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Kabul attack won't go unanswered, NSA Mohib warns

Afghanistan's National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib has condemned Monday night's attack in Kabul city which left at least 4 dead and more than 90 others wounded.

Mohib has said in a statement that the government would not remain silent against the attack in the city as he vowed to avenge the casualties inflicted on civilians in the bombing.

He said the government is committed to thoroughly investigate the incident, emphasizing that the perpetrators must know that their crime will not remain unanswered.

In the meantime, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has instructed the relevant authorities to thoroughly investigate the circumstances surrounding the incident and assist with the families of the victims.

The Ministry of Interior officials are saying that the militants ... **P3**



Kabul urged to appoint envoy to Saudi-led Islamic military alliance

Saudi Arabia has requested Afghanistan to appoint a representative to Islamic military alliance to fight terrorism.

Formed in 2015 by Riyadh, the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition has 41 members, including Afghanistan.

The call for appointment of representative to the coalition came during the visit of Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib to Saudi Arabia, as he was meeting with Secretary-General of the alliance, Abdulelah bin Othman al-Saleh.

Abdulelah said that the coalition would stand with Afghanistan at various levels considering its importance in the region and the world, a statement from Afghanistan National Security Council said on Tuesday.

Mohib emphasized on joint cooperation in the fight against terrorism and welcomed the coalition's offer in this regard.

It was agreed that the coalition and the Afghan government to prepare ... **P2**

Pakistan detains Taliban minister after controversial meeting with Pak official



Pakistan has arrested a senior Afghan Taliban member in an attempt to put pressure on the militants amid talks with the US, say sources in the group. Hafez Mohibullah, religious affairs minister when the Taliban ran Afghanistan before 2001, was held in Peshawar, the sources told the BBC. The US has repeatedly called on Pakistan to end "safe havens" for the Taliban on its soil.

Pakistan denies backing the group to retain influence in Afghanistan. The reported detention of Hafez Mohibullah comes ahead of a visit to Pakistan by US special representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, who has held a series of meetings with the Taliban's political office in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

The US wants Pakistan to encourage

the militants to reach a settlement in Afghanistan and bring the 17-year conflict to an end.

There was no immediate response from authorities in Pakistan.

Taliban sources say Hafez Mohibullah had been living in the city for years. Two high-ranking Taliban figures, talking on condition of anonymity, suggested the former minister had been detained to put pressure on

the group into meeting Khalilzad in Pakistan this week, and crucially to agree to meet representatives of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

So far, the Taliban have refused to hold direct talks with Afghan officials, whom they dismiss as "puppets" and have only met US officials. Sources within the group say both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have been trying to convince the Taliban to change their stance.

One senior Taliban figure told the BBC: "They arrested him [Mohibullah] to send a message."

Another from the group's Quetta Shura, or leadership council, added: "There was a meeting with Pakistani officials on the upcoming peace talks which ended in arguments. Right afterwards, the authorities raided a number of houses and arrested Mohibullah. After that [Taliban leader] Sheikh Hibatullah sent a message warning everyone to be alert."

Taliban officials have previously said they will only engage with the Afghan government once a firm date for the withdrawal of American troops from the country has been agreed.

The last set of negotiations between Khalilzad and Taliban representatives took place in Abu Dhabi in December, with Pakistani and Saudi officials also in attendance.

A team from the Afghan government also went to the Gulf state but ... **P3**

Zalmay Rassoul runs for president for second time

Former minister of foreign affairs, Zalmay Rassoul, on Tuesday registered for upcoming presidential elections for the second time.

He also ran for president in 2014 elections in which he was one of the leading candidates in the first round of the elections in April.

This time, Rassoul is accompanied by Abdul Jabbar Taqwa and Ghulam Ali Wahdat as his running mates.

So far, five candidates including Rassoul have registered for 2019 presidential elections.

In an address to reporters after registering for presidential elections at the Independent Election Commission, Rassoul said he will fight ... **P3**



Fazal-ur-Rehman calls on Taliban to talk to Afghan gov't

Pakistan's senior cleric, Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, has called on the Afghan Taliban to enter into peace talks with the Afghan government.

