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Russia Calls Taliban 'Rational,' Blames Afghan Gov't for Blocking Talks

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A vital Pakistani-Afghan border crossing reopened last week days after Taliban forces took control of the Afghan side. **TASS**

Russia's top diplomat commended the Taliban for being "of sound mind" and criticized the Afghan government of stalling power-sharing talks on Friday.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov becomes the latest Russian political figure to praise the militant group this week, with the Kremlin calling it a "powerful force" and Russia's envoy for Afghanistan calling its rapid takeover of border areas "positive" for regional security.

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Lavrov said the Taliban delegation promised during its recent Moscow visit not to threaten neighboring ex-Soviet Central Asian states and to fight the Islamic State. He added it has also expressed readiness to discuss Afghanistan's political structure with other stakeholders "despite accusations that they want to create an Islamic emirate based on Sharia law."

“The statement I’m talking about sends a very important signal that [the Taliban] are sane people,” Lavrov said during a webinar on Russia’s foreign policy hosted by the country’s ruling, pro-Kremlin political party.

President Vladimir Putin has named Lavrov, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and the head of Moscow’s main coronavirus hospital at the top of the United Russia party’s list of candidates in this fall’s high-stakes legislative elections.

Lavrov’s inclusion does not require him to step down as foreign minister and take up a seat in parliament if elected in September.

The foreign minister also called on the government in Kabul, which has been ceding significant territory to the Taliban amid the withdrawal of U.S.-led forces, to sit at the negotiating table and not “maintain uncertainty as long as possible.”

The Kremlin, when asked about its changing attitude toward the Taliban, said it does not yet plan to strike the group off its list of banned terrorist groups.

The Taliban and the Islamic State are terrorist organizations banned in Russia.

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