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Russia estimates some 3,500 ISIS militants operate in Afghanistan

October 8, 2015

The Russian intelligence estimates some 3,500 militants loyal to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group are operating in Afghanistan.

Speaking to a security conference in Moscow, a senior Russian diplomat, has said militants from Russia are also trained by ISIS instructors in Afghanistan.

Zamir Kabulov, President Putin's special representative for Afghanistan, quoted by Russia Today, said "There are several camps operated by [Islamic State, previously ISIS/ISIL, in Afghanistan] that train people from Central Asia and some regions of Russia. They speak Russian there."

He said instructors including Arabs, Pakistanis and even people with US and British citizenship are busy training militants in those camps.

"The rise of [Islamic State] in Afghanistan is a high-priority threat. Just think about it: [ISIS] showed up in Afghanistan for real just a year ago, and now it has 3,500 fighters plus supporters who may be recruited into the ranks of the militants," Kabulov added.

A Russian General Valery Gerasimov, who heads the Russian General Staff, said overall there are some 50,000 fighters belonging to more than 4,000 militant groups in Afghanistan.

According to gerasimov, Afghan Taliban is by far the strongest militant movement in the country, with some 40,000 fighters in their ranks.

However, Colonel General Igor Sergun, the head of the Main Intelligence Directorate, Russia's military intelligence agency, said Taliban's dominant position is being challenged by Islamic State, which sees Afghanistan as a recruiting ground, a source of income and a foothold for further expansion over Central Asia.

"ISIL [a former name for Islamic State, along with ISIS] uses the worsening of the situation in Afghanistan to strengthen its position," he said, adding that such development poses a real threat to Russia's security.

"We estimate that ISIL gets new troops by bribing field commanders of Taliban, the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan and other radical religious organizations operating on Afghan territory," Sergun said.

This comes as the United Nations released a report late last month warning that the terror group is making inroads in Afghanistan with the number of sympathizers and followers growing across the country.

According to the report around 70 militants of the terror group are busy in forming the core of the group's branch in Afghanistan.

The report further added that the group is recruiting followers in at least 25 provinces of Afghanistan with 10 percent of the sympathizers belonging to the Taliban group.