

Officials from both Russia and the Taliban, the Islamist militant group, have separately condemned Washington's extended presence in Afghanistan, where the U.S. military's efforts to help local security forces battle insurgents has entered its 16th year.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid presented journalists Tuesday with [a 1,600-word open letter](#) addressed to President Donald Trump. In it, the group said that the U.S.'s campaign to stabilize the war-torn Asian nation was in vain, despite "spending billions of dollars, sacrificing thousands of soldiers and losing tens of thousands to injuries and mental illness."

The militants maintained that their interests were merely national, despite their links to global jihadi group Al-Qaeda, and urged Trump to reverse his predecessors' policies, which the Taliban said only further destabilized the country.

"Your forces have spent 16 years in our country Afghanistan and have used every means to win this war," the letter went on. "Despite the fact that the former administration officials created a large coalition to attack our country, your 16-year military presence in Afghanistan has resulted in Afghanistan becoming the most unstable country security wise, the most corrupt administrative wise and the poorest country economically."

The letter continued, "The reason behind all this is because foreign invasion is being used to subdue the will of our proud Afghan nation, our national integrity is stripped and keys to power have been handed to individuals who are the most repulsive, wretched and hated faces in the Afghan society due to their servitude to foreigners," it added.



Left-wing Afghan Solidarity members hold placards and chant slogans as they stage a protest against the Afghan government and Taliban militants, following a Taliban and ISIS attack in Mirzawalang village, in Kabul, on August 11. A number of Afghans have become disillusioned with the U.S.'s long-term military presence in their country after decades of war with insurgents. WAKIL KOHSAR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The letter also referenced prior U.S. support for the mujahedeen, a loose coalition of armed opposition groups that overthrew the Soviet-backed communist government of Afghanistan in 1992. A number of these organizations went on to found the Islamic State of Afghanistan, while others ultimately established the Taliban, which overthrew the government to form the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996. War between factions continued through 2001.

Following the 9/11 attacks, Afghanistan's Taliban leadership refused to [extradite Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden](#) to the U.S., prompting a mass invasion of the country.

U.S.-led NATO forces have been struggling to defeat the militants ever since, in what is the longest war in U.S. history.

Russia says it's a staunch opponent of the Taliban, but it also has strongly denounced the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union withdrew from the country in 1989 after fighting the U.S.-backed mujahedeen, but reports suggested Russian President Vladimir Putin's government may have [established diplomatic channels with the militants](#) and [possibly even armed them](#) in anticipation that they would ultimately play a greater role in Afghanistan's future.

Putin's special representative for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, criticized the U.S. for destabilizing Afghanistan, which he called an "incubator for international terrorism." He also decried potential U.S. plans to [replace soldiers with private armies](#), which he referred to as "mercenaries."

"Since the U.S. Army is unable to do anything serious, let it leave Afghanistan," Kabulov told Moscow-based daily [Izvestia](#) in remarks translated by China's state-run [Xinhua News Agency](#).

"The Americans are in despair, and their plans to replace professional military men with mercenaries are foolish. It will not lead to anything good, and mercenaries will simply escape. They recruit them for money from around the world. How are they going to fight against the Taliban in general?" Kabulov added, according to the Communist Party's [Pravda](#) newspaper.



Veterans lay flowers at the monument for the dead in the Soviet war in Afghanistan during a memorial ceremony in Kiev, Ukraine, on February 15. The decade-long conflict killed nearly 15,000 Soviet troops, tens of thousands more Russia-backed forces and their U.S.-backed mujahedeen foes, and hundreds of thousands of Afghan civilians. It has been compared to the U.S.'s experience in Vietnam. SERGEI SUPINSKY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The Taliban often fashions itself as a local, nationalist movement, but it is a key Al-Qaeda ally. Taliban fighters often clash with a competing hard-line Sunni organization, the Islamic State militant group (ISIS), but local Afghan officials say the two have worked together recently, with deadly results. [Militants from both groups joined forces last week](#) to slaughter up to 50 men, women and children in the Sayad district of Afghanistan's northern Sar-e-Pul province. Mujahedeen denied that the Taliban worked with ISIS or that it killed civilians.

Army General John Nicholson, the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, has requested additional troops to train, advise and assist local forces fighting both ISIS and the Taliban. But some officials, including Trump himself, have questioned U.S. goals in the country. Defense Secretary James Mattis said

Monday that the government was "very, very close" to making a decision on the war in Afghanistan, according to [Reuters](#).