

Taliban Says No Contacts With Russia Over Islamic State

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Taliban denied reports that representatives had met Russian officials to discuss the common threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan as a British newspaper reported that President Vladimir Putin had met the Taliban leader.

Last week, a senior Russian official was quoted saying that Russia's interests "objectively coincided" with the Taliban in the fight against Islamic State, which has established a foothold in eastern Afghanistan.

He said channels of communication had been established with the Taliban to exchange information.

Moscow, currently conducting a bombing campaign in Syria it says is directed against Islamic State forces, has been concerned about the possible spread of the radical movement from Afghanistan into neighbouring states including Tajikistan or Uzbekistan.

In a statement, the Taliban said it was in contact with countries in the region but had not discussed support against Islamic State, which it calls Daesh.

"The Islamic Emirate has made and will continue to make contacts with many regional countries to bring an end to the American invasion of our country and we consider this our legitimate right," it said, using its formal name.

"But we do not see a need for receiving aid from anyone concerning so-called Daesh and neither have we contacted nor talked with anyone about this issue."

Britain's Sunday Times newspaper this week quoted an unnamed "senior Taliban commander" as saying that Putin met Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour in September to discuss possible Russian support.

"Putin is said to have met Mansour over dinner at a late-night meeting on a military base in Tajikistan in September," the newspaper said.

It quoted a Kremlin spokesman as saying the reports were "not relevant".

Mansour, longtime deputy to Taliban founder Mullah Mohammad Omar, assumed leadership of the movement after the announcement in July that Omar had died more than two years previously and his death concealed.

Taliban militants have been engaged in a bloody struggle with groups declaring loyalty to Islamic State, particularly in the eastern province of Nangarhar, where they are challenging the Taliban for leadership of the insurgency.

The struggle has also been linked to an internal power battle within the Taliban, where several factions have rejected Mansour's leadership claims.

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