

What Does Closer Relations Between Russia and the Taliban Signify?

News:

Sergei Shoigu, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, led a high-ranking delegation to Kabul, where he held discussions with Taliban officials regarding the development of bilateral relations. During this visit, he met with Afghanistan's deputy prime ministers for political and economic affairs, Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior, and General Director of the Intelligence Department. Following this visit, Russian President Vladimir Putin, on the sidelines of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit, announced that Moscow seeks to expand its relations with Afghanistan's current authorities.

Comment:

The relationship between Russia and the Taliban should not merely be viewed as a tool to counter U.S. interests in Afghanistan and the region. Russia has consistently pursued a pragmatic and cautious policy in this area. For instance, during NATO's occupation of Afghanistan, Russia supported the counter-terrorism strategy designed by the U.S. and NATO. While maintaining ties with the Taliban, Russia did not provide them with significant support that could directly threaten U.S. interests. Moreover, Russia played a key role in facilitating peace negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban, offering the Moscow Format as a platform for dialogue — an initiative that also aligned with Russia's political goals.

Russia's closer relationship with the Taliban stems from its geopolitical position and security concerns related to militant group activities. The threats posed by ISIS and the presence of Central Asian jihadist groups in Afghanistan, many of which have pledged allegiance to the Taliban, have driven Russia to adopt a more cooperative approach with the Taliban. As Vladimir Putin recently described the Taliban as an ally in the fight against terrorism.

These relations are also tied to border threats. Central Asia, considered Russia's strategic backyard, is increasingly affected by militant groups. Drug trafficking, a significant regional issue, also remains a major concern for Russia. Consequently, the Russian delegation's visit to Kabul focused more on security and intelligence issues than economic matters. As Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated, "We have repeatedly emphasized that Russia, like other global powers, intends to develop pragmatic cooperation with Kabul on issues of mutual interest, including combating terrorist threats and drug trafficking originating from Afghan territory. Achieving this goal is impossible unless the terrorism label is removed from the Taliban."

In their recent visit, the Russians offered several concessions to the Taliban, including increased trade and transit levels, investment in Afghanistan's infrastructure, removing the Taliban from Russia's list of terrorist groups, and granting Afghanistan

an observer seat in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). However, no detailed information is available about the Taliban's reciprocal promises and commitments. Although, the Putin-led Russia often portrays itself as stronger than it truly is, it remains mired in illusions about its global policies.

Historically, Russia has pursued policies that are against the interests of Muslims, and its crimes continue today in various regions, including inside Russia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. While a foreign policy centered on economic interests and engagement with non-Muslim countries might yield short-term economic benefits; but in the long run, it leads to a departure from Islamic values.

The Taliban should learn lessons from the fate of other Islamic groups and territories. Saudi Arabia's economic policies, for instance, have resulted in events such as dance and music festivals featuring semi-naked women being held in the holy land.

Turkey's economically driven policies have led to deep economic, political, and military cooperation with the Zionist entity, while we see the Turkish leaders shedding crocodile tears for Gaza.

Thus, the contemporary history in Islamic lands teaches us that Islam cannot be implemented within the framework of nation-states. Rather, it can only be applied through Khilafah (Caliphate) – a system which brings unity, dignity, and strength. Conversely, if foreign policy is not based on the proclamation of Islam and a clear understanding of "al-Wala wa al-Bara" (loyalty and disavowal), it will assimilate us into the corrupt and non-Islamic international order, turning us into mere pawns in regional and global power struggles.

Finally, our message to the sincere members of the Taliban is to view Russia as a historical enemy of Islam and Muslims and to strictly avoid deepening relations with it. Strengthening ties with Russia is seen as a betrayal to Muslims in Central Asia, Chechnya, Syria, and Africa. Instead, establish the Second Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly-Guided Caliphate), which is the best path to prosperity, progress, and political strength.

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Yusuf Arsalan

Member of the Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir in Wilayah Afghanistan