

USE OF FORCE AND FEAR IN THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN IN SWAT: A CASE STUDY

Sajjad Malik*

Abstract

The Taliban in Pakistan first flourished in the tribal areas after the invasion of Afghanistan by NATO forces in 2001 and gradually expanded their influence to the settled areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. It was not clear when they reached Swat, where they became so powerful by 2007 that they ran a parallel administration. The militants rose to power by using violence and tried to maintain it through fear and intimidation by inflicting severe punishment on opponents. This research shows how constant use of force to intimidate the civilians and the officials ultimately alienated the people and led to the downfall of the Taliban in Swat. The subsidiary aspect of state failure to ensure a timely check on the rise of militancy has also been highlighted. The study is based on primary and secondary sources. David Kilcullen's counter-insurgency framework, based on enemy-centric and population-centric approaches, has been partially used to analyze Taliban efforts to maintain a stranglehold over the civilians. The conclusion shows that the Taliban were initially successful with their declaration of introducing Sharia law and justice in the society. This was the reason people supported them with money and even tolerated their violent tactics. However, the Taliban failed to keep their word and instead of focusing on the improvement of socio-economic conditions in the areas under their control, they used brute force to silence their opponents. Consequently, they slowly lost public support. Finally, they lost power in 2009 when defeated by the army and expelled from Swat.

Key Words: Swat, Taliban, Militancy, Pakistan Army, Civilians, OperationRah-e-Rast

* The writer is an independent researcher, teacher and a freelance journalist.

Introduction

Pakistani Taliban flourished in the north-western tribal region along the Afghan border as a result of post 9/11 developments in Afghanistan. They slowly spread into the settled areas, including Swat, and its adjoining districts. It is difficult to give an exact date as to when they took over the picturesque Swat Valley, but it is a fact that by the year 2007, they had grown so powerful that they ran a parallel administration on the pattern of a government.

The Taliban grabbed power by use of force and tried to sustain it with intimidation. Creating fear was one of their key tools in Swat, where they inflicted severe punishments on their opponents. Not only the local people but also state functionaries were afraid of the coercive rebel power. A time came when they were more powerful than the police or other law enforcement agencies. Their system, based on fear, thrived for more than two years in Swat and ended in 2009, when they were defeated by the military.

The research highlights how the Taliban used force to grab power, and then tried to consolidate it by creating fear among the civilian populations as well as the local administration. A subsidiary aspect of state failure has also been highlighted to show that official inaction in the face of rebel oppression contributed to the gradual loss of administrative power.

David Kilcullen's counterinsurgency framework, based on enemy-centric and population-centric approaches, has been used to understand Taliban efforts to secure their hold on the population, while the army used the enemy-centric model to defeat the militants first and establish control over the people later on.¹

The study is based on primary and secondary documents and material. Major local and international newspapers, articles and books have been perused for this purpose. The author also used his own observations as a witness to some of the events in Swat.

The Taliban in Swat

Swati Taliban, also known as local or Pakistani Taliban, to distinguish them from the Afghan Taliban led by Mullah Omer, flourished in the Malakand Division and the Bajaur tribal agency along the border with Afghanistan. They were mainly the followers of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) or the Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws, defined by Maulana Sufi Mohammed, which emerged in Swat in the 1990s. Later on, they were influenced by the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the tribal areas. Initially, they were not called Taliban, but when Sufi was

¹- Dave Kilcullen, "Two schools of classical counterinsurgency", *Small War Journal*, January 27, 2007, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/two-schools-of-classical-counterinsurgency>>

imprisoned, his son-in-law Fazlullah took over the command of his followers and forged close links with the Taliban of Bajaur and TTP; the militants in Swat were also named as Taliban.

Sufi Mohammed had formed TNSM in 1992 after leaving Jamaat-i-Islami, when he issued a decree that political parties and electoral politics were un-Islamic.² By denouncing state institutions, Sufi embarked on the same path which was treaded by a number of religious mullahs in Swat who used Islam to confront the prevailing system, and the people followed them. As confirmed by Fredrik Barth in *The Last Wali of Swat*, Islam has been a great force in the area. Barth states that the mullahs had monopolized knowledge as they were the ones who could read and write. "They (*mullahs*) just taught their own children and nobody else- they wanted to keep their advantage for themselves and remain dominant."³

Sufi was associated with a religious seminary in the Lal Qila area of Dir district before initiating militant efforts to enforce his brand of Islam. "In terms of sectarian linkages, he was an ardent believer in the Wahabi school of thought and remained associated with Saudi-sponsored groups from the Afghan theatre of war from 1980-88."⁴ The TNSM motto was "*Shariat or Shahadat*" (Islamic laws or martyrdom), and it rejected political processes and the democratic form of governance. Its followers were known by their black turbans, traditional *shalwar-kamiz*, and shoulder length hair.

