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Pashtun Muslims battle Taliban

By [Dr. Richard L. Benkin](#) and [Roohul Amin](#)

There is a popular uprising forming against the Taliban, and it is being carried out by Pashtun, a Muslim-majority group whose leaders tell us they share our values.

The Pashtun are a tribal people of about 40-50 million. The majority live in Pakistan's North and West Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA); Pashtun also constitute Afghanistan's ethnic majority. The two regions were united until 1896, when the British divided their homeland between Afghanistan and what was then-British India. The "Durand Line," which was named after Sir Mortimer of the same name, forms the boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan and has never been recognized by the Afghans as legitimate.

Despite the fact that there are more Pashtun than Poles, few people in the West are familiar with them. Those who are aware of them tend to focus on their [representation among the Taliban](#). While it is true that many Taliban are Pashtun, the vast majority of Pashtun are virulently anti-Islamist. In an exclusive interview in Frankfurt, Germany, Pir Riaz, chairman of the [Pashtunistan Freedom Movement](#), told us, "Pashtuns as a nation is totally democratic and secular – no forced conversions *ever* in our entire history. During India's partition [when one to two million people lost their lives in communal rioting], there were no riots in Pashtunistan. Many people even fled to us for safety, and we still have Sikhs and Hindus living peacefully and safe. The greatest number of our intellectuals are anti-Islamist, and they reflect the Pashtun people who are very democratic and freedom-loving. Because Pashtun have always been among the ruling elite in the region, it is not surprising that some turned away from Pashtun values and supported the Taliban. They and all of their supporters represent far less than one percent of our people."

Over the last few weeks, Pashtun have been battling the Taliban, fighting those radicals who are killing young Americans in Afghanistan. Thus far, these incidents have resulted in property damage only due to Pakistani military presence. In the videos linked below, you can see Pakistani military men in the crowd, protecting the Taliban and identifying the Pashtun rioters.

On February 6, in Dera Ismail Khan, hundreds of people attacked the [Taliban office](#) and [took their weapons](#), promising more to come. Ten days after the attack, the local [Taliban leader](#) told Pashtun elders: "We are not terrorists. We are working for Pakistan's military intelligence and ISI. The state is behind us."





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Pashtun long have accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban. Now [others](#) including [President Trump](#) have come to the same conclusion. On February 6, gleeful Pashtun tore down the [Pakistani flag](#) in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunwa. They never have desecrated the *American* flag, according to Riaz.

Richard Benkin is an American human rights activist, and Roohul Amin is a former journalist and Pashtun rights activist. Dr. Benkin's involvement has been partially funded by the Middle East Forum.



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