

Propagandizing the COVID-19 Crisis: The Response of the Taliban Government

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Abstract

Since signing the agreement with the U.S. to return to power in early 2020, the Taliban has announced moves to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus via domestic and international policy. However, according to the WHO database, from January 2020 to March 2022, 173,659 cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Afghanistan, and the infection rate increased drastically during this period (WHO). The Borgen Project concludes that Afghanistan continues to be “one of the worst countries for pandemic response.” On the surface, the Taliban’s declaration of active responses to the pandemic seems beneficial for mitigating the public health crisis. However, policy researchers have questioned the Taliban’s true motivation for announcing an active pandemic response, with some concluding that the Taliban is using pandemic response as a form of propaganda to boost its nominal political performance. Nevertheless, NGOs such as the United States Institute of Peace argue that it is advantageous for the Taliban government to view its pandemic response as a political initiative, as doing so creates an impetus for more effective prevention policies. This paper, from a political perspective, analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of the Taliban government’s action to propagandize its pandemic response. In addition, the paper provides recommendations on what actions the Taliban government should take under such debate over its purpose for COVID-19 controlling policies.

Keywords: Afghan, COVID-19, political initiative, propaganda, Taliban government