The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Karzai Talks Bring Hope of New Projects

By The Moscow Times

January 23, 2011



Afghan leader Hamid Karzai taking part in a wreath-laying ceremony Friday at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. **Denis Sinyakov**

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has invited Russia to rebuild Soviet-era facilities in Afghanistan, courting a nation eager to expand its influence decades after the Soviet Union's costly war there.

"We want to give a new start to vital projects that were begun very long ago," Karzai, on his second visit to Moscow in six months, said at a news conference with President Dmitry Medvedev after talks in the Kremlin on Friday.

The leaders issued a joint declaration in which Russia expressed its readiness to participate in "priority economic projects" in Afghanistan, some dating back to the Soviet era.

The projects included the Salang Tunnel in the Hindu Kush mountains, hydroelectric power facilities in Kabul and Baglan provinces, a customs terminal and a university in Kabul.

Neither the declaration nor the leaders mentioned the cost or potential terms. Russia has said it would rebuild Soviet-era infrastructure in Afghanistan provided that the international community underwrote the cost.

The declaration expressed support for Russian involvement in a proposed gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan, subject to other countries' approval. Ex-Soviet Turkmenistan, eager to lessen reliance on long-dominant gas buyer Russia, has been cool toward Russian participation.

Russia is seeking to increase its influence in Afghanistan, where Soviet forces fought a nearly decade-long war in the 1980s. Karzai, whose country is eyeing the eventual withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces after their own decade-long war against the Taliban, said he wants to step up ties with Moscow.

"Russia is a great power," Karzai said in a speech at Russia's Academy of Sciences. "For us, Russia is ... a teacher."

Moscow has ruled out sending troops to Afghanistan, where some 15,000 Soviet soldiers died fighting mujahedin insurgents before pulling out in 1989.

With the Afghan government expected to take the lead in security nationwide by the end of 2014, Medvedev said Moscow would continue to help train and equip Afghan forces and provide transit routes for NATO.

Russia will hold talks with the United States next month on plans for the sale of 21 Mi-17 helicopters for use in Afghanistan, Russian foreign ministry official Zamir Kabulov said on the sidelines of the Kremlin meetings.

In a separate meeting, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said his country would invest $500 million in the Central Asia-South Asia 1000 electricity project if Russian utility Inter RAO is selected as its operator.

"If our company Inter RAO is granted the right to be the operator, we can join in the construction of the high-voltage CASA-1000 transmission line," Putin said.

The project is designed to transmit electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to South Asia.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/01/23/karzai-talks-bring-hope-of-new-projects-a4414