



Paulo Casaca

[South Asia
Democratic Forum
\(SADF\)](#)

19 Avenue des Arts
1210 Brussels
Belgium

info@sadf.eu
www.sadf.eu

+12 026 834 180
+32 2 808 42 08

Reg. Num.
BE 833606320

SADF COMMENT

Pakistan, military rule and terrorism

The Pakistani [ban on the international organization “Save the Children”](#) on June 11 was justified by its “anti-Pakistani activities”. Authorities explained that the organisation was under strict surveillance and this measure had been considered for quite a long time.

According to the [Pakistani](#) and the [international press](#), a Pakistan intelligence report in 2012 linked the aid group to Pakistani doctor Shakeel Afridi, who the CIA allegedly accused of carrying out a fake vaccination program as they searched for Al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

The banning of the famous UK-based charity – whose local personnel was exclusively Pakistani – follows Dr Afridi’s sentence to life imprisonment and is therefore widely seen as another strong warning against all citizens that might be tempted to develop any anti-terrorist co-operation with the West.

It is a well-known fact that the Al-Qaeda leader was living in a villa in Abbottabad close to the main Pakistani military academy. The Pakistani authorities have strongly campaigned to deny their involvement in Bin Laden’s sheltering; and they even tried to shape international public opinion to believe

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they contributed to the Western anti-terrorist operation. The truth is, however, that no one was ever condemned in Pakistan for sheltering the terrorist leader, and as we see the harshest measures are taken against anyone and whichever organisation is suspected of having contributed to find his whereabouts.

The banning comes one week after the press established that the official declaration of the jailing of 10 Taliban members over the attempted murder of co-Nobel peace prize-winner [Malala Yousafzai](#) was a myth as eight of the men were not convicted and their secret trial was a pathetic sham. As stated by [Chris Hughes](#) from the Daily Mirror, “The trial had absolutely no credibility due to the fact that nobody was there to witness it apart from a public prosecutor, a judge, the army and the accused. This was a tactic to get media pressure away from the Malala case because the whole world wanted convictions for the crime”.

The international press – and the [New York Times](#) was perhaps the most obvious case – they gave a high profile to the news of the ten life sentences, as if the sentence were decided transparently by a civil Court in a procedure open to the public. The new rules giving the military the upper hand on justice in affairs connected with terrorism were given little international attention.

In the wake of the massive slaughter of schoolchildren in Peshawar on 16 December 2014, the National Assembly and the Senate approved the 21st Constitutional Amendment Bill, unopposed as 247 members voted in favour. As [Dr. Siegfried O. Wolf](#) states “these laws will provide constitutional cover for extending the jurisdiction to military courts for the trial of terrorism suspects”. The 21st Amendment Act shall remain in force for two years starting from January 7, 2015 when the President signed the Act.

In addition to foreign affairs and internal or external security – that are domains where the military establishment was already in command – this new step in direct military rule shall be seen, as [Dr. Wolf](#) rightly stresses, as a “well-planned, gradual strategy intended to build up a formal role of the military in the country’s political landscape”. To perceive the military rule as a means to combat terrorism is to confuse the solution to the problem with its cause.

Although the military rule and religious extremism marked Pakistan's existence since shortly after its foundation, the military coup in 1977 of General Zia-ul-Haq increased dramatically and made perennial both these features.

The dissemination of religious fanatic ideology and the creation and masterminding of Jihadi groups as foreign policy instruments and as internal tools to combat secular, liberal or nationalist forces are at the origin of the human dramas happening in the region.

The standard Western doctrine, discreetly assumed during the Cold War, made of the military rule a lesser of two evils in face of communist or communist-related forces. Whereas the later was seen as a consistent and lasting threat, the first was only perceived as a transitional abhorrence with some short-term advantages.

Islamic fanatic militancy is also considered as a transitional nuisance by most political actors, either in Muslim countries or in each side of the World political divide.

9/11 should have been the shocking proof of how tragically erroneous this perception was: the very same fanatic group supported for combatting the Soviet Union became the author of the biggest civilian slaughter of our history, right at the heart of the US in time of peace.

Unfortunately, nothing of the sort happened. The response to 9/11 was a half-baked military operation ousting the Taliban from Kabul, without touching the interests of its founders and supporters across the border or without understanding the global civilizational nature of the confrontation. Soon the operation was overshadowed by a disastrous action in Iraq that objectively opened widely the gates of the Middle East to Jihadist destruction.

As long as the Pakistani military structures do not cut radically their instrumental view of Islamic extremism, and do not understand the imperative need to leave the political scene, allowing the strengthening of the civil society, minority rights, education for tolerance and the rule of law, terrorism will remain a major threat endangering the Pakistani people and its neighbours.