One of the several acts of defiance by Sufi was a blockade of the main Mingora-Peshawar road in 1994 for seven days to enforce Sharia. Sufi's armed rebellion invited the ire of the state; he was defeated, captured and put in prison. Though the Black Turbans, as Sufi's followers were-dubbed, dispersed after 1994, yet the Benazir Bhutto government announced the introduction of Sharia laws in the Malakand Division, and the government compromised its writ by agreeing to release Sufi to help the authorities restore peace.

The Benazir government introduced the first set of laws in 1994, and the Nawaz Sharif government brought a second set of laws in 1997. The issue was apparently resolved for some time, but the TNSM did not sit idle and continued to increase its influence in the neighbouring Hazara Division and tribal areas, especially in Bajaur. The authorities failed to realize the simmering discontent and did nothing to address the grievances of the people after creating a semblance of peace, leaving the region susceptible to similar uprisings; soon, militants led by Mullah Fazlullah surfaced around 2005 to raise the flag of another rebellion.

The TNSM uprising in Swat coincided with events in neighbouring Afghanistan, where, after years of internecine warfare, local Taliban

² Amir Mir, *The Fluttering Flag of Jihad*, (Mishal: Lahore, 2008), 89.

³ Fredrik Barth, *The Last Wali of Swat*, (Norwegian University Press: Oslo, 1985), 11.

⁴ Amir Mir, *The Fluttering Flag of Jihad*, (Mishal: Lahore, 2008),90.

(madrassa students) militants emerged at the end of 1994.⁵ The rise of the Taliban was phenomenal, and one after another, provinces and cities fell to them. They finally captured Kabul in September 1996 and by 1998 they were in control of over 90 percent of the country. They were based in Kandahar where their one-eyed reclusive leader, Mullah Mohammad Omer, lived; he had lost his eye in 1989 when a rocket exploded near him.⁶

The Taliban were mostly madrassa students based in Pakistan, where efforts to set up more religious schools were underway since the Russians had moved into Afghanistan. Pakistan and many foreign governments made generous contributions to spread madrassa radicalism. Ahmed Rashid says that from 1982 to 1992, some 35,000 Muslim radicals from 43 Islamic countries in the Middle East, North and East Africa, Central Asia and the Far East underwent baptism under fire the Afghan Mujahideen. "Thousands of foreign Muslim radicals came to study in the hundreds of new madrassas that Zia's [General Zia ul Haq] military government founded in Pakistan and along the Afghan border. Eventually, more than 100,000 Muslim radicals were to have direct contact with Pakistan and Afghanistan and be influenced by the jihad."⁷

The rise of Taliban-style militancy in Pakistan's various areas, including Swat can be attributed to the situation in Afghanistan and the policies of the Pakistani government. As the jihadi politics led by the Pakistani establishment continued, socio-economic indicators suffered massively, making people in the tribal areas, Swat and elsewhere more vulnerable to jihadist tendencies. When Fazlullah stepped forward to lead a disgruntled group of youth in Swat, there existed the perfect background and circumstances to support him.

Before Fazlullah came to the scene, a lot had happened in Afghanistan due to the US invasion in October 2001. When the Americans attacked Afghanistan, Sufi Mohammed led over 10,000 volunteers to fight them in November 2001.⁸ Upon his return he was tried by the assistant political agent of Kurram Agency on March 30, 2002, and sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of carrying arms and explosives and entering Afghanistan. He was sent to prison in Dera Ismail Khan.

Sufi lost power and influence after the Afghanistan misadventure in which thousands of his inexperienced young followers were killed. His cadres were in disarray, until important events occurred in 2005 and afterward, that changed the situation in favour of another uprising in Swat.

First, the tragic earthquake of October 8, 2005, shook the country, allowing religious organizations like TNSM to come out and help the

⁵ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Games in Central Asia*, (I. B. Tauris and Co Ltd: London, 2000), 19.

⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Games in Central Asia*, (I. B. Tauris and Co Ltd: London, 2000), 17.

⁷ Ibid., 130.

⁸ Amir Mir, *The Fluttering Flag of Jihad*, (Mishal: Lahore, 2008), 91.

victims; this helped them gain the support of the locals. Second, a madrassa in Damadola village of Bajaur Agency was hit by missiles on October 30, 2006, leaving more than 80 dead, including the head of the seminary Maulana Liaquat and dozens of children. Liaquat was the brother of Maulana Faqir Mohammed, a senior leader of TNSM, who later emerged as an important Taliban leader in Bajaur and announced that he would take revenge for the attack.⁹ TNSM avenged the madrassa attack a few weeks later on November 8, 2006, when they sent a suicide bomber to target the Punjab Regimental Training School at Dargai and killed over 45 Pakistan Army recruits. The attack was a turning point in the Taliban resurgence in Malakand, and from there they grew from strength to strength. The third important factor which greatly helped the militants in Swat was Operation Silence against Lal Masjid (Mosque) in Islamabad in July 2007. Allegedly, a number of students were killed in the operation and the Swat-based militants fully exploited the wave of sympathy for the victims in their own favour.

Government failure

The Taliban established their power base in Swat during the time of the right-wing Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) government, which came to power in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (former NWFP) province after the 2002 elections. The provincial government tolerated Taliban excesses and some of its officials supported them, (the story of District Coordination Officer, Syed Muhammad Javed is well known). The government compromised its writ on several occasions. For example, Fazlullah was opposed to polio vaccinations and the government accepted several of his demands to launch an anti-polio campaign. In fact, a nine-point agreement was signed between Fazlullah and the MMA government, which was represented by District Coordination Officer Syed Muhammad Javed and District Police Officer Yameen Khan, who met Fazlullah in Imam Dherai, his native village. He agreed to drop opposition to the polio vaccinations in return for the government's word that it would not interfere with his illegal FM radio transmissions. The daily times reported that,

In exchange for allowing the FM radio station to continue broadcasts, Mullah Fazlullah agreed to support the polio vaccination campaign and education for girls, as well as government efforts to establish law and order. He also agreed to wrap up all training facilities for militants and making of weapons, and support the district administration in any operation against anti-state elements.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰ Iqbal Khattak, "Polio vaccination, girl education in Swat: Govt signs peace deal with TNSM", *Daily Times*, (Lahore), May 23, 2007.

Fazlullah, then 28, who later waged an armed struggle for his cause, was reported as saying, "I have signed the agreement for the sake of peace as Islam teaches us peace."

Under the agreement, the government also promised that it would find legal ways to withdraw various cases against the cleric, who agreed that he would not allow his supporters to be involved in making weapons and running militant training camps in mountain areas of the district, and that he would support the government against militants. "The Maulana sahib and his supporters will not interfere if the police move against suspicious people in Imaam Dheri and other strongholds," the agreement read.¹¹ The cleric also agreed not to create hindrances for the administration officials in discharging their duties, such as carrying out the polio vaccination campaigns. The agreement also barred the cleric and his supporters from displaying weapons in public and interfering in government departments' affairs.

Apparently, the agreement gave the government the upper hand, but it was actually Fazlullah who was the real beneficiary, as he was allowed to run his FM channel. He lost nothing, as his supporters continued their clandestine activities. Fazlullah merely gave a simple undertaking that he and his supporters were against piling up arms and ammunition in the area and that, if the government would take an action against such elements, neither he, nor his supporters would oppose the move; rather they would support the police in case suspected outsiders were spotted in the area. It was reported that the people of Swat heaved a sigh of relief following this signing of the agreement to establish the writ of the government.¹²

These were the kind of tiny victories against a spineless government that emboldened the militants and resulted in their establishment of almost complete control over the area. Taliban rule and high-handedness continued till their defeat at the hands of the Pakistan Army in the early second half of 2009, when Operation Rah-e-Rast forced Mullah Radio (Fazlullah) to seek refuge in Afghanistan. The early victories of the Taliban in Swat were greatly aided by the sympathetic MMA government, which had a soft corner for the militants, apparently struggling for Sharia.

