in the thick of this coming battle whether we want to talk about that or not." But administration officials choose their words carefully when they talk about it.

That's because Obama insists America's combat mission is over and Afghan troops are now in the lead. "Our forces therefore remain engaged in two narrow but critical missions," he said, "training Afghan forces and supporting a counterterrorism mission against the remnants of al-Qaeda."

Al-Qaeda - not the Taliban. But it appears that training mission is becoming more of a partnering effort with Afghan forces battling Taliban fighters.

And that makes things more difficult for officials like Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook. When asked if the combat mission continues for American troops, he said they were in harm's way.

Two days later, he was asked again. "This was clearly a combat situation," he said, "as we have seen painfully in this particular instance."

A "combat situation" - not a mission. This week's firefight by American and Afghan commandos was not the first. Back in October, American special operators headed to Kunduz, after the Taliban seized the northern city and scattered the police force. The Afghan troops needed American help once again. (Tolnews)

(17) 5 Killed in...

the country's tribal areas 13 times last year, killing between 60 and 85 people which is almost half the 25 strikes in 2014 and 10 times fewer than the campaign's peak of 128 in 2010. (Xinhua)

(18) US Drone...

in front of local villagers and a member of the Afghan National Army was also among the victims. Khogyani, however, would not confirm it. The Taliban this week launched attacks against IS bases in two districts around Achin, killing dozens of fighters of the rival group and evicting them from these areas, according to local officials.

This is not the first time IS has headed people in Afghanistan after establishing its footprint in the country.

On Wednesday, Afghan Acting Defense Minister Masoom Stanekzai told VOA that the government has formed a special force to counter Islamic State in eastern parts of the country.

IS has been active in several districts of Nangarhar, where it launched multiple attacks on government facilities. (VoA)

(19) Taliban Waging...

round of talks also involving the United States and China to try to agree a comprehensive road map for peace. Pakistan, which is said to wield considerable influence over the Taliban, hosted a breakthrough first round of talks in July.

"The surge in winter violence in Afghanistan appears to be timed with the pressure on Pakistan to induce the Taliban to join peace talks," Mohammad Taqi, a U.S.-based Pakistan political analyst, said.

"Pakistan seems to be betting on its Taliban proxy gaining a toehold such as in Helmand Province" - where the Taliban is engaged in fierce fighting with Afghan and U.S. special forces after threatening to overturn several districts - "and then to present that as a fait accompli to the Afghan government and the U.S."

Taqi added that whether or not the Taliban gains new territory, the violence will be used as leverage in talks. The Washington Post last month quoted Western and Afghan officials as saying that "the Taliban now holds more [Afghan] territory than in any year since 2001," when the U.S.-led invasion ousted the Taliban regime that controlled much of the country. (RFE/RL)

(20) Few Russian...

strikes that are not precise cause me great concern because I think there is an indirect correlation to the refugee flow," the official said. "It is not just the pressure it is putting on NATO and the EU, it is also the humanitarian cost," the official said. (Reuters)

(21) Damascus Says...

on opposition-held areas. The outlook for the talks has been further clouded by increased tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which back opposing sides in the conflict. Tensions have risen since Saudi Arabia executed Shi'ite cleric Nimr al-Nimr. (Reuters)

(22) IS Claims ...

Thursday, a group of 15 men attacked a tourist hotel in Giza's Ahram district on Thursday, causing no casualties, for which the Egyptian affiliate of Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility.

Also on Thursday, unknown assailants blew up a main natural gas pipeline near Arish city of Egypt's restive North Sinai province bordering the Palestinian Gaza Strip and Israel, a security source told Xinhua. (Xinhua)

(23) U.N. Yemen ...

dullah Saleh, who retains the loyalty of the armed forces despite having stepped down from office nearly four years ago after months of protests, joined forces with the Iran-allied Houthis in fighting the Saudi-led alliance trying to shore up Hadi. Saleh said on Friday that he would not negotiate with Hadi's government, throwing into doubt the fate of the peace talks. The U.N. envoy is due to travel to Sanaa soon after his Riyadh visit. (Reuters)

(24) Japanese, British ...

bomb. Clear evidence corroborating this is still pending and doubts have become rampant among some experts due to the relatively small size of the seismic explosion associated with the bomb's detonation, as investigations continue to definitively determine the device, type and size. Nakatani said the discussions held with his British counterpart were "fruitful" and he hoped the two countries' bilateral relations and defense cooperation would become deeper through further dialogue. (Xinhua)

(25) Baghdad ...

training and air cover, but not presence of foreign troops, renewing his call for neighboring Turkey to withdraw its troops from northern Iraq. "Daesh seizes part of the Iraqi land, but that does not give justification to any state to violate Iraq's sovereignty. These states have to stand with us not against us. They have to help us (in fighting against IS) not hamper us," Abadi told the ceremony broadcast live on the state-run Iraqiya television. (Xinhua)

(26) EU Pushes ...

day the unity government comes to power because the security situation "needs to be tackled immediately", she said. Mogherini made the remarks in Tunis, where she separately met with Fayeze al-Sarraj, a businessman named in a UN-brokered national unity government as prime minister designate, as well as other Libyan lawmakers. (AFP)

(27) Iran Complains...

Saudi embassy in Tehran, prompting Riyadh to sever relations. Zarif said Iran had "no desire" to escalate tensions further, but offered no compromise as he placed the blame for the crisis, and the wider turmoil across the region, squarely on Saudi shoulders. (Reuters)

(28) 18 Kurdish...

attack on Saturday, security sources said. In the town of Silopi, near the Iraqi border, security forces seized 24 militants seeking to leave the town with local citizens, the military statement said. The army said a total of 426 militants have been killed in the towns of Cizre, Silopi and the Sur district of Diyarbakir - all subject to a round-the-clock curfew - since security force operations began there around a month ago. (Reuters)

(29) Candidates ...

Lien Chan and Wu Poh-hsiung. According to the KMT, about 200,000 people attended the parade. Participants started from three locations, Taiwan University and two city parks, and headed toward a square downtown where a grand gala was held.

Unlike the rainy and overcast weather earlier this week, Taipei saw a rare sunny day on Saturday. Old couples strolled in the parade holding hands while young couples carried toddlers in their arms or pushed strollers. (Xinhua)

(30) Turkmenistan ...

amount of five percent. Ministry of Economy and Development of Turkmenistan was instructed to ensure the state registration of Closed Joint Stock Company "TürkmenMillinebitgazkompaniýasy" according to established procedure. (Agencies)