

RUSSIA FOR TALIBAN'S INCLUSION IN AFGHAN INTERIM GOVT.

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Russia said on Friday it backed the Taliban's integration into a future interim government in Afghanistan, as global powers ramped up efforts to secure a peace deal and end decades of war.

The Foreign Ministry's comments come as a May deadline looms for the U.S. to end its two-decade military involvement in the ravaged country.

Washington has encouraged the Afghan leadership to work towards establishing an "inclusive" government and proposed talks with the Taliban to secure a peace accord.

"The formation of an interim inclusive administration would be a logical solution to the problem of integrating the Taliban into the peaceful political life of Afghanistan," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters ahead of talks next week in Moscow.

But she added that the decision should be made "by the Afghans themselves and should be resolved during negotiations on national reconciliation".

Regional stability

U.S. President Joe Biden is reviewing whether to stick to a deal with the Taliban negotiated by his predecessor Donald Trump, who wanted to pull out the U.S. troops from Afghanistan by May.

The Biden administration has signalled that it wants to take a hard look at Mr. Trump's deal and its repercussions for Afghanistan and regional stability.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote a letter to Afghan leaders, encouraging them to consider a "new, inclusive government."

The U.S. withdrawal is being complicated by a new surge in fighting and concern that a speedy exit may only unleash further chaos.

Mr. Blinken's letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said bluntly that Washington feared the "security situation will worsen and the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains" if the U.S. suddenly withdrew. Mr. Blinken proposed a 90-day reduction in violence that would avoid the Taliban's annual bloody spring offensive.

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