

### (1) Afghanistan Says...

who are fighting to oust foreign forces, defeat the U.S.-backed government and impose their version of Islamic rule, said they never wanted to hold peace talks with the United States anyway.

"Their main strategy is to continue war and occupation," the spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said in a statement. He said Taliban fighters would respond in kind if the Americans wanted to focus on war: "If you emphasize war then our mujahideen will not welcome you with flowers."

#### 'PUBLIC CONSUMPTION'

Trump last year ordered an increase in U.S. troops, air strikes and other assistance to Afghan forces.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, said this month the strategy was working and pushing the insurgents closer to talks.

That was before a suicide bomber penetrated the highly guarded center of Kabul on Saturday and detonated an ambulance laden with explosives, killing more than 100 people and wounding at least 235.

That attack followed a brazen Taliban assault on the city's Intercontinental Hotel on Jan. 20, in which more than 20 people, including four Americans, were killed.

The Taliban said the attacks were a message to Trump that his policy of aggression would not work.

Another Taliban member said the United States had been approaching states that have relations with the Taliban to try to get them to push the insurgents to the negotiating table.

"President Trump is saying this for public consumption," the Taliban member, who declined to be identified, said of Trump's rejection of talks. "He and his team are making every effort to bring us to the negotiating table."

"Actually, the latest attack in Kabul awakened President Trump and his puppets in Afghanistan about the capability of the Taliban and their ability to mount big attacks anywhere."

The Taliban refer to the Afghan government as U.S. "puppets".

The United States believes the Haqqani network, a faction within the Taliban, was behind Saturday's bomb blast in Kabul.

It and Afghanistan have long accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban, and the Haqqani network in particular, as assets to be used in its bid to limit the influence of old rival India in Afghanistan.

This month, Trump ordered big cuts in security aid to Pakistan over its failure to crack down on militants.

Pakistan denies accusations it fosters the Afghan war, and condemned the recent attacks in Afghanistan.

Pakistani officials were not immediately available for comment on Trump's rejection of talks with the Taliban. (Reuters)

### (2) Pentagon Blocks ...

deflect blame for the decision, the latest move to limit the amount of publicly available information about the 16-year-old war in Afghanistan - America's longest.

It said in a statement that the Department of Defense did not tell SIGAR to withhold the data, but rather it was the NATO-led Resolute Support coalition that made the determination.

It added that the Pentagon did not have the authority to overrule the classification made by Resolute Support, which is led by U.S. General John Nicholson. "The Department continues to work with SIGAR, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, and NATO Resolute Support to resolve concerns about restrictions on information that was previously unclassified," Lieutenant Colonel Michael Andrews said.

Former officials and experts said that regardless of who restricted the information, it was particularly worrying because Afghan and U.S. officials had publicly set a benchmark it would now be difficult to measure.

The top U.S. general in Afghanistan set a goal in November of driving back Taliban insurgents enough to control at least 80 percent of the country within two years.

In its most recent report, SIGAR said that 43 percent of Afghanistan's districts were either under Taliban control or being contested.

Sopko said people would jump to the conclusion that information was being withheld because progress was not being made, which may not be the case.

A similar accusation was made during the Vietnam War, which later proved true.

"In essence, you can ask me almost any question and I will have to say, it is classified or non-releasable, I mean you go down the list, it is just amazing," Sopko said.

He added that the Department of Defense did not give him any reasons for

the move.

### RECENT ATTACKS

The move by the Pentagon comes amid a spate of violence in Afghanistan over the past nine days that is putting a new, more aggressive strategy under the spotlight.

An ambulance bomb in the city center killed more than 100 people, just over a week after an attack on the Hotel Intercontinental, also in Kabul, killed more than 20, including four U.S. citizens.

President Donald Trump has committed an additional 3,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan in recent weeks, bringing the total number of American troops in Afghanistan to about 14,000.

Michael Kugelman, with the Woodrow Wilson Center, said it made little sense to block the information.

"It's not fair to the American people, to American troops and I would think it's pretty hard to justify doing something like this," Kugelman said.

It is not the first time data has been withheld on the Afghan war.

Last year, U.S. forces in Afghanistan restricted the amount of data it provided on the ANDSF, including casualties, personnel strength and attrition rates - data that has now been completely withheld.

