

(1) US Military...

"We have cut their numbers in half over the last two years. We have killed their 'amirs' (chiefs), we have reduced their territory, again, we have driven their fighters out of parts of the country," explained the general, who also commands NATO's Afghan military mission.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, while speaking in Moscow, asserted that thousands of IS terrorists are present in northern and eastern Afghan regions and are being joined by militants fleeing Syria and Iraq.

Questions about IS 'proliferation' Officials in neighboring Pakistan and Iran have also raised concerns and questions about what they allege is the rapid "proliferation of Daesh" in Afghanistan. Pakistani officials say rising terrorist attacks against the country are being plotted in IS sanctuaries on the Afghan side of the border.

Nicholson acknowledged the presence of foreign fighters in IS ranks but said their number is "very small" and added, "we have not seen a migration of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan."

The American general said the Afghan branch of Islamic State was "for a period of time" receiving financial support and "leadership guidance" from Syria and Iraq. But that assistance has dwindled since coalition forces have reduced Daesh in those countries, Nicholson added.

In his remarks earlier this week in Moscow, Lavrov again alleged that "unidentified helicopters, most likely helicopters to which NATO in one way or another is related, fly to the areas where the insurgents are based, and no one has been able to explain the reasons for these flights yet."

Iranian leaders and military officials have in recent days also consistently accused the U.S. of covertly supporting IS's rise in Afghanistan.

American and Afghan officials, however, accuse Moscow, Tehran and Islamabad of helping the Taliban insurgency militarily. Pakistani officials deny any links to the insurgent while Russia and Iran maintain their ties with the Taliban are meant only to encourage them to engage in peace talks with the Afghan government.

U.S. officials are skeptical of those claims and see Russian involvement as part of efforts to undermine international mission to secure and stabilize Afghanistan.

It is widely perceived that Russia and Iran see the Taliban as blocking the growing IS Afghan threat because of a weakening government control in the country.

General Nicholson dismissed those assertions as a "false narrative", saying Afghan forces with U.S. support have effectively degraded IS in their mission to defeat the terrorist group and regional stakeholders need to help in those efforts.

Visiting U.S. General Curtis Scaparrotti, Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO, speaking alongside Nicholson, also called on Russia and Iran and other countries in the region to work together with the international mission to ensure stability in Afghanistan.

"We would ask them to work with us to not support the Taliban or any of the other insurgent forces that are here but to work with us to ensure stability and that is in everyone's interest here in the region," said Scaparrotti. (VoA)

(2) First US Front....

On a post this week on the unit's Facebook page, the 1st SFAB's leadership arrived in Kabul and was welcomed by US Forces commander Gen. John Nicholson. Military.com reported that more than 800 members of the brigade will arrive over the coming weeks in preparation for the spring fighting season, which usually begins in early April.

The brigade will be part of NATO's Resolute Support mission, which is focused on training, advising and assisting Afghan forces, and is separate from the US counterterrorism mission in the country. According to the report, histori-

cally, conventional US Army units have been used in an ad hoc fashion to advise and assist forces in Afghanistan and other theaters. The new SFABs, trained specifically for combat advising, are intended to make advisory more effective and efficient.

Military.com also reported that the White House plans to increase the number of American troops in Afghanistan from 11,000 last summer to around 15,000 by spring. (Tolo news)

(3) Turkey Condemns...

by the Taliban in the restive western Farah province bordering Iran. In a statement, Gen. Dawlat Waziri, spokesman for the Ministry of Defense, said an Afghan National Army's (ANA) check post in the ShakWasat area of the Bala Balook district was attacked Friday night, leaving 18 soldiers dead.

Without providing exact figures, Waziri said a number of "enemies of the nation" had also been killed in these clashes.

The Taliban have taken responsibility for the attack and claimed to have killed 25 soldiers and captured two others.

In two separate suicide attacks on Saturday, four people, including civilians, were killed in capital Kabul and in the southern Helmand province, the country's Ministry of Interior said in a statement.

Last week, the Taliban staged similar attacks, killing at least 20 police officers in the provincial capital Farah city and in the Bala Balook district. (AA)

(4) TAPI to...

The implementation of the project would cost around \$8 billion, according to some international sources. Turkmenistan already pledged to offer 85 percent expenditures to the project.

The CEO assured that the people of Afghanistan would support the project at all cost and would never allow anyone to harm the multinational project.

He added TAPI besides providing energy would also promote trade relations between South and Central Asian countries.

After years of delay, construction work on the Afghanistan section of TAPI project was launched on Friday in western Herat province in the presence of leaders from the four countries. (Pajhwok)

(5) Logar Pharmacies...

Zahid, a resident of Kalangar area, said the bulk of medicines were imported illegally to Afghanistan through Khost and Paktia provinces. He accused the authorities of being complicit in the phenomenon.

Some other residents expressed similar views and asked the relevant organs to resolve the issue at the earliest possible.

