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Russia Evacuates More Citizens From Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan

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The Russian Air Force's Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft at Kabul airport. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

The Russian military said Thursday it has resumed evacuating citizens of Russia and regional allies from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

The Defense Ministry said it has deployed three military aircraft to send 36 metric tons of humanitarian aid to the local population, according to a statement carried by the RBC news website.

The returning planes will transport 380 Russian, Belarusian, Kyrgyz, Armenian, Ukrainian and Afghan nationals to Russia.

"Military medics were sent with the necessary medical equipment to help these people," the Defense Ministry was quoted as saying.

Russian Ambassador to Kabul Dmitry Zhirnov added that 900 Afghan students who have been accepted to Russian universities also signed up for the evacuation planes.

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Zhirnov also commended the "responsible and constructive" Taliban leadership that seized power from the Western-backed government this summer, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency quoted him as saying.

"We all remember what happened at the Kabul airport when the Americans were taking out their own, how many people died then because of the confusion," the Russian envoy said.

"I must say that the Taliban authorities have interacted with us constructively and responsibly on this issue," he added.

The flights are the second widely publicized evacuation of Russian and ex-Soviet citizens from war-torn Afghanistan since the militant group's takeover.

In August, the Defense Ministry evacuated more than 500 Russian citizens seeking to flee the Taliban. Earlier that month, Moscow said it had evacuated "one or two hundred" Russians due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Russia has signaled it is not yet ready to recognize the Taliban as Afghanistan's legitimate government, despite expressing cautious optimism about the extremist group since its Aug. 15 seizure of power in Kabul.

The Taliban is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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