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Russia May be Supplying Afghanistan's Taliban, U.S. General Says

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Allauddin Khan / AP

A top U.S. General accused Russia on Thursday of harboring close ties with the Taliban, a militant Islamist group in Afghanistan.

Army General Curtis Scaparrotti, who is also NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, told a Senate Armed Services Committee during a hearing that the Kremlin may be sending supplies to the insurgents.

"I've seen the influence of Russia increasing in terms of association and perhaps even supply to the Taliban," General Scaparrotti said Thursday.

The general did not specify the nature of Russia's alleged relationship with the Taliban.

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

In interviews with the Reuters news agency, Taliban officials confirmed that the group's ties with Russia have strengthened since 2007. However, officials denied reports that they are receiving material support from Russia.

Senior Taliban leader Syed Mohammad Akbar Agha told Russia's Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper this year that the Islamist group were seeking closer ties with Russia in order to rid Afghanistan of the "U.S. threat."

Since invading in 2001, U.S.-led NATO forces have been propping Afghanistan's fledgling government up against a revanchist Taliban insurgency.

“Of course, Russia has its own strategic goals, and we, the Taliban, have ours,” he told the newspaper. "But we are united. We consider the former Soviet republics [of Central Asia] to be the Russian border and we are able to provide stability and security to these borders.”

The Taliban was one of the first overseas groups to be designated a terrorist group in Russia. During the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan, beginning 1979, the U.S. funded a Taliban-led counter-insurgency that led to the Soviet Union's withdrawal.

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