**Obama to Keep Troops in Afghanistan Beyond 2016**

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama will keep 3,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan beyond 2016, according to senior administration officials, casting aside his promise to end the war on his watch and instead ensuring he hands the conflict off to his successor.

Obama had originally planned to pull out all but a small, mission-based U.S. military presence by the end of next year, a timeline coinciding with the final weeks of his presidency. But military leaders argued for months that the Afghan forces needed additional assistance and support from the U.S. to beat back a resurgent Taliban and hold territory won over the last 14 years of American bloodshed and billions of dollars in aid, reported The Associated Press.

The president was to announce the policy in a prime-time address Tuesday evening, from the White House. Officials said the plan would outline plans to maintain the current force of 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of next year, then draw down to 5,500 troops in 2017, at a pace still to be determined.

**ERC’s Selection Committee to Start Work in a Week**

KARUL - New commissions are set to be appointed within the next 2-3 days to run Afghanistan’s election management bodies - the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) - a senior official of the Electoral Reform Commission (ERC) was quoted as saying on Thursday.

The statement comes after the formation of ERC body under fire from civil society, political parties, and the ECC and IEC, who called the move a step backward. The ERC was initially formed to deal with the issue of the formation of the new election management body.

**Afghanistan’s Fighting: Putin Warns of Spillover**

MASOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday warned that violence in Afghanistan could spill over to the Caspian region, a day after the US announced it would keep 33,000 troops in the conflict-ridden country.

"The situation there (in Afghanistan) is generically close to ours," Putin said at a meeting of leaders from the ex-Soviet republics in Karakalpakstan.

"Many of the processes and people are more or less identical and do not have their plans to further expansion," Putin said, quoted The Associated Press.

**President Ashraf Ghani**

Better Management of Land & Water Resources Key to Stability

KARUL - President Ashraf Ghani addressed the National Land Conference in Kabul that Afghanistan’s socioeconomic stability and future development was directly linked with effective management of land and water resources.

Addressing delegates he pledged to establish a new committee to deal with the issue in future.

"The effective implementation of mega economic projects, a supreme council of land and water will be founded to handle the issue," Ghani said, adding that sufficient authority will be endowed to the new body to conduct its job effectively.

"People must cooperate with the government while acquiring so that important economic projects are implemented," he added.

**Ghani Visits Kunduz, Pays Tribute to Forces**

KARUL - President Ashraf Ghani on Friday visited Kunduz city where he paid tribute to the security forces and thanked them for their commitment to restore security in the areas of the province.

Ghani said "the Afghan forces proved in the Kunduz battle that they are able to defend their country bravely. "Kunduz’s dark situation has not changed to one of hope and I am proud of my security forces," Ghani said, after the forces drove out insurgents from the city.

In addition, he awarded posthumous medals to soldiers who lost their lives in Kunduz which fell to the Taliban about three weeks ago following a coordinated attack by the group on the city.

Ghani also promised the soldiers he would approve their promotions as soon as possible.

"Be sure I will stand behind each married soldier’s family,” Ghani vowed at an event attended by army officials, government authorities and parliamentarians.

Highlighting U.S. President Barack Obama’s remarks Thursday about Afghan troops and the delay in the drawdown of American troops presence until 2016, Ghani said "Yesterday the world’s biggest, most powerful country’s..."