

Pakistan and State Failure: Waiting For Justice

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By Ahmed Rashid

Can Pakistan's future be decided by more military-civilian wrestling or is joint action against extremism possible?

Ahmed Rashid is a journalist and the author of five books on Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. His latest book is "Pakistan on the Brink, the future of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the West".

The security situation in Pakistan has deteriorated without much reaction from the government, argues Rashid [EPA] Here is a shortlist of recent horror stories from Pakistan, for which there is no government accountability or action and little public protest out of fear generated by an ever-widening range of Islamic extremists, who carry out acts of terror with impunity.

On May 27, a young woman who had married on her free will was [stoned to death](#) by her father and brothers near the Lahore High Court on a road that is one of the busiest in the city. Farzana Parveen, 25, was pregnant and on her way to court to contest an abduction case filed by her family against her husband - whom she had married out of love. Some 20 members of her family were waiting for her outside the court.

They smashed her skull with bricks and she died instantly. Her father was arrested - but in a country where there are [800 registered cases](#) of honour killings a year while thousands more go unregistered, culprits are rarely tried, let alone sentenced. No laws have been changed to make honour killings more punishable or to protect women. Successive military and civilian governments have followed a policy of inaction in all such cases.

A day earlier, a Pakistani-born US citizen Mehdi Ali Qamar, 50, a prominent heart surgeon from Ohio state, was [shot dead](#) in front of his wife and three-year-old son, as they visited the family graveyard near Rabwah in central Punjab. Two men on a motorcycle pumped 10 bullets into Qamar at close range.

He belonged to the minority Ahmadiyya sect that has long been vilified by Islamic extremists, who believe that Ahmadis cannot be termed Muslim, are apostates and barely human. Successive governments believe strongly in inaction in protecting Ahmadis, because it may incur the wrath of the extremists. The killers are still at large. A day earlier, bombs in Islamabad and the tribal areas planted by the Pakistan Taliban killed six soldiers and wounded several civilians.

On May 7, [Rashed Rehman](#), a well-known human rights lawyer from south Punjab, was shot dead in his office by gunmen. He was defending a university professor who was being prosecuted according to Pakistan's vaguely worded blasphemy law. The killers are still at large.

Blasphemy charges

Another case that has only highlighted the absurdity of the blasphemy law are the [blasphemy charges](#) put on 68 lawyers from Jhang in Punjab by the police. Most of them belong to the minority Shia sect, who have been targeted by Sunni extremists.

Meanwhile Geo, the largest TV network in the country, has also been booked for blasphemy in a campaign orchestrated by right-wing groups and the military, which seek to punish Geo for several reasons. Geo has now apologised to the military, but its future is uncertain.

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The courts, judges and police are now too scared to carry out trials against militant groups, with their hitmen or leaders who carry out such killings. The government refuses to reform the system or even condemn such killings. It took two days before Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif [reacted to the killing](#) of the pregnant woman. The publicity field is left free for a variety of extremist groups to take control.

The extremists are also decapitating the health sector. Half a million children will not be inoculated against polio, the disease which cripples children, because the Pakistani Taliban will not allow doctors into the regions they control. Since late 2012, the Taliban has gunned down [56 nurses, doctors and policemen](#) who were part of inoculation teams. The World Health Organization has declared a global public health emergency, saying the Pakistani strain of the virus has been found in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Israel so far.

Thus Pakistan has gone from being the epi-centre of terrorism to the global epi-centre of a disease that should have been wiped out in 2012. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is rushing from country to country to drum up foreign investment, while the government appears helpless to stop Pakistan's most lethal export - polio. Sharif still believes that talks with the Taliban, who are now waging war against children, are still possible.

When people ask me how Pakistan compares to Afghanistan, I answer that Afghanistan has only one civil war - the one between the government and the Taliban. But Pakistan has at least three and possibly half a dozen lesser civil wars. These three major wars are being fought against the Pakistani Taliban, Baloch separatists who want to divide the country and multiple ethnic, criminal and Islamic gangs in Karachi.

Minor wars are those being waged against the minorities, the massacres of Shia innocents, sectarian killings, murder on behalf of blasphemy and honour killings. Extremists are happily seeking heaven by targeting all minorities - Muslim and non-Muslim - Christians, Hindus, Shias, Ahmedis, Ismaelis and others.

The failure of governance is all around us, every day, every hour. We worry about our children when they don't get home on time, and we worry for them when they do. Those in the front lines against extremism - lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers, women activists - have started to live circumscribed lives. No unnecessary trips to the bazaar, the park or to restaurants. Stay hunkered down in homes that increasingly look like fortresses.

Those who can afford it, buy guns, bullet-proof cars, bodyguards and attack dogs. In Karachi, a city of 20 million, there are only 27,000 policemen but [55,000 private security guards](#), according to the government. For us from an earlier generation, this is not the way we were brought up to live.

Failure to govern

Both the military and elected political governments must be blamed for the failure of the state to govern. For the last three decades the army and its Interservices Intelligence Agency and civilian governments have played backup to a variety of Islamic groups who have become part of the country's foreign policy to keep neighbouring India and Afghanistan on the defensive, but instead have inundated Pakistan with their hate-filled venom, false narratives and distortion of social norms.

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Former President Pervez Musharraf helped revive the Afghan Taliban in 2003 to fight the Americans in Afghanistan, and this led to the rapid spawning of the Pakistani Taliban who instead chose to fight the Pakistan army with the aim of turning the country into a theocratic state. People were told that those Taliban fighting the Americans and the Afghans were the "good" Taliban, those fighting Pakistan soldiers the "bad" Taliban.

Later, right-wing Islamic parties produced a new narrative - that the Pakistani Taliban killing Pakistani soldiers were actually paid agents of India, the US and Israel. The public discourse became heatedly anti-American and anti-Western. Democracy, human rights, women's rights or polio inoculations were seen as Western plots to subvert true Islam. Neither the army nor the politicians countered this narrative.

When democracy arrived in 2008 under the elected government of President Asif Ali Zardari, it failed on every level of governance and quickly became so threatened by the army that Zardari decided to hand over all security and foreign policy decision-making to the army chief General Pervez Kayani.

Kayani refused to take on the Pakistani Taliban in a sustained campaign. They used Kayani's "do nothing" strategy to expand their territory, intensify attacks on civilian and military targets and recruit militant groups from around the country to join them.

Now in a welcome change, the new army chief General Raheel Sharif (no relation) wants to go up against the Pakistani Taliban. The army has suffered enough casualties at their hands to convince them of the need to wipe out them out. But the army wants political support from the government, which since January has been involved in meaningless non-productive talks with the Pakistani Taliban.

Prime Minister Sharif and General Sharif are at loggerheads over several other issues, which has meant that once again, Pakistan's future will be decided by the outcome of a military-civilian wrestling match rather than joint action against terrorism and the rising tide of intolerance.

Two successive civilian governments and an earlier military regime have failed to provide good governance, improve the economy or improve ties with its neighbours. No government has pursued a policy of no tolerance towards extremism. If Pakistan is not to sink further or once again become enmeshed in a civil-military conflict, the need of the hour is a common front for civilians and the military to deal comprehensively with the extremist threat. Until that happens Pakistan will remain a ship permanently poised on the verge of failure, alienated by the global community for failing to take its international responsibilities seriously, whether it be saving children's lives or protecting the minorities.

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