

(1) Khalilzad: The Blunt...

He spent most of the 1990s in the private sector, but returned to public service when Bush appointed him to the National Security Council with an Afghanistan brief.

After the Kabul posting the Bush administration appointed Khalilzad -- who is also an accomplished arabophone -- as ambassador to Baghdad in 2005, despite Karzai reportedly pleading with the US president not to transfer him.

Unlike his smooth stint in Afghanistan, where he cut deals with tribal chiefs and warlords, Khalilzad's Iraq mission was rocky.

He knew the Iraqi political terrain well, having served as Bush's envoy to the "free Iraqis" before the 2003 US invasion, and helped draw up the country's new constitution after the toppling of Saddam Hussein.

But he failed to accomplish a task similar to the one he now faces in Afghanistan: getting Iraq's warring factions to reconcile, and defusing the terrorist core of Sunni Muslim resistance.

Khalilzad was allied with Bush administration hawks like Vice President Dick Cheney and John Bolton, whom he replaced as Washington's UN envoy in 2007. He held the position until 2009.

He later criticised President Barack Obama's handling of the war in Afghanistan, especially the decision to draw down US troops. Khalilzad has also been a fierce critic of Pakistan and like many American officials has accused it of playing a "double game" by supporting militant groups in Afghanistan despite being a US ally.

That has won him few friends over the years in Islamabad, which has denied the allegations, and whose support Pompeo said Tuesday was needed for the reconciliation effort in Afghanistan. Khalilzad was the introductory speaker for then-candidate Donald Trump's first major foreign policy speech in April 2016.

He later told India's The Hindu newspaper that Trump's "America First" policy was not about isolationism, but "the universality of American values". Now Khalilzad is a key player in the Republican president's efforts to extricate the US from the 17-year conflict in Afghanistan.

Born in 1951 in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif, Khalilzad attended the American University of Beirut before earning a doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1979.

He taught at Columbia University from 1979 to 1986, and has over the years also held key positions at prominent US think tanks, including the RAND Corporation.

Before his stints as ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq and the UN, he also served in various capacities in the State Department, the Pentagon and the National Security Council.

Khalilzad also once worked with US oil giant Unocal and runs a business advisory firm called Gryphon Partners.

In 2014, Austrian authorities briefly froze bank accounts belonging to his wife during an investigation into money he transferred from the US. Khalilzad denied any wrongdoing. (AFP)

(2) Mattis: Afghan...

Afghan government.

He also cited increased Afghan military capability and the "steadfast nature" of international support under the White House's new South Asia strategy.

New phase of conflict?

The comments come as Army General Scott Miller takes over as top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, the ninth U.S. general to lead the 17-year-old war.

Miller will attempt to guide the conflict into a reconciliation-focused phase, even as heavy fighting continues.

Through the first half of the year, the U.S.-led coalition is on pace to drop a record number of bombs on Afghanistan, according to a VOA analysis of Pentagon data.

The Taliban has also increased its attacks, in what some see as an attempt to gain leverage ahead of more substantive peace talks.

"Violence is leverage... for all sides, but probably more so for the Taliban," said former Pentagon adviser Christopher Kolenda, who helped set up the U.S.-Taliban talks.

"So in these exploratory phases, the Taliban can be perfectly serious about peace, but still engaging in these major operations," Kolenda told VOA last month.

Pakistan's role

The uptick in violence coincides with the one-year anniversary of the Trump administration's new strategy for Afghanistan.

U.S. officials insist the strategy is working, but continue to express frustration at what they see as Pakistan's lingering support for Taliban militants on their side of the border.

The U.S. last week withheld \$300 million from Pakistan "due to a lack of Pakistani decisive actions in support of the South Asia Strategy."

The issue is sure to come up during U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Islamabad Wednesday.

Pakistan, which denies sheltering Taliban militants, has a new government, led by former cricketer Imran Khan.

Mattis on Tuesday appeared to hold out hope the new government would change its policies on Afghanistan.

"We do expect that Pakistan will be part of a community of nations that gives no haven to terrorism," he said.

Mattis spoke before landing in India, where he is expected to push for greater Indian economic and development assistance in Afghanistan. (VoA)

(3) 'Return to Afghanistan...

should be voluntary and respectful considering the situation in Afghanistan.

Rabbani termed the UNHCR commissioner's trip to Afghanistan as important and sought the organization's further support for Afghan refugees in regional countries and Afghan IDPs.

The statement said both the sides discussed Geneva international conference on Afghanistan, future activities of UNHCR in Afghanistan and emergency humanitarian assistance. (Pajhwok)

(4) Critical Afghan...

"This election has become a business," he said. "If I had money and political influence, I would be back on the list, too."

The list of barred candidates also includes some puzzling names, including Fawzia Koofi, 43, a liberal longtime legislator and outspoken activist for women's rights. She has been banned from seeking reelection based on complaints by unknown individuals in her native Badakhshan province who claimed she was affiliated with an illegal group. "When I first heard about this, I laughed," Koofi said in an interview. "I have spent my career struggling against these kinds of abusive people and warlords, and now they say I am one of them?" She said she suspected the complaint came from political adversaries but has no way to know because the process was secret. If she could see the charges, she said, "I would happily fight this in court."