The U.S. military said at the time the data belonged to the Afghan government, which did not want it released.

A former U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there was pressure on the U.S. military to achieve success that could create a risk about not being fully open with the facts.

"We're going in a direction of hiding facts and shading and shaping facts in reaction to a lot of pressure to show fast results," the former official said. (Reuters)

### (3) Polio Vaccination ...

of the most insecure regions in the southern Kandahar province.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has said the practice of preventing children from being inoculated against polio in insecure regions of Afghanistan is concerning.

Polio is incurable and the vaccine is the only way to protect children against it. During winter months the virus doesn't circulate as easily and immunizations are particularly effective.

Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria are the three nations in the world where polio has not been eradicated completely. (Tolo News)

### (4) MoD to Step ...

security forces and foreign troops.

Meanwhile, a number of security force members who are in strongholds fighting the Taliban said they welcome the transition in Washington and Kabul's stances against the Taliban.

Noor Mohammad and Qudratullah, two police members along with their colleagues have been stationed in the east of Kunduz to prevent Taliban activity, and said they have been there for seven months, and through winter.

They also welcomed the decision against the Taliban and said they will not let the group operate in the province. However, this region has been the scene of heavy battles in recent months.

"Afghanistan's war is fueled from outside of the country," said Noor Mohammad. "We will fight against Afghanistan's enemies," said Qudratullah.

Police forces in Kunduz said the shift in approach by Kabul and Washington against the Taliban - from peace talks to battles - will give them more authority to target the group.

"We spend days and nights, tolerate cold and warm weather to maintain people's security," Abdul Qadir, a police officer in Kunduz said.

"We have the ability to fight the enemies," Hasher Mohammad, a police commander in Kunduz said.

Despite a harsh winter, fighting between insurgents and security forces is ongoing in parts of the country. Both the Taliban and Daesh have carried out a string of attacks, especially on Kabul, and in the rural areas. (Tolonews)

### (5) ISI Trained ...

US alleged the attack was planned by Pakistan.

"A clear proof that the attack on the hotel was planned in a madrasa on Pakistan's soil: Abdul Qahar, father of one of the suicide attackers, is an eyewitness of the story," said Majeed Qarar, cultural attaché at the embassy of Afghanistan.

"The night vision goggles found with Taliban attackers in maiwand's ANA base were military grade goggles (Not sold to public) procured by Pak army from a British company & supplied 2 Lashkar-e-Taiba in Kashmir & Taliban in Afghanistan," he said in another tweet.

Afghan Ambassador in Washington Hamidullah Mohib did not respond to questions on the tweet by his cultural attaché.

In an op-ed, Marvin G. Weinbaum, director for Afghanistan and Pakistan Studies at the Middle East Institute said the Taliban appeared to have chosen urban guerrilla warfare to demonstrate their undiminished strength as a fighting force.

"The Taliban are intent upon undermining the public's confidence that their government and its foreign allies can offer Afghans basic security," he said. (Pajhwok)

### (6) Saikal Hopes for ..

, he said, had been calling for improving implementation of the sanctions regime and strengthening the monitoring mechanism. "And second, not to politicise the sanctions regime," he added. Evidence provided by Afghanistan should be seen on its merit, not through political lens, the ambassador cautioned. "Probably one or two every now and then look at it not from a technical but from a political point."

Without going into specifics, Saikal said Afghanistan recently presented to the sanctions committee all evidence with regard to the leader of a terrorist group. "Now a member has put that on hold. We don't know the logic of it."

Saikal lamented Pakistan had been unsuccessfully trying to change the narrative in the past couple of years. But there are no takers for such an argument from Pakistani diplomats either at the UN or other international forums.

"Most member states know about the safe havens. They know the leading figures of terrorist groups have lived in Pakistan. They have been found dead in Pakistan. They have been killed and buried in Pakistan," he continued.

"Osama bin Laden was found and killed in Pakistan. Mullah Omar died in a Karachi hospital. Mullah Akhtar was killed in Balochistan. And right now, leading figures of the Taliban are in Pakistan. This is public knowledge," he alleged, saying Pakistan's efforts to change the narrative did not help.

"I think the time has come that we accept there is something wrong. It's something which is hurting Pakistan itself. It's hurting our region. And it is the job of all of us to work together to address it."

