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Russia Urges Taliban, Tajikistan to Avoid Clashes

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Deputy Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexei Zaitsev. **Russian Foreign Ministry Press Office / TASS**

Russia has urged Tajikistan and the Taliban to avoid confrontation on the Afghan-Tajik border amid conflicting reports of a buildup of fighters in the volatile Central Asian region.

Russia's Foreign Ministry issued the call for calm on Thursday days after the Taliban accused Tajikistan of interference, and a Taliban government spokesman tweeted that "thousands" of its fighters were deployed near the Tajik border to address security threats. The Taliban later denied the spokesman's tweet and Tajikistan said it was not witnessing Taliban fighters amassing near its borders.

Alexei Zaytsev, the Russian Foreign Ministry's deputy spokesman, said Moscow is "watching with concern the growing tension in Tajik-Afghan relations amid mutually harsh statements by the two countries' leaders."

"We call on Dushanbe and Kabul to search for mutually acceptable solutions to the current

situation," Zaytsev said.

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The Taliban has previously said that it poses no threat to Afghanistan's neighbors.

Tajikistan has been particularly alarmed by the Taliban's return to power in neighboring Afghanistan after the hasty retreat of U.S. forces in August following a 20-year war. The ex-Soviet republic's strongman leader Emomali Rakhmon has since complained of a buildup of militant groups along its border with Afghanistan and warned that Tajikistan will not recognize the Taliban.

The Russian military has carried out several live-fire exercises at its base in Tajikistan in the wake of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. The Kremlin has been cautiously optimistic about the Taliban, though it is in no hurry to recognize the fundamentalist group as a legitimate Afghan government.

Tajikistan, a former Soviet republic with an economy and military still highly dependent on Russia, shares a nearly 1,500-kilometer border with Afghanistan.

The Taliban is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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