Fazal-ur-Rehman, who heads a conservative political party, has previously made remarks supporting Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have held three rounds of peace talks with the United States, but the group has refused to sit with the Afghan government representatives.

The Pakistani cleric told the Voice of America that the Taliban belong to Afghanistan and their war is also against the Afghan government. He said that the intra-Afghan talks are as much as important as dialogue with US.

The cleric said that the Taliban's



struggle is not jihad (holy war). This comes after his visit with Umar Daudzai, president Ghan's envoy for peace and regional consensus.

Daudzai met with Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman this week and discussed Afghan peace with him.

The Afghan High Peace Council in a statement said Mr. Daudzai

emphasized on the importance of the support of Pakistani Ulemas for the revival negotiations between the Afghan government and Taliban group.

He also briefed Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman regarding the peace process in Afghanistan and urged to take practical steps and play a constructive role in this regard.

I would risk...

permission to Open Arms to sail Med Central," the charity wrote in a tweet.

"Preventing us from saving lives is irresponsible and cruel. Cowardly politicians are putting in place a counter for the dead," added Proactiva Open Arms founder Oscar Camps in a separate tweet.

Proactiva Open Arms operates between Libya and southern Europe, coming to the aid of those who get into difficulties during the crossing from northern Africa.

The charity's ship, the Open Arms, docked in southern Spain on 28 December, with 311 mainly African migrants it had plucked from the sea off Libya, after both Italy and Malta denied the boat entry.

Spanish authorities said the vessel had violated maritime regulations by ignoring "the obligation to leave those rescued at sea at the nearest port".

Spain became Europe's main entry point for refugees last year, overtaking Greece and Italy, which have taken measures to prevent those rescued from landing in its ports.

Kabul urged...

practical counter-terrorism plans and implement them in coordination with each other.

During the visit, Mohib also met with his Saudi counterpart, Msaed Al-Aiban, and head of intelligence of the kingdom, Khaled al-Hamidani.

They discussed Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process, counter-terrorism and bilateral cooperation.

The Saudi side reiterated support for Afghanistan peace process and pledged to cooperate with the Afghan government's request in this regard.

Richard N. Haass

Agonizing over Afghanistan

After more than 17 years, the time has come to accept two important truths about the war in Afghanistan. The first is that there will be no military victory by the government and its American and NATO partners. Afghan forces, while better than they were, are not good enough and are unlikely ever to be capable of defeating the Taliban. This is not simply because government troops lack the unity and often the professionalism to prevail, but also because the Taliban are highly motivated and enjoy considerable backing at home and from Pakistan, which provides it critical support and sanctuary.

The situation on the ground is something of a slowly deteriorating stalemate. The government controls territory where an estimated two-thirds of the population lives. But the Taliban and even more radical groups, including those associated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, control or contest nearly half the territory and have repeatedly demonstrated an ability to attack military and civilian targets alike anywhere and everywhere inside the country, including the capital, Kabul.

What really weakens diplomatic prospects, though, is that the Taliban see little need to compromise. It is only a matter of time, they seem to believe, before the United States grows weary of stationing troops in a far-off country and spending on the order of \$45 billion a year on a war that cannot be won.

They may well be right. The White House's recent announcement that roughly half of the current 14,000 US troops will soon be leaving reinforces the Taliban's view that the future is trending their way. Coming on the heels of President Donald Trump's decision to pull all US troops out of Syria, it is unsurprising that the Taliban and other insurgents would conclude that it is a question of when, not if, the remaining 7,000 US troops (and another 8,000 NATO soldiers) will be withdrawn.

A complete troop withdrawal is a real possibility, given Trump's longstanding skepticism of the value of the US effort. His frustration is understandable. More than 2,000 US soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan, and another 20,000 have sustained injuries. The war begun in the wake of the 9/11 attacks has cost well over \$1 trillion. It is hard to see how 14,000 or 7,000 American troops could accomplish what more than 100,000 could not.

