



Has Pakistan really refrained from criticizing the Taliban?

Briefing Paper
October 2021

© 2021, **CommandEleven**. All rights reserved.

Report Authors

“Has Pakistan really refrained from criticizing the Taliban?” was researched and written by Andrew Korybko is a political analyst, journalist and a regular contributor to several online journals, as well as a member of the expert council for the Institute of Strategic Studies and Predictions at the People’s Friendship University of Russia. He specializes in Russian affairs and geopolitics, specifically the US strategy in Eurasia. His other areas of focus include tactics of regime change, color revolutions and unconventional warfare used across the world. His book, “Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach To Regime Change”, extensively analyzes the situations in Syria and Ukraine and claims to prove that they represent a new model of strategic warfare being waged by the US.

About CommandEleven

CommandEleven is a research organization focused on Pakistan’s national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, **CommandEleven** provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

CommandEleven seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

Visit <http://commandeleven.com> for more information or contact info@commandeleven.com.

Deputy Director of the Wilson Center's Asia Program, Michael Kugelman, tweeted over the weekend that "...Pakistan is publicly advocating for engagement with and aid to Taliban, and it hasn't criticized Taliban actions". The first part of this well-known expert's statement is true while the second is misleading.



Michael Kugelman ✓
@MichaelKugelman



Interesting piece. One big difference I see between the two is that Pakistan is publicly advocating for engagement with and aid to Taliban, and it hasn't criticized Taliban actions. Qatar has been quieter publicly, but it has criticized Taliban actions.



nationalinterest.org

Qatar and Pakistan's Battle for Afghan Influence Has Only J...
In the wake of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Qatar are fighting for influence over the future...

9:53 PM · Oct 2, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

50 Retweets 12 Quote Tweets 233 Likes



Pakistan's stance towards the Taliban is pragmatic due to the simple fact that it's the de facto leaders of a neighboring state from where multiple security threats emanate. Nevertheless, Pakistan has indeed constructively critiqued the Taliban in ways that are intended to convey its concerns while avoiding any inadvertent offense.

Several high-profile examples prove this point. Prime Minister Imran Khan worked closely with popular American conservative broadcaster Glenn Beck to save the Afghan girls' football team. This implies that he was concerned about their future in the neighboring country under Taliban rule. Prime Minister Khan later told the BBC that the Taliban's speculated Afghan girls school ban would be un-Islamic, which was a message to them not to restrict women's fundamental right to an education. The Pakistani leader also teamed up with the Tajik President to encourage the Taliban to form an ethno-politically inclusive government like they promised.

These facts contradict this misleading claim that Pakistan “hasn't criticized Taliban actions”. The country certainly isn't going to do so as obnoxiously as those in the West who don't have any direct stakes in Afghanistan's stability but are driven to talk about its internal affairs for the sake of virtue signaling their view of democracy and human rights, but it also hasn't stayed silent either. Prime Minister Khan isn't “Taliban Khan” like some of his Western detractors previously claimed and Kugelman's tweet seems to imply for those who know how to identify such dog whistles. He's a pragmatic leader who understands how to deal with the group.

It would be counterproductive to Pakistan's national interests to once again carry out America's bidding in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Khan has said on multiple occasions that those days are over. It's therefore unrealistic for experts like Kugelman to expect Pakistan to “do more” as the infamous mantra goes by emulating the Western form of criticism against them. Doing so would rightly be regarded as meddling by the Taliban and would worsen relations between the two sides to the detriment of Pakistan's security. By constructively critiquing the Taliban, Pakistan retains their trust and can utilize their services to facilitate TPP talks.

Whether it's Kugelman's intent or not, there's no denying that some in the American Establishment (which in this context includes policy influencers like him just as much as the policymakers that rely on his work) would prefer to divide and rule Afghanistan and Pakistan by provoking tensions between them. There's no quicker way to advance that Machiavellian end than to imply that Pakistan is doing the Taliban's bidding by not criticizing them in the same way as the West is. If Pakistan didn't have the confident policymakers that it presently does, it might capitulate to such public pressure from influential experts for the sake of approval just like in the past.

It's important to point out how misleading Kugelman's claim was because of the influence that he has on shaping perceptions about Pakistani policy inside that country as well as his own. While it's unlikely that those in the US who are influenced by his work will ever come across this rebuttal, there's a chance that a lot of Pakistanis might read it because of the platform that published it. They should realize that Kugelman's claim is misleading and might have even been deliberately so. From an outsider's perspective, he seems to represent the faction of policy influencers that are skeptical of Pakistan and seeks to appeal to like-minded policymakers.

If this assessment is accurate, then it means that well-intended Pakistanis are wasting their time by engaging with him on social media. They aren't going to change his mind, but by interacting with him after being provoked by tweets such as that one and others, they're only boosting his organic reach. This term refers to the algorithm's prioritization of certain posts in others' feeds without that user paying to promote them. The exact workings remain unknown, but many believe that posts that generate a lot of reactions meet this criterion. This means that those who hope to change his mind after being baited are actually boosting his misleading posts.

This in turn helps them go viral, which could then contribute to further shaping the perceptions of those who might come across his posts on that platform due to the organic reach that his critics inadvertently gave him. Kugelman, like everyone, has the right to his

opinion, but those who disagree with his generally skeptical take on everything regarding Pakistan would do better to ignore his posts instead of engage with them if they want to limit the damage to their country's perception. Those like-minded policymakers who rely on his work to influence their own won't be affected by this, but it could at least mitigate its effect on the general public.

Back to the primary topic of this analysis, nobody should have any doubts that Pakistan does indeed disagree with the Taliban on some issues but it responsibly expresses this through constructive critiques. This stands in contrast to the arrogant way in which some in the West convey similar concerns. Experts like Kugelman might hope to influence Pakistani policymakers into emulating his country's style by misleadingly implying that they're Taliban stooges for not doing so, but the country has become much more confident over the years and thus isn't likely to compromise on its national interests in Afghanistan just for the sake of approval from foreigners.

About the Author

Andrew Korybko is a political analyst, journalist and a regular contributor to several online journals, as well as a member of the expert council for the Institute of Strategic Studies and Predictions at the People's Friendship University of Russia. He specializes in Russian affairs and geopolitics, specifically the US strategy in Eurasia. His other areas of focus include tactics of regime change, color revolutions and unconventional warfare used across the world. His book, "Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach To Regime Change", extensively analyzes the situations in Syria and Ukraine and claims to prove that they represent a new model of strategic warfare being waged by the US.

About CommandEleven

CommandEleven is a research organization focused on Pakistan's national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, **CommandEleven** provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

CommandEleven seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

Visit <http://commandeleven.com> for more information or contact info@commandeleven.com.