Mohammad Nasir Ghairat, a public representative, confirmed that medicines were being smuggled to Logar illegally. "Spurious drugs are being smuggled from Pakistan and are poisoning patients."

Dr. Mohammad Ayub, a local medical store owner, said some pharmacies were importing cheap drugs because people could not buy expensive drugs.

According to Ayub, a packet Amoxicillin (a commonly used antibiotic drug) from Bacham Company was sold for 70 afghanis but the same drug of Iranian origin was sold for 25 afghanis.

In response to these complains, Dr. RasoulGul Samar, provincial public health director, said they had prevented most of illegal drug imports to the province.

He said: "I don't reject the sale of low-quality medicines but it is not as much as claimed by the people." He said expired and low-quality medicines were being collected from all medical stores in the province with the support of NDS personnel and police.

"There are some companies which make spurious drugs with the label and marks of the original medicines, we don't have labs for their reorganization," he complained.

Referring to the issue, police spokesman Shapoor Ahmadzai said expired and low-quality medicines' smuggling had been prevented and police confiscated such drugs two times during the ongoing year.

"Our police personnel are striving day and night to prevent import of low quality medicines." (Pajhwok)

(6) 12-Member...

motorbikes were recovered from the group accused of killing police, tribal elders and disruptive acts in the 9th police district of Kandahar City, Tirai Ada, BrishnaKot, Eidga-Darwaza localities.

In recent past, a number of security forces and some tribal elders had been killed in targeted attacks in the province.

Provincial officials believe the arrest of the group would help decrease terrorist attacks in the province. (Pajhwok)

(7) Pakistan Says...

and research on Allama Muhammad Iqbal."

The Embassy of Pakistan prayed to Almighty Allah to shower His blessings on the departed soul and grant courage and fortitude to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss. (Pajhwok)

specifying voting centers and the rights of political parties to monitor electoral processes.

"We are committed to using elections as a tool to overcome crisis," said a member of Jamiat-e-Islami Party's leadership Muhayuddin Mahdi.

"Ensuring the transparency of elections and no opposition from any side on (election) results can happen if all election processes are monitored by political parties and election coalitions - from start to the end. And mistakes and flaws of previous elections should not be repeated," said Mahdi.

"The parliamentary elections should be held in July. The votes of every polling center of the involved political parties should be transferrable in order to prevent the waste of votes," said Zmaryalai Ahadi, head of Qiyam-e-Milli (national rebellion) party of Afghanistan.

The parties meanwhile called for voting rights to be given to refugees and internally displaced persons - also known as IDPs. (Tolo news)

(9) Three Killed in ...

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the incident.

This comes after at least 20 people were killed in a string of bombings on Saturday in the country.

Two bombings were reported in Helmand province on Sunday and a third in Kabul city. (Tolo news)

(10) 25 Insurgents...

Laghman, Ghazni, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul, Farah, Faryab, Takhar, Sar-e-Pul, Nimroz and Helmand provinces, MoD said.

During the operations enemy hideouts and weapons were destroyed, the MoD added. (Tolo news)

(11) Decouple Trade...

political and security tensions and suggest bilateral and transit trade needs rejuvenation."

In 2014, the two countries had pledged to boost bilateral trade to 5 billion US dollars in five years. But worsening relations, blame game, border closures and obstacles to implementation of transit agreements have affected the trade volume.

They called for confidence-building measures to overcome mistrust in the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship that was not only hampering political dialogue but also significantly impacting economic cooperation between the two countries.

Afghan Chambers of Commerce President Khan Jan Alkozai said Pakistani traders were interested in trade through Gawadar and Karachi port as they were near to Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan has been facilitating Pakistan trade with the Central Asian states and Afghan businessmen also want similar cooperation from the Pakistani side" Alkozai said.

The delegates demanded a meeting of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority (APTCA) on facilitating discussions to revive the economic transition leading to peace and prosperity across the border. Pakistan had hosted the last meet-

ing of APTCA, an important forum to deal with problems affecting smooth implementation of the 2010 revised transit treaty in February 2016.

Afghanistan was to host its 7th meeting in Kabul in September 2017. But the meeting was postponed amid tensions. An Afghan delegate, who had been involved in Pak-Afghan trade talks for years, said the APTCA should meet every six months. (Pajhwok)

Ivanka Trump: Visit to Olympics 'So Incredibly Inspiring'

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea - The U.S. president's daughter and adviser said Sunday that her visit to the Olympics was "so incredibly inspiring" and expressed gratitude at the chance to watch competition and - in a subtle nod to Korean Peninsula politics - "be here with our allies in South Korea."

Ivanka Trump plans to attend the closing ceremony of the 2018 Pyongchang Games on Sunday night after two days of visiting venues and meeting American and other athletes. Her presence there could bring her in contact with a visiting delegation from North Korea, the country in a monthslong war of words with U.S. President Donald Trump's administration. "I'm so excited to be here. It's just so incredibly inspiring," Trump said. "It's been an amazing couple of days, and such an honor and privilege to be here with our allies in South Korea and celebrate all that we've accomplished as a culture, a society economically and, of course, in sport."

