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The Taliban Wants Closer Ties With Moscow to Rid Afghanistan of 'U.S. Scourge'

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The Taliban has been chasing closer ties with Russia for the past three years in a bid to rid U.S. forces from Afghanistan, a former Taliban commander has claimed.

Pro-Kremlin newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda spoke to Afghan warlord Syed Mohammad Akbar Agha in an interview which saw the former leader heap praise upon Russian government.

Akbar Agha said the Taliban wanted to build political ties with Moscow to fight the region's "U.S. threat." The militant group had been inviting Russians to meet with them at their "office" in the United Arab Emirates for the past three years, he added.

In return for their support, the Kremlin could expect Taliban fighters to secure "Russia's

borders,”▣ along the lines of the former Soviet Union, Akbar Agha claimed.

“Of course, Russia has its strategic▣goals, and we, the Taliban, have ours,” he said.” But we are▣united. We consider the former Soviet republics as the Russian border▣and we are able to provide stability and security of these borders.”

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Akbar Agha skimmed over the subject of the Soviet-Afghan war, insisting that Afghanistan had always had “excellent historical relations with the Russian people.” He even compared Russian invaders favorably to their American counterparts.

“The hatred and hostility left from the Soviet invasion has run its course,” the warlord said. “We are ready to shake hands with Russia in order to rid ourselves of the scourge of America. History has proven that we are closer to Russia and the former Soviet republics than to the West.”

The former commander was also keen to distance the Taliban from Islamic State (IS), even though both groups have been designated terrorist organizations by the Kremlin. He claimed that IS was created by the United States as part of a strategy to “divide and rule.”

“There's this eternal policy of "divide and rule" which splits Sunni and Shiite Muslims [in Iraq],” he said. “We've never had such problems in Afghanistan and we never will.”

“The Islamic State here is made of foreign mercenaries. Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tajiks and Russian citizens, as well as Arabs and those who have defected from the Taliban. The movement wants to target Central Asia, destabilize the region and threaten Russia's borders,” he said.

Akbar Agha was sentenced to 16 years in prison for kidnapping UN personnel in 2004. He was pardoned by Afghan President Karzai in 2009, and became one of the region's most infamous warlords.

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