

Facebook reaffirms a ban on Taliban accounts even as the group looks to communicate a new message.



By Daniel Victor

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Facebook has reaffirmed its ban on Taliban-related accounts, as have the Facebook-owned WhatsApp and Instagram, even as the group engages in a publicity campaign to persuade Afghans and the rest of the world that they can be just and competent rulers.

The Taliban, who seized power over Afghanistan in the past week, are banned under Facebook's "Dangerous Individuals and Organizations" policy, a Facebook statement said.

"This means we remove accounts maintained by or on behalf of the Taliban and prohibit praise, support and representation of them," the statement emailed this week said. "We also have a dedicated team of regional experts helping to identify and alert us to emerging issues on the platform."

The statement added that "Facebook does not make decisions about the recognized government in any particular country, but instead respects the authority of the international community in making these determinations."

A Taliban spokesman hit back at Facebook on Tuesday, accusing it of hypocrisy for promoting freedom of speech while censoring the group.

All of the companies said they were relying on U.S. law and related company policies for their decisions. The United States has imposed sanctions on the Taliban and in 2002 labeled the group a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity."

Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, told Bloomberg News on Tuesday that the company was "relying on that policy to proactively take down anything that we can that might be dangerous or is related to the Taliban in general."

The Financial Times reported that WhatsApp had shut down a Taliban-created complaints hotline, to be used by civilians to report violence and looting, along with other "official Taliban channels."

Some experts in the region said the move could be counterproductive, further isolating Afghans and making it harder to hold rank-and-file Taliban members accountable.

A WhatsApp statement said the company was "obligated to adhere to U.S. sanctions laws," adding that it was seeking more information from relevant U.S. authorities given the evolving situation in Afghanistan.

Daniel Victor is a general assignment reporter based in London after stints in Hong Kong and New York. He joined The Times in 2012. @bydanielvictor