"Our intention is to see Pakistan as a trusted partner in countering terrorism, a good neighbour that believes in coexistence and feels responsible for its own security, security and safety of neighbours and the region at large," he concluded. (Pajhwok)

### (7) NATO will ...

by Afghans. "A stable Afghanistan benefits us all, so we encourage all regional actors to play a constructive role."

NATO will continue to stand with Afghans as they fight terrorism, and work to build peace and reconciliation. He added. (Pajhwok)

### (8) Ulema Council...

council felt about US President Donald Trump's remarks on Monday night about all talks with the Taliban being off the table for the US, Kashaf said the council believes in peace and in a negotiated settlement and not in war. He also stated that those not joining the peace process are against Islam.

On Monday night, Trump said the US would no longer talk with the Taliban following the spate of attacks in Afghanistan.

Trump railed against a series of "atrocities" and said "we don't want to talk with the Taliban."

This comes after three deadly attacks rocked Kabul in the past 10 days. The first was last Saturday against the Intercontinental Hotel. A week later a deadly ambulance bomb was detonated in the heart of the city killing over 100 people and wounding more than 260 others.

On Monday morning, insurgents attacked a military academy in Kabul. In addition to this, Save the Children organization in Jalalabad, in Nangarhar, came under attack last week as did other installations around the country.

However, in a statement on Tuesday, in response to Trump's remarks, the Taliban said the Kabul government is not in control of peace or war but that it's in the hands of the US - which is now clear following Trump's comments. (Tolo News)

### (9) 3 Militants ...

The anti-government armed militant groups including the Taliban and ISIS insurgents have not commented regarding the reports so far.

This comes as counter-terrorism operations including airstrikes are underway in some restive districts of Nangahar province against the Taliban and ISIS insurgents.

Lagman has been among the relatively calm provinces in the East but the anti-government armed insurgents have been attempting recently to increase their insurgency activities in this

province. (KP)

### (10) Stray Dog ...

different depending on the injury's distance from human brain.

He confirmed receiving dog bite victims from Darem, Urgo, Shahr-i-Buzarg, Bharak, Shuhada, Arghistan and other areas in the civil hospital for anti-rabies vaccination. "If someone gets bitten at an area near to the head he/she has 24 hours to visit a clinic."

Abdul Rahim, a resident of Urgo district, said: "There are too many stray dogs in our area. We can't come out of homes at night due to the fear the dogs would bite us, and we want the government to eradicate the wild dogs."

Habibullah, a resident of Daryayim district, said a dog bite him the foot when he came out of his house at night. "The doctors said it was a stray dog bite and I should be administered the anti-rabies vaccine at the central hospital." After vaccination, Habibullah said he felt good but doctors had advised him to get vaccinated another three times. (Pajhwok)

### (11) Highway Commander...

However, he was unaware of casualties.

Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban's spokesman, claimed Azizullah was among the 12 police officials killed in the firefight in Andar, where an operation has been ongoing since Friday. Only two rebels were injured, he said. (Pajhwok)

### (12) Recent Attacks ...

enemy," he stated.

"As horrible as this is, to me, it strengthens our resolve to help them move forward."

While critics still blame government for its weakness to thwart Taliban attacks, a number of military commentators have said that to curb Taliban attacks in Afghanistan, there is a need to hit them in their bases and training camps before they can launch any attacks.

This comes hours after insurgents raided a military facility in Afghanistan's capital Kabul killing at least eleven Afghan army officers.

In the past few days, both Afghan security officials and their foreign counterparts have said that they are planning more inclusive programs to hit Taliban and Daesh insurgents in different parts of the country such as Helmand and Kunduz provinces.

"We have eliminated over 10 enemy personnel. Five other enemies were wounded (in the past few days)," said Sayed Qurban Mousavi, commander of Pami 20 army regiment in Helmand.

"There is widespread clashes, but they (Taliban) will not be able to takeover big cities," said Mohammad Dawoud-Tarakhail, commander of 505 police in Bost district of Helmand province.

But analysts say that when government officials and foreign forces have tried to launch operations, insurgents increased their coordinated attacks in urban areas of the country, such as Kabul.

"The US is obliged to issue warnings to Pakistan and the Taliban to stop their activities in Afghanistan, they must isolate them and their resources in Pakistan must be frozen," said military analyst HaiGulSulaimankhail.

