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Russia Hails 'Positive Signal' From Taliban

By AFP

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. **MFA Russia / flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)**

Russia said Tuesday that the Taliban's initial assurances since completing their military takeover of Afghanistan have been a "positive signal" and that the militants are behaving in a "civilized manner."

Moscow has been cautiously optimistic of the new leadership in Kabul and is seeking contact with the militants in an effort to avoid instability spilling over to neighboring ex-Soviet states.

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"I consider it a positive signal that the Taliban in Kabul are declaring and in practice showing their readiness to respect the opinion of others," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"In particular, they said that they are ready to discuss a government in which not only they but other Afghan representatives will also participate."

Lavrov told a meeting in Kaliningrad that Moscow wanted the formation of Kabul's new government to be an inclusive process.

"We support the beginning of an inclusive national dialogue with the participation of all of Afghanistan's political, ethnic and religious groups," he said in comments carried by the state-run Rossiya 24 television channel after the meeting.

Later Tuesday Russia's ambassador to Afghanistan Dmitry Zhirnov met with the Taliban in Kabul, hailing on state television a "positive and constructive" meeting.

"They are currently engaged in restoring order in the city and have succeeded in this," Zhirnov said in an interview from Kabul with Rossiya 24.

He said that the meeting was of a practical nature given that there is still no central authority in Kabul, just a "de facto senior Taliban" member.

He admitted that the Taliban can be "tough" — even shooting criminals, he said — but rejected that there would be a "bloodbath" that "many Westerners" had predicted.

"They behave in a responsible, civilized manner," Zhirnov said.

Russia on Monday said it would decide on recognizing the new Taliban government based on the "conduct" of the new authorities.

The Kremlin has in recent years reached out to the Taliban — which is banned as an "extremist" group in Russia — and hosted its representatives in Moscow several times, most recently last month.

The Taliban is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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