

Our two-faced policies on extremists

The cowardly attack on Malala Yousufzai, a 14-year-old child, is a tragic reminder of the violent blowback that Pakistani society continues to bear and sustain at the hands of religious extremists who are extremely upset and frustrated because their creators and mentors are no more willing to support and finance them.

But unfortunately for the state, this change of heart on the part of our military and the intelligence set-up only encourages the militants to indulge in this type of religious vigilantism that we witnessed in the form of an attack on Malala. Since the state is the very source that taught these militants the lessons of jihad, it should shed little or no tears in now going after them, especially now that they have turned their guns towards the state itself.

For all those who are filled with anger and want the perpetrators of this heinous crime to be brought to justice, I ask a very simple question. Who allowed extremism to creep into our society? Who sponsored militancy and gave state patronage to jihadists to fight 'our secret wars'? Who partnered with the CIA using its dollars and weapons to conduct the biggest covert operations ever in this part of the world? Who again rehabilitated religious extremism by asking the jihadists to occupy Kargil and brought upon us the shame of a failed operation? And most importantly, whose military coup retained and brought to power the mindset of the senior military officers who instead of being held accountable for their military failures were put in positions of authority?

The hands that today hold the weapons that fire on innocent girls like Malala Yousufzai are the same hands that were employed by the state to fight our secret war in Kashmir. The generals of that time propagated the brilliance of their military strategy that employed a few hundred jihadists to engage and hold back half a million Indian troops in Kashmir, thus blocking any Indian military design to challenge us on the eastern front. Little did the generals know that the same guns will one day be used to kill our innocent daughters.

The military in Pakistan was unfortunately allowed to work outside the fold of any central government for too long and with far too much autonomy. This enabled it to create a new 'ideological frontier' of which the death squads of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan are an essential part. The guardians of our territorial frontiers were once the creators and guardians of this ideological frontier that has recruited, armed and trained the perverted minds that indulge in violent acts like the one that severely injured Malala.

Who will hold the state accountable for the patronage that it has given to jihadists in the past? Will those who ran the affairs of the state or the autonomous and powerful institutions within the state be ever considered as criminals who committed state crimes?

At least two ISI heads in the past, Lt General Javed Nasir and Lt General Hameed Gul, used the agency to support jihadists and militants as part of state policy. These promoters of 'great pan-Islamism' used and employed jihadists not for geostrategic but for ideological reasons. They promoted 'Islamic nationalism' by utilising huge funds at their disposal through the dollars stacked in secret ISI accounts. These generals and many others played a direct role in creating and rehabilitating these religious extremists who have today turned their guns on our society.

Utilising power but without any semblance of responsibility, military dictators used the intelligence agencies to create this 'ideological frontier' that sustains and feeds cowards like those who fired the shots at Malala. We will not be able to defeat the mindset that harbours and flourishes in the 'ideological frontier' by only conducting military operations against its believers, but by bringing to justice all those who have in the past played a role in its creation.

Those who formulated and implemented the policy in the past of supporting, arming and training militants to fight proxy wars against India and Afghanistan must be held accountable. If this is not done, we will have many more leaders playing with the future of this country, leaving Malala, her generation and the generation after that to pay the price.

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