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RECOGNITION OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE BY RUSSIA: MUTUAL GOALS AND NEEDS



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In this issue:

- Recognition of the Islamic Emirate by Russia: Mutual Goals and Needs 3
- Recognition of the Islamic Emirate by Russia in the Light of International Law..... 3
- Russia's Objectives in Recognizing the Islamic Emirate 4
- Objectives and Needs of the Islamic Emirate 5
- Conclusion 6
- Recommendations 6
- References..... 7



RECOGNITION OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE BY RUSSIA: MUTUAL GOALS AND NEEDS

Introduction

Four years ago today, on August 15, 2021, the forces of the Islamic Emirate overthrew the republican government in Afghanistan, a system that had been established with the support of Western countries, and took control of Kabul. Within a short period, they announced a caretaker government and consolidated their authority across all provinces of the country.

Russia, which during the first period of the Islamic Emirate's rule not only refused to recognize this government but also collaborated extensively with its opponents, had calculated its strategic interests in supporting the U.S.-led attack on Afghanistan and provided various forms of assistance to the Western coalition.

However, when this coalition failed in Afghanistan, several countries closed their diplomatic missions in Kabul. Despite this, Russia was among the few countries that kept its embassy open in Afghanistan and, in its international positions, supported engagement and interaction with the Islamic Emirate. Moreover, Russia invited the leaders of the Islamic Emirate to several important conferences. It even removed the Islamic Emirate from its list of terrorist organizations, a designation that had been imposed in 2003. Russia accepted political representatives of the Islamic Emirate in its own country and has, in fact, officially recognized the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan.

This raises an important question: Despite its historically tense relations with the Islamic Emirate, on what grounds did Russia decide to recognize the Islamic Emirate? What objectives does Russia pursue through this recognition? Furthermore, this analytical article will clarify what significance Russia's recognition holds for the Islamic Emirate itself, and what goals the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan might be able to achieve as a result. These are the questions this analysis seeks to explore.

RECOGNITION OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE BY RUSSIA IN THE LIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

In simple terms, "recognition" means acceptance and acknowledgment. In the context of international law and international relations, this term refers to accepting and confirming the international legal personality of a new state or government.

The United Nations, as an international institution, has worked since its establishment to create clarity and certainty in global political affairs by adopting international laws for certain key aspects of international conduct. For this purpose, in 1949, the UN's International Law



Commission included the topic of recognition in a list of fourteen subjects for which legal rules and guidelines would be developed to guide significant areas of international behavior.

After a comprehensive analysis and consultations, the International Law Commission concluded that states' actions regarding recognition are not uniform and that recognition is not a strictly legal process but rather depends on the foreign policy and political interests of each state. Therefore, to this day, no country is legally obliged to recognize a new state or government, and each country decides on this issue based on its political interests and ideological inclinations.

In international law, two main theories guide states in recognizing new governments: the Tobar Doctrine and the Estrada Doctrine. The Tobar Doctrine was proposed in 1907 by Carlos Tobar (1853–1920), a former Foreign Minister of Ecuador. According to this doctrine, a new government in a country should be recognized only if it has come to power through democratic means, based on the constitution and official processes.

The Estrada Doctrine, proposed in 1930 by Gennaro Estrada (1887–1937), the Foreign Minister of Mexico, takes the opposite view. It argues that recognition of new regimes should not depend on whether they are democratic, but rather on the stability of the government and the extent of its control over its territory.

It appears that Russia applied the Estrada Doctrine in its assessment of recognizing the Islamic Emirate. On July 3, 2025, Zamir Kabulov, Russia's Special Representative for Afghanistan, confirmed in an interview with a state media outlet that Russia officially recognizes the Islamic Emirate as the legitimate government in Afghanistan.

This announcement was not only confirmed by Russia's Foreign Minister. Still, it was also officially communicated by Dmitry Zhirnov, Russia's ambassador to Afghanistan, during a meeting with Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. As a result, Russia became the first country to recognize the Islamic Emirate's government in Afghanistan for a second time. For the first time, the flag of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was raised over the building of Afghanistan's embassy in Moscow.

RUSSIA'S OBJECTIVES IN RECOGNIZING THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE

Russia seeks to strengthen relations with a government in Afghanistan that can effectively combat terrorism, to address its security concerns, and contain threats that extend not only to Central Asia but also directly to Russia itself. The Russian government has concluded that this objective can be better achieved with the presence of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. In this context, Russian President Vladimir Putin has stated that "the Taliban are reliable allies in the fight against terrorism."