Use of Force and Creating Fear

The Taliban's short stint in Swat left behind bitter memories. It was a sad commentary on their regime which proved that militants were better at destruction than rebuilding. They created fear to get support from the masses without realizing that it was not a substitute for the love and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Behroz Khan, "Swat cleric signs peace deal with govt", *The News* (Islamabad), May 23, 2007.

real development work based on a solid, long-term agenda. They tried to annihilate the last remnants of resistance by eliminating their opponents and giving more dead bodies to the locals than hopes for better lives. Soon, Swat, usually referred to as the Switzerland of Pakistan due to its scenic beauty, icy peaks and alluring resorts, virtually turned into a valley of death, as mutilated bodies were dumped in main Mingora city and the people ordered not to remove them till further orders. "Mingora's central square, known as the Green Chowk, has been renamed Slaughter (Khooni) Chowk, as the Taliban routinely dumped bodies and occasionally conducted public executions there. In December (2008), the Taliban deposited 27 bodies in the square and ordered the residents not to move them."¹³

The security situation in Swat deteriorated at a fast rate. First, the government's typical slothful behaviour in understanding the gravity of the situation costed it the rural areas, when it gradually gave away the strategically important countryside, considered best for guerrilla warfare, to the militants due to ineptitude and inefficiency in understanding the real motives of the belligerents. Then, the authorities saw the fall of towns and the urban centres from a distance, till a time came when Taliban roamed freely in Mingora and other main cities to implement their laws by force. The government only had symbolic control, and the residents followed Taliban edicts instead of municipal laws because the militants had established a shadow government to replace the lawful authority.

The entire district turned into a police state, where the only force recognized by the residents was the Taliban. The police force, already demoralized, began to melt away and a time came when more than half of all police officials had either deserted or gone on extended leave. "The police have been hit so hard that the force has been rendered ineffective. More than 800 policemen, almost half of the force, have deserted their posts or taken extended leaves to avoid the Taliban attacks. Police and government officials live in fear of being targeted, and many have taken out public advertisements or carry letters to announce their resignations."¹⁴

One of the favourite tactics of the Taliban was to kidnap or kill those who opposed them. They carried out targeted assassinations of tribal elders, politicians and government officials. An influential leader, Pir Samiullah, was killed in December 2008 when he opposed them and aligned with the government. He was from the Barelvi sect of Islam, while the Taliban mostly follow the Wahabi or Deobandi school of thought. Later, his body was exhumed and desecrated by being hanged publicly. "The exhumation and hanging of Pir Samiullah's body at a square after his killing petrified the already terrified people of the militancy-plagued Swat Valley;

¹³ Bill Roggio, "Taliban rule Pakistan's 'valley of death'", *The Long War Journal*, January 23, 2009, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/01/taliban_rule_pakista.php>, accessed January 6, 2012.

¹⁴ Ibid.

but the militants, instead of repenting the act, threatened to hit every person supporting the existing system in Malakand Division."¹⁵

They also targeted the local land-lords and Khans (tribal chiefs), who not only owned large landholdings but also exercised a lot of influence over the masses. In 2008, they attacked the estate of Jamal Nasir Khan, destroyed his house, and set the furniture on fire. One of the attackers, a former labourer who had worked there while the house was being constructed, expressed his joy for being part of the group who damaged the property.¹⁶

Khan's house was razed to the ground and the Pir was killed to make an example to warn the people that the Taliban would not tolerate any kind of opposition. It is important to know that before taking such measures, the militants had consolidated their position by exploiting the security and political situation. They were at the forefront to take revenge for the Red Mosque Operation conducted in July 2007 in Islamabad, which created widespread resentment in right wing circles. The first military operation in Swat launched in October 2007, could not achieve its prime objective of creating peace by subduing the militants; rather it had an adverse effect as the Taliban became stronger after the half-hearted operation. They embarked on the next stage of their rule and began implementing their system of Sharia with more violent force.

One of their earliest decisions was to ban females from visiting the markets to buy items of daily use or get clothing, shoes, cosmetics and other necessary goods. Within Mingora city, places like Cheena Bazaar, a shopping centre popular among women, were threatened to either stop selling cosmetics and undergarments to females or face closure of the businesses. Most of the shopkeepers followed the orders to avoid the consequences.

While women were asked to remain in their houses, men were asked to grow beards to improve their appearance and look more Islamic. To facilitate the implementation of the order, barbers were ordered to stop shaving beards of their customers. It was announced that men found without beards and barbers shaving beards would both be punished.