So why not just withdraw all of the troops? One reason



is that the government might collapse, in which case Afghanistan could again become a place where terrorists train recruits and plan attacks against US interests around the world and against America itself. Of course, even if that were to happen, Afghanistan would be little different from other places where terrorists are able to operate unmolested.

Another reason not to leave in a manner unrelated to conditions on the ground is that, coming after Syria, such an exit would cast further doubt on America's willingness to sustain a leading role in the world. This is not to say that the US should remain involved in Afghanistan simply because it has been involved. But perceptions matter, and simply walking away would lead many allies – not just in the region, but also in Asia and Europe – to wonder if they might be the next American partner to be abandoned.

America's policy in Afghanistan should be one that avoids the risks of a rapid, unconditional exit but also minimizes the costs of staying. To accomplish the latter would require trimming strategic ambitions. Although the US and its European partners cannot expect to win the war or broker a lasting peace, it should be possible to keep the government alive and carry on the fight against terrorists. Doing so would probably require keeping a few thousand troops deployed, continuing to provide intelligence, arms, and training to Afghan forces, and, in special situations, a readiness and ability to intervene narrowly but directly.

It would also help if the US both reoriented and stepped up its diplomatic engagement. Current efforts are focused on brokering an internal settlement

with the Taliban. A more fruitful approach might be to convene Afghanistan's six immediate neighbors (which include both China and Iran as well as Pakistan) and other actors, including Russia, India, and the EU, that have a stake in the country's future. None has an interest in seeing Afghanistan become a haven for terrorism and drug production.

This is not a strategy for winning, but rather one for not losing. It may not be ambitious enough for some, but, in Afghanistan, even seemingly modest goals have a way of becoming aspirational.

Ex-Ivorian...

Anna Holligan.

"Many are concerned that the court is emerging as an institution where only rebels can be successfully prosecuted," he added.

The ICC has also seen cases collapse against former DR Congo Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba, and former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta.

On the other hand, the ruling demonstrates the judges' independence and impartiality and makes it harder to push the narrative, popular among those who fear the long arm of the ICC, that the court is a biased weapon of neo-colonial justice used purely to convict African leaders, our correspondent says.

Janet Anderson, a writer for the Justice Tribune, told the BBC: "It's important also to find people not guilty or to find there isn't a case to answer if there isn't one."

Editorial

IECC's responsibility as IEC finally announces preliminary election results

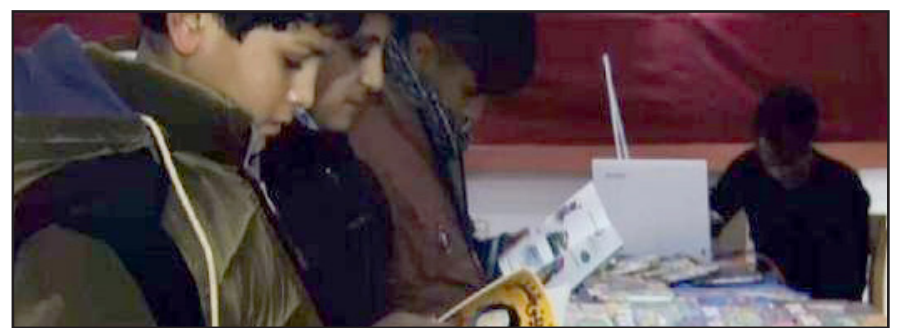
The Independent Election Commission (IEC) on Monday announced the preliminary results of Wolesi Jirga election for Kabul province and Kuchis after an almost three-month delay. The election commission has been under fire for allegations of fraud and tampering with the results of the parliamentary election, especially in Kabul. Even there are claims that the results were postponed because of financial bargaining between IEC officials and some candidates over securing seats in the parliament. The results show that the will of people has once again been disrespected.