Election officials deny that the vetting process was flawed or manipulated. They said they sent written explanations to all barred candidates but that they could not name individuals who had brought complaints to protect them from reprisal. More than 100 other candidates were disqualified on technical grounds, such as being younger than 25 or actively serving in government office.

"We have taken our decisions independently, based on evidence from people and verified by many government departments," said Ali Reza Rohani, spokesman for the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission. He said all candidates are "welcome to prove" that officials had barred them or restored others "through bribery or political pressure," and that it is also their right to protest "in a civil manner."

Election monitoring groups, though, worry that the contretemps will permanently taint the election's credibility. Even with international guidance, they noted, several previous elections have been badly marred by fraud -- including the 2014 presidential election that led to a U.S. -- brokered power-sharing deal between the two top candidates, current Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah.

Yousuf Rashid, head of the Fair and Free Elections Forum of Afghanistan,

said that because the country has a weak judicial system, violent clashes and crimes often go unresolved in any formal way. As a result, festering personal, tribal or wartime feuds can be injected into elections, with no way to know which side is telling the truth.

"People come and say, 'He killed my brother,' or 'He stole government properties,' but this is not the mandate of the election commission," Rashid said. In one case, he noted, a group complained that a candidate had orchestrated the massacre of 120 people in a mosque. "If the commission decides that A or B killed 120 people," but without a public process, "everything becomes politicized. It can create a disaster."

This headline-grabbing drama has overshadowed the efforts of lesser-known candidates, some of whom are entering politics for the first time. It has also obscured the struggles of others running in conflict-ridden or Taliban-controlled districts that are so dangerous they cannot hold campaign events or meet with constituents.

Little attention has been paid to the unprecedented bid by the small community of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus to send their first-ever representative to parliament. A Sikh leader from Jalalabad city, Awtar Singh Khalsa, had planned to run, but he was killed July 1 while traveling in a convoy there that was bombed by insurgents.

His son Narinder Singh Khalsa, 37, was wounded by shrapnel in the attack. A shy man who runs the family herbal medicine business, Khalsa is now reluctantly running in his father's place to speak up for their religious minority. "We have not picked up arms to threaten or fight anyone," he said. "We are harmless people, but we have not been given our rights."

The challenges are just as tough for Nazari Turkman, a legislator from Kunduz who is running for reelection. Kunduz has been overrun twice by the Taliban and retaken by Afghan security forces with U.S. support. During the last election in 2009, Turkman said, the Taliban controlled about 10 percent of the district where most of his supporters live. Now, he said, they control 90 percent of it.

"I have not been able to visit there so far. I don't have enough guards," he said by phone from Kunduz city. He said four people in the area have already been killed by the Taliban for participating in pre-election activities. When the campaign starts several weeks from now, Turkman said, "I will visit the district once at any cost. It is impossible to go there twice." (Monitoring Desk)

(5) Badakhshan's Nusay...

military operations in other areas too," said Akhtar Mohammad Khairzada, deputy governor of Badakhshan.

Meanwhile, a commander of public uprising forces, Nazir Mohammad Niazi, said to gain a good result from military operations, there is a need for government to call for the help of public uprising forces.

"Government does not have sufficient troops to maintain the safety of the areas therefore it will be good if it calls for the help of public uprising forces in this respect," said Niazi.

Military affairs analysts in Badakhshan said Taliban's main hideout is in Wardooj district in the province therefore, they said they call on government to launch military operation for clearing of this part of Badakhshan.

Nusay is the link to Maymi, Kof Aab, Sheki and Khwahan districts. The only bridge into these districts, which share a border with Tajikistan, is located in this district and all these districts get supplies through Nusay. (Tolo news)

(6) Pompeo in...

in the past year since President Donald Trump accused the country of playing a double game -- publicly supporting U.S. efforts while secretly supporting the insurgency in Afghanistan. Last week, the Pentagon decided not to offer \$300 million in military aid to Pakistan.

So far, the United States has withheld \$800 million in Coalition Support Funds this year.

Pakistan leaders deny providing assistance to Afghan insurgents. Instead, they say the Taliban continues to recruit and capture more territory be-

cause of the U.S. presence and show of military force.

Pompeo is expected to convey the Trump administration's desire to wind down the fighting in Afghanistan, which has continued since late 2001.

"We need Pakistan to seriously engage to help us get to the reconciliation we need in Afghanistan," Pompeo said.

Quereshi said his goal is to build a relationship of mutual trust and respect. "Bilateral engagement is almost nonexistent, almost in total suspension," he said. "So we need to look as to how to move forward. We will listen to their point of view and place our stance before them."

Randall G. Schriver, assistant U.S. secretary for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, didn't sound as optimistic.

"Our approach of cutting assistance and pressuring Pakistan on their relationship with the Taliban -- persuading them to come to the table, dealing with terrorist networks -- that will be sustained."

Speaking to reporters on his way to Pakistan, Pompeo made clear what he wants from this round of diplomacy.