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also became targets of the militants, as they were alleged of being involved in spreading Western ideas and advocating rights for women, which the Taliban considered a conspiracy to westernize Muslim societies. The NGOs were told to pack up or face retribution; nearly all of them opted for the first option. With the media already threatened and subdued, and aid workers

¹⁵ Delawar Jan, "Why did Swat militants exhume Pir Samiullah body", *The News*, December 19, 2008, <<http://criticalppp.com/archives/582>>, accessed January 6, 2012.

¹⁶ Shaheen Buneri, "Dancing Girls of the Swat Valley", *Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting*, September 13, 2011, <<http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/pakistan-mingora-dancing-taliban-pashtun-fazlullah>>, accessed December 7, 2012.

packing up for their own good, the Taliban erected a virtual barrier in the transmission of unbiased information to the region.

The Taliban also considered magicians, charmers, sorcerers, faith healers etc. as un-Islamic and declared these professions as such. They warned those practicing them of dire consequences. Though the people might not support unscientific healing methods, yet they considered as unjustified, the treatment meted out to those who were accustomed to this form of healing.

The hardliner cleric also considered music, dancing and other forms of fine arts, as contrary to the tenets of Islam, and passed an edict ordering all those involved in such professions to immediately discontinue them, or face strict punishments. The Taliban implemented this edict so religiously that Mingora and some other cities, famous for music and dancing, were drained artists, who mostly took refuge in other cities or hid in the area.

After successfully banning all sources of entertainment, the Taliban filled the markets with jihadist literature and CDs, which were meant to inspire people to join the militants waging jihad against unjust rulers and implementing true Sharia.

At the same time, his (Fazlullah's) own production facility, known as 'Al-Fateh Studio,' now with a virtual monopoly on production, began turning out jihadist CDs that contained gory images of beheaded bodies of Taliban opponents and police officers. These CDs flooded the markets, and youths uploaded the videos to their cell phones and computers.¹⁷

They also started a systematic campaign to destroy the education system in the region by banning female education and destroying their schools. "On January 15, 2009, the Taliban ordered all girls' schools closed, and threatened to destroy any that remained open. Yet the Taliban destroyed eight schools, including even boys' schools. Since the edict was issued, over the past year, more than 200 schools have been destroyed."¹⁸

The unending cultural destruction badly hit the tourism industry, as thousands of potential visitors decided to stay away from the region. It is believed that some "40,000 people" lost their jobs due to fall in the number of tourists, and the once-thriving hotel industry sunk to a record low. A large number of tourists from countries like Japan, who would visit the region due to its rich Buddhist heritage, refused to set foot on a land where foreigners faced the risk of kidnappings, beheadings, and terrorist attacks.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bill Roggio, "Taliban rule Pakistan's 'valley of death'", *The Long War Journal*, January 23, 2009, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/01/taliban_rule_pakista.php>, accessed January 6, 2012.

Inter-faith harmony was also affected, and the ancient heritage sites, which had survived many attacks for centuries, were vandalized and damaged. "In September 2007, Fazlullah's supporters also tried to destroy the centuries-old statues of Buddha and prehistoric rock carvings in the Swat Valley on the grounds that they were un-Islamic."¹⁹ It was clear that they were following the footsteps of the Afghan Taliban, who blew up two giant-sized statues of Buddha in Bamiyan in 2001, despite international protest and Pakistan's request not to do so. The militants tried to permanently deprive the people of Swat of their rich heritage by attacking the Swat museum. Luckily, it survived the assault and the federal government, taking timely action, took hundreds of priceless and timeless artefacts into possession and shifted them to a safer place. Later, they returned over 2000²⁰ such articles to the provincial government in January 2012 after the situation improved in the region.

The strict laws imposed by the Taliban were initially welcomed but soon the locals found them too harsh and some of them started leaving their ancestral homes to find refuge in the provincial capital Peshawar or the federal capital Islamabad. "It is believed that more than 300,000 of Swat's estimated 1.5 million people have fled the district and more are expected to leave. The people of Swat fear the Taliban and have lost faith in the government and the military. Residents claim the military will not fight the Taliban and often use indiscriminate force during the fighting, resulting in civilian deaths."²¹