After the announcement of election results by IEC, it is the responsibility of the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) to ensure electoral justice by making sure the results are fair, transparent and free of fraud, and that the candidates who have genuine votes become members of Wolesi Jirga. Instead of caving in to the rich

and powerful, IECC should respect the will of people, who defied security threats and numerous other challenges to go to the polls. Despite the fact that the front runners in the 2014 presidential election gave preference to a power-sharing deal brokered by Former US Secretary of State John Kerry over millions of votes, Afghan people came out in large numbers to cast their votes in the previous parliamentary election with the hope that their votes will be respected and that they could play a part in shaping their own and their country's future. They hoped their votes will be counted transparently, and would be able to elect individuals for the parliament who would truly represent them other than pursue their personal interests. Now IECC is the only hope and the ball is in its court to deliver that justice. It must address all documented complaints by applying the existing electoral procedures and regulations. While it seems less

practical that IECC will ensure complete transparency in the election results, it has got the opportunity to ensure a relative transparency. If it manages to ensure a relative justice, Afghan people, who have lost their faith in electoral processes, will have a reason to participate in the upcoming presidential election. Otherwise, people will never trust the democratic process, which will lower the voter turnout in future elections, because when they become certain that their votes don't bring about any change, how they will convince themselves to risk life and limb for something that makes no difference in their life. The international community, civil society organizations, and the candidates should jointly press the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission to impartially investigate all documented complaints, and strive to make sure the candidates who have genuine votes make it to the final list.

Culture of reading on the rise among Herati children



A number of booksellers in western Herat province have expressed pleasure with the growing culture of reading among children.

They say parents have been encouraging their children to enter into friendship with books, which will enhance their knowledge on the one hand and keep them from unhealthy activities on the other.

Mehrdad, 8, says he has been motivated by his parents into reading books. His focus has been on stories about children and other day-to-day issues.

"I have a very good fiction book about lying and kindness. I have learned from the book how to listen to and respect elders," he told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Mohsa, another nine-year-old child, spoke about the pleasure of reading books. "I read books so much because they have delightful stories. A person who reads understands a lot of things."

Muzhgan, 12, has been reading books for the past two years. Now she can write stories as well. "I wrote a story about winter vacation. I think all children should use their winter vacation to play and attend courses."

Marzia, a woman from Herat City, said: "I take my daughter to book exhibitions for the children to choose books of her choice and I buy them for her."

A number of booksellers, meanwhile, are pleased with the increasing sale of books in the province. Syed Mahmood, one of the booksellers, said: "Many parents are trying to encourage their children to read books."

Aziz Ahmad, another bookseller, confirmed the sale of books for children had seen a spike in Herat province.

Parvez Mujib, a psychologist, said: "Reading helps improve the personality of the child besides honing their skills like sound thinking and accurate analysis."

Kandahar customs revenue up by 22.6pc last year

The customs office of southern Kandahar province last fiscal year collected 7.82 billion Afghanis, showing a 13.5 percent increase over the target. The revenue registered a 22.6 percent surge compared to last year's income at a time when bilateral trade volume with Pakistan has reduced. Mohammad Akbar, Kandahar customs director, told Pajhwok Afghan News that the Ministry of Finance had set them 6.239 billion Afghanis revenue target for Kandahar in 1397 fiscal year, they collected 7.82 billion Afghanis. He said the amount of revenue collected last fiscal year showed a 22.6 percent increase over six billion Afghanis collections the year before. Akbar said the revenue was collected on different items such as edible and nonedible items, construction materials, drugs and other commercial goods imported from Pakistan or other countries to Afghanistan. Fighting corruption, blocking illegal routes for trafficking, reforms and a computer based system were reasons

that helped increase the custom revenue last year, he said. He added the revenue increased despite trade volume with Pakistan declined last year.

Afghanistan's trade volume with Pakistan reduced after Afghanistan opened trade routes with central Asian countries, he said.

Akbar said their revenue in 1393 fiscal year was only two billion Afghanis. Many people earlier escaped taxes and there was corruption as well in the revenue collections, but gradual reforms helped increase the income, he said.

