

(1) Obama to...

by commanders. The officials previewed the decisions on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly ahead of the president. U.S officials have been hinting at the policy shift for weeks, noting that conditions on the ground in Afghanistan have changed since Obama's initial decision on a sharper troop withdrawal timeline was made more than two years ago. The White House has also been buoyed by having a more reliable partner in Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who succeeded the mercurial Hamid Karzai last year, reported AP. "The narrative that we're leaving Afghanistan is self-defeating," Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Wednesday during a speech at the Association of the U.S. Army. "We're not, we can't and to do so would not be to take advantage of the success we've had to date." While officials said the Afghan policy had been under review for several months, Obama's decision to leave more forces in Afghanistan than initially envisioned was reinforced when Taliban fighters took control of the key northern city of Kunduz late la

Beyond the recent security troubles in Afghanistan, U.S. commanders have also expressed concern about Daesh fighters moving into the country and gaining recruits from within the Taliban.

The troops staying in Afghanistan beyond next year will continue to focus on counterterrorism missions and training and advising Afghan security forces, the officials said. They will be based in Kabul and Bagram Air Field, as well as bases in Jalalabad and Kandahar.

The president's decision to keep the U.S military in Afghanistan beyond his tenure thrusts the conflict into the 2016 presidential race. The next president will become the third U.S commander-in-chief to oversee the war and try to bring it to a close.

Until now, Afghanistan has barely factored into campaign discussions on foreign policy and was not mentioned in Tuesday's Democratic debate. The war was discussed only briefly in two Republican debates.

Officials said discussions on staying in Afghanistan longer began during Ghani's visit to Washington in March. The top U.S commander in Afghanistan, Gen. John Campbell, recently presented the president with a range of options calling for keeping more troops there based on his judgment of what it would take to sustain the Afghan army and minimize the chances of losing more ground. Officials said NATO allies had expressed support for extending the troop presence in Afghanistan, but they did not outline any specific commitments from other nations.

Last week, during a meeting of defense ministers, Carter urged allies to remain flexible and consider abandoning their earlier timelines to cut troop levels in Afghanistan. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and other defense ministers were quick to agree, saying that the size of the force should be based on security conditions rather than a fixed timeline.

Upending the troop withdrawal decision, however, carries broad political implications.

Obama campaigned for the White House on a pledge to end America's involvement in the two wars he inherited, Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, he'll likely finish his presidency with troops back in both countries.

The president did withdraw all U.S troops from Iraq in late 2011, a moment he heralded as a promise kept to a war-weary nation. But the rise of Daesh drew the U.S military back into Iraq last year to train and assist local security forces and launch airstrikes, a campaign Obama has said will likely last beyond his tenure.

Obama announced the end of the Afghan war with similar fanfare last spring, saying it was time for the U.S. to "turn the page" on more than a decade of deadly conflicts. But his remarks at the time also foreshadowed the difficulties he would face in fulfilling that pledge.

"Americans have learned that it's harder to end wars than it is TO BEGIN them," he said. (Tolonews)

(2) Govt. Welcomes ...

ongoing consultations with their partners across various sectors including soldiers, officers and army commanders have evaluated the needs of the armed forces of the country particularly with regards to their struggles against terrorism, the statement says.

The Afghan forces continue to be responsible for security in the country and in defending territorial integrity and national sovereignty against threats inflicted by the enemy and the new US decision can help to further strengthen the Afghan security forces and boost their war capabilities, read the statement.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan wants to reaffirm its commitments to the Afghans and to its international partners that it will continue with the process of rule of law, reforms, protection of human rights, protection of women rights and economic development, the statement added.

In conclusion it read, the Taliban and other terrorist groups should remember that their efforts against security forces will not change into reality and they will face historic defeats. (Tolonews)

(3) Afghan Fight...

on the Kremlin's website. US President Barack Obama on Thursday said American troops would remain in Afghanistan past 2016, retreating from a major campaign pledge as he admitted Afghan forces were not ready to stand alone against the resurgent Taliban.

Russia has military bases in the ex-Soviet nations of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and - with local militaries ill-equipped - many in the region look to Moscow to shore up the region's vulnerable southern frontier with Afghanistan. (AFP)

(4) ERC'S Selection...

he said. Meanwhile, the office of administrative affairs, which is also tasked with introducing seven members of the selection committee, has assured that the commission will start its work within a week.

Certain elements, both inside and outside government, continue with efforts to derail election reforms, the IEC said on Thursday, in reaction to the latest announcement by the ERC.