Shaheen Beneri, a journalist, has given graphic details of the Taliban rule from 2007 to 2009. He said that during that period, the violent campaign of cultural and ideological cleansing began. The militants destroyed more than 250 girls' schools. Suicide bombers hit targets ranging from schools to security forces. "The Taliban insurgency completely changed the cultural narrative of the Yousafzai Pashtuns of Swat where artistic pursuits had been an integral part of society for hundreds of years."²² Beneri says that musicians had a hard time during the Taliban regime as Fazlullah and his dreaded deputy, Shah Dauran, termed all musicians and dancers "friends of Satan", and accused them of spreading obscenity and moral degradation in the society. They were asked

¹⁹ "Pakistan Militants Try to Blow up Buddha Statue," *Associated Press*, September 12, 2007, <<http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2007-09-12-pakistan-buddha-N.htm>>, accessed December 7, 2012.

²⁰ "Centre returns artifacts removed from Swat Museum to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government", *Daily Mashraq* (Peshawar), January 27, 2012, 1.

²¹ Bill Roggio, "Taliban rule Pakistan's 'valley of death'", *The Long War Journal*, January 23, 2009, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/01/taliban_rule_pakista.php>, accessed January 6, 2012.

²² Shaheen Beneri, "Dancing Girls of the Swat Valley", *Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting*, September 13, 2011, <<http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/pakistan-mingora-dancing-taliban-pashtun-fazlullah>>, accessed December 7, 2012.

to shut down their business and those failing to obey were targeted through bomb attacks.

A popular Pushto singer, Sardar Yousfzai, and his musicians were attacked by militants on December 15, 2008, in Malakand. Though Yousfzai survived, one of his musicians, a harmonium player Anwar Gul, died later in a hospital in Peshawar due to injuries. The campaign of terror to banish the fine arts matured during the dark hours of a night on January 2009, when the Taliban forcibly entered the house of a well-known singer, Shabana, who had violated Taliban rule by dancing at a wedding ceremony in the neighbouring town of Maidan. A long quotation from Buneri's article captures the horror of the incident:

"In the middle of the night, the cries of two women awakened the neighbourhood. The militants, having somehow gained entry to the home, set about beating Shabana—pulling her hair, battering her hips with their guns, and screaming that it was time for her to die. Shabana's mother begged the leader of the group to spare her daughter's life and swore she would never dance again. Refusing to listen, the men dragged the young woman by her hair through the town to Green Square, her wailing mother running after them. Shabana was executed at point-blank range, her bullet-riddled body left in the square—a warning to others that dancing was in defiance of the Taliban's will."²³

Shabana's mother died three months after the brutal killing of her daughter. A piece of sharp glass pierced her foot while she ran barefoot, pleading with the Taliban to forgive her daughter. The same wound developed a deadly infection and took her life as she refused to consult a doctor.

By the time the government decided to launch the final operation in 2009, most of the dancing girls and musicians had disappeared. Some of them started a life in Peshawar, where the customers were more interested in physical favours than dance and art. Pressed by the dire financial constraints, many of them found that spending one hour with someone paid more than dancing for a whole night. It transformed the decades-old pure performing arts tradition in Swat. According to many people who were aware of the latest trends among former dancers, many of them now lived as prostitutes, earning more than \$50 per hour, which was almost equal to the monthly salary of an average worker in Swat.

The situation was deteriorating but Fazlullah maintained that he was right to destroy all un-Islamic relics as part of his campaign to reorganize the society. In an interview, he said that he had destroyed TV sets, video equipment, computers and digital cameras worth Rs. 20 million, as they were a source of sin. "Now we have no other option but to re-

²³ Ibid.

organize our movement and work for a society purged of all types of evils including music, dancing and drinking alcohol."²⁴

The government, after abandoning the military campaign of 2007 to tame the Taliban monster, did not completely pull out the forces and sporadic clashes continued. The militants showed enterprise by setting up road-blocks on busy highways and carrying out frequent raids on vehicles entering the main cities to give an impression of their rule. There were also reports that militants had their picket only a dozen meters away from the check posts maintained by security forces. They also upped the ante by regularly targeting the forces with roadside bombs and suicide attacks. It increased the losses suffered by the army, and the "Pakistani military, which is known to downplay its own casualties, said 142 soldiers and paramilitary troops have been killed since August of 2008, making the Swat insurgency far more dangerous than the conflicts in Afghanistan or Iraq."²⁵

The deaths and attacks demoralized the once indomitable armed forces who also suffered some damage to their public image as people began to brand them as incompetent or complicit with the Taliban. It also gave a lot of confidence to the militants who were now basking in full glory as they had braved the military onslaught, demoralized the police force, eliminated the opposition and forced the people into submission by force and intimidation. As their power increased, the government and the armed forces came under immense pressure to deal with them sternly. There were daily reports in the Western press about the mortal danger posed by the militants to the government of Pakistan. It was said that militants had overtaken at least nine of the 24 settled districts in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and all seven tribal agencies.