He added traders were provided many facilities in return for paying taxes and the tax payment process had been simplified compared to the past. Akbar said 22 acres of land has been allocated for the customs office in Spin Boldak border town where commercial goods were loaded into trucks without any disorder and traffic problem.

On the other hand, Akbar said the



installation process of scanners was underway in Kandahar Airport, which would prevent tax evasion and facilitate taxation process of commercial goods.

Traders in Kandahar now can clear their taxes through E-Payment system which was activated this ongoing solar year to speed up the tax payment process and save traders' time, he said. On the other hand, traders complain they are overtaxed on raw materials,

an issue they say has damaged the country's industry.

But Kandahar customs office says all raw materials being imported from abroad and used for productions in domestic factories were taxed only two or one percent.

He said a laboratory for testing medicines and food materials would be imported from abroad and installed in Kandahar. These materials are currently sent to Kabul for test, he said.

Zalmai Rassoul...

against discrimination and inequalities and will work for peace and democracy in the country.

"I am committed to fighting against discrimination, prejudice and inequality and will continue to work for peace, security and democracy," Rassoul told reporters.

In a response to a question about transparency in elections, Rassoul said he will defend the rights of Afghanistan's people.

"It is the duty of the election commission to act in a manner that does not betray the people's vote. It is the duty of the commission to do its job and if the commission does not show transparency, then the commission is responsible to the people of Afghanistan and we will defend the rights of the Afghan people," he said.

Rassoul stressed the need for peace and stability in the country to move forward elections.

"The Constitution of Afghanistan is clear now. The ways of the amendments are also in the Constitution," Rassoul said as he responded to a question about his stance on a change in government's system after the elections.

Rassoul served as minister of transport and civil Aviation in 2002, as chairman of National Security Council from 2002-2010, and as minister of foreign affairs from January 2010 to October 2013. He accompanied Afghan President Hamid Karzai on all official visits since the establishment of the Interim Administration in 2001. He resigned as foreign minister on 5 October 2013 to stand as a candidate in the 2014 presidential elections. He was born in 1942 in Kabul.

Kabul attack...

detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device near an accommodation compound housing foreigners.

The officials further added that the explosion left at least four people dead while more than 90 others including several women and children sustained injuries.

The Taliban group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Pakistan detains...

the Taliban refused to meet them.

A source involved in the negotiations said Pakistan had pressed for the talks to take place, and that Saudi officials had tried to persuade the Taliban members to at least shake hands or pray alongside the Afghan government representatives, but were unsuccessful.

Despite Pakistani denials, US and Afghan authorities have in the past consistently accused the country's intelligence services of backing the Taliban. In a tweet in January 2018, US President Donald Trump claimed Pakistan had given "nothing but lies and deceit" in return for American aid.

Analyst Ahmad Rashid told the BBC: "I think there has been a change in Pakistan's policy. The military and ISI [intelligence service] are trying to persuade, cajole the Taliban into meeting

both the Americans and Kabul government."

Rashid added: "One of the main pressures [on Pakistan] is coming not from the Americans but from the Saudis and UAE."

Both countries have recently offered Pakistan's struggling economy loans worth billions of dollars.

President Trump is thought to be considering withdrawing a significant portion of the approximately 14,000 US troops currently in Afghanistan, reportedly out of frustration at a lack of progress in the conflict. Pakistani officials often say the country "no longer has the influence it once had" over the Taliban. But they have also insisted that they want to help create a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

In October, Pakistan released a founding member of the Taliban, Mullah Barader from detention,

reportedly to allow him to play a role in peace negotiations. Maj-Gen Asif Ghafoor, the spokesman for the Pakistani military, told the BBC last year the decision had been made because "we should take any chance which facilitates peace."

Rashid said, however, that "a great amount of Taliban logistics comes through Pakistan" and that it is "not clear whether those supply chains have been stopped".

One former high-ranking Taliban member expressed other doubts over the intentions of the Pakistani authorities - suggesting that in the peace talks, the country was trying to propel forward members of the group sympathetic to Pakistani interests as opposed to the official political office in Qatar.

