

# Pakistan: Who killed Saleem Shahzad?

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**The most bothering question, as posed by one Indian journalist Pradip Joshi while commenting on the brutal killing, is “how could he alone have access to supposedly the most secret covert operation upon PNS Mehran or other journalists too had this information but preferred to remain un-vocal”.**

After the Abbottabad Operation by American commandos to kill Osama bin Laden and then militants attack at PNS Mehran naval base in Karachi, the callous murder of a high profile journalist has shaken the government and security establishment in Pakistan once again. Perhaps, it is the first time that intelligence wing of the armed forces, the ISI, has so strongly reacted against the media reports that the intelligence agency might be involved in Saleem Shahzad’s killing. According to Associated Press of Pakistan, a government-controlled news agency, an official of the ISI has said, “It is regrettable that some sections of the media have taken upon themselves to use the incident for targeting and maligning the ISI.”

The journalists’ community in Pakistan is equally outraged over the murder of a humble, courteous as well as courageous colleague. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) has announced country wide demonstrations and rallies on 3 June to protest against killing of Saleem Shahzad who worked for an Italian news agency and a Hong Kong-registered website. PFUJ has also announced to observe two-day mourning to start from today (Thursday). The PFUJ has said that Saleem Shahzad had talked of threats—allegedly from some quarters on a number of occasions.

Major western powers, led by the US, have assailed the mysterious kidnapping and killing of Saleem Shahzad. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the US embassy in Islamabad, in separate statements have said, “ The United States strongly condemns the abduction and killing of reporter Syed Saleem Shahzad.” So far, British Foreign Secretary William Hague and French embassy in Islamabad have also expressed their shock and grief over the killing. France has asked the Pakistani Authorities “to take all necessary measures to explain the circumstances of this tragedy and punish those responsible”.

The forcible abduction, third degree torture and brutal murder of a well-known journalist based in Pakistan’s federal capital is shocking and condemnable in the strongest words. One is deeply dismayed over the sad incident and expresses solidarity with the bereaved family. Pakistan has become one of the most dangerous countries for the journalists. Journalists face threats from militants and security agencies. But the irony is that in the prevailing geo-political scenario the journalists are more attracted towards the security agencies or the militant groups now in abundance in Pakistan. For the scoops, the journalists have put their lives in danger, and many have sacrificed their lives.

The love for spy agencies, not only the ISI but CIA, Saudi intelligence agency, Indian or Iranian or Afghan spy agencies also, and for the different militant Islamist groups of some journalists and media houses have baffled the audience who have been bombarded with misinformation. True, that militants have penetrated the security establishment of Pakistan but it is also true that intelligence

agencies and different militant groups have also penetrated in the journalist community and in some media organizations. Saleem Shahzad was a brave journalist. He sacrificed his life in his pursuit of bringing truth forth. But he left many questions to media persons. The most bothering question, as posed by one Indian journalist Pradip Joshi while commenting on the brutal killing, is “how could he alone have access to supposedly the most secret covert operation upon PNS Mehran or other journalists too had this information but preferred to remain un-vocal”.

The onus is on the security agencies to prove that they had no role in Saleem Shahzad murder. But other elements who have penetrated in security agencies, and who are waging war against the US and about whom the deceased journalist have talked about in his last report published by the Asia Times on 27 May and in his recently published book, should also be suspected. Some circles in Islamabad are suspecting Punjabi Taliban in this respect. Does the strong reaction from western powers indicate something?

With the penetration of intelligence agencies and militant groups in journalist community the credibility of journalism as a whole is at stake. The most news and views dished out by day and night by the print and electronic media in Pakistan are planted. Either they are fed by the spy agencies of all sorts or by the different militant Islamist groups. To sift the truth from what is being informed is a hard work even for the most media literate person. This has broken the trust between the media and the people. When the journalist is not credible, the journalism is not credible. So, the journalism in Pakistan is on decline.

The journalists’ organizations are ineffective. The working journalists, and also the media owners, do not follow any code of ethics. If any journalist or organization works for spy agency or for the militants there is no one to make them accountable. So, the media and journalists are really “independent”. Sadly, when there is no check and no responsibility such gory incidents would continue to occur.

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