This comes after Gen. John Nicholson, the commander of US forces in Afghanistan, said during a trip to the southern province of Helmand that the Taliban will no longer be safe in Helmand.

He also said that the Taliban will not be able to take over any key city of Afghanistan. (Tolo News)

### (13) Chinese Envoy...

start of seminar.

The envoy pledged to cooperate in paving the way for Afghanistan's exports to China specially the pine nuts, marbles and pomegranates.

He spread light over China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and said the purpose of the multinational scheme was to improve inter-state connectivity, strengthen economies of other countries and social integration.

Jingsong said BRI emphasized the great potential and space for cooperation among the regional countries by promoting policy coordination and facilitating connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people to people communication.

He said China was fostering a new type of international relation base on principle mutual benefit, respect and would never force any country to adopt Chinese policy.

Afghan government officials, journalist and political affairs experts also attended the event and spread light over different aspect of China-Afghan relation. (Pajhwok)

### (14) Kandahar Trader...

us these materials which we badly needed".

Another displaced person, Haji Rahim, said: "This aid does not meet all our needs, we want more."

Chahar Dara district has been the scene

of fierce clashes between government and rebel forces, leaving over 4, 000 families displaced. The families have not yet received sufficient aid. (Pajhwok)

### (15) Salang Highway ..

dangerous due to heavy snow and harsh cold weather. Several fatal incidents have occurred in the tunnel in recent years. (Pajhwok)

## CIA Chief Says China is As Big a Threat to US as Russia

WASHINGTON - Mike Pompeo said the Chinese "have a much bigger footprint" to carry out covert activities than what the Russians have.

In an interview this week with the BBC, CIA director Mike Pompeo said China is as big a threat as Russia and that Chinese efforts to exert covert influence over the West are just as concerning as Russian subversion.

According to him, the Chinese "have a much bigger footprint" to carry out such covert activities than the Russians do.

He told the BBC that he also expected Russia to target the 2018 US mid-term elections.

The US intelligence community has said that it believes Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election.

"Think about the scale of the two economies," Pompeo said of Russia and China to BBC.

"The Chinese have a much bigger footprint upon which to execute that mission than the Russians do." According to BBC, a former CIA officer was arrested earlier this year on charges of retaining classified information in a case thought to be connected to the dismantling of the agency's spy operations in China.

BBC stated that in the two years before Jerry Chun Shing Lee's arrest, some 20 informants had been killed or jailed - one of the most disastrous failures of US intelligence in recent years.

But officials did not know at the time whether to blame a mole or data hack.

Pompeo meanwhile told the BBC that countries could collectively do more to combat Chinese efforts to exert power over the West.

"We can watch very focused efforts to steal American information, to infiltrate the United States with spies - with people who are going to work on behalf of the Chinese government against America," he said.

"We see it in our schools. We see it in our hospitals and medical systems. We see it throughout corporate America. It's also true in other parts of the world... including Europe and the UK."

According to the BBC report, Russian interference has been the focus of political debate in Washington with allegations of hacking and releasing information as well as using social media to sow division.

But the CIA director's claim to BBC that China has a more wide-ranging ability to exert influence and more needs to be done to confront it was surprising. (Tolonews)

## Price of Flight Tickets Soar after Series of Terrorist Attacks in Kabul

KABUL - The cost of flights from Afghanistan increases up to USD 50 Dollar after series of deadly attacks in its capital Kabul.

Mohammad Rasooli who is a flight ticket seller in Kabul says since last six months, particularly, the recent bombings in the capital has raised the cost of flights in the country.

"In the past, if price of a ticket was \$340, now it is reached to \$380," he said.

Meanwhile, Kabul residents' travel to abroad has also been increased.

"Insecurity has forced me to leave the country," Meena, a Kabul resident said who has applied for passport at the relevant department.

According to Directorate of Passport, at least 4,500 people receive passport on average per day. Among them most of the applicants are from Kabul.

"We issue passport to 1,800 people in Kabul per day and in about 2,500 in other provinces," said Sayed Omar Sabor, Head of Passport Department.

This comes as some Kabul residents who cannot afford to leave the country, urged the government to make "serious" efforts for ensuring security of its citizens. (KP)