He warned that if there was too much pressure on the Taliban, negotiations might "collapse".

Erdogan, Trump...

we have fought to defeat ISIS."

Ankara considers the US-allied Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and its political wing - the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) - to be "terrorist groups" with ties to the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. For weeks, it has vowed to carry out military operations against the YPG and has condemned the US for its military relationship with the Kurdish fighters.

The Trump administration has defended its relationship with the YPG, and on Sunday the US president vowed to "devastate Turkey economically" if it targeted them. In response, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said "we are not scared of and will not be intimidated by any threats," adding that "economic threats

against Turkey will get nowhere."

Turkey has said the US administration has been incoherent about the withdrawal process since Trump's December 19 announcement that he would pull some 2,000 US troops out of Syria, as well as in its approach to different "terrorist groups".

Yasin Aktay, an adviser to Erdogan, said the US has been "a highly unreliable partner" to Ankara.

"The problems and misunderstandings between the US and Turkey are results of the confusion and cacophony between the actors at different levels of the US administration and institutions," he told Al Jazeera.

Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency reported that the two leaders also discussed the need to complete a plan regarding

Syria's border town of Manbij, so as to avoid giving any opportunity to elements seeking to block the planned withdrawal of US forces.

Turkish and US troops began joint patrols in Manbij on November 1 as part of an agreement that focuses on the withdrawal of YPG fighters from the city to stabilize the region.

Last month, Trump's withdrawal announcement several politicians in Washington as well as Western and Kurdish allies fighting alongside the US.

Trump's decision was initially expected to be carried out swiftly, but the timetable became vague in the weeks following his announcement.

France, Britain and local armed groups have also warned that ISIS has not been totally defeated yet.

Iran says...

Javad Zarif said last week that pursuing Iran's aerospace program is not against international law.

"The satellite is part of a civil project with purely scientific

aims, foreign ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi told the semi-official ISNA news agency.

"Iran will wait for no country's permission to conduct such scientific projects."

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Erdogan, Trump consider setting up 'security zone' in Syria

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his US counterpart, Donald Trump, have discussed the situation in northern Syria over the phone amid rising tensions over the fate of Kurdish fighters in the war-torn country.

The conversation on Monday came a day after Trump threatened on Twitter that he would "devastate" Turkey's economy if its forces attacked the US-backed Kurdish fighters, who helped Washington in its fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) group.

The war of words between the two NATO allies is the latest consequence of Trump's surprising decision last month to withdraw US troops from northern Syria, potentially leaving the Kurdish militia under threat as Ankara weighs a new offensive there.

In a statement, the Turkish presidency said Erdogan told Trump he had no problem with

Kurds in Syria and that Ankara is only seeking to fight armed groups in the war-ravaged country which threaten its national security.

The two leaders also "discussed the idea of creating a security zone cleared of terrorism in the north of the country", the statement added. Trump confirmed this in a tweet later, but referred to the proposed area as a "safe zone".

He did not give any details about the safe zone proposal, but US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington wanted to provide security for those who have fought ISIS and to prevent any attack on Turkey from Syria.

Sarah Sanders, White House press secretary, said in a statement: "The president expressed the desire to work together to address Turkey's security concerns in northeast Syria while stressing the importance to the United States that Turkey does not mistreat the Kurds and other Syrian Democratic Forces with whom ... **P3**



A look at the world

Iran says launched a satellite, failed to reach orbit

Iran has conducted one of at least two satellite launches it plans despite criticism by the United States, but the satellite failed to reach orbit, an official said.

"The Payam satellite was successfully launched this morning with the Basir satellite carrier. But the satellite unfortunately failed to be placed in orbit in the final stage," Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi told Iranian state television on Tuesday.

The rocket carrying the Payam satellite successfully passed its first and second stages, but then couldn't reach the "necessary speed" in the third one.

Iran had planned to send two satellites, Payam and Doosti, into the orbit. Payam means "message" in Farsi, while Doosti means "friendship".

