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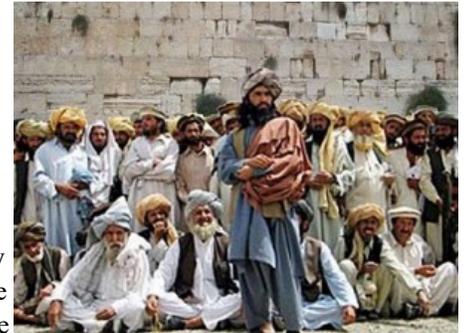
The Trump Factor and the Pashtuns

By [Richard L. Benkin](#)

On February 6, 2018, the New York Times [published a piece](#) about social unrest by Pashtuns in Pakistan. It gave some background on how the Pakistanis have been perpetrating human rights abuses against the Pashtuns for decades. Of course, it also missed completely the big story for Americans: the protesters, their leaders, and many of the minority populations there have been inspired by President Donald Trump and his new, tough policy toward Pakistan and his support for human rights in the area.

This is in line with the Times' and the rest of the mainstream media's anti-Trump bias – a bias they seem quite comfortable with in coloring the prism through which their readers get the news.

Roohul Amin is a Pashtun activist who had to flee Pakistan after being attacked by the military and Taliban, leaving his wife and children behind. He currently lives in Germany, where his asylum request could be ruled on as soon as next month. I was able to talk with him about the Pashtun, and while no one is saying the Pashtun are rebelling *because of* President Trump, most Pashtun you talk to will tell you he has inspired them and gives them hope that the United States will support their aspirations. They believe that recent statements and actions by the president represent a clear departure from former president Barack Obama's foreign policy. It is interesting that as I speak with these people and many more Asians, it is they who are ecstatic about the United States resuming its leadership role on the world scene – more so than many Americans, including, it appears, the editors of the New York Times.



Amin, along with others, said Trump's strong words calling out Pakistani complicity in Islamist terror [galvanized Baloch, Pashtun, and Sindhi](#) in their struggles against their Pakistani. His statements led to an avalanche of tweets praising him. This one from Zar Ali Khan Afridi was typical: "We support His Excellency! President Trump. Very bold man. Long live." Trump's positive impact on our respect and international reputation caused at least one village to praise him and pray for his long life. Trump resonates on an official level, too. Former Afghan president (and Pashtun) [Hamid Karzai said](#): "I welcome today's clarity in President Trump's remarks and propose a joint U.S.-regional coalition to pressurize [sic] the Pakistan military establishment to bring peace to ... the entire region."

It also is leading to grassroots action where Muslims are battling the Taliban. I have been involved in South Asia for over a decade and believe that it will be where we fight the most critical battles for our planet's soul. Pro-democratic forces in the region have faced violence at the hands of the Pakistani military and intelligence services for decades. According to Amin and other Pashtuns and Sindhis I've interviewed, they now feel they have an ally in President Trump and the United States, after previously considering us part of the problem due to our decades-long support for Pakistan.

In the last few days, Pashtun have been [protesting publicly](#) and in [large numbers](#) against the actions of Pakistan's military and spy agency. Standing up to the Pakistani government can mean a summary death sentence for the individual doing so and perhaps even his family. Yet, thousands have felt emboldened to take that risk. In part, it was finally too much to bear. In part, it was an expectation that they would find support, perhaps even from the world's strongest nation and Pakistan's former bankroller.

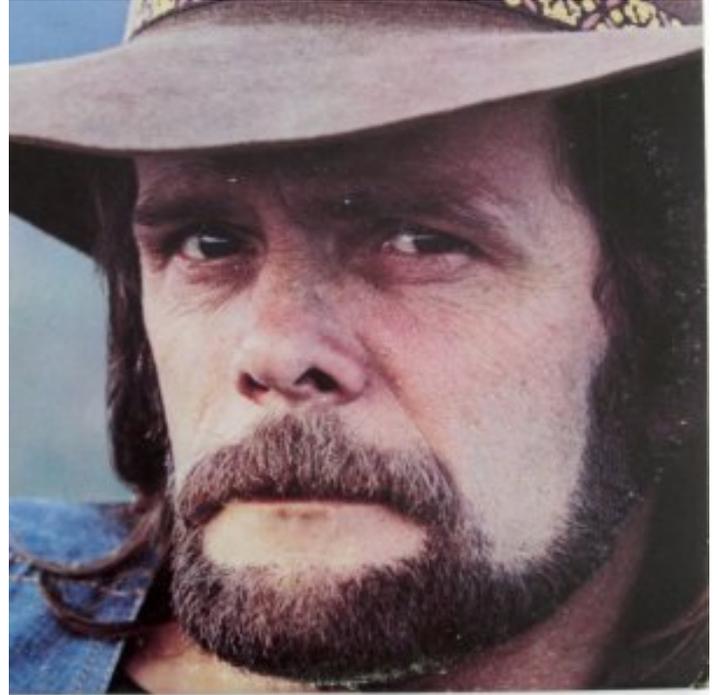
The implications of this could not be greater – and could justify President Trump's more aggressive foreign policy that looks for ways to further both U.S. interests and those of the peoples with whom we team. It also marks a watershed departure from the Obama foreign policy that was so roundly condemned by American allies and potential allies worldwide. Not only is Pakistan supporting the terrorists killing American and Afghan troops by allowing them safe haven, something a free Pashtun people say they will stop, but Pakistan also is engaged in an extensive project with China – the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC – that would be ruinous to American and Western interests in the region if unopposed.

How much would an emboldened Pashtun populace force Pakistan to shift its resources and concentration away from these anti-American activities? How much more would they be forced to do so if a successful Pashtun emboldened Baloch, Sindhi, Kashmiris, and other nationalities that have been complaining of Pakistani oppression for decades? And all of it without putting a single American in harm's way.

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