

# Tasks and grounds for Russia to interact with the Taliban through military intelligence

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Information on Russia's involvement in coordinating the Taliban in Afghanistan, targeting to destroy the U.S.-led coalition troops, is confirmed by certain facts of interaction and cooperation between the Taliban and the Russian leaders. Meanwhile, the work with the Taliban is undoubtedly conducted both through the lens of politics and military, featuring not only the weapons supply, but also military assistance and, most likely, the tactical level of operations planning. Such cooperation has been active for at least 3.5-4 years.

According to the NYT, American intelligence officials have concluded that a Russian military intelligence unit secretly offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants for killing coalition forces in Afghanistan – including targeting American troops – amid the peace talks to end the long-running war there, according to officials briefed on the matter.

The United States in March, 2020 concluded that the Russian [Unit 29155](#), which has been linked to assassination attempts and other covert operations in Europe intended to destabilize the West or take revenge on turncoats, had covertly offered rewards for successful attacks in 2019.

Intel officials claimed Islamist militants, or armed criminal elements closely associated with them, are believed to have collected some bounty money.

The intelligence assessment is said to be based at least in part on interrogations of captured Afghan militants and criminals. The officials did not describe the mechanics of the Russian operation, such as how targets were picked or how

money changed hands.

In November 2019, [the IGTDS highlighted close ties between the Taliban and Russia](#) and the Kremlin's arms sales to the Taliban movement. According to our estimates, Taliban's funding to harm the coalition forces could have started between late 2018 and early 2019. It is arguable highly likely that the Kremlin is seeking to gin up U.S. losses in Afghanistan, thus putting Washington in a position similar to the Soviets in the 80s. Consequently, the growth of the U.S. troops toll, as envisioned by Russia, should cause a wave of discontent in America and trigger a complete withdrawal of the troops from the country. Moreover, Moscow believes this scenario would prevent the U.S. from taking part in other overseas military operations, as well as facilitate further reduction in the number of U.S. military groups abroad.

Although it is not clear whether Russian operatives had deployed inside Afghanistan or met with their Taliban counterparts elsewhere, according to the reports, data analysis suggests that Russian tactical groups were seen in Taliban-controlled territories during at least 2017. In May 2017 chief of the northern province of Baghlan, Brig. Gen. Ikramuddin Sarai, told Pajhwok Afghan News that Russian and other foreign military advisers had arrived to support the Taliban amid heavy clashes.

To be sure, this Russian group is a military assistance unit with the Russian Special Operations Forces, and its tasks might have been not only to assist in the development of operations against coalition forces and the Afghan government, but also to study the peculiarities of the U.S. order of battle in Afghanistan.

It is conceivable that the Taliban sought to refrain from attacks on U.S. troops in Afghanistan for the time being starting in February 2020, despite negotiations and agreements at a certain point. The Taliban have not attacked American

positions since a February agreement. However, it does not mean that such attacks, encouraged by Russia, had not been launched before February.

Operations involving Unit 29155 tend to be much more violent than those involving the cyberunits.

Russia seeks to gain a foothold in Afghanistan by betting on the Taliban as the country's political foundation. Such choice allows the Kremlin to get an ally, and the relations with this ally are based on common values and do not affect the issues of democracy, freedoms, and the primacy of international law. Thus, the Kremlin could speak the same language with the Taliban, using the pragmatic categories of mutual services.

The Russians are ramping up political, economic and propaganda activities to improve their image and reestablish their influence amid pervasive corruption that is impeding progress in Afghanistan.

In 2017 Sen. John McCain said that Russia is [propping up the Taliban](#) to undermine U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.

Russia is ready to offer the Taliban assistance in climbing to power in Afghanistan, demanding to strengthen Moscow's geopolitical hand in the region and grapple with U.S. regional influence in return. The alliance with the Taliban enables Russia to obtain local armed forces that could be used to advance the political agenda to exert pressure and influence on the countries in the region. Pulling the Taliban's strings, Russia will be able to control the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia, playing up the fear of the Taliban's invasion. This opens the way for boosting Russia's military export to these countries, as well as for the rapid deployment of military groups there, including for the purposes to put the screws on the political leadership in these countries.