It's unclear how the failure of the Payam will affect the launch timing for the Doosti. Jahromi wrote on Twitter that "Doosti is waiting for orbit," without elaborating.

The US has called Iran's satellite programs a violation of UN Security Council resolution that endorsed a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between major powers and Tehran.



Tehran reined in most of its nuclear program under the deal, since abandoned by the US in May last year, but has continued to develop its ballistic missile and rocket technology. Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space.

The US and its allies allege the same satellite-launching technology could be used to develop long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

Earlier this month, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Iran's plans to send satellites into orbit demonstrate the country's defiance of the resolution that calls on Iran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

"The United States will not stand by and watch the Iranian regime's destructive... **P3**

Ex-Ivorian leader Gbagbo acquitted of war crimes to be freed



The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague has acquitted Ivory Coast ex-President Laurent Gbagbo.

He had been charged with crimes against humanity in connection with violence following a disputed 2010 election that left 3,000 dead and 500,000 displaced.

Mr Gbagbo was captured in 2011 in a presidential palace bunker by UN and French-backed forces supporting his rival, Alassane Ouattara.

He was the first former head of state to go on trial at the ICC.

The violence in Ivory Coast, the world's biggest cocoa producer, came after Gbagbo refused to accept that he had lost a disputed election run-off to Ouattara in 2010.

The five months of violence that followed were described as some of the most brutal clashes the country had ever seen.

During the political stand-off there were bloody clashes and targeted killings in Abidjan in the south, and several hundred were massacred in the western town of Duekoue.

Prosecutors accused Gbagbo of four counts of crimes against humanity, murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, persecution and "other inhuman acts". He denied the charges, which he said were politically motivated.

ICC judges ruled on Tuesday that he had no case to answer because the prosecution had not managed to prove several charges against him. They have ordered his immediate release.

Presiding Judge Cuno Tarfusser said the prosecution had "failed to demonstrate that public speeches by Gbagbo constituted ordering or inducing the alleged crimes".

Mr Gbagbo's supporters whooped, cheered and threw their fists in the air in the public gallery following the announcement, the BBC's Anna Holligan reports from the court.

"Whenever a case involving mass atrocities essentially collapses at the ICC, it does damage to the perception of the court as a credible and effective institution of international justice," Mark Kersten, author of Justice in Conflict, told the BBC's... **P2**

UN refugee chief: I would risk death to escape a squalid migrant camp

The head of the UN refugee agency has said he too would do "anything" to escape if he was stuck in a squalid refugee camp, as he called on the world's wealthy nations to properly fund services in developing countries.

Speaking to reporters after meeting the Egyptian president, Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, Filippo Grandi, the high commissioner for refugees, said countries are not getting enough recognition for hosting refugees, and that he would campaign for Cairo to receive more bilateral development aid to support its efforts.

According to the latest figures, Egypt hosts more than 242,000 registered refugees of 58 different nationalities, mainly concentrated in Greater Cairo, Alexandria and the north coast, 55% of them fleeing the war in Syria. While migrant flows to Europe across the dangerous Mediterranean sea route had fallen sharply, Grandi said, that decline had not reduced the number of people fleeing war and poverty flocking to holding camps in places like Libya.



"If I was a refugee or a migrant or anybody going into this center I would opt for anything to get out of there, even if I knew the risk of death was very high," Grandi said, adding that what Libya needed was help to enforce the rule of law instead of just naval support, as well as aid to stop illegal people trafficking.

Seeking similar arrangements to those in eastern Europe, EU leaders have been urging Egypt to help stem the flow of people entering Europe from Africa, offering to step up economic cooperation as an incentive. Cairo, however, has stopped short of setting up the "disembarkation platforms" Europe seeks, where people rescued at sea could be dropped off for screening.

Grandi made his comments as Spanish charity Proactiva Open Arms said on Monday that Spanish authorities were preventing its ship from setting sail in the Mediterranean. "We are blocked in a port once again. Port Authority in Barcelona denied... **P2**



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