"The very reason for this trip is to try and articulate what it is our expectation is, the things that they can do, the things that they expect us to do and see if we can't find a path forward together," he said. (UPI)

(7) Killing of US...

was apprehended by Afghans, he added.

Separately, the U.S.-led coalition in Kabul announced that a U.S. service member died in a "non-combat incident" Tuesday, also in eastern Afghanistan.

The threat of attack on U.S. and coalition troops by Afghan soldiers and police is a persistent worry, although such violent is far less common than several years ago. There was an epidemic of attacks in 2012, with dozens of Americans killed and wounded in shootings almost weekly by the very troops the U.S. was fighting alongside. U.S. troops since 2014 have been mainly in an advisory and training, rather than combat, role.

The 2012 rash of killings led to the development of new procedures and precautions by coalition forces, including the use of "guardian angels" -- armed U.S. forces keeping watch whenever their fellow soldiers interact with Afghan forces. The reasons for such attacks are often not determined conclusively, but officials have said they sometimes reflect resentment by Afghans of the presence of foreign forces. U.S. troops have been in Afghanistan since 2001.

The previous insider attack this summer was against one such U.S. protective soldier, Cpl. Joseph Maciel of South Gate, California. He was killed and two other Americans were wounded in an attack July 7 by an Afghan security force member at an airfield on the military base at Tarin Kowt in southern Uruzgan province, a Taliban hotbed. (AP)

(8) New Contract...

coalition forces officials in Afghanistan had earlier said that the size of the Afghan Air Force will be tripled over the next five years with the addition of new equipment and aircraft. (KP)

(9) Ghani Chairs...

taken during the National Procurement Commission meeting regarding the protection and maintenance of the billing system.

The participants of the meeting approved the request by the Afghan Telecom Company for expanding the capacity of the system from 3.1 million to 6.1 million, ARG Palace said, adding that the meeting also approved the recommendation by the Information Technology and Telecommunications Ministry for the installation of Core Network GSM and related equipments. The statement by ARG Palace also added that the meeting approved the recommendation by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications regarding the request by the proposing company about the payment in foreign currency.

President Ghani said the security of telecommunications in the capital and provinces have direct links with the security of the country, emphasizing that the telecommunications security must

be ensured immediately.

The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications and the Afghan Telecom Company were also instructed to present a report regarding their services in 34 provinces. (KP)

(10) Afghan Health...

from 496 in 2002 to more than 2,400 in 2016, and immunization coverage for PENTA3 more than doubled from 29 percent to 72 percent among children aged 12 to 23 months in the lowest income quintile," the study states.

According to the study, school enrollment has increased significantly since 2001. In 2016, 8.7 million Afghan students were enrolled in school, with girls comprising 39 percent of these students, while teacher numbers came in at more than 185,000. The study further suggests that an estimated 310,000 students (3 percent of whom were female) were enrolled in public and private higher education institutions in 2016, starting from a low of 10,000 at the end of 2001.

The study, titled "Policy Research Institutions and Health Sustainable Development Goals: Building Momentum in South Asia," explains that poverty has increased from 36 percent in 2011 to 39 percent in 2013, plunging approximately 13.5 million people into a daily struggle for survival. Rural poverty is increasing while urban poverty remains at the same level as 2011-2012.

This study briefly describes Afghanistan's country implementation of health-related SDGs, with a focus on mapping stakeholders and institutional arrangements accordingly. It also assesses existing and potential future roles of health policy and research institutions in promoting the achievement of SDGs in the country. According to this study, the government can play the role of an overseeing agency to bring all stakeholders together and direct public investments to achieve Afghanistan's SDGs, and research and policy institutions as well as other non-state actors can play a solutions-oriented role in Afghanistan's SDGs by implementing agencies with knowledge on best practices and designing evidence-based interventions.

Dr. Orzala Nemat, AREU Director said, "Health SDGs are some of the most urgent goals for Afghanistan to achieve. Easily preventable health risks still account for far too many deaths in Afghanistan. It takes commitment to realize these health-related goals, but through education campaigns and an increase in accessibility to healthcare across the country, lives can be saved."

"In-depth, analytical research is needed to identify the gaps Afghanistan faces in attaining these SDGs. In this regard, we hope to disseminate the results of this study to a wide range of stakeholders and also prioritize this topic (i.e. review of SDGs) in AREU's future research endeavors," Nemat continued.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be a groundbreaking global achievement if attained by 2030.

AREU is an independent research institute based in Kabul that was established in 2002 by the assistance of the international community in Afghanistan. AREU achieves its mission by engaging with policy makers, civil society, researchers and academics to promote their use of AREU's research-based publications and its library, strengthening their research capacity and creating opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate. (Wadsam)

(11) Clashes Force...

the local government had provided only one tent to each family and still many families lived under the open sky.

A displaced woman, Khal Bibi said: "The Taliban killed our elders and forced us to leave our homes. We are in bad condition and if not assisted, we may die."

The number of IDPs increased in Ghor province after the Taliban launched assaults on Shahrak, Tolak and Saghar districts, triggering more displacement. (Pajhwok)