

Headlines:

- **Alarm Raised Over Bill Allowing Sisi to Rule Egypt Until 2034**
- **It's Time to Let Go of America's 18-year Afghan War**
- **Saudi Crown Prince to Announce \$20B Investment Projects in Pakistan**

Details:

Alarm Raised Over Bill Allowing Sisi to Rule Egypt Until 2034

Egypt's president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, has moved one step closer to staying in power until 2034 after parliament advanced a bill that changes the constitution by extending presidential terms and allows Sisi to run for re-election beyond the current two-term limit. The bill also grants new political powers to the military and extra presidential control over the judiciary, dealing another blow to opponents of Sisi's increasingly autocratic regime. In a rare criticism during a debate over the bill, one MP branded the reforms "medieval" and said they were tailored to facilitate absolute rule by Sisi, the former head of Egypt's armed forces who took power in a coup in 2013. The bill has moved swiftly through the Egyptian legislature since it was tabled on 3 February, aided by a decision to move the debate forward by several days. On Thursday, 485 out of 596 MPs voted to advance the bill, which also contains a package of more palatable changes such as the creation of a vice-presidential post, a quota of 25% female representation, and a new upper house in parliament. It is expected to pass a second committee reading and parliamentary debate by early March, triggering a referendum in which the public will be asked to approve the changes. A coalition of 11 political parties and prominent political figures joined forces to fight the plans, but will struggle to mount a campaign ahead of a referendum in an environment where dissent has been systematically crushed. Last year, the Guardian reported the existence of a petition calling for Sisi to remain in office beyond his second term, which circulated within institutions and among pro-state figures. Pro-government lawyers also mounted a legal challenge demanding that parliament – often seen as little more than a vehicle for rubber stamping Sisi's demands – remove the article in the constitution that sets term limits. [Source: The Guardian]

America's strong man Sisi is set to cement his dictatorship with Washington's blessing for another 15 years. America openly supported Sisi's coup against the democratically elected Morsi and is now muted about Sisi extending his autocratic reign. Rather than promoting democracy, the US has turned to enslaving the Muslim world by encouraging dictators and monarchs to extend their powers and entrench the brutality of their rule. Indeed, Trump their masters aspires to be a dictator in the US.

It's Time to Let Go of America's 18-year Afghan war

Make no mistake, if it is done in a precipitous and haphazard manner, there are risks to a withdrawal -- especially if it is without the cooperation of other regional powers with a stake in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Important details need to be worked out in US talks with the Taliban and the Afghan government. But even if these things cannot be agreed on -- and it's likely they won't -- the US should still withdraw. We can protect our core interest in Afghanistan -- counter-terrorism against transnational terror groups -- without maintaining thousands of boots on the ground or any kind of permanent US presence on Afghan territory after our troops leave. The creation of a well-functioning, stable, secure Afghan central government, led by moderate and pro-democratic forces, has been magical thinking for years now. Although US officials will not publicly admit it, for the past several years the US has defined winning as not losing, which means hoping we can train the Afghan military to keep Kabul and the shrinking territory controlled by the central government out of the hands of the Taliban. But this goal is unachievable, whether US forces leave or stay another 18 years or longer. To meet this limited

objective, the US needs to have a credible, reliable and effective Afghan political and military partner. And Pakistan has to stop giving sanctuary to insurgent forces. The opponents of withdrawal have no viable "theory of victory" for not losing except offering more of the same. Staying in a war that cannot be won doesn't demonstrate resolve but rather a failure to grasp reality. It also leads to tragic and unnecessary US deaths. Since the US formally ended its combat role in 2014, 42 Americans have been killed in Afghanistan, according to a report from the New York Times. One American dying in a seemingly endless war where we cannot achieve any of our goals is one too many. The Pentagon estimates that the war in Afghanistan is also costing it \$45 billion a year. This cost, projected over an indefinite period, may be affordable in the context of a country with a \$19 trillion GDP and an annual defense expenditure of over \$600 billion for the last 16 years. The US can't make Afghanistan a coherent functional state with rule of law, gender equality, and respect for human rights, no matter how many troops or additional dollars we throw at this challenge. It is sad and tragic that we promised more in Afghanistan than we could deliver—and that in the eyes of the Afghan people, women in particular, the US has abandoned them. But that's no reason to stay in a never-ending war. What we could not accomplish with over 100,000 US forces -- the maximum number deployed in 2010 -- we certainly cannot with the 14,000 now in the country. It's neither pretty, satisfying nor politically convenient to admit. But it's time to let go of America's 18-year Afghan war. [Source: CNN]

Afghanistan a recognized graveyard for empires is proving too much for Pax Americana. Alexander the Great, the British, the Soviets and now the Americans have discovered that victory will always be elusive in Afghanistan.

Saudi Crown Prince to Announce \$20B Investment Projects in Pakistan

Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, is set to make his first state visit to Pakistan on Saturday, where he is expected to announce investment projects worth up to \$20 billion, a senior official told VOA. The unprecedented Saudi investment is being viewed by Prime Minister Imran Khan's nascent government as a major boost for cash-strapped Pakistan, which is facing an economic crisis and balance of payments pressure. It will also send a strong message to other international investors to come to Pakistan, said Haroon Sharif, who chairs Pakistan's Board of Investment, (BoI) which promotes and facilitates investors. "At this stage, we are expecting serious Memorandums of Understanding [for concrete projects] between \$15 billion to \$20 billion worth of investments from Saudi Arabia in the area of oil refining, petrochemicals, energy sector, alternate energy and the mineral sector," Sharif told VOA. However, these number are subject to technical feasibilities, he emphasized. The Saudi prince, often referred to as MBS, will be accompanied by a high-powered delegation, including members of the royal family, key ministers and leading businessmen. He will hold meetings with Prime Minister Khan and other top officials, as well as Pakistani military leaders. Sharif said that the anticipated Saudi investment includes an oil refinery to be established in the southwestern coastal city of Gwadar, where China has built a seaport as part of its global Belt and Road Initiative. The proposed refinery is estimated to cost around \$10 billion. Officials say the refinery will be in place "in 3-5 years" and it will help meet Pakistan's needs of refined oil products, which it currently imports. The surplus, they say, will be exported from Gwadar to other buyers. Saudi investment also intends to target food and agriculture sectors in Pakistan. Pakistani officials insist the Saudi intended investment has no strings attached to it such as asking Pakistan to send its troops to assist in Saudi war in Yemen. [Source: Voice of America]

It is hard to believe that the Saudis will invest so much money in Pakistan without demanding favours in return. America needs Pakistan's troops to spearhead a coalition of soldiers from Islamic countries to stabilize Syria and Yemen. The crown prince's promise of investments appears to be a sweetener for Pakistan to send troops into danger zone under the pretext of an Islamic NATO force headed by Raheel Sharif. As usual, the chief benefactor is America and main loser is the Ummah.