

Trump Denies He Was Briefed on Russia-Taliban Bounty Intelligence

By [James Mannion for AFP](#)

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President Donald Trump speaks during a visit to Fincantieri Marinette Marine, Thursday, June 25, 2020, in Marinette, Wis. **TASS / AP / Evan Vucci**

U.S. President Donald Trump denied Sunday he had been briefed on intelligence that reportedly showed Russia had offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants for killing U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

In a pair of early morning tweets, Trump angrily slammed the report by The New York Times as "Probably just another phony Times hit job, just like their failed Russia Hoax."

Related article: [Russia Spies Aided Taliban Attacks, U.S. Intel Says – NYT](#)

"Nobody briefed or told me, @VP Pence, or Chief of Staff @MarkMeadows about the so-called attacks on our troops in Afghanistan by Russians, as reported through an 'anonymous source'

by the Fake News @nytimes, " he wrote.

"Everybody is denying it & there have not been many attacks on us...."

"Nobody's been tougher on Russia than the Trump Administration."

On Friday, the Times reported that U.S. intelligence had concluded that a Russian military intelligence unit offered rewards to Taliban-linked militants to kill troops of the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan.

The rewards were purportedly incentives to target U.S. forces as Trump tries to withdraw troops from the conflict-torn country — one of the militants' key demands — and end America's longest war.

Citing anonymous officials, The Times said Trump was briefed on the findings in March, but has not decided how to respond.

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany on Saturday issued a denial similar to Trump's but left open the possibility that such intelligence existed.

"This does not speak to the merit of the alleged intelligence but to the inaccuracy of The New York Times story erroneously suggesting that President Trump was briefed on this matter," McEnany said.

Skepticism Trump not briefed

Others were skeptical that Trump would not have been informed of such an explosive conclusion.

"The idea that Trump wouldn't be briefed on Russia putting a bounty on U.S. troops is even crazier than him being briefed and doing nothing," Ben Rhodes, a former national security aide to Trump's predecessor Barack Obama, wrote on Twitter.

The Taliban have denied the report, reiterating that they were committed to an accord signed with Washington in February that paves the way for withdrawing all foreign forces from Afghanistan by next year.

The militants also said homemade explosives account for most fatalities among U.S. forces.

"The 19-year jihad of the Islamic Emirate is not indebted to the beneficence of any intelligence organ or foreign country," the Taliban said in a statement issued in Kabul.

The group, widely believed to have received years of support from Pakistani intelligence, also denied previous U.S. accusations it was given arms by Russia.

"The Islamic Emirate has made use of weapons, facilities and tools... that were already present in Afghanistan or are war spoils frequently seized from the opposition in battles," it said.

Russia has also denounced the report, with its embassy in Washington tweeting that the "baseless and anonymous accusations" in the Times story had "already led to direct threats to

the life of employees" at its embassies in Washington and London.

"Stop producing #fakenews that provoke life threats, @nytimes," the embassy added in a later tweet.

Tortured history

Russia has a tortured history in Afghanistan, where the former Soviet Union in its final years was bogged down in a devastating fight against Islamist guerrillas, then backed by Washington.

The Times said there were different theories on why Russia would support Taliban attacks, including a desire to keep Washington bogged down in war.

It said Russia may also be seeking revenge over the U.S. killing of Russian mercenaries in Syria, where Moscow backs President Bashar al-Assad.

According to the newspaper, the Taliban operation was led by Unit 29155, an arm of Russia's military intelligence agency GRU, which has been blamed in numerous international incidents including a 2018 chemical weapons attack in Britain that nearly killed Russian-born double agent Sergei Skripal.

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