

Opinion

# Waziristan: Arif Wazir, Pakistan's Noted Rights Activist Assassinated

Sunday 3 May 2020, by [KHAN Dilawar](#) (Date first published: 1 May 2020).

**Arif Wazir is the eighteenth adult male in Ali Wazir's family that has been killed in the last decade.**



*Arif Wazir, a Pushtun rights activist and a central leader of the Pushtun Protection Movement (PTM)*  
| Photo: Social Media

Arif Wazir, a Pushtun rights activist and a central leader of the Pushtun Protection Movement (PTM), died on May 2 after he succumbed to bullet injuries he sustained in a gun attack a day before (May 1) in his native village, close to Afghanistan's border.

Wazir's widely-mourned and shocking assassination is unusually significant on two counts. First, the 27-year-old was one of the prominent public faces representing the PTM, a rights group formed in January 2018, viewed by many commentators as the largest social movement to have emerged in the recent years.

Campaigning for the civil rights of Pushtuns, one of the country's three largest ethnic groups, the PTM has been brutally repressed and vilified by the country's all-powerful military establishment.

Secondly, Wazir is the 18<sup>th</sup> member of his unfortunate family assassinated since 9/11 by, what many Pushtun activists euphemistically call, the 'good Taliban'. The 'good Taliban' is a not-so-concealed reference to state-sponsored Taliban. Previously, his father, uncles, and cousins have been assassinated.

Arif Wazir's cousin Ali Wazir is a Member of the National Assembly (MNA), the lower house of the parliament. Two years ago, Ali Wazir, also on the PTM leadership committee, made history when he became the first Marxist to independently reach the parliament from Waziristan, a hub of state-sponsored Taliban. President Obama once declared Waziristan the most dangerous spot on the face of the earth.

Ali Wazir has also survived assassination attempts. In one case, during his election campaign, he was attacked along with Arif Wazir. Ali was also lucky when in May 2019, he along with hundreds of others, was rained with bullets by the military personnel during a rally. Thirteen PTM activists lost

their lives while another 25 were injured. The attack had come after months-long vilification campaigns on mainstream media and social media out ( both controlled, monitored, and manipulated by the military). The PTM was portrayed as a fifth column, sponsored and funded by arch-enemy India and Afghanistan (a new-found official enemy).

Not surprisingly, instead of any action against the military troops, Ali Wazir along with Mohsin Dawar was booked on the charge of attacking the military check post (video clips that emerged afterward established how the bogus military claim was). Like Ali Wazir, Mr. Dawar is also a member of the National Assembly and a PTM stalwart. Both were elected from Waziristan.

Both spent months in jail, on the charge of attacking military check posts, despite their high profiles as the MNAs. Now they are on bail. Likewise, Alamgir Wazir, a nephew of Arif and Ali Wazir, was arrested November last year from Lahore, country's second-largest town, after a student rally. In his fiery speech, Alamgir Wazir has criticized the military. After months of imprisonment, Alamgir Wazir was released only weeks ago on court orders. In short, the Wazir family now symbolizes sacrifice, resistance, and defiance.

*Amnesty International South Asia*  
*@amnestysasia*

The Pakistani authorities must carry out an independent and effective investigation into yesterday's attack in South Waziristan on Arif Wazir, a member of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement. The suspected perpetrators must be held accountable.

2,595

8:45 AM - May 2, 2020

Arif wazir himself spent 13 months, intermittently, in prison since the launching of PTM. No other PTM leader or activist has been arrested as many times as Arif Wazir. His most recent arrest was on April 17. Two days before the assassination attempt, he was set free. 'Jail was his second home, now graveyard will be his eternal home of comfort,' wrote one blogger on his death.

Last year, he also contested elections for the provincial parliament. Despite his victory, a massive rigging effort was made to finally deny him his parliamentary seat.

This ruthless persecution of the Wazir family mirror's the brutalities inflicted on Pushtun tribes inhabiting the districts on the east of Durand Line, the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, drawn by British colonialism.

These brutalities have been jointly afflicted on Pushtuns by the military and the Taliban. This region, formerly called Tribal Areas, became a theatre of a complicated three-pronged conflict post-9/11. Waziristan, owing to its geographical location close to the Afghan border, particularly became a hot spot.

A little backgrounder is in place here. After 9/11, Pakistan was coerced by Washington to join the military effort to oust the Taliban. Ironically, Pakistan besides Saudi Arabia was the Taliban's key sponsor. The Taliban would not have captured Afghanistan in 1997 without active military cover by the Pakistani military. Also, since the 1970s, Pakistan had nurtured close relations with the so-called Taliban. The Taliban had many ideological affinities with the military top brass and shared strategic interests. Hence, it was not easy for General Musharraf, the military ruler at the helm when 9/11 occurred, to sever relations with the Taliban.