"Members of the election commission believe that the violation of the law will create a crisis in the country and those who resort to such actions deliberately or unintentionally will be responsible for that. If democracy is harmed, responsibility will be on shoulders of those who work for certain elements," IEC spokesman Noor Mohammad Noor said.

"If threats are posed to democracy, the responsibility lies with the same elements who work for certain individuals," Noor said.

Amid the controversy, some Afghan political analysts believe that the serving officials of the country's election organizing bodies played a key role in plunging last year's presidential elections into crisis. They stressed that the ERC must appoint highly qualified commissioners to replace the current officials.

"The independent election commission and independent electoral complaints commission has shown the worst management of the election process. The election was declared as one of the worst in the world. This also harmed people's trust in elections. Hence, the officials are now responsible to appoint those whom people trust so that the people vote in elections in future," political analyst Fatana Gillani said.

President Ashraf Ghani issued a decree in July ordering the formation of the electoral reform commission. The ERC is tasked with delivering a list of proposals to government within four months, in a critical STEP to reform the nation's election law. (Tolonews)

(5) Better ...

d on time," he said. Meanwhile, the Ministry of finance (MoF) has said that problems which exist with regards to the Land Acquisition Act have undermined the development budget spending process in the country, saying that the issue must be resolved soon.

"One of the reasons which prevents the ministries from

spending their development budgets is because of problems with the Land Acquisition Act, therefore, we need to resolve the problem," Mohammad Shafi Qarizada, deputy head of the treasury department of MoF said. "Besides implementing amendments on the Land Acquisition Act, Afghanistan Independent Land Authority should also take the initiative and introduce a particular body to find solutions to the problems on land acquisition," Minister of Public Works, Mahmoud Baligh said. Referring to issues currently facing people regarding the matter, officials from Afghanistan Independent Land Authority said that with the approval of the new Land Acquisition Act, the problems will be resolved.

"The previous law cannot address the needs of the people. For this reason, Afghanistan Independent Land Authority proposed a new draft law which has been prepared in line with international standards. Approval of the new law will help in settling the issues in land acquisition," Jawad Paikar, head of Afghanistan Independent Land Authority said.

It appears that in recent years, the implementation of development projects in various regions of the country have faced issues due to problems relating to the Land Acquisition Act.

Economic commentators have urged that the implementation of the law is critical in order to overcome current problems. (Tolonews)

(6) Ghani Visits...

president said "the Afghan forces proved that they believe in their system and in their country and they are able to defend their system."

Furthermore, Ghani said houses for soldiers should be built near their bases so that they can live with their families.

Referring to the commission he appointed to investigate the fall of Kunduz, he said the task team will soon share the results of their findings with the nation.

Also, Ghani stressed the need for depoliticizing the security force members.

He urged that the system should be reformed and the forces must be separated from politics. Also present at the event was the Deputy Chief of Army Staff, Gen Murad Ali Murad, who also praised soldiers' sacrifices in Kunduz and other parts of the country.

"Armed forces showed that they can defend our country," said Murad, who led the war in Kunduz.

According to Murad, the defeat of insurgents in Kunduz was a good lesson for those who don't have good will towards Afghanistan. Kunduz saw more than two weeks of fighting and bloodshed where thousands of families were left homeless.

The city has been retaken by the government, however, fighting still continues in some areas surrounding Kunduz city. (Tolonews)

(7) Mujahideen ...

of harboring terrorist groups and committing crimes in Afghanistan. During his speech at the gathering, he accused Pakistan more than 10 times of fueling militancy in the country.

"Pakistan has always tried to eliminate the political stability of Afghanistan through Taliban, al-Qaeda and Daesh to launch cowardly attacks on different parts of our country," said Massoud, the brother of late National Hero Ahmad Shah Massoud.

According to him, relying on Pakistan's repeated and unpracticed commitments for peace talks is just a waste of time. He urged that the government will not be successful in talking peace with the Taliban.

Moreover, some lawmakers present at the gathering emphasized that the mobilization of people and Jihadi commanders was not aimed at building militia groups.

"Our people are ready to defend their country and we reject the propaganda that suggest it is building militia," said Mirdad Nijrabi, a member of the internal commission of Wolesi Jirga. "This means to stand alongside the security forces." (Tolonews)

(8) Decades of ...

expropriation process need to be reduced in order to avoid

bureaucracy.

