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Russia Becomes First Country to Recognize Taliban Government

By AFP

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Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi (2R) meeting with Russia's Ambassador to Afghanistan Dmitry Zhirnov (3L) at the Foreign Ministry in Kabul. **Afghanistan Foreign Ministry / AFP**

Afghanistan's government said on Thursday that Russia had become the first country to officially recognize its rule, calling it a "brave decision."

The Taliban swept back to power in 2021 after ousting the foreign-backed government and have imposed an austere version of Islamic law.

They have keenly sought official international recognition and investment, as the country recovers from four decades of war, including the Soviet invasion from 1979 to 1989.

The announcement was made after Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi met with Russia's Ambassador to Afghanistan, Dmitry Zhirnov, in Kabul on Thursday.

"This brave decision will be an example for others... Now that the process of recognition has

started, Russia was ahead of everyone," Muttaqi said in a video of the meeting on X.

"Russia is the first country which has officially recognized the Islamic Emirate," Taliban Foreign Ministry spokesman Zia Ahmad Takal told AFP, using the government's name for their administration.

Muttaqi said it was "a new phase of positive relations, mutual respect, and constructive engagement," the Foreign Ministry posted on X.

Russia's Foreign Ministry added on Telegram: "We believe that the act of official recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will boost the development of productive bilateral cooperation between our countries in several areas."

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It highlighted potential "commercial and economic" cooperation in "energy, transportation, agriculture and infrastructure."

The ministry said that Moscow hoped to continue helping Kabul "reinforce regional security and fight against the threats of terrorism and drug trafficking."

Moscow has taken recent steps to normalize relations with the Taliban authorities, removing them from a list of "terrorist organizations" in April and accepting a Taliban ambassador in Kabul.

In July 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin called the Taliban "allies in the fight against terrorism."

Russia was the first country to open a business representative office in Kabul after the Taliban takeover, and has announced plans to use Afghanistan as a transit hub for gas heading to Southeast Asia.

'Allies'

Only Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates recognized the Taliban during their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001.

This time, multiple other states, including China and Pakistan, have accepted Taliban ambassadors in their capitals, but have not officially recognized the Islamic Emirate since the end of the then-insurgency's two-decade war with U.S.-led NATO troops.

There has been limited but growing engagement with the Taliban authorities, particularly from regional neighbors, but also major global players China and Russia.

However, restrictions on women and girls, barring them from education and squeezing them from public life, have been key sticking points for Western nations.

Multiple Afghan women activists were quick to condemn Russia's recognition.

The move "legitimizes a regime that bans girls from education, enforces public floggings, and shelters UN-sanctioned terrorists," said Mariam Solaimankhil, former member of Afghanistan's parliament.

"The move signals that strategic interests will always outweigh human rights and international law."

Senior Taliban figures remain under international sanctions, including by the United Nations.

Another former MP in Kabul, Fawzia Koofi, said any recognition of the Taliban "will not bring peace it will legitimize impunity" and "risk endangering not just the people of Afghanistan, but global security."

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