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Iran Says Ready to Work With Russia, China on Afghanistan 'Peace'

By AFP

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Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi on Wednesday told his Russian and Chinese counterparts that Tehran is ready to cooperate with the two countries to establish "stability and peace" in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have capped a staggeringly fast rout of Afghanistan's major cities in just 10 days, achieved with relatively little bloodshed, following two decades of war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

The collapse came as U.S. President Joe Biden moved to complete the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

"Iran is ready to cooperate with China to establish security, stability and peace in Afghanistan and strive for its people's development, progress and prosperity," Raisi told China's Xi Jinping in a phone call initiated from Beijing, Raisi's official website said.

He also expressed Iran's readiness for "any cooperation for establishing peace and calm in Afghanistan" in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We believe all Afghan groups should work together... and turn the U.S. withdrawal into a turning point for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan," he said.

Analysts say the Taliban's advances have put neighbouring Iran on edge, but the majority Shiite Islamic republic is taking a pragmatic stance on the hardline Sunni group's resurgence.

Iran had tense relations with the Taliban between 1996 when they took power and 2001 when they were toppled in an American-led invasion over their links to Al-Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks.

Iran never recognized the Taliban's rule, but has stressed in recent months that they must be "part of a future solution" in Afghanistan.

The ultraconservative Raisi on Monday said the "defeat" and U.S. withdrawal should "offer an opportunity to restore life, security, and lasting peace" in Afghanistan.

On Sunday, Iran's foreign ministry said it had reduced its diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, but has kept its embassy open in Kabul.

Raisi also called on China and Russia to increase Covid-19 vaccine deliveries to Iran.

He hoped that Beijing would "accelerate procurement of millions of doses purchased" and told Putin that Tehran requests "more shipments" over its current "special circumstances."

The Middle East country worst hit by the pandemic, Iran is going through a new wave of Covid deaths and infections amid an inoculation campaign that has progressed slower than authorities had planned.

It has officially recorded more than 99,000 deaths and nearly 4.6 million infections, according to the health ministry.

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