Russia uses the tactics of incorporating illegal (terrorist, separatist) armed groups leaders into power in Afghanistan,

like in other intel targets yet again. It enables the Kremlin to keep them from drawing closer and establishing relations with the West (because of a categorical divergence in values and image risks for those who engage with them), as well as maintaining the Kremlin's influence and the full dependence for such authorities on Moscow.

Taliban-backed Russia's return to Afghanistan is in line with Moscow's confrontational model of the Cold War era, where Vladimir Putin had returned it. The foreign policy that Putin understands comes down to the need to have an external enemy, enabling to consolidate Russian society around the government, as well as take responsibility for Russia's failures in domestic social and economic policy.

Thus, the Kremlin's come-back to Afghanistan is symbolic since Russia extremely writhes at being defeated in this country in 1979-1989 and blames the U.S. on it. The Kremlin believes that strengthening Russia's hand in Afghanistan and ousting the United States from there is a revenge, and the Russian government got the better of Washington, showing greater efficiency than the Soviet one. The mounting U.S. losses in Afghanistan is a kind of Kremlin's revenge for the Soviets' casualties in the Afghan war, Moscow blames Washington for, despite the Russian invasion of Kabul in 1979.

Russia's policy under Vladimir Putin highlights the deliberate attempts to set the record that triggered the Soviet breakup straight. This explains the Russian President's statements as for the task to revive the Soviet Union and return the Russian lands.

Russia is highly unlikely to be seeking revenge on NATO forces for a [2018 battle in Syria](#) in which the American military killed several hundred pro-Syrian forces, including numerous Russian mercenaries, as they advanced on an American outpost. First, the Kremlin interacted with the Taliban before 2018, and second, those killed in Syria were not military personnel,

but Wagner Group mercenaries, Moscow not taking their losses as a challenge.

An alliance with the Taliban enables the Kremlin to double down its hand in the region. For example, to obtain additional say over Pakistan that has been trying to drive the Taliban out of North and South Waziristan for over 10 years. Likewise, Moscow gets additional argument in relations with Iran, which is concerned about the separatist ideas of the Baluchi people to set up their own state on the border with Afghanistan. Influence on Pakistan and Iran opens up potential for indirect influence on India and China.

In 2019 Zamir Kabulov, a chain-smoking former KGB agent at the center of Moscow's Afghanistan involvement since the 1980s and now special envoy in Afghanistan wanted to know whether Washington would agree to secret talks about the country's future with Russia, Iran and several other nations.

Mil intel 29155's involvement in working with the Taliban in Afghanistan is also proved by the fact that a meeting with the Taliban in February 2019 was held at the President Hotel in Bolshaya Yakimanka, Moscow. This facility, being the part of the Presidential Administration property, came to the IGTD analysts' attention when studying [the activity of Russia's anti-globalization movement](#), responsible for working with a large network of Internet trolls and separatist movements' backing around the world.

The analysis published in December 2019 suggests that Russia's anti-globalization movement leaders are associated with the Russian military intel unit 74455 and 29155, related to Russian military intelligence. Consequently, the U.S. intelligence community data as for Russian's military intelligence involvement in contacts with the Taliban and the agreements on military operations against coalition forces in Afghanistan are implicitly confirmed.

These facts and assessments provide additional arguments to adopt a law recognizing Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism. The Republican Study Committee (RSC), which has 147 legislators from the Republican Party, has submitted [Strengthening America and countering global threats paper](#), where they propose to extend sanctions against Moscow and label Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism. This will ratchet up pressure on Moscow and cut back on backing terrorist organizations around the world.

Source: [igtlds.org](http://igtlds.org)