Since this goal could not be fully realized without official recognition of the Islamic Emirate, Russia found it necessary to grant such recognition.

Moreover, according to information from international organizations, after the return of the Islamic Emirate to power in Afghanistan, opium cultivation in the country has decreased by 95 percent. Countering drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan has long been one of Russia's key concerns, as drug smuggling from Afghanistan into Russian territory poses a serious threat to Russia's national security. Given that the Islamic Emirate has initiated and continues to implement effective measures in this area, Russia has been further motivated to recognize the Islamic Emirate as the legitimate and legal government in Afghanistan, in hopes of encouraging continued and intensified efforts against narcotics.

Economic factors, regional connectivity, and trade are also among Russia's objectives in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a country heavily reliant on imports and imports food, oil, gas, and other goods from Russia. In addition, Russia aims to use Afghanistan as a corridor to expand its trade with South Asian countries. Achieving these goals would not be feasible through engagement with a government lacking official recognition; therefore, Russia has found it necessary to recognize the Islamic Emirate.

Furthermore, Russia is striving to enhance its regional and international influence and to counter the penetration of Western countries in the region. Now that Afghanistan has freed itself from Western dominance after twenty years, Russia is working to strengthen its relations with the country. This improvement in bilateral relations and cooperation cannot happen effectively without formal recognition. Therefore, Russia's diplomatic establishment has decided to officially recognize the Islamic Emirate as the government in Afghanistan.

OBJECTIVES AND NEEDS OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE

Upon coming to power, the Islamic Emirate needed to make its voice heard in international forums and organizations through its representatives. Achieving this goal effectively is not possible without official recognition. With Russia's recognition, the Islamic Emirate can now partially fulfill this objective.

Moreover, Russia is an important regional power and a member of the United Nations Security Council. Therefore, recognition of the Islamic Emirate by such a country may encourage other states to follow suit, contributing to the international legitimacy of the Islamic Emirate and bringing an end to its political isolation.

In addition, following recognition by Russia, legal and regulatory obstacles to expanding economic and trade relations are removed. This enables the Islamic Emirate to broaden its



economic and commercial ties with Russia, which is essential for alleviating economic pressures.

Domestically, recognition strengthens public confidence in the Islamic Emirate, increases the number of its supporters, and conversely, weakens its internal opponents. These opponents face negative consequences for their political and military activities, encountering serious obstacles to their efforts.

Recognition of the Islamic Emirate by the Russian Federation also represents a significant success in the foreign policy of the Islamic Emirate. Although Russia had previously supported the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan, the positive aspects it perceived in the Islamic Emirate prompted a shift in its foreign policy and opened the path for bilateral relations. According to Zamir Kabulov, Russia's Special Representative for Afghanistan, these relations began in 2015. He stated that Russia has maintained contacts with the Taliban and engaged in intelligence exchanges. The gradual development and strengthening of these ties reflect the growing capacity and effectiveness of the Islamic Emirate's foreign policy apparatus.

CONCLUSION

The issue of recognizing governments does not follow any specific legal procedure, as states base their decisions primarily on their political interests and considerations. Russia's recognition of the Islamic Emirate reflects this reality. From a legal perspective, this recognition is influenced by the principles of the Estrada Doctrine, which emphasizes that the key factors in recognizing a government should be its stability and the extent of its effective control over its territory.

Through recognizing the Islamic Emirate, Russia seeks to expand its relations with Afghanistan to address the security concerns it associates with Afghanistan, doing so in cooperation with the Islamic Emirate to manage those threats effectively.

Likewise, the Islamic Emirate, through this recognition by Russia, can strengthen its domestic legitimacy and move closer to achieving international legitimacy. Consequently, other countries, particularly those maintaining good relations with Russia, may also be encouraged to recognize the Islamic Emirate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The foreign policy apparatus of the Islamic Emirate should consider this development as the starting point for broader diplomatic engagement with the world and the region and should accelerate efforts to build trust with other regional and international actors.



2. The international community, especially regional countries, should take into account the current realities in Afghanistan and intensify comprehensive efforts to prevent the negative political consequences of Afghanistan's isolation on both global and regional levels.
3. Russia should remain committed to the principles of equality and mutual respect in its economic, trade, and political relations with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.
4. The Islamic Emirate, in the process of strengthening its relations with Russia, should also remain mindful of the concerns of Western countries and seek to maintain a balanced approach.
5. The Islamic Emirate should make efforts to address the legitimate concerns of other regional and global actors, thereby creating the conditions for broader international recognition from additional states.

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