

Headlines:

- **Taliban say They Control 85pc of Afghanistan**
- **Chinese FM to Visit Central Asia on SCO Mission for Afghan Peace**
- **US says Shared Interests with Pakistan Go Beyond Afghanistan**

Details:

**Taliban say They Control 85pc of Afghanistan**

Taliban officials said on Friday the insurgent group had taken control of 85 per cent of territory in Afghanistan, and international concern mounted over problems getting medicines and supplies into the country. Afghan government officials described the assertion that the Taliban controlled most of the country as part of a propaganda campaign launched as foreign military personnel, including those from the United States, withdraw after almost 20 years of fighting. However, local Afghan officials said Taliban fighters, emboldened by the withdrawal, had captured an important district in Herat province, home to tens of thousands of minority Shia Hazaras. Torghundi, a northern town on the border with Turkmenistan, had also been captured by the Taliban overnight, Afghan and Taliban officials said. Hundreds of Afghan security personnel and refugees continued to flee across the border into neighbouring Iran and Tajikistan, causing concern in Moscow and other foreign capitals that radical groups could infiltrate Central Asia. Three visiting Taliban officials sought to address those concerns during a visit to Moscow. "We will take all measures so that (militant) Islamic State (group) will not operate on Afghan territory... and our territory will never be used against our neighbours," one of the Taliban officials, Shahabuddin Delawar, told a news conference. He said, "you and the entire world community have probably recently learned that 85pc of the territory of Afghanistan has come under the control" of the Taliban. The same delegation said a day earlier that the group would not attack the Tajik-Afghan border, the fate of which is in focus in Russia and Central Asia. Asked about how much territory the Taliban held, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby declined direct comment. "Claiming territory or claiming ground doesn't mean you can sustain that or keep it over time" he said in an interview with CNN. "And so I think it's really time for the Afghan forces to get into the field — and they are in the field — and to defend their country, their people." "They've got the capacity, they've got the capability. Now it's time to have that will," he said. [Source: The Dawn]

**It is quite evident that one option being deliberated by the US is to use Taliban's rapid advance to forge a broad coalition to halt Taliban's progress. Hence, the emphasis by both Kirby and Biden on Afghan opposition forces uniting and using the capacity of the Afghan army to restrict Taliban. In this way, America is hoping to use "internal balancing" to arrive at a peace deal. However, this option is quite risky as it can easily spill into a protracted civil war similar to the 1990s.**

**Chinese FM to Visit Central Asia on SCO Mission for Afghan Peace**

As the security threats of the US military's hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan spills over to neighboring countries, Chinese foreign minister has scheduled visits to three Central Asian countries upon invitation, and will discuss with Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) officials about the situation in Afghanistan. Despite the shadow cast by Afghanistan's new situation, it propels regional countries, including China, to gaze closely into it. Analysts said there are both challenges and opportunities for China in Afghanistan's situation. By including the Afghanistan issue into the SCO agenda, not only can Beijing help further subdue the chaos left by the power vacuum in this country, but will also push ties between China and other Central Asian countries closer, they noted. Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan between July 12 and 16 on the invitation of foreign ministers of the three countries, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin announced on Friday. Wang Yi is also scheduled to attend the meeting of foreign ministers of the

SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, where he will exchange views with other SCO member states and his Afghan counterpart on promoting regional security and stability, advancing the process of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, and deepening cooperation between the SCO and Afghanistan, Wang Wenbin said. The US' "irresponsible and hasty" withdrawal from Afghanistan has given rise to security threats in the country, and instability has begun to spill over to regional states, Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, told the Global Times. Under such a circumstance, regional countries are turning to China, hoping it could coordinate a multilateral framework in dealing with the issue, according to Qian. Yet analysts said that China will cautiously deal with the issue, not jump in the power vacuum left by the US. "We won't interfere, we won't try to navigate the country, we will just provide the help it needs," said Qian. President Joe Biden on Thursday defended the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan as the country appeared increasingly at risk of spiraling into civil war. He said that the US military mission there will conclude August 31, earlier than initially announced. [Source: Global Times]

**China fears more the threat of Islam sweeping Central Asia than the security vacuum created by America's withdrawal. Ironically, the US used Islamic countries - Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran - to expedite the collapse of the Soviet Union. America's rapid withdrawal gives credence to another option being considered by Washington and that is to simultaneously manage a protracted civil war in Afghanistan and export chaos to Central Asia thereby bringing instability to Russian and Chinese borders.**

### **US says Shared Interests with Pakistan Go Beyond Afghanistan**

While the US acknowledges Pakistan as a "helpful and constructive partner" when it comes to Afghanistan, the shared interests of both the countries go well beyond that, Radio Pakistan quoted US State Department spokesperson Ned Price as saying during a press briefing on Thursday. He added that the US and Pakistan had shared interests in peace and stability in Afghanistan, and "our collective efforts will bring some semblance of peace and security there." However, Price said, the shared interests of the US and Pakistan went beyond Afghanistan and included broader counter-terrorism initiatives and steps for strengthening people-to-people contact. "Pakistan is an important partner on multiple fronts," he said. The State Department spokesperson stressed that all of Afghanistan's neighbours needed to play a constructive role for a "durable political settlement [in the country] and a ceasefire [between the Afghan government and Taliban]." He added that the US was going to ensure that Afghanistan's neighbours played a constructive role in the country. Price's remarks have come when the US pullout from Afghanistan is in final stages and the country is on the brink of civil war, descending into chaos in the face of assaults by the Taliban. The present situation will likely lead to the redefining of Pakistan-US ties, which was evident when Prime Minister Khan categorically ruled out the possibility of Pakistan allowing US any bases and use of its territory for any sort of action inside Afghanistan. "Absolutely not. There is no way we are going to allow any bases, any sort of action from Pakistani territory into Afghanistan. Absolutely not," the prime minister had told Axios on HBO in an interview last month. He had stated the same in an opinion piece for The Washington Post, saying that: "We simply cannot afford this. We have already paid too heavy a price. Meanwhile, if the US, with the most powerful military machine in history, couldn't win the war from inside Afghanistan after 20 years, how would America do it from bases in our country?" [Source: The Dawn]

**Khan knows full well that America—world's lone super power—has failed miserably in Afghanistan. But rather than taking strength from this fact and working with the Taliban to annex Afghanistan and create a pivotal moment to end Western interference, Khan continues to lament about Western pressure. Under the Khilafah Rashidah (rightly guided Caliphate), Pakistan will annex Afghanistan and all the five pivotal Central Asian states to permanently end Western and Eastern interference in the region.**