There were muted calls for another military operation but the religious parties continued their support for the militants and forced the government to enter into a peace deal with them. There was a peace accord in May 2008 with Fazlullah to resolve the issue through talks but fighting restarted in July. Irregular incidents of clashes continued until another peace agreement was signed in 2009, which was considered as the culmination of Fazlullah's rule in Swat. He declared it a grand victory and started an aggressive campaign to increase his power to other neighbouring districts. It proved to be a grand folly on his part, and it led to another more vigorous and decisive military operation, that ended Taliban rule by the middle of 2009 when they were defeated and their leader Fazlullah fled away.

²⁴ Fazlullah, interview with Free Muse Radio, February 2008, <<http://www.freemuse.org/sw24746.asp>>, accessed December 5, 2012.

²⁵ Bill Roggio, "Taliban rule Pakistan's 'valley of death'", *The Long War Journal*, January 23, 2009, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/01/taliban_rule_pakista.php>, accessed January 6, 2012.

Conclusion

The Taliban started their rule in Swat as kings of a social movement to address problems faced by the people. Initially, they had a semblance of mass appeal and enjoyed support. Soon they transformed into a political and militant force and started using ruthless force and fear to broaden their support base. For a brief while, they were successful, but soon ran into trouble when challenged by the army. Thus, they lost their control on Swat to a superior force. Their system, based on fear, vanished with them. Had Fazlullah shown maturity and waited for some time to consolidate the gains he got through peace deals, he could have lasted longer. But, he was in great haste and took several provocative steps, which forced the government and the army to launch a counter-offensive, which swept away Taliban rule.

It was evident from the short rule that militants were good at destruction and had no programme for reconstruction. Fazlullah promised to introduce an Islamic system, which he misconstrued and circumscribed to just strict punishments for even minor deviations. People initially applauded when criminals were hauled to the open squares and punished, but they slowly grew sick of ghastly scenes of dangling dead bodies and video clips showing Taliban slaughtering their enemies. People expected more than a quick justice system, as they had hoped for a just social and economic order that could make life easier. However, they found that the new rulers were as oppressive and inefficient as the former ones when it came to the provision of jobs, health and education facilities, and low-priced items of daily use.

The Taliban made several mistakes, showing that they did not learn anything from Mullah Omar's rule in Afghanistan. Their puritanical regime had a degree of efficiency by introducing a selective judicial system of Islam, like flogging for crimes and killing criminals involved in kidnapping and murders; but several other aspects of Islam, which the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and his four companions implemented, were ignored. They were also bad planners and could not bring anything which could be termed as progress. They created peace but it was a peace of the graveyard, as there was none to tell them to their face that they were wrong. Their rise to power was not a means but an end in itself. Once in power, they only planned to prolong it and increase it through fear, rather than thinking of the economic or the social welfare of the people. It should be a warning for people who still believe that religious organizations and parties will resolve complex modern day issues.

In a country like Pakistan, which is bursting at the seams due to a population explosion and unplanned urbanization, the implementation of Sharia should not only end lawlessness and crimes but also provide decent job opportunities and affordable commodities of daily life. This is not possible without industrialization for which huge investment is needed,

that should come from either internal or external sources. Also, modern societies are dependent on foreign nations for travel, trade, technology and material goods, and a country cannot achieve progress by antagonizing the international community. The Taliban and other religious movements should also understand the prevalent worldview of human rights and women rights, and avoid actions that unnecessarily pit them against the values held high by many people across the globe. What they need to do is to make adjustments in their methodology and refine their techniques, but it is doubted that they would learn. If they do, then they will not be gun-toting Islamists.

The Taliban reign in Swat had a demonising impact on the Islamists operating in other parts of the country, as it reinforced the belief that mullahs had nothing to offer in terms of progress and development. That is why, there were few who lamented the fall of Fazlullah, while the majority had a sigh of relief and welcomed the army as their saviour.

