

Afghanistan: Russia Draws Redlines for U.S. Moscow Will Not Accept U.S. Military Presence in Central Asia

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Moscow has categorically stated that it will not accept a US military presence in the Central Asian region. This reiteration has come at the level of Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov who told Tass that Afghanistan had been discussed at a meeting with Victoria Nuland, the visiting US Undersecretary of State in Moscow on Tuesday.

Ryabkov added, “We emphasised the unacceptability of a US military presence in Central Asian countries in any form whatever.”

Prima facie, Ryabkov has squashed the disinformation media campaign by Washington that at the Russia-US summit in Geneva in June, President Vladimir Putin had offered to President Biden that Pentagon could use Russian bases in the Central Asian region for conducting future (“out-of-the-horizon”) operations in Afghanistan.

The The Wall Street Journal had earlier referred to its sources that Russia and the US had allegedly discussed the possibility of the US military using Russian bases in Central Asia at the level of Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with Gen. Valery Gerasimov, the Russian Chief of General Staff at a meeting in Helsinki on September 24 “at the request of President Biden’s National Security Council staff.” [read more](#)

Washington’s ploy appeared to have been to create misconceptions among the Central Asian states regarding Russia’s intentions. To be sure, just before the Helsinki meeting of the two generals, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also took a meeting of the so-called [C5+1 Ministerial on September 22](#) to discuss “coordination on Afghanistan” with his Central Asian counterparts.

As follow up, the US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman appeared in the steppes just 10 days later to meet the leadership in Tashkent presumably to fathom whether Uzbekistan might be open to Pentagon having some basing facilities in that country. Apparently, she drew blank.

Ryabkov underscored that there is no scope at all for the US to have a military presence “in any form whatever” in the Central Asian steppes.

Conceivably, Ryabkov voiced a consensus opinion among regional states, including China and Iran.

From such a perspective, a regional consensus is steadily evolving in regard of the Afghan situation. Tehran disclosed yesterday that it will soon be hosting the second foreign-minister level meeting of Afghanistan’s neighbours and has sought an enlargement of the format as a special case to include Russia as well. That is to say, the format will now comprise Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China and Russia. (India stands excluded!)

Ryabkov’s remark comes after the meeting between the Taliban officials and a US delegation led by the deputy director of the CIA in Doha in the weekend where Taliban ruled out any form of unilateral military operations by the US on Afghan soil under whatever pretext.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has also categorically refused to facilitate any US operations directed against Afghanistan. Although India is increasingly acting as a junior partner of the US on regional security issues, it is unlikely that the Modi Government will want to provoke the Taliban government, either.

That is to say, the Pentagon’s much-touted plan for staging “out-of horizon” operations in Afghanistan turns out to be a pipe dream. Apart from outer space, perhaps, such operations will have to be staged from the Pentagon bases in West Asia and their efficacy is in serious doubt.

Ryabkov’s remark testifies to extreme wariness in Moscow about the US military or intelligence presence in or around Central Asia where Russia has profound security concerns. Given the US’ clandestine links with the ISIS and its history of using terror groups as geopolitical tools, Russia has to be extra-cautious.

So will China and Iran be. The Central Asian states are also mindful of the US strategy to incite colour revolutions to bring about “regime change” in the ex-Soviet republics. The US-government-funded media organs are waging a sustained information war to discredit the Central Asian leaderships.

Broadly, a schism is appearing in the international community as regards the way forward in Afghanistan. The regional states refuse to follow Washington’s lead. India is probably the solitary exception, but here too, Delhi’s animus against Pakistan and China could be the real leitmotif.

Significantly, Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping did not participate in the G20 Extraordinary Leaders’ Meeting on Afghanistan on Tuesday under Italy’s Presidency. The Italian initiative had aimed at mobilising support for the US leadership. The unspoken core issue is of course the international recognition of the Taliban government. The US expects that no country should recognise the Taliban government until Washington is ready.

The document summarising the outcome of yesterday’s G20 meeting deftly sidesteps the issue of recognition. Instead, it de facto gives green signal for a comprehensive engagement with the Taliban government.

The Summary inter alia states: "Solutions must be identified to guarantee the provision of basic services – in particular in education and health – that go beyond delivering emergency aid, provided those services are open to all. The functioning of the payment system and the overall financial stability should also be addressed. G20 countries will cooperate with the International Organisations, International Financial Institutions, including Multilateral Development Banks, and humanitarian actors in this field."

"G20 countries invite the World Bank to explore possible ways to redirect support to international agencies with presence in the country for humanitarian efforts." [read more](#)

The big question is about the diplomatic recognition of the Taliban government by the regional states. Pakistan is keen that the regional states should evolve a collective decision.

Indeed, the Deputy Minister of Information and Culture in the Taliban government Zabihullah Mujahid told TASS on Monday, "We are negotiating with Russia, mainly on the recognition of our government and the resumption of the work of the embassies. Resolving these issues will pave the way for further cooperation." [read more](#)

We may expect some regional initiative before long on recognition. The criterion for recognition is usually a government's effective control of the entire country.

Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, when the victorious Mujahideen warlords grabbed power in Kabul in April 1992, no one from the West or East demanded that Burhanuddin Rabbani ought to form an "inclusive government" or should accommodate Afghan women. Even countries like India do not necessarily have "inclusive government".

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