According to Naderi, the expropriation law was established at the end of 70s which does not meet with current requirements. Most recently, Afghanistan Independent Land Authority made rectification to the expropriation law which was welcomed by private sector. (KP)

(9) UN Urges...

"This is not a crisis that at the moment is being adequately managed."

The EU has approved a plan to share out 160,000 refugees, mostly Syrians and Eritreans, across its 28 states to tackle the continent's worst refugee crisis since World War Two. The first 19 Eritrean asylum seekers were transferred from Italy to Sweden a week ago.

The U.N. Children's Fund voiced concern about the under-18s who make the perilous journey through Europe without their families. It has set up seven "child-friendly spaces" along the borders of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia that help 200-100 children a day. (Reuters)

(10) Nowhere to ...

orphanges admitted that corruption within the administration systems at orphanages is a serious problem and said this was having an impact on the facilities.

"More than fifty percent of the problem is due to nepotism and corruption and other issues - this results in orphanages, outside of Kabul, being below standard," said Sayed Abdullah Hashimi general director for Afghanistan orphanages.

Meanwhile Hashimi raised his concerns over budgets allocated to orphanages and said these were being used to find other sectors.

At the moment 13,500 children and teenagers are living in 40 orphanages across the country but Hashimi said that only thirteen orphanages in the country are deemed to be run properly. (Tolonews)

(11) US, Turkey ...

the report. Tensions have been running high in southeastern Turkey, as major military operations against PKK militants have been going on since July, after a cease-fire fell through. The PKK is designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union and the United States.

Obama and Erdogan also discussed issues related to the upcoming G20 summit to be held in the tourist Antalya province of Turkey.

On Saturday, twin blasts hit a train station in the Turkish capital of Ankara, stirring up widespread condemnation across the international community. (Xinhua)

(12) Olson Appointed ...

of service as the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Olson served as the Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs at U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan, from 2011 to 2012, during which time he oversaw all U.S. non-military assistance programs and support for the Afghan government. (KP)

(13) Time Ha...

to bring the anti-government armed militant groups to negotiation table in a bid to end the ongoing insurgency in the country.

Afghan officials were expecting to sit-in for the second round of peace talks with the Taliban group representatives in Pakistan late in the month of July shortly after the first round of talks.

However, the process was delayed with the sudden disclosure of the Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar's death shortly before the second round of talks.

Mullah Omar's death confirmation led to widening rift among the Taliban leadership which resulted to suspension of peace talks and a series of deadly attacks in capital Kabul which left scores of people dead or wounded

The Taliban group claimed responsibility for majority of the attacks but the Afghan officials harshly criticized Pakistan for sheltering the Afghan militants who are plotting attacks in Afghanistan besides they hold open gatherings in Pakistan.

In the meantime, the newly appointed Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour has given mixed signals about the peace process, while vowing to continue jihad to

implement Shariah in Afghanistan as the unleashed a wave of violence across the country since peace talks were abandoned.

The rampant insurgency activities by the Taliban resulted into the fall of the strategic Kunduz city lately which was considered as the most spectacular victory of the group after they were toppled from power in 2001. (KP)

(14) NATO Welcomes ...

environment. So it's crucial that we continue to support them, practically and financially, to preserve the gains we have achieved in Afghanistan through our joint efforts over many years," he added. (Tolonews)

(15) Gen. Campbell to the new announcement. Obama made the new announcement following months of argument by the military leaders who are insisting on additional assistance and support to the Afghans by US to beat back a resurgent Taliban and hold onto gains made over the past 14 years in the country. (KP)

(16) Islamic State's ...

villagers who fled areas under the militants' control. They had found themselves trapped in a fierce new battle for power and territory between Islamic State fighters and the Taliban, with U.S warplanes bombing both sides, which ended in victory that day for Afghanistan's latest tormentors.

Even as they mirror the cruelty of their Middle East counterparts, the militants in Afghanistan arose from a different set of circumstances and come to the struggle with a somewhat different outlook. While ISIS in the Middle East seeks to create a global Islamic caliphate, some fighters here have local ambitions: re-creating the Taliban's medieval social order, particularly taboos imposed on girls and women, which have waned in many areas since first imposed two decades ago.

The majority of fighters are disaffected Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, their desertions fueled partly by the revelation this summer that their one-eyed supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, had been dead for more than two years. Whether they have operational or financial ties to the home base in Syria, are merely inspired by the group, or are using its name to generate attention, remains unclear. Nor is it clear how they are obtaining the substantial funds and heavy weaponry that they wield.

