

Headlines:

- **The US Doesn't Plan to Leave Afghanistan**
- **Taiwan: America's Insurance Policy**
- **The Rich Get Richer in the US**

Details:

The US Doesn't Plan to Leave Afghanistan

Since President Trump said all US troops in Afghanistan would be home by Christmas, the military has kept quiet on the possible deadline. In an interview with NPR recently, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley avoided endorsing or rejecting Trump's Christmas deadline and insisted withdrawal is "conditions-based." When asked about Trump's comment and an earlier statement from National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, who said there will be 2,500 US troops in Afghanistan by early 2021, Milley refused to disclose information on possible future numbers. "We have a plan, a series of responsible drawdown options that has been briefed to the president. I'm not going to go into specific numbers for the future," he said. Milley further elaborated: "The whole agreement and all of the drawdown plans are conditions-based, and I expect that we'll have further discussions on the conditions and ensure that they warrant," Some of those conditions, Milley explained, include a reduction of violence, a commitment from the Taliban to prevent groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS from gaining a foothold in Afghanistan, and progress with intra-Afghan peace talks. Talks between the Taliban and the US-backed government are ongoing in Doha.

For the US, Afghanistan was always a means to an end. It has taken longer, cost more and used up much US resources to have the country to act as a farward base for Central Asia, South Asia and China, but the US controls the nation's foreign policy and ante the domestic situation brought to some semblance of stability. The US plans a permanent presence in Afghanistan to achieve this, the size and type will change based on resources. The only way to change this is for a nation to enagge in political struggle with the US and develop political plans to weaken, erode and counter US plans. China and Russia have no such agenda or capabilities, despite their rhetoric. Anew nation based on another ideology would undertake such a mission

Taiwan: America's Insurance Policy

The White House is going forward with the sale of three weapons packages to Taiwan, according to a report from Reuters. Sources said that the Trump administration recently notified Congress about the deal. The weapons being sold include a truck-based rocket launcher made by Lockheed Martin, long-range missiles

made by Boeing, and external sensor pods for F-16 jets. The three sales could be the first of many. In September, sources told Reuters that the Trump administration was preparing for a massive arms sale to Taiwan that could include up to seven types of weapons systems. The news of the arms sale comes a week after US officials encouraged Taiwan to spend more money on defense. At an event last week, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien warned China against an invasion of Taiwan and urged Taipei to increase its military budget. Since the US severed ties with Taipei in 1979, Washington has sold arms to the island to discourage China from invading. Those sales are lucrative for US weapons makers, and Taiwan is a leading customer. In the 2019 fiscal year, Taiwan requested more weapons from the US than any other country.

The US backed the nationalists to rule over China during WW2. They were however driven out by the communists led by Mao and settled on the Taiwan island across mainland China. Despite the warming of ties between the US and China during the 1970s, Taiwan always represented an insurance policy against China. It has become even more important now as China looks to dominate its region.

The Rich Get Richer in the US

50 Americans now have a combined net worth nearly equal to 50% of America's population – some 165 million people. Whilst many Americans have been struggling with the COVID pandemic, the virus has exacerbated inequality in the US, with job losses falling heavily on low-wage service workers and the virus disproportionately infecting and killing people of colour. The 50 richest people in the country are worth almost \$2 trillion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, up \$339 billion from the beginning of 2020. At the same time, the poorest 50% of Americans collectively hold just \$2.08 trillion. Meanwhile, the top one percent of Americans have a combined net worth of \$34.2 trillion. They hold 30% of all US household wealth and more than half of the equity in corporations and in mutual fund shares. Whilst many have been trying to survive the COVID outbreak some have done fantastically well out of everyone else's misery.