Trump spent part of Sunday morning watching the U.S. team compete in the bobsled competition and meeting with athletes, including Team USA bobsled silver medalist Lauren Gibbs - who offered Trump a taste of Olympic glory by letting the first daughter try on her hardware.

"I feel like this almost is like trying on someone's wedding band," Trump said. "Am I allowed?"

Gibbs placed the medal around Trump's neck. She raised the medal with one hand and draped her other around Gibbs' while posing for a photo, saying, "That is so cool!"

Trump also met with the family of bobsledder Nathan Weber, who competed Sunday, and chatted briefly and took pictures with U.S. lugers Taylor Morris and Matt Mortensen, telling them their sport was "wild." She gave the three athletes presidential challenge coins and thanked Morris and Mortensen, both sergeants in the U.S. Army, for their service.

Among Trump's other weekend sports sojourns: watching speed-skating and Big Air competitions, and seeing the Americans take gold in curling on Saturday night. She pronounced her experiences "incredibly exciting." (AP)

Mexican Leader's Visit with Trump Shelved Over Wall

WASHINGTON - Mexico and the United States have shelved tentative plans for a visit to Washington by President Enrique Pena Nieto as tensions persist over a proposed border wall, US media reported Saturday.

Pena Nieto had already cancelled a visit in January last year because of US President Donald Trump's insistence that Mexico pay for the wall, which he wants as part of his efforts to curb immigration.

The White House had said in mid-February that the two presidents were working on arranging a meeting.

But The Washington Post, which first reported cancellation of the provisional meeting, said both countries agreed to call it off after a testy telephone call ended in an impasse over the border barrier.

Citing US and Mexican officials, the Post said Trump "would not agree to publicly affirm Mexico's position that it would not fund construction of a border wall that the Mexican people widely con-

sider offensive."

Pena Nieto's visit had been considered for February or March, the Post said, but the Mexican leader wanted to avoid public embarrassment.

Building the border wall was a primary pledge of the 2016 presidential campaign by Trump, who says the barrier is necessary for his country's security.

Asked about the reports, a Mexican presidential source told AFP there would be no comment.

"There's nothing additional to the last Tuesday statement," the source said, referring to comments after the phone call.

Both countries said at the time that they agreed in their call to boost cooperation on security, trade and migration.

In addition to disagreement over the wall, Trump's attacks on Mexican immigrants and threats to scrap the North American Free Trade Agreement have strained relations between the neighbors.

The leaders did meet once, on the sidelines of the G20 summit of major economies in Hamburg, Germany, last July.

Mexico goes to the polls this July as Pena Nieto approaches the end of his term, with his Institutional Revolutionary Party deeply unpopular. (AFP)

N. Korea Slams Latest US Sanctions as 'Act of War'

SEOUL - North Korea on Sunday slammed the latest US measures against it as an "act of war", after US President Donald Trump announced the "heaviest sanctions ever" on the nuclear-armed regime.

The measures, which Washington says are aimed at forcing Pyongyang to roll back its banned nuclear and weapons programmes, target more than 50 North Korea-linked shipping companies, vessels and trade businesses.

"Like we have said repeatedly, we consider any restrictions on us as an act of war," the North's foreign ministry said in a statement carried by the state-run KCNA news agency.

It also vowed a retaliation if the US "really has the nerves" to confront the North in a "rough" manner.

Trump warned on Friday that, if the latest sanctions don't work, the US would "go to phase two" that "may be a very rough thing", without elaborating.

In response, the North also vowed to "subdue the US in our own way" if provoked, saying "Trump is trying to change us with such sanctions and hostile remarks, which shows his ignorance about us". (AFP)

Wrong Turn Costs Cross-Country Skier Medal at Olympics

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea - Austrian cross-country skier Teresa Stadlober was well on her way to a silver medal at the Pyeongchang Games.

Then came a mental hiccup that cost her a spot on the podium but earned her a place in Olympic history.

With 7 kilometers left in Sunday's 30-kilometer race, the 25-year-old Stadlober inexplicably veered right on a downhill slope while the rest of the skiers went left. By the time she had corrected her course, she had fallen from second place to eighth.

Her medal hopes had vanished. "I don't know, I really don't know," said an embarrassed Stadlober, who ended up in ninth place. "I took the wrong way - and I did this twice. The second time I wasn't sure anymore. I had a blackout. I don't know why I took the wrong way."

Austrian sports director Markus Gandler said he believes Stadlober, trailing far behind eventual champion Marit Bjorger, simply took her eyes off the track for a moment and lost her orientation.

"For us, it's unbelievable," Gandler said. "On this downhill there are two sides, the right course and the left course. The right course is the first loop and the left course is the second loop. The second loop is going into the finish area." (AP)