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## **TALIBAN CONTROLS MORE THAN HALF OF AFGHANISTAN'S TERRITORY**

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Russian News Agency (16 July 2018)

Taliban (a radical movement outlawed in Russia) is present in most of Afghanistans provinces and controls more than a half of its territory, Russian presidents special envou on Afghanistan and director of the Russian foreign ministrys second Asia department, Zamir Kabulov, said in an interview with the Kommersant daily on Sunday.

"Taliban is very integrated into Afghanistans military and political life. It controls more than a half of the countrys territory by now," he said.

According to the Russian diplomat, Taliban is present in most of the countrys provinces and is a key force even where an official administration is present. "As a matter of fact, they establish parallel power bodies, including a court system Afghan people have more confidence in than in the official one," he noted.

"So, in this sense, they are very integrated into Afghanistans state life," he added.

Militants from the terrorist group Islamic State are present in nine out of Afghanistans 34 provinces, he added.

"So far, luckily, they are present only in nine Afghan provinces. But what we are worried about most of all that these are northern Afghan provinces bordering Central Asia," he said. "It is a serious threat for us. So, we cannot play down the Islamic State threat."

"History, including Afghan history, teaches us that problems must be resolved before they grow into a serious threat," the diplomat noted.

Kabulov also said that Russia will invite representatives of the Taliban radical movement (outlawed in Russia) to a Moscow-format meeting on Afghanistan to be held before the end of this summer.

"In order to facilitate the process of launching negotiations we, already last year, we initiated dialogue of the so-called Moscow format. By the end of this summer, we will organize another meeting in this format, but it needs thorough preparations to yield, if not a breakthrough, but a visible result. We want it to be the beginning of real progress, which is possible only when Taliban begins to speak with the Afghan government or with a more or less broad spectrum of the Afghan establishment," he said.

According to Kabulov, the problem is that Taliban considers Afghanistans current government "as a puppet one installed by the Americans, and, hence, illegitimate." "They dont want to hold talks with it but want to negotiate separately with the Americans," he noted.

He stressed that the key goal of the Moscow format is to help launch dialogue between the Afghan government and Taliban. "If we dont invite Taliban, there will be no dialogue," the Russian diplomat said. "That is why we hope Taliban will come to the meeting."

The Moscow format involves representatives from Afghanistan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The previous round of consultations was held in April 2017.

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