

MODI, PUTIN DISCUSS AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

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Diplomatic ties: NSA Ajit Doval and other officials during a virtual meeting of BRICS NSAs in New Delhi. PTIPTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday discussed charting out a “coordinated” strategy in Afghanistan, while National Security Advisers (NSA) from the five BRICS countries met virtually to discuss developments there with a focus on combating terrorism.

Officials said the Russian President called Mr. Modi to discuss developments in Afghanistan, with the two leaders agreeing to set up a “permanent bilateral channel” on the issues arising from the Taliban takeover.

“Had a detailed and useful exchange of views with my friend President Putin on recent developments in Afghanistan,” Mr. Modi tweeted after the 45-minute conversation.

Among the particular areas of concern were ensuring regional security, countering radicalisation and spread of “terrorist ideology”, and the proliferation of drugs as a consequence of the developments, a Russian Embassy spokesperson said.

These were also issues that figured as the NSAs from India, Russia, China, Brazil and South Africa met virtually, one of the key meetings in the lead-up to next month’s BRICS leaders’ summit, which India is chairing.

NSA Ajit Doval hosted the virtual meeting. The Ministry of External Affairs said the meeting “reviewed the regional and global political and security scenario with particular reference to current developments in Afghanistan, Iran, West Asia and the Gulf, and emerging threats to national security, such as cybersecurity”.

The meeting also discussed counter-terrorism, and India raised “the issue of cross-border terrorism and activities of groups such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba [LeT] and Jaish-e-Mohammed [JeM], which enjoy State support and threaten peace and security,” it said.

The Ministry added that the representatives “adopted and recommended the BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan”.

On Afghanistan, there do remain differences within the grouping, with China and Russia broadly aligning their positions.

China and Russia, along with Pakistan, are among the few countries that continue to keep their embassies open in Afghanistan in contrast to India, which has evacuated all diplomatic personnel.

Both Russia and China continue to maintain their diplomatic presence in Kabul and have hosted Taliban delegations on a number of occasions, most recently by China on July 28. However, both are yet to offer recognition to the new regime.

How far India and Russia can indeed coordinate their strategies, as both leaders discussed on Tuesday, remains to be seen.

Both Indian and Russian officials said it was significant that Mr. Putin reached out to Mr. Modi directly, indicating the Russian interest in working with India bilaterally, and multilaterally at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and at other forums like BRICS, despite the differences between India and China on the Afghanistan issue, and on the role of Pakistan in facilitating the Taliban. China's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the BRICS NSA's meet was "an important platform for the five countries to strengthen political security cooperation".

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