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**'RUSSIA AWAITS NATO EVIDENCE ON TALIBAN AID'**

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Russia on Thursday said it was awaiting documentary evidence from NATO regarding Moscows alleged support to the Afghan Taliban.

Russian President's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov told a press conference that NATO had not provided any documentary evidence to support its accusations of Russia supporting the Afghan Taliban.

According to Sputnik agency, Zamir said Russia was waiting for NATO's reaction about helicopters without identification marks that were seen over the territory of Afghanistan. We did not receive any answer," the diplomat noted.

The NATO-Russia Council met on Thursday for the third time this year in Brussels, this time after alleged Moscows aiding of Afghan Taliban.

The meeting, chaired by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, discussed topics relating to Afghanistan, Ukraine and risk reduction.

After the meeting, Stoltenberg told reporters they had a useful discussion on issues of mutual concerns. Our dialogue is not easy, but that is exactly why our dialogue is so important, he stressed.

He said the Western military alliance and Russia "continue to have fundamental differences," particularly regarding the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Stoltenberg was talking to reporters after NATO ambassadors met with Russian envoy Aleksandr

Grushko at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels.

The NATO chief described the latest session of the NATO-Russia Council as a "frank and open discussion" on Ukraine, Afghanistan, transparency, and risk reduction.

We also had a frank exchange on the security situation in Afghanistan, including the regional terrorist threat. Our analyses differ considerably.

But he said they all shared the same interest in ensuring security and stability in Afghanistan. Russia provided a briefing on its policy in Afghanistan and allies set out NATO's substantial efforts to strengthen the Afghan security forces, he said.

It is important that everybody supports the National Unity Government. This is the best way to help fight terrorists in Afghanistan and achieve greater security and stability for the whole region.

Relations between Moscow and the West have been severely strained over issues including Russia's seizure of Ukraine's Crimea region in March 2014 and its support for separatists who control parts of eastern Ukraine.

Petr Pavel, who is chief of NATO's Military Committee, said on the eve of the meeting that Afghanistan will be on the order of business because it is in the interest of both NATO and Russia to fight terrorism.

Asked about reports that Moscow is supplying arms to the Afghan Taliban, which U.S.-led coalition forces are fighting, Pavel said he had not seen any hard evidence of this.

However, he said he has seen reports that Russia is providing fuel to companies that in turn sell such fuel to the militants.

Earlier this week, President Ashraf Ghani accused Russia and Pakistan of supporting the Afghan Taliban who he said responded to his call for peace with suicide attacks.

Ghani, who travelled to southeastern Paktia province to condole with families of the victims of recent terrorist attacks, accused Pakistan and Russia of providing weapons, training and money.

The president had said: Every Talib should ask himself and the masses should ask the Taliban the one basic question that to show a single problem which cannot be solved through dialogue.

The Taliban are accepting guns from those who have blood on their hand of 1.5 million Afghans.

The Russian diplomatic mission in Afghanistan strongly rejected the Afghan presidents statement which he made during a trip to southeastern Paktia province.

The Russian Embassy in a statement had said they considered unacceptable such statements by the head of a friendly state of Afghanistan.

The embassy statement recalled Afghan officials had confirmed at different levels that such accusations against Moscow were groundless.

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Kaynak/Source: