

Russia Has Made Friends With a Former Enemy

Back when Russia was known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it attempted to occupy Afghanistan for several years, a move that is sometimes referred to as “Russia’s Vietnam.”

The occupation provided a proxy opportunity for the United States to wage actual war against its Cold War adversary, and in the meantime, vast numbers of Pashtuns from Afghanistan took refuge in neighboring Pakistan. This led to the emergence, less than 10 years after the Soviet withdrawal, of the Taliban.

That’s the same Taliban that aligned with al Qaeda and harbored Osama bin Laden at the time he was planning terrorist attacks against the United States—including the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. It’s the same Taliban that American forces still face in Afghanistan today.

And, according to testimony from Army Gen. Joseph Votel, Commander of U.S. Central Command, it’s the same Taliban that is now receiving military aid from Russia.

“I believe what Russia is attempting to do is they are attempting to be an influential party in this part of the world,” he told U.S. Rep. Susan Davis (D-Calif.) during committee testimony Wednesday. “I think it is fair to assume they may be providing some sort of support to [the Taliban], in terms of weapons or other things that may be there.”

Votel said there was still a lot the Intelligence Community doesn’t know about Russian efforts to align with the Taliban, or of other efforts to influence the situation in its impoverished neighbor. But, he urged a continued commitment to support the government of President Asraf Ghani.

The Trump administration is still formulating a long-term plan for military commitment to Afghanistan, which is one of the least-developed countries in the world. U.S. military forces have been staged in that country for nearly 16 years. {eo}