*Mosharraf Zaidi*

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Those of us that want more polite slogans from PTM should ponder the pain we feel at the death of acquaintances or friends — and imagine what being Ali Wazir feels like.

1,206

12:33 PM - May 2, 2020

The Pakistani generals, therefore, decided to hunt with imperial hound and run with the Taliban hare. Consequently, while the U.S.A was provided the air-force bases in Pakistan to bomb Afghanistan and supply routes to ferry ammunition, the Taliban were provided the safe heavens in Waziristan. The double-game began to unravel by 2006 but the sham was globally exposed in 2011 when Osama ben Laden was hunted down in Abbottabad, a garrison town. Incidentally, Osama was also assassinated on the night of May 1.

Meantime, several pro-Taliban factions in Pakistan (Pakistani Taliban) were annoyed by the state policy to facilitate the U.S. in Afghanistan. Hence, they turned against their uniformed mentors. Subsequently, a wave of terrorist attacks on the Pakistani military, later civilian targets as the military was quick to fortify itself, rocked Pakistan. Over 70,000 were killed in Pakistan between 9/11 to 2018 when terrorism began to subside.

Simultaneously, certain Pushtun tribes were opposed to the state-policy of harboring the Afghan Taliban in Waziristan and neighboring districts. The Wazir family was most prominent among the belligerent tribals. Hence, mercilessly targeted.

*Gulalai\_Ismail*

@Gulalai\_Ismail

This pretty much explains who killed Arif Wazir. They even couldn't stop themselves from celebrating his murder on social media.

[View image on Twitter](#)

1,072

5:25 PM - May 2, 2020

Twitter

That Pakistan was harboring the Taliban could not be concealed for long. By 2008, the U.S. had unleashed a drone war in Waziristan. At the same time, the Pakistani military was under immense pressure to militarily eliminate the Taliban from this region. Consequently, the number of military operations involving aerial bombings were launched in this region. However, the 'good Taliban' were discreetly provided a safe exit ahead of every such operation. The 'bad Taliban', now estranged with Pakistan military, would often escape to Afghanistan since Kabul was happy to patronize Pakistani Taliban as a tit-for-tat policy.

In the process, sandwiched between military tanks and suicide bombers villages and towns were reduced to rubble. Over three million people were displaced. Hundreds, if not thousands, of youth 'disappeared' or went 'missing'. In certain cases, their dead bodies, bearing torture marks, were found by the roadside. In many cases, parents keep waiting on their missing sons.

Since 9/11, a generation has grown up helplessly witnessing displacement, bomb blasts, military operations, exploding mines, disappearances, beheadings Taliban-style, humiliation and an uncertain

future whereby peace remains elusive.

Arif Wazir and his cousins, their friends such as Mohsin Dawar and most notably, Manzoor Pashteen, a self-styled agitator protesting against military excesses, grew up in this milieu.

Two years ago, they started holding protest sit-ins and rallies. To the surprise of everyone, their protest calls began to mobilize thousands. It was like the 'Arab Spring' of the Pushtun region in Pakistan. The protest rallies organisationally translated into the PTM.

The PTM demands included an end to military check posts where Pushtun had to wait on for hours even when they were returning to their homes. The return of missing persons was yet another important demand. After huge mobilizations, the military conceded certain demands. The number of check posts was reduced and dozens of 'disappeared' youth returned from torture cells. However, the PTM discourse exposing military excesses besides the double-game of harboring the 'good Taliban' was unacceptable to the military establishment.

Hence, a brutal campaign to leash in the PTM was launched. On the one hand, there is a complete ban on PTM's media coverage. On the other, the PTM is maligned and vilified. The attack and subsequent death of Arif Wazir were not reported on any news channel even if it had emerged as the biggest trend on twitter.

Even on social media, some pro-military subscribers were celebrating Arif Wazir's death. Chaudhry Sarwar, the Governor of the largest province of Punjab, was among those celebrating. Unsurprisingly, Afghanistan has been blamed, by the conspiracy theorists, for the murder to defame Pakistan.

Will this cycle of violence come to an end any time soon? Hard to say. However, only mass mobilizations and an international wave of solidarity may prove a catalyst for future peace.

**Dilawar Khan**

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**P.S.**

• Telesurenglish. Published 2 May 2020:  
[https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Arif-Wazir-Pakistans-Noted-Rights-Activist-Assassinated-2020-0502-0009.html?utm\\_campaign=shareaholic&utm\\_medium=email\\_this&utm\\_source=email](https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Arif-Wazir-Pakistans-Noted-Rights-Activist-Assassinated-2020-0502-0009.html?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=email_this&utm_source=email)