"In our areas, the time of the Taliban is now over," declared Ahmad Ali Hazrat, a lawmaker in Jalalabad, the provincial capital, a dusty city where Osama Bin Laden first lived when he arrived in Afghanistan in 1996. "We are in a new drama."

Since the withdrawal of most U.S. and international troops in December, the Islamic State has steadily made inroads in Afghanistan. A report last month from the United Nations' al-Qaida/Taliban Monitoring Team found that the group, also known by its Arabic acronym Daesh, has a growing number of sympathizers and was recruiting followers in 25 of the nation's 34 provinces.

Since late July, tens of thousands of Afghans have fled the region on foot. Many come to Sar Shahi, a hamlet roughly 20 miles east of Jalalabad, where they have squatted in unfinished houses.

On a recent day, as a gentle breeze blew through the hulk of a half-constructed dwelling, the villagers clamored to tell an outsider of how their valley died. (Agencies)

(17) US Tank ...

The Islamist militants had briefly taken control of Kunduz city, in their biggest military victory in 14 years of war.

MSF officials have said the hospital's location had been clearly indicated to all parties, and that no Taliban fighters were occupying the site, as some Afghan government officials initially stated.

A group of MSF staff members were in Kunduz this week to assess the damage to the hospital, which is no longer functioning. At present, 22 staff members and patients are confirmed to have died in the attack, and two additional staff members are presumed to be dead.

"What we need is the answer to the question that we are asking everybody ... Why this hospital was targeted. Up to now there

is no answer to this question," Guilhem Molinie, MSF's country representative in Afghanistan, told Reuters this week. (Reuters)

(18) Afghan ...

his words, one of the migrants was wounded by a ricochet and later died," Kostov told the radio. He did not confirm initial information that the group was armed.

The Burgas regional prosecution had opened an investigation, Kostov added.

This is the first serious incident with migrants in the European Union's non-Schengen zone member Bulgaria, which was so far bypassed by them on their way to western Europe. (Agencies)

In a move to buttress its porous -260kilometre (-160mile) border with Turkey, Bulgaria built a -30kilometre razor wire fence along part of it and dispatched some 2,000 border guards, police and army to guard the rest.

The incident prompted Prime Minister Boyko Borisov to leave an EU summit in Brussels on the migrant crisis and fly back home late Thursday.

"Prime Minister Borisov informed me just before he left. It shows how important our discussion was (...) We are ready to help rebuilding of control of our external borders," European Council President Donald Tusk said in Brussels. (Tolonews)

(19) Military...

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials were holding Tanin in Great Falls. He will be transported to Salt Lake City, where he will face deportation proceedings, Border Patrol Agent Melissa Hart said.

Last September, three Afghan military officers who were participating in a joint military training exercise in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, were detained after they crossed the Canadian border at Niagara Falls to seek refugee status.

They said they feared retribution by the Taliban because of their work with U.S. soldiers.

Canada denied the men entry and returned them to the U.S., which began deportation proceedings against them. One of the three was later allowed to make a refugee claim in Canada. (AP)

(20) EU Leaders ...

tion, registration, fingerprinting and reception of applicants for international protection and other migrants, as well as their relocations and resettlements.

They also agreed to create a dedicated return office within EU border agency Frontex in order to scale up support to EU member states before the end of the year.

They also agreed to enlarge the Frontex mandate on return to include the right to organize joint return operations on its own initiative, and enhance its role in the acquisition of travel documents for returnees. (Xinhua)

(21) Turkey...

Russian origin, but the Russian defense ministry said all of its planes in Syria had safely returned to base and that all its drones were operating "as planned".

The Turkish military said the aircraft which was shot down had continued on its trajectory despite three warnings, in line with Turkey's rules of engagement. Broadcaster NTV said it had come 3 km (2 miles) into Turkish air space. (Reuters)

(22) Australian ...

"I look forward to discussing this issue with John Key, but it is very important that we maintain our standards, our security," Turnbull told reporters in Sydney on Friday.

"We do have a principle which is enshrined in statute, that people who have been convicted, foreigners who have been convicted of serious criminal offenses, have the automatic revocation of their visa." Australia's Immigration Minister Peter Dutton told reporters last week that 40 out of 285 detainees on Australia's Christmas Island Detention Center were New Zealanders.

According to reports in the Australian media, another 40 to 50 Kiwis are due to be transferred to the facility in the next few days.

Key said a further 1,000 New Zealanders stood to be deported if the